

**Labour**

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

**Le Travail**

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



## Andy Hanson, Class Action: How Ontario's Elementary Teachers Became a Political Force (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021)

Duncan MacLellan

Volume 89, Spring 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090042ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2022v89.0021>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

MacLellan, D. (2022). Review of [Andy Hanson, Class Action: How Ontario's Elementary Teachers Became a Political Force (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021)]. *Labour / Le Travail*, 89, 303–305.

<https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2022v89.0021>

All Rights Reserved © Canadian Committee on Labour History, 2022

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

jusqu'à former une toile complexe, des parcours qui se répondent sans cesse. L'implication dans les mouvements Idle No More ou Hoodstock, ou encore le travail d'accompagnement à la naissance, deviennent autant de modes de revendication formant une vaste nébuleuse susceptible de transformer le Québec contemporain.

*Empreintes de résistance* s'adresse à toute lectrice désireuse de repenser le récit des luttes féministes, et constituera à terme une ressource pédagogique précieuse pour les cours d'études féministes de premier cycle universitaire. On pourrait lui reprocher son caractère panoramique : la multiplication des échos entre différentes stratégies d'émancipation ne permet pas toujours d'entrer en profondeur dans les enjeux soulevés. Il n'en demeure pas moins que l'ensemble est d'une grande richesse théorique et critique, précisément par son caractère foisonnant. On soulignera à cet effet l'abondante bibliographie, que les lectrices pourront consulter afin d'approfondir certains aspects et d'ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives de savoir, et qui s'inscrit à coup sûr dans la constellation militante créée par Alexandra Pierre. On peut faire l'hypothèse que le livre deviendra un incontournable des pensées féministes antiracistes et décoloniales du Québec.

ARIANE GIBEAU

University of British Columbia –  
Okanagan

**Andy Hanson, *Class Action: How Ontario's Elementary Teachers Became a Political Force* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021)**

*CLASS ACTION* provides a comprehensive and well-researched study of Ontario's elementary teachers' unions' struggles that

contributes to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the historic battles and long-overdue gains that teachers have achieved.

Previous books have covered similar ground in tracing the rise of teachers' unions in a number of Canadian provinces. However, what sets this book apart is its analysis of Ontario's political and social landscape, based on Hanson's four arguments that provide the foundation for this work. First, the right conditions needed to exist internally and externally within teacher unions before teacher activism could emerge. Second, historic divisions between men's and women's elementary teachers' organizations worked to galvanize women but resulted in reactionary responses from the men's union, which reduced militancy in both unions. Third, Egerton Ryerson's influence in imbuing a professional ethos led teachers to develop a desire to push for better working conditions. Fourth, gendered and class-based social structures defined how labour relations played out in classrooms. In essence, Hanson's "... study holds a labour feminist lens, asking who performs the work, who has the power, who benefits, and where the contradictions are." (xiv)

The book explores the historical roots of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO) and the Ontario Public School Men Teachers' Federation (OPSMTF), later renamed OPSTF. Hanson documents the evolution of these two teachers' unions effectively, particularly the early days that led to the formation of FWTAO. One of the book's strengths is the detailed analysis of FWTAO's changing relationship with OPSTF. Many of the reforms FWTAO wanted to pursue were not as important for men to support. For example, men held many senior administrative positions in schools and received higher

salaries. In addition, male teachers could marry and raise a family without suffering any professional or financial consequences. The privileged position that men teaching at the elementary level enjoyed weakened FWTAO's push for equality in the teaching profession. The issue of equal pay-for-equal work was a key objective FWTAO was pursuing, long before it became a national public policy goal in the decades following World War II.

The 1960s and 1970s were periods of great discontent and frustration for teachers' unions in Ontario. Local teachers' affiliates held rotating strikes to highlight the degree to which labour relations between teachers and trustees had degenerated, and eventually the Ontario government took notice. This resulted in the 1972 Committee of Inquiry into Negotiations Procedures concerning Elementary and Secondary Schools of Ontario (also known as the Reville Report). One of the most contentious aspects of the Reville Report was the recommendation that teachers be denied the right to strike or to negotiate working conditions, and that adjudicative tribunals use binding arbitration to settle disputes between trustees and teachers. The political action that followed the Reville Report and Bill 275, *An Act to Amend the Schools Adminstrating Act*, was that on 18 October 1973, teachers across Ontario walked out of their classrooms and gathered at Maple Leaf Gardens to organize a march to Queen's Park. This political act by teachers resulted in Premier Bill Davis agreeing to reopen negotiations for a collective bargaining process. According to Hanson, the 1973 teachers' strike became a political act that brought all five teachers' unions together for a common cause.

The desire to amalgamate the FWTAO and the OPSTF was gaining support; however, some FWTAO members were still suspicious of OPSTF's motives to amalgamate the two unions. The election of

the New Democratic Party (NDP) to power in Ontario brought about a number of far-reaching changes. Notable among these was the Employment Equity Act, which included affirmative action in its legislation. However, having campaigned on bringing common sense back into government decision making, the newly elected Conservative government, led by Mike Harris, repealed the Act.

Although it was created under the Bob Rae NDP Government, the 1995 Royal Commission on Learning for the Love of Learning brought a seismic shift to Ontario's education landscape. This change was driven by a neoliberal vision of education, which included far-reaching reforms to pedagogy, curriculum, working conditions, the creation of a professional self-governing body, and a host of additional recommendations that upset teachers' unions across Ontario. This critical period showed FWTAO and OPSTF that the time had come to amalgamate to fight the list of large-scale educational restructuring initiatives that the Harris Conservative Government had on its radar screen.

Hanson provides a decisive analysis of the Harris government's neoliberal agenda, especially Bill 160, the *Education Quality Improvement Act*, which scaled back and removed many of the gains teachers' unions had struggled to achieve. Because of Bill 160, teachers across Ontario took to the streets to protest, which worked until the Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens which translates as Franco-Ontarian Teachers' Association (AEFO), FWTAO, and OPSTF announced they would be seeking a way to end the strike. This decision resulted in a sense of frustration within the teachers' unions. Despite this setback, the 1997 strike showed that teachers were willing to challenge Ontario's neoliberal state and, in the end, the Harris Government

amended aspects of Bill 160. Regretfully, this episode also showed how weakened the labour movement had become in Ontario; more work was needed to turn back the neoliberal clock.

The aftermath of the 1997 strike caused FWTAO and OPSTF to take stock of what was next, because the last few years were difficult for both unions. After 80 years, it looked like OPSTF and FWTAO were poised to amalgamate. In August 1998, the two unions became one, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), which now had the capacity to possess a much stronger voice to advance educational issues.

The final chapter offers an analysis of the role of gender in relation to class and social conventions. Within this environment, Hanson observes that female teachers were not given the same rights as men, even into the mid-20th century. At the core of FWTAO's resisting amalgamation were concerns that female teachers would have to compromise, while male teachers would enjoy all the benefits but suffer few of the costs. Hanson refers to this as "gendered paternalism," and he provides an effective analysis of this concept. History has shown us that amalgamating FWTAO and OPSTF into ETFO resulted in a more powerful organization for elementary school teachers. Recent battles have positioned ETFO to stand firm against the Ford Conservative government's decisions with respect to COVID-19 and school closings, which have brought strong public support for ETFO's position.

Hanson's important account of elementary teachers in Ontario reminds us of how complicated the road to gender equity has been for female teachers and that we still have more progress to make on many fronts to achieve a level playing field for female teachers. The significant contribution of this book is to make us aware of how long and arduous this

journey has been for Ontario's elementary teachers, especially female teachers. Yet, female teachers persevered to create a union that stood strong and became even more influential with ETFO's creation. In the decades to come, labour will need to continue to remain vigilant in the face of expanding neoliberal policies that threaten the core values of education in Ontario and beyond.

DUNCAN MACLELLAN  
Ryerson University

**Serge Bouchard et Mark Fortier, *Du diesel dans les veines, la saga des camionneurs du Nord* (Montréal: Lux Éditeur, 2021)**

LA VOIX ET les écrits de Serge Bouchard résonnent encore dans la mémoire des Québécois. Récipiendaire de deux prix littéraires du Gouverneur général – pour *Les yeux tristes de mon camion* en 2017 et le présent ouvrage en 2021 –, Bouchard demeure un éternel curieux tout au long de sa vie. À la fois animateur de radio, essayiste, conférencier et anthropologue, il s'est intéressé à de nombreux sujets dont la culture des peuples autochtones et le travail des camionneurs. Peu avant sa mort en mai 2021, *Du diesel dans les veines* paraît chez Lux avec l'aide du sociologue et éditeur Mark Fortier. Celui-ci découvre le vieux manuscrit de son ami anthropologue et le réécrit en bonne partie.

Le récit comporte une vingtaine de courts chapitres et une quinzaine de photos, dans lesquels l'univers des camionneurs du nord est dépeint. Entre novembre 1975 et octobre 1976, Serge Bouchard parcourt des milliers de kilomètres aux côtés de truckeurs tout en notant anecdotes, manières de parler, non-dits et divers comportements afin de compléter sa thèse de doctorat en anthropologie. D'abord, c'est la force du