motivate them to turn to unions as the best means to achieve voice and democracy at work. Daniels writes, "The desire of textile workers to have an equal role in deciding issues of workplace fairness and justice was likely to be as strong and persistent in the new century as it had been in the old" (p. 281). Would that were so, and that a "culture of misfortune" would never prove itself sufficiently powerful to extinguish the faith of those who believed in the cause of unionism.

Melvyn Dubofsky
Bartle Distinguished Professor
of History
Binghamton University, SUNY

Unionization and Union Leadership: The Road Haulage Industry. By Paul Smith. London: Continuum, 2001. 230 pages. ISBN 0-8264-5214-0, $99.95 (hardback).

The British road haulage industry is rarely studied by students of industrial relations. It is not hard to understand why. Compared to miners and dockworkers, engineering and auto workers, and even railway workers, the men who drive trucks in Britain have always looked a rather unattractive group for those in search of romanticism and a lost class-conscious proletariat. But this comparative lack of interest in truckers in the study of British labor history—for all their importance to the economy—has been profoundly mistaken. The lasting value of Paul Smith's short but lucid and well-argued analysis, based firmly on interviews and a range of archival sources, is that it has gone some considerable way to make up for that serious past neglect.

Smith's study—developed from an earlier doctoral thesis—is much more than a straightforward narrative of the evolution of road haulage trade unionism in the twentieth century. It claims higher theoretical ambitions. Indeed, it purports to challenge many of the alleged assumptions lying behind the work of Warwick University's Industrial Relations Research Unit, mainly during the 1970s and early 1980s. Smith argues that the "creation and mobilization of trade union power—unionization—has been unexplored." The emphasis on job control and workplace organization in so much research of that time resulted, he argues, in the exclusion of "any analysis of the changing nature and meaning of trade unionism." Whether this charge constitutes anything so grand as a theory is questionable, but Smith does have a point. Far too much of the academic research in the so-called golden age of British industrial relations was concerned with shop stewards and workers in the engineering and auto industries, and trade unions as such were not the central focus of attention.

In this study Smith relates the development of road haulage industrial relations to the rise and fall of trade union organization, in particular that of the Transport and General Workers union, the 1921 brainchild of Ernest Bevin. In doing so he digs deep into the complexities of road haulage with empirical studies of the union's trucker branches in London, Liverpool, and Birmingham. What unfolds reads like a description of a lost world of workplace democracy and mobilization of collective power on a district-wide basis, a world that lasted for only a surprisingly brief time in the 1960s and 1970s.

This so-called new unionism reached its apogee in the January 1979 road haulage dispute, which turned out to be an important part of the much wider national trade union offensive, during the "winter of discontent," against the Labour government's attempt to restrain wages for what it perceived to be the national interest. The lorry drivers won a famous victory on that occasion—mainly as a result of their aggressive use of picketing to disrupt the movement of food supplies—and humiliated both the government and the road haulage employers. However, this proved to be only a short-lived triumph.

Smith displays considerable sympathy for the truckers in their struggle, but he admits that "the very determination and breadth of the 1979 road haulage strike was a major factor precipitating the mobilization of the coercive power of the state during the 1980s to counter the power of militant trade unionism." Not long after the election of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives a few months following the strike, the so-called balance of industrial power shifted in road haulage back to employers. Abetting anti-union initiatives by the government were the onset of recession and a rapid contraction of unionization, which weakened the TGWU's "capacity to mobilize collective action across the sector." We have witnessed few signs of recovery in road haulage unionism in recent years. Smith argues that "an accommodation to overwhelming force has narrowed hopes and aspirations," which the arrival of the social partnership concept and new union recognition laws under Labour since May 1997

have done little to modify. This is a bleak but perhaps realistic assessment of trade union prospects in the British road haulage industry.

What would now be of real research interest would be a comparative study of truckers in Britain and the United States. No ruthless, charismatic figure like Jimmy Hoffa ever represented the British drivers. (Perhaps Alan Law, who was a union district organizer in the Midlands, came the nearest to such a phenomenon.) Nor did the British drivers create a powerful union like the Teamsters devoted exclusively to their interests, which might have helped them raise their status and achieve a clear identity. Instead, as a rather isolated group inside the huge Transport and General Workers union, they suffered the familiar weaknesses born of fragmentation and sectionalism.

This book usefully enlarges our understanding of postwar British trade unionism during its brief period of supposed dominance. Thanks to Smith's efforts, too, the drivers' important contribution to that history has at least received some belated recognition.

Robert Taylor

[[Robert Taylor's title will be here]]
London School of Economics
and Political Science
Centre for Economic Performance