Adrian Vicary. *In the Interests of Education: A History of Education Unionism in South Australia*. St. Leonards, Aus.: Allen and Unwin, 1997. Pp. xii, 289.

I confess that I pick up with some trepidation any book dealing with teachers union history—particularly those "commissioned" by the very organizations in question. I come by this fear honestly, having subjected myself over the years to many Canadian examples of the genre consisting of chronological, sycophantic iterations of the wonderful activities of all the worthy leaders and lessers (mainly male, of course) of these organizations. Touchy issues that cannot be avoided —for example, repeated instances over the years of individual and collective pressure on the leadership from rank and file members demanding a more pro-active bargaining stance—are invariably dealt with in a benign style favouring the "reasoned" overview of the leadership and the historic importance, above all else, of continuing good relations with government officials. Issues too controversial for this treatment are glossed over or simply omitted: discriminatory gender and status relations among teachers in schools and within teacher unions themselves; sectional tensions and splits, often based on these aforementioned gender and status relations; back-room concessions made by leaders to government officials in times of recession and cut-back; the unseemly enthusiasm of many leaders towards "reducing and abolishing unprofessional conduct" (however defined) among the membership—not to mention the informal but strong links over the years between many of these officials and the political parties in power.

The overall moral of these "histories" is clear. Only through the tireless efforts of brilliant and omniscient leaders, cajoling and coercing reluctant and backward classroom teachers, could "a dream long held by a number of leaders" (to quote one) ever be realized: state-sanctioned (and controlled) professionalization. The epitome of this genre is actually entitled *The Long March*—to be sure, as historian Andrew Spaull has adroitly noted, "decidedly non-Maoist in form."

Adrian Vicary's *In the Interests of Education, A History of Education Unionism in South Australia* came as a very refreshing change indeed. First, while the volume is laid out in three chronological divisions (1850–1950, 1950–80, and post-1980), the chapters and sub-sections are organized along themes within the "history of education unionism" itself. Virtually all important (and seemingly universal) issues affecting state school teachers and teaching—whether embedded in schools themselves, and/or in their communities, and/or in the corridors of government—are dealt with. We learn about them not as abstract and agentless entities somehow "happening" out there, but as they are taken up in the discussions, debates and conflicts between unions and other sectors, as well as, importantly, struggles amongst teachers and teacher union activists themselves. To be sure, a plethora of names roams across the pages, but very much in the context of the issues in which they were all immersed. The thick, but highly readable, description and analysis of these varied and numerous themes is to be commended.

What are these themes? At the material level, interactions over policy and practice concerning the selection, training, certification, hiring, and supervision of teachers; issues of teachers' working conditions, salaries, benefits, job secur-

ity, promotion and pensions; issues of curriculum, teaching resources, class sizes, and continuing education/training for teachers. At another level we find more ethereal themes and issues, such as questions and conflicts over the status (ideological, as compared to material) of teachers, their role in schools and in society, and the nature of their relationship, as teachers, to others in society.

What differentiates Vicary's study from its Canadian equivalents is his attention to yet a third level of conflict and struggle: issues of social difference within schooling, within the teaching cohort, and within their organizations. These differences manifest themselves in many ways—differential treatment on the basis of national and family status, race, ethnicity, age, seniority, religion, sexuality, language, and physical ability, to name several categories. Vicary's identification and extensive coverage of three particular aspects—the gender, schooling sector, and geographical location of teachers—suggests that it is only through an effective unpacking of these relations (largely untouched by many historians) that we can really come to understand the reasons, and the relations, underlying the more visible material and ideological struggles mentioned above —and to understand why these questions and conflicts have unfolded in the ways that they have.

What were these differences, and how did they interrupt—or alternatively, determine—the aims, objectives, strategies and events of teachers unions? Gender played a formative role, and evidenced by points to the perennial struggles of women teachers in South Australia to convince male colleagues to support equal salaries, working conditions, job security, and pensions. Males were materially well advantaged by these inequities, and state officials appreciative of the financial savings from such a two-tier system. Women teachers' attempts to improve their conditions were often made even more ignominious by the tactics of the more sophisticated male union leaders, many quite adept at appearing to favour change while working behind the scenes to prevent it. Vicary is particularly acute in analyzing the complex and difficult relations among aggrieved women teachers themselves, as they agonized and often disagreed over strategies and tactics to deal with their recalcitrant male colleagues and leaders—on occasions over the years even parting ways, some choosing to break formally from patriarchal organizations to create their own structures while others continued their struggles from within.

Like many of their colleagues in other parts of the world, South Australian teachers were beset by differential treatment based on their positions in the schooling system. Senior teachers and headmasters, usually from the larger towns and cities, often dominated both the leadership and the activities of teacher unions, using these positions as stepping stones to become managers of teachers within government departments. Vicary's empirically-based analysis casts doubt upon whether the interests of classroom teachers, particularly those from the rural areas, were well served by these "representatives" in formal and informal negotiations with state officials. Again, these relations were complex ones, even cutting across gender lines. For example, in times of recession and re-trenchment, both married and temporary women teachers found themselves the angry targets of their unmarried and/or permanently employed sisters.

Other relevant themes and issues are also well covered in this volume—to name a few, the union's (mixed) handling of red scare attacks on some of its members in the 50s and 60s, the internal discussions and differences over industrial politics and affiliation with organized labour, and a (rather short, but at least existent) section dealing with union differences in relation to the struggle by aboriginals for educational self-determination.

From a (my) Canadian perspective at least, Vicary is to be congratulated for producing a history of teacher unionism which is, at one and the same time, thorough, analytical, critical and informative. Whether it will have any effect on comparative Canadian studies remains to be seen.

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