Trade Unions and Politics

Trade Unions and Politics

A comparative introduction

Andrew J. Taylor

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For Helena Jayne

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to analyse and compare the role of trade unions as political actors in liberal-democratic industrial states: in particular, the United States, Britain, West Germany, Sweden and Japan. As such, it is not concerned with formal political institutions (for example, parties, parliaments, executives) so it assumes the reader will have some familiarity with the political institutions of the societies examined, although institutional detail has been included where necessary.

The comparative method has both advantages and disadvantages. The obvious advantage is breadth of study, which permits generalisations across political systems, enabling us to examine how the same phenomenon is treated in different political systems and contexts; this approach, however, sacrifices the detail of the specialised study. My experience of teaching comparative government and politics has caused me to be profoundly sceptical about its scientific possibilities and suspicious of grand theoretical frameworks – which often obscure more than they explain, and sometimes become an end in themselves – but the study of politics is essentially comparative. I have, therefore, striven to avoid presenting a potted country-by-country study in favour of a thematic approach, though most chapters analyse their subject matter according to country. Such a structure, though complex, allows the reader to follow the unions' political role in a particular system, or to pursue a theme across national boundaries. Only the reader can judge if the book achieves this.

Why write a comparative book on trade unions? The first reason is that comparative politics has in recent years shifted away from

systemic comparison to sub-system comparison; virtually every political institution has been analysed comparatively but unions remain relatively understudied. There is a vast amount of material on individual states but few attempts to pull this material together in a digestible and convenient form. The second reason is that during the last decade or so unions have enjoyed a very bad press, being blamed for virtually every economic and political ill afflicting the industrial body politic. This might have made for good journalistic copy or political sloganeering but it is poor analysis. Unions are not perfect but they are certainly not the fount of all evil, they are the product of the society in which they are situated, and this book tries to place them in their context.

The central arguments of this book are that unions are inevitably *political*, whether they or politicians like it; that within capitalist industrial states they are relatively *powerless*; and that unions are primarily *reactive* and *defensive* in their political behaviour. As the international post-war economic boom collapsed in the 1970s unions were increasingly seen, to a greater or lesser degree, as a 'problem' about which something 'had to be done'. The purpose of this book is not to apportion blame or responsibility but to show how unions fit into the politics of liberal-democratic capitalism, and what their position is in the structure of political power. Authors, I believe, should always make their biases clear at the very outset; these are mine: unions meet a deep-seated need for collective protection from the operation of the market and, despite their faults and imperfections, unions remain a bulwark of democratic freedoms. No dictatorship of left or right can tolerate free, independent trade unions.

The central concern of comparative politics is the state. This book draws on the experience of five: the United Kingdom, the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden and Japan. These five were selected because they represent a sample amenable to comparative analysis and represent a variety of liberal-democratic industrial political systems. The United Kingdom was chosen because of the long history of union political activism in the first industrial state, and because the UK is so often cited as an example of the consequences of excessive trade union power. The United States offers an opportunity to examine unions in a political culture hostile to collective action, but whose fragmented political system enables a well-organised group to achieve

political influence. Sweden is interesting because of the ideological and political dominance of Social Democracy in which the unions are allocated a defined position within a corporatist political system. West Germany represents a case mid-way between the USA, the UK and Sweden. Here, an established union movement with a long history of political activism was destroyed and remade and accorded a legitimate role as a social partner in the increasingly conservative new German political system. Finally, Japan. In some ways Japan represents an obvious contrast to the other systems, but in other ways it exemplifies the subordination common to unions in the politics of the advanced capitalist industrial states. There is also considerable ignorance and misunderstanding about Japanese trade unions and industrial relations in the West; perhaps this book will enhance understanding of this complex, perplexing, yet fascinating, political system.

The organisation of the book is straightforward. It is a truism that the present is an extension of the past so Chapter 1 presents a brief overview of the political development of the five union movements in the twentieth century. This is examined through their growth as pressure groups, as electoral actors, and the evolution of their relationship with the state. Each of these is treated in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 explores the relationship between structure, ideology and political behaviour. It presents basic data on composition and the degree of centralisation in each union movement. The distribution of power in the unions, the nature of union government and internal union politics are considered as external behaviour is, in part, produced by internal politics. This leads to a discussion of the role of national union centres as labour's political spokesgroup. Finally, Chapter 2 examines the impact of voluntarism on union political behaviour and attitudes. Chapter 3 examines the party-union relationship. In particular, why unions attach themselves to a party, the variety of structural, ideological and personal connections and the role played by unions in making party policy. Chapter 4 continues the party-political theme through, first, the unions' role in recruiting the parliamentary elite and the degree of influence enjoyed by the unions over 'their' parliamentary representatives. This is then widened into an analysis of the voting behaviour of trade union members and, in particular, the impact of partisan dealignment. Chapter 5 considers the unions as interest

groups, using variations of corporatism to analyse the different degrees of closeness enjoyed by union movements with their respective states. Chapter 5 concludes by analysing the breakdown of union–government relations in the 1970s. Chapter 6 is concerned with the rise of white-collar trade unionism, public sector trade unionism and the political management of the unions in the 1990s. Chapter 6 critically examines the ‘new working class’s’ supposed consequences for ‘traditional’ unions as political actors: just how ‘different’ is the new working class? These chapters are the heart of the book and are concerned essentially with the politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Chapter 7 presents the book’s conclusions and offers an analysis of the position of trade unions in the power structure of liberal capitalist industrial states, concluding that the *image* of union power cultivated in the media and by politicians has disguised their basic *powerlessness*.

In the late 1960s and 1970s unions were the target of polemics and a convenient scapegoat for the economic problems of the advanced capitalist economies caused by the destabilisation of the international economic balance created in the 1940s. Subsequent developments and continued economic instability have demonstrated that unions had little responsibility for events; though they are still universally regarded as a problem, it is now possible to begin a reassessment of their role in the political economy. This book is intended to be one small contribution to that process.

ANDREW J. TAYLOR

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ANDREW J. TAYLOR

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABF	Workers' Educational Association (Sweden)
ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (UK)
ADB	General Federation of Civil Servants (FRG)
ADGB	General German Confederation of Trade Unions
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AfA	General Federation of Free Employees (FRG)
AFGE	American Federation of Government Employees
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
AMP	Associate Membership Program (US)
AMS	National Labour Market Board (Sweden)
APEX	Professional Executive and Computer Staff (UK)
ASTMS	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (UK)

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BDA	Federation of German Employers' Associations
BDI	Federation of German Industry
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (FRG)
CGD	Christian Trade Union Federation (FRG)
Churitsuroren	Federation of Independent Unions of Japan
CIO	Committee (now Congress) of Industrial Organisations (US)
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CND	Council for National Defense (US)
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees (UK)
COPE	Committee on Political Education (US)
COWPS	Committee on Wages and Prices (US)
CPSA	Civil and Public Servants' Association
CSU	Civil Service Union (UK)
CWA	Communication Workers of America
DAG	Salaried Employees' Union (FRG)
DBB	Civil Service Federation (FRG)
DGB	German Workers' Federation
DNC	Democratic National Committee (US)
Domei	Japan Confederation of Labour
DSP	Democratic Socialist Party (Japan)
ETU, now EETPU	Electrical Trades Union
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FOS	Modified Labour Market Model of Spring 1987 (Sweden)
FPD	Federal Postal Division (US)
FRG	Federal Republic of West Germany
GCE	Federation of Christian Trade Unions (FRG)

GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GDBG	Federation of German Civil Servants
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEDAG	Federation of German Salaried Staffs
GMBATU	General Municipal and Boilermakers Allied Trade Unions
HSC	Health and Safety Commission (UK)
ISTC	Steelworkers (UK)
JSP	Japan Socialist Party
Keidanren	Federation of Economic Organisations (Japan)
Koenkai	Personal support organisations (Japan)
Komeito	Clean Government Party (Japan)
Komuin Kyoto	Joint Struggle Council of Government Workers' Unions (Japan)
Korokon	Roundtable Conference for Public Corporations and National Enterprises Labour Problems (Japan)
Korokyo	Council of Public Corporation and National Enterprise Workers' Unions (Japan)
LAC	Labor Advisory Council (US)
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (Japan)
LKAB	State mining corporation (Sweden)
LLPE	Labor's League for Political Education (UK)
LMSA	Labor-Management Services Administration (US)
LO	Landorganisationen i Sverige, Swedish Trade Union Confederation
LPSL	Local Public Service Law (Japan)
LRC	Labour Representation Committee (UK)
MSC	Manpower Services Commission (UK)

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MITI	Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Japan)
NAGE	National Association of Government Employees (US)
NALC	National Association of Letter Carriers (US)
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers (UK)
NAM	National Association of Manufacturers (US)
NATGA	National Air Traffic Controllers' Association (US)
NEA	National Education Association (US)
NEC	National Executive Committee, of the Labour Party (UK)
NEDC	National Economic Development Council (UK)
NFFE	National Federation of Federal Employees (US)
NGA	National Graphical Association (UK)
NHS	National Health Service (UK)
Nikkeiren	Federation of Employers' Associations (Japan)
NIRA	National Industry Recovery Act (US)
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act (US)
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board (US)
NPA	National Personnel Authority (Japan)
NPSL	National Public Service Law (Japan)
NTEU	National Treasury Employees' Union (US)
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers (UK)
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees (UK)
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen (UK)
NUT	National Union of Teachers (UK)
NUS	National Union of Seamen (UK)
NWLB	National War Labor Board (US)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OTV	Public Service and Transport Union (FRG)

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PAC	Political Action Committee (US)
PATCO	Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Association (US)
PC	Personnel Commission (Japan)
PCNELR	Public Corporation and National Enterprise Labour Relations Law (Japan)
PCNELRC	Public Corporation and National Enterprises Labour Relations Commission (Japan)
PED	Public Employees' Division (US)
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party (UK)
RCN	Royal College of Nurses
Rengo	Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (Japan)
SACO	Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisationen (Sweden)
SACO-SR	SACO after its merger with the Civil Service Federation (Sweden)
SAF	Svenska Arbetsforeningen, Swedish Employers' Federation
Sanbetsu-Kaigi	Congress of Industrial Labour Organisations (Japan)
Sanrokon	Industry and Labour Roundtable Conference (Japan)
SAP	Svenska Arbetar Parti, Social Democratic Party (Sweden)
SCAP	Supreme Command Allied Powers (Japan)
SCPS	Society of Civil and Public Servants (UK)
SDP	Social Democratic Party (FRG)
Shinsanbetsu	National Federation of Industrial Organisations
Shunto	Spring Labor Offensive (Japan)
SLD	State/Local Division (US)
Sodomei	Japan Labour Federation
SOGAT 82	Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (1982)
Sohyo	General Council of Trade Unions of Japan

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TASS	Technical and Supervisory Staffs (UK)
TCO	Tjanstemannens centralorganisationen, Central organisation of salaried workers (Sweden)
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union (UK)
TUC	Trades Union Congress (UK)
TUCC	Trade Union Coordinating Committee (UK)
TUFL	Trade Unions for Labour
TULV, now TUFL	Trade Unions for a Labour Victory (UK)
UAW	United Auto Workers
UCW	Union of Communication Workers (UK)
UK	United Kingdom
UMWA	United Mineworkers of America
UPBP	Union Privilege Benefit Programs (US)
US	United States
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
WCL	War Committee of Labor (US)
Zenmin Rokyo	Japan Private Sector Trade Union Council
Zenro (later Domei)	Japan Confederation of Labour