
INTRODUCING *JUST LABOUR*

Editorial Committee,
JUST LABOUR: A CANADIAN JOURNAL OF WORK & SOCIETY

The editorial committee is very proud to launch the first volume of our new electronic journal, *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society*. Three years ago, the governing council of the Centre for Research on Work and Society's envisioned a new journal. After almost two years of planning and another year of intense work, we are pleased to have the first issue on-line.

WHY *JUST LABOUR*?

The assault on Canadian working people and their unions continues. Globalization, technological change, privatization, deregulation, the deepening international division of labour, and government hostility rip through our workplaces changing not only the way people work (or, in many cases no longer work) but also the context of union action.

Changes in the workplace are dramatically affecting the lives of working people. New technologies are intensifying labour processes and downsizing workforces, subcontracting and the growth of self-employment are undermining the traditional employee-employer relationship, and new management

strategies are disciplining workers in increasingly complex ways.

While working lives are transformed, so are the collective abilities of workers to influence these changes. Union action has been subverted by the internationalization of capital, the proliferation of precarious employment, the challenges of organizing marginalized workers, and the anti-union practices of employers and the state.

There is a growing need for sophisticated information and analysis by academics and trade unionists. We need a full understanding of the changes in our workplaces and the challenges to our unions. Many argue that organized labour's understanding of new forms of representation, the potential of coalition building with non labour groups, and the importance of international action will largely determine its future. But it is important that our discussions reach beyond academic accounts of '*what should be*' to include the voices of front-line trade unionists describing '*what is*' and '*what can be achieved*'.

Just Labour seeks to bridge the gap between academic research and the research activities undertaken by

trade unionists. Our goal is to provide a venue which 'transfers' knowledge not only from academics to unionists but also from unionists to academic audiences. The journal provides an opportunity for academics to publish material in a format that is accessible to a broad non-academic readership. *Just Labour* will publish shorter articles (usually less than 3,600 words) without the extensive literature reviews and complex jargon found in more traditional academic work. At the same time, the journal encourages union based researchers to share their findings in a forum which allows a more detailed account than found in a union newsletter or a report in labour media, while freeing the contributor from many of the conventions of strictly academic journals.

Admittedly, the lines between these two groups are increasingly difficult to draw. Academics are changing the way they engage with the organizations they research and in some cases are themselves intimately involved in the organizations they study. As is the case with the article by Clarice Kuhling in this issue, academics are also rank and file members and trade union officers who find themselves reporting on their own lived experiences in the labour movement.

While *Just Labour's* contributors are drawn from academic and union activist circles, we hope to publish a journal that will appeal to a wider

readership. There has been heightened interest in labour studies during the last decade. A growing number of Canadian universities and colleges have developed labour studies programmes. *Just Labour* will be a useful resource for students in several programmes of study. Union sponsored courses are also expanding in scope and number. Union members increasingly need access to up to date, relevant, and labour friendly articles.

THE FIRST ISSUE

While the right contest trade union unwillingness to accommodate the new economic realities of the global workplace, the left criticizes the inability of unimaginative working class organizations to break out of their prolonged stagnation. In our inaugural edition, *Just Labour* focuses on the new directions that many Canadian trade unions are actively exploring. Richard Hyman's commentary on the future of trade unions establishes a context within which unions in many industrial nations now find themselves. The author carefully links the future of the labour movement to 'trajectories' from its past to present. Michael Lynk then looks at the relationship between Canadian labour law and union democracy. Lynk skillfully situates Canadian unions in national and provincial legal frameworks while arguing union traditions rather than laws are the best safeguards of union democracy.

Articles then shift to the changing practices of the labour movement as it builds a foundation for the future. Charlotte Yates' thorough survey of organizing campaigns over the last decade demonstrates which organizational strategies are proven to be more successful. Julie White's examination of the CEP's campaign against excessive overtime demonstrates how one union is extending itself beyond traditional bread and butter bargaining issues to broader social policy initiatives with job creation potential. Geoff Bickerton and Catherine Stearns give an appraisal of Winnipeg's Workers Organizing and Resource Centre (WORC) established by CUPW to assist workers with everything from health and safety concerns to employment insurance inquiries. Mona-Josée Gagnon reflects on the role unions played in the People's Summit against the Free Trade Area of the Americas meeting in Québec, in April, 2001. She argues that the summit was an important part of the provincial labour movements re-engagement with other groups in civil society.

Teresa Healy, a researcher with CUPE's national office, documents the union's engagement with the privatization and deregulation of the post-secondary education system. Clarice Kuhlring, a member of CUPE 3903, gives a detailed account of her local's strike against York University and the important role

democracy, solidarity and militancy play in union victory.

Two articles deal with training and unions, albeit in a manner quite different than we imagine traditional workplace training. Tamara Levine outlines how expanding workplace literacy programs can result in previously alienated members becoming active in their union, while delivering a vital skill to workers. Tom Nesbit gives a critical review of how the labour movement is providing training for union staff members.

Each issue of Just Labour will aim to bring practical resource information to students, academic and union researchers. Suzanne Payette and Céline Laporte of Human Resources and Development Canada outlines the vast amount of labour data available to labour researchers from the Workplace Information Directorate. Jan Kainer and Rosemary Warskett provide an introduction to their extensive pay equity bibliography and the current state of pay-equity research in Canada.

Lastly, Just Labour will review key texts we feel will be of interest to our readers. This issue reviews two widely accessible books. Doug Smith's *Consulted to Death*, an account of the ongoing tragedy of workplace injuries, and Errol Black and Jim Silver's, *Building a Better World: An Introduction to Canadian Trade Unions*.

THE FUTURE

We live in a media-driven age, but establishing a quality journal remains a challenge. Even with the help of new technologies, it takes considerable time and resources to secure quality content, edit it and distribute the finished product. For future issues, we are confronted by three important considerations.

Electronic versus print. We originally planned a print journal. But, costs and the limits of print in a digital environment led us to abandon this approach. We decided we are more likely to reach working people through a web site than through the periodical room of a university library. However, we have formatted the journal as a print publication. We hope this first electronic issue will provide a subscription and funding base so future issues can appear in print and electronic versions.

Frequency of publication. The journal was conceived as an annual publication. But, our first issue has twice the number of articles found in most journals. The content is out there. If we can find the resources we will, in future, produce two issues a year.

Language. We would like Just Labour to be truly bi-lingual. Presently we speak of the Canadian Labour movement as two separate movements, one in English Canada,

one in Québec. There are important reasons for this, since the Québec labour movement is distinct. But, if the two movements are to learn from each other, a transfer of knowledge must occur. We plan to translate articles from English Canada into French, for francophone unionists inside and outside Québec. We also plan to seek contributions aggressively from francophone researchers, which we will translate and share across Canada.

The launch of this journal took much work. Thank you to our exceptional contributors. In a competitive age of careerism, not everyone is daring enough to write for a new journal that lacks the credentials of an established, formally refereed academic publication. At the same time, we thank our union-based contributors whose full job descriptions do not necessarily make writing for any journal a high priority.

Just Labour is the result of the efforts of an imaginative group connected to each other through York University's Centre for Research on Work and Society. We thank CRWS and its staff for lending passionate support to Just Labour. We also thank the labour organizations that are supporting this issue at arms length.

Most of all, we thank the readers who will take the initiative to download articles and so give life to the issues and debates that currently affect working people.