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## BOOK REVIEWS

Cynthia J. Cranford, Judy Fudge, Eric Tucker, and Leah F. Vosko. (2005). *Self-Employed Workers Organize: Law, Policy and Unions*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 247 pages.

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Societies have historically been slow to recognize when economic change requires a rethinking of policies and institutions. Canada's labour relations policy and labour standards legislation were founded on the "industrial model" of production and a traditional employment relationship in which workers were represented on the basis of industry rather than occupation and skill. This model is problematic in the face of changes in the economy and labour market, resulting in a diversity of production and employment relations. In particular, the growth of self-employed workers and the increasingly precarious nature of this form of "employment" have called into question the scope and effectiveness of traditional labour relations policy.

The extent and implications of the divergence between industrial norms and non-industrial realities is taken up by Cranford et al. in *Self-Employed Workers Organize: Law, Policy and Unions*. The book highlights how this divergence has made it increasingly difficult for non-standard workers to benefit from labour protections or, to participate in collective bargaining to obtain reasonable terms and conditions of employment. Since self-employment is legally considered a form of independent contracting, it lies outside the realm of labour standards protection and collective bargaining. However, as the case studies in the book reveal, many self-employed workers occupy an ambiguous status. Their labour conditions more closely resemble those of *employees* rather than *employers*. In mapping the vulnerability of self-employment and the strategies self-employed workers have taken to address their precarious conditions, the book reveals how the Canadian collective bargaining regime (based on a full-time, full year employment relationship norm with a centralized employer) does not work for many "new" forms of self-employed workers. The authors' contention of blurring boundaries between self-employed workers and employees exposes the realities of economic dependence and the lack of regulatory protections for this increasingly precarious segment of workers. The book is particularly rich in its vision for alternative models of regulating the labour market to provide protection, flexibility, parity and security for the self-employed.

The book contains four case studies, covering a broad range of self-employed workers: newspaper carriers, rural route contractors, home care workers and freelance editors. Each follows a similar structure: they begin with a

discussion of workers' socio-economic context, followed by an account of past attempts to organize collectively and an overview of the legal barriers that workers have confronted. As the authors note, self-employment has mixed rewards whose quality and extent depend considerably on the type of self-employment as well as the legal, political, social and economic position of workers. The authors begin and end with the premise that all workers, regardless of their specific employment status, are entitled to certain fundamental rights and freedoms at work, including the right to organize.

The book explores the extent to which workers are covered by basic employment standards and have access to bargaining rights. It also examines the relationship between collective representation and access to employment rights and the benefits of a social wage. Without downplaying the gains of the self-employed in challenging existing labour laws, the authors note the limits of current industrial relations practice that place certain workers, particularly women and new immigrants, in employment positions that render them vulnerable and exploitable.

In examining the relationship between non-standard work and vulnerability along intersections of race, class and gender, the book seeks to expose the diversity and heterogeneity of "self-employment" in Canada. The authors employ a framework of "social location" to identify the ways in which political and economic conditions shape the meanings and strategies of the self-employed.

The poor economic and social status of rural route mail couriers and the shift to an ethnically diverse and mixed-gender workforce of newspaper carriers for instance, are directly related to the precarious conditions of their work and help determine who does this work and how they are remunerated. Added to the precarious social and economic position of mainly female personal care workers in a newly restructured care context, the problem of defining personal care workers as either independent contractors or domestic workers poses further challenges to organizing. Newspaper carriers face additional difficulties because of divided interests among workers in gaining employment status or remaining independent contractors for the sake of tax and social wage legislation. And, like personal-care workers, freelance editors perform personal services, delivering copy to multiple producers at multiple worksites. The distinction is important given the limited nature of a legislative regime organized around the creation of an artistic product rather than the delivery of service or labour.

The experiences of workers in the case studies demonstrate the ambiguities and limitations in the definition of employee status and the implications for union organization and collective bargaining. The case studies demonstrate that underlying their diversity, all forms of self employment share a common link: employment relations diverge from the standard employment norm and their precariousness is intensified by their particular social locations.

The case studies point to the need to broaden the scope of employment status to include the realities of economic dependence and address questions of worker entitlements. To redress employee inequities, the authors suggest extending the scope of coverage under current labour law; improving access to collective bargaining; allowing domestic workers, freelancers, employees with multiple employers and independent contractors to organize collectively, and establishing broader-based bargaining with industry-wide standards for all persons performing the same work, regardless of their employment status. In the final chapter, the authors identify various models of labour market unionism and community unionism that would transcend traditional industrial models of workplace organizing and expand collective bargaining rights to include all types of self-employed workers.

Historically, self-employment has been equated with entrepreneurship, characterized by autonomy, ownership and control over production. However, many forms of self-employment have come to resemble a “disguised wage labour” that diverges sharply from traditional conceptions of self-employment. They lack regulatory protection, exercise limited autonomy, have little opportunity to “profit” from capital accumulation, typically own little or no capital, are involved in atypical employment contracts, receive few social benefits and often hold multiple jobs to make a living. The authors express deep concern about the growing size of this vulnerable labour force

*Self-Employed Workers Organize: Law, Policy and Unions* is an engaging, critical, and comprehensive case analysis of the vulnerable status of many self-employed workers in Canada. Situated in the context of restructuring employment relations, the authors’ analysis successfully challenges its audience to look beyond traditional conceptions of “self-employment” to redress employment inequities. Empirically, the book demonstrates that many self-employed are not conventional entrepreneurs. Conceptually, the book contributes to an understanding of the links between self-employment, “social location,” changing employment relations, precariousness and industrial relations practice. It contributes to an understanding of the erosion of the standard employment relation and the mismatch between the legal employment relationship and the social relations of work. Stimulating further thinking on how to confront the challenge of institutional redesign, the book is a reminder that while many workers have benefited from previous struggles and recent developments in various legal regimes, there remain many ongoing obstacles to overcome.

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