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BOOK REVIEW

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CRACKING LABOUR'S GLASS CEILING: TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH WOMEN'S UNION EDUCATION

Cindy Hanson, Adriane Paavo, and Sisters in Labour Educations, Fernwood, BlackPoint, NS, 2019, 216 pages.

In *Cracking Labour's Glass Ceiling*, the Prairie School for Union Women (PSUW) serves as a jumping off point for a lively exploration of women's union education across Canada and the United States. Since 1997, this 4-day residential summer school has provided a unique space for developing women's union activism and leadership in Saskatchewan. The program formed around a vision of non-hierarchical participatory education, where participants and facilitators co-produce knowledge and engage in personal transformation. The distinctiveness of this and similar long-standing women-only union education programs prompted the authors to document various approaches for women's labour learning and investigate the outcomes. The result is the series of case studies that make up this edited 10-chapter volume: the first 4 chapters and conclusion discuss the PSUW from a variety of perspectives while other chapters provide diverse examples of female-oriented union learning programs. Many programs draw from critical emancipatory methods inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, and all chapters explore strategies of popular education and engage with feminist analysis. The authors consider the effectiveness of each program for creating change within participants' lives and within the political structures of unions.

In the first chapter, long-time educators Adriane Paavo and Barb Thomas offer personal insights about leadership development methods used at the PSUW. They stress the importance of developing new course facilitators on an ongoing basis. Following this, Cindy Hanson and Adriane Paavo present results of two research projects that investigated how the PSUW shaped women's active involvement in unions and how specific educational practices contribute to the transformative power of the school. They note that transformation of the self does not necessarily translate into broad-based transformation within the labour movement. They conclude that more must be done to bring about equality of representation, a finding echoed by several authors throughout the book. The next chapter shares how a course about Indigenous perspectives and colonial history on Turtle Island creates new realizations among learners. The intimacy created by the conversational format of this chapter by Sandra Ahenekew, Yvonne Hotzak and Cindy Hanson gives the reader a sense of the depth of learning that takes place within the course. In the last chapter about the PSUW, Donna Smith traces the uneasy path toward acceptance and eventual overt support

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of LGBTQ members within the labour movement before describing a course designed to raise awareness about LGBTQ concerns.

The second half of the book covers several other women-oriented labour education programs. In Chapter 5, Bev Burke and Suzanne Doerge describe a visual participatory methodology they developed in 1993 called “The Wall.” This workshop, intended to bring about understandings of how women are affected daily by neoliberal globalization, has been implemented in several global contexts. In the next chapter, Helena Worthen describes the Regina V. Polk Women’s Labor Leadership Conference in Illinois. Worthen locates the pedagogy of the conference in the “demands of the double shift intersected in a woman’s body” (2019, p. 67), referring to the burden that is placed upon women who often perform the bulk of unpaid domestic work even while engaging in paid employment. Following this, Tess Ewing, Dale Melcher and Susan Winning outline the origins, objectives and methods of the Women’s Institute for Leadership Development in Massachusetts. This program prioritizes access for women of colour, with an explicit focus on the intersections among work, immigration, racialization and gendered oppression. In the following chapter by Carol Zavitz, we see how Leaders for Tomorrow, an initiative of the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, advances the organization’s feminist mandate. The final program to be covered is the Canadian Union of Public Employees’ Women Breaking Barriers program. What stands out about this chapter, by Morna Ballantyne and Jane Stinson, is the diversity of strategies employed within the popular education model linking personal and employment experiences within a structural analysis.

Important themes emerge across the chapters. Many observe that participants find the programs personally transformative yet note that the transformation of women through education is simply not enough to trigger structural change. The large portion of unpaid domestic work performed by women, cultural practices that privilege male voices and decision-making, and other forms of systemic and intersectional discrimination are persistent barriers that prevent women from gaining equal representation in labour leadership. A few chapters also point out the lack of equitable access for women of diverse backgrounds within the educational programs themselves, suggesting that they still have work to do to become truly inclusive. A number of programs have equity policies in place, yet these seem to have had limited impact on diversifying participation. The book’s conclusion acknowledges that union schools need to work to undo intersectional forms of exclusion inside and outside their programs. While the authors engage in an honest, reflexive analysis of how power operates within their organizations, it seems that part of the solution might be to incorporate more voices from equity-seeking groups in the development of this field and in future publications.

In the Introduction, Hanson and Paavo are explicit that the book is not exclusively intended for an academic audience. Showcasing the voices and experiences of those in the field, – union leaders, activists and educators – the chapters present stories, real life scenarios and personal insights to document and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. Several chapters also draw on research findings to enhance personal observations. As such, this collection will appeal to practitioners and researchers interested in adult and popular education, and those who pursue goals of social and economic justice. With unionization rates among men on the decline in Canada and with women now occupying close to half of unionized jobs, *Cracking Labour’s Glass Ceiling* is a timely contribution to the literature on labour education. Furthermore, the gender analysis it offers moves beyond educational

contexts by offering a critical examination of the impediments to women's involvement and advancement in union political structures. The book prompts readers to join with the authors in envisioning a more expansive form of feminism within the labour movement.

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