

The overall conclusion of the editors is that employees will be better off under Fair Work than Work Choices. The picture however is not so bright for unions (pp. 236-37). This is a somewhat surprising conclusion given the prominence afforded to 'good faith bargaining' under Fair Work. The editors maintain that 'A right to bargain at a workplace only has meaning for a union if it can organise there, and the resources required are usually more effectively directed at larger enterprises' (p. 237). Such a statement seems to reflect an unspoken belief that unions have been so dismembered under both the Accord years and the Howard government that they will be unable to assume any meaningful role at the bargaining table. More generally, Fair Work removes and/or places some constraints on managerial prerogatives which Work Choices enshrined in an extensive and complicated piece of legislation.

The final chapter also has an ahistorical feel. It tells us of 'the increasing influence of overseas systems of workplace regulation on Australian labour law' (p. 233). In making such a statement the editors ignore the importance of neo-liberal ideas developed by Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan of the United States of America which helped to inspire Work Choices. They are also in ignorance of the incomes policies and corporatist ideas of Western Europe which were utilised to drum up support for wage indexation, from 1975 to 1981, and the Accord(s) of 1983 to 1996. It might also be pertinent to add that Henry Bournes Higgins, who was so important to the early development of industrial tribunals, was heavily influenced by the tenets of Fabian Socialism, especially the writings of Sidney and Beatrice Webb; Catholic Social Thought, especially the 1891 Papal Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (The Workers' Charter); and American Progressivism. It was not by accident that his 'New Province for Law and Order' was published in the *Harvard Law Review*. Australia always has and probably always will be 'open' to ideas developed elsewhere. Is this a virtue, or is it not?

This volume provides useful information on major legislative changes that have occurred in Australian industrial relations in the first decade of the twenty-first century. These are changes which have occurred under the corporations power, rather than the more restrictive, traditional conciliation and arbitration power. If nothing else, recent experience has demonstrated that a national government which now enjoys direct powers will utilise them in giving vent to whatever their desired goals and objectives happen to be. As national governments change we can expect that there will be further major legislative changes and more volumes like this one to explain and summarise what has occurred.

University of Melbourne

BRAHAM DABSCHECK

Frank Stilwell and Kirrily Jordan, *Who Gets What? Analysing Economic Inequality in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2007. pp. x + 266. \$34.95 paper.

Too often social inequality studies give only passing attention to concentrations of wealth and economic privilege and its social impacts. In *Who Gets What?* Stilwell and Jordan provide a critical perspective on wealth as the font of poverty. Their focus on relations of inequality does not allow the wealthy to flee from the scene of economic

disadvantage or to hide behind neo-liberal notions of material well-being as a social marker of ability or merit. Using an institutional analysis framework, based primarily on national and international quantitative data and secondary sources, Stilwell and Jordan provide an important contribution to Australian political economy. Aimed at an undergraduate or general readership, *Who Gets What?* is a valuable one-stop source of empirical evidence, with accessible and concise analysis of economic inequality in Australia.

The first half of the book details the contours of economic inequality such as income and wealth distribution and class, gender and spatial dimensions. Chapter 2 locates a raft of income statistics within a class analysis of capitalism, arguing that inequality has grown since the 1980s, with little evidence to support the neo-liberal notion of an effective trickle-down process. Indeed, much of the income transfer has been from labour to capital rather than from the wealthy to the poor. In chapter 3 the authors investigate the question of 'who owns what' as the material foundation of the income inequality outlined previously (p. 43). Overall, they observe a widening of wealth inequality in recent decades, particularly on the back of stock market and real estate booms leading up to the recent global financial crisis. Chapter 4 employs *Business Review Weekly* rich lists from 1994-2006 to analyse the composition of the Australian ruling class, noting ironically that the reports echo old Communist Party tactics of profiling 'these well fed faces', but 'for the purpose of celebrating wealth rather than denouncing it' (p. 65). Despite some noted methodological difficulties, the chapter conveys just how well the ruling class thrived during the Howard administration, with the price of entering the top 200 rich list trebling during the period. In stark contrast, chapter 5 considers the condition of the impoverished class. The complex picture that emerges of rising material living standards, alongside entrenched deprivation and hardship, sets the scene for subsequent chapters that focus on the spatial and gendered dimensions of inequality. Chapter 6 gives attention to the geography of wealth and poverty in contemporary Australia. Chapter 7 tempers the familiar story of women's increased rights and participation, especially in the labour market, with the reversals and stalling they have experienced and the economic and political heights they have yet to scale in anywhere near proportionate numbers. Inequalities among classes of women also feature. The authors suggest that because women comprise roughly half the population, their inequality is harder to see and yet paradoxically of greater social significance. No doubt space limitations prevented greater attention to the intersections of class, gender, cultural background and so forth in the economic inequality stakes. Nonetheless, the opening chapters make a start on this task.

Discussion of the causes of economic inequality is largely held over to the second half of the book, which deals with the origins, impacts and possible responses. Chapter 8 begins to unpack the foundations of economic inequality in Australia by examining the capitalist economic structure, political machinations, labour market machinery, processes of discrimination, and property relations. It weaves together a multidimensional account of how the relationships between capital, labour and the state create the historical and material landscape in which economic inequality in Australia today can be understood. Chapter 9 delves into the happiness scholarship to provide a different take on the question of who benefits from economic inequality. It presents the argument that beyond modest levels, economically unequal societies

impoverish those it benefits materially, as well as those it does not, in terms of health and well-being, not to mention broader political and ecological costs. Orthodox assumptions about the pursuit of self-interest may falter on this sort of evidence, but the systemic logic of capital accumulation has no concern with the production of individual happiness unless it can be commodified. Chapter 10 assesses the economic, social, political and environmental impacts of economic inequality. In short, it contends that economic inequality, far from reflecting incentive and reward structures to ensure social cohesion as neo-liberalism suggests, actually unravels the social, economic and political fabric. In doing so, it threatens the social and ecological sustainability of our ways of living and working. Chapter 11 turns to the question of responses. It ponders a myriad of individual reactions to economic inequality (eg downshifting, philanthropy) that have gained greater ideological currency with the neoliberal ascendancy. It then considers what is to be done by government, particularly in the areas of taxation, employment and income policies.

The question of political will at the grassroots and in the formal halls of power is an underlying tension throughout the book. In chapter 12, on the prospects for change, this tension surfaces for more explicit treatment. Particularly engaging, is the authors' effort to grapple with the apparent contradiction between strong egalitarian social attitudes in the community and their simultaneous reluctance to support government policies that might deliver a more equitable society. Herein the authors rekindle a perennial and fundamental quandary. On the one hand, the social democratic mission aims at progressive and occasionally radical policy reform. For these objectives to stand half a chance of success, the support and imagination of working people is needed to breathe life into the political momentum required. The social groups most likely to support redistributive reforms are those who least benefit from the status quo. On the other hand, their exploitation and alienation under the current political economic system fuels an inherent distrust of authority, whether it is embodied in the politician (radical or not), bureaucrat or boss. In other words, many amongst the disadvantaged and impoverished classes do not trust their oppressors to set them free. This message is amplified in studies of working class politics and labour history, and in more recent studies of the democratic deficit and the declining political legitimacy and trust of parliamentarians.

While there may still be a way to go in answering the question of what is to be done, forging progressive social change towards equality and freedom is a vital ongoing project. *Who Gets What?* helps to keep the intellectual tradition of radical political economy alive and real. Moreover, written before the global financial crisis and the rolling out of Federal Labor government policy, the book will continue to provide a useful point of historical comparison as the impacts on economic inequality flowing from both developments unfold.

Charles Sturt University

HELEN MASTERMAN-SMITH