

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Jacoby, Sanford P., ed. *Masters to Managers. Historical and Comparative Perspectives on American Employers*

Norman A. Solomon

Volume 48, numéro 3, 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050880ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/050880ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Solomon, N. A. (1993). Compte rendu de [Jacoby, Sanford P., ed. *Masters to Managers. Historical and Comparative Perspectives on American Employers*]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 48(3), 567–570.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/050880ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1993

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

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

(cadre légal, politiques syndicales et patronales, etc.). Plowman analyse justement ces changements aux politiques patronales alors que Thompson en montre les conséquences sur la négociation collective. Les employeurs ont cherché à transformer de façon radicale leur gestion du personnel, à éliminer la présence syndicale dans certains cas (États-Unis) et à décentraliser et à rendre plus flexible les relations du travail dans la plupart des pays capitalistes avancés. Pour sa part, Keller examine les politiques étatiques de différents pays et conclut que les rigidités généralement associées aux régulations étatiques n'ont pas pour effet unidirectionnel de réduire la productivité des entreprises et économies nationales comme le supposent les thèses néo-libérales.

Ce volume constitue une bonne source de documentation pour les étudiants inscrits à un cours de relations industrielles comparées. Mais il laissera songeur ceux qui se préoccupent de l'avenir des relations industrielles comme champ de la pratique sociale et comme champ scientifique. En effet, au plan de la pratique, alors que les systèmes nationaux de relations industrielles sont en transformation radicale, que le syndicalisme décline dans de nombreux pays, que les modes de gestion du personnel se transforment, etc., le volume traite surtout des thèmes traditionnels en relations industrielles (par exemple, l'étude du taux de syndicalisation, le rôle de l'État et la négociation collective). Plowman et Thompson font tout de même mention d'approches différentes de l'étude des relations industrielles avec la notion de *labour process* ou des solutions de rechange à la négociation collective. Au plan du champ scientifique, alors que le paradigme théorique dunloppien d'orientation néo-positiviste sur lequel se sont construites les relations industrielles connaît une crise et qu'on assiste à une multiplication des paradigmes et à l'apparition des théories post-structuralistes en relations industrielles, que l'avenir même des départements de relations industrielles est remis en question aux États-Unis, en Australie et ailleurs, on demeure étonné à la lecture du volume de l'absence de remises en question telles, la réhabilitation de la théorie dunloppienne, la ré-explication de Commons: *science as usual*, véritable cas de « science normale » au sens de Kuhn (*La structure des révolutions scientifiques*). Est-ce le champ des relations industrielles qui refuse de se remettre en question ou est-ce le reflet du choix éditorial? Une réponse positive à la première question serait plus inquiétante qu'une réponse positive à la deuxième. Elle signifierait que le champ scientifique des relations industrielles est décroché des relations industrielles contemporaines et des mouvements de la science moderne (montée des épistémologies anti-positiviste constructiviste et interprétative), alors que la seconde signifierait que l'éditeur n'atteint pas totalement son objectif de présenter les théories et recherches comparatives contemporaines.

Guy BELLEMARE

Université du Québec à Hull

Masters to Managers: Historical and Comparative Perspectives on American Employers, Sanford P. Jacoby, ed., New York, Oxford, Columbia University Press, 1991, 249 p., ISBN 0-231-06802-6

This book represents a fascinating treatment of an important subject. The industrial relations literature is replete with historical studies of trade unions and their

struggles but far less has been written concerning employers and how they have dealt with employee issues. This volume fills an important gap in the literature by providing an historical view of the labour-management equation from the employer's perspective. Well edited and well written this volume has earned a place on the book shelf of all serious students of the field. This reviewer will provide a general description of the book as a whole and its readability; briefly describe each chapter; and finally, discuss the volume's contributions to industrial relations.

The book is a collection of eight studies devoted to historical and comparative perspectives on employers policies towards employees in the United States. The volume is made 'reader friendly' by separating the studies into three categories and by providing an editor's preface to each category. The categories are as follows: *Managing the Workplace*; *Politics and Labor Markets*; and *Comparative Perspectives*.

Each study consists of original empirical research being published for the first time. The scholars contributing to the volume have been trained in a variety of disciplines, including history, economics, law and sociology. In addition to dividing the chapters into three substantive categories, the editor, Sanford Jacoby, in his introduction, provides a framework for understanding the debates that arise within and across disciplines concerning the field of employer studies. He explains how each reading in the collection fits into that framework. Jacoby posits that there are three ways of thinking about employer actions. The internal factors approach argues that employers make decisions in reaction to technological and economic necessity. The environmental factors approach posits that cultural norms, government regulation, social conflict, political power and ideologies of authority mediate the effect of internal factors. The contingent factors approach stresses that chance, variety, hazard and complexity determine employer actions. Thus Jacoby's introduction provides the reader with a concise 'road map' to the remainder of the book.

What follows is a brief description of the chapters falling under each category heading. Although brief, the descriptions are intended to provide the reader with a taste of what to expect. The first category heading, "Managing the Workplace" consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 by Jens Christiansen and Peter Philips is entitled, "The Transition from Outwork to Factory Production in the Boot and Shoe Industry, 1830-1880." Using modern statistical techniques the authors find that "...no existing theory can adequately explain the transition from outwork to factory production" (p. 41). Instead they argue that internal factors, such as the employer's quest for profits, rather than an inherent need or desire to control workers led to the transition. Thus they challenge the thesis put forth by both mainstream and Marxist economic historians that the shift to factory production was the result of problems at the work site.

Chapter 2, "Studying Work: Personnel Policies in Philadelphia Firms, 1850-1950" by Walter Licht provides a rich analysis of personnel policies at a variety of firms. The firms he analyses have policies that range from highly informal to paternalistic to bureaucratic. He can find no conceptual framework to encompass the diversity he observes and argues that the policies were determined by case specific contingencies.

Chapter 3, "Scientific Management and the Workplace, 1920-1935" by Daniel Nelson challenges the thesis that scientific management, as espoused by Frederick

W. Taylor significantly deskilled individual workers and reduced the opportunity for individual initiative. Nelson, using survey data and case studies conducted at the point of production, studies what managers actually did in the area of scientific management. He finds that the impact of scientific management was contingent on the will of managers to fully implement Taylor's principles; a will, that as Nelson reveals, varied substantially from workplace to workplace.

Chapter 4, "Ford Welfare Capitalism in its Economic Context" by Daniel M.G. Raff reviews the welfare program introduced by Ford Motor Company in 1913. That program included the five-dollar day, home visits by social workers and various educational and social activities designed to Americanize workers. Raff concludes that Ford's efforts were not motivated by altruism but rather by a desire to ensure that the complex and highly integrated assembly line was well supplied with loyal and competent workers. Ford wanted to eliminate any propensity for collective action that could threaten the efficiency of the assembly line.

The second category heading, Politics and Labor Markets, includes Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5, written by Howell John Harris, is entitled "Getting it Together: The Metal Manufacturers Association of Philadelphia, c. 1900-1930". The chapter argues that internal and environmental factors forced these small to medium sized metal working firms to band together to hold down the costs of skilled labour in a union-free environment.

Chapter 6, "The Closed Shop, the Proprietary Capitalist, and the Law, 1897-1915" by Daniel R. Ernst focusses on the efforts of small businessmen to combat unionism. He finds that, absent the resources of larger employers, small businessmen relied on each other, local politics and the courts to defeat unions. This environmental and contingency based analysis of employer actions actually finds that, for a variety of reasons, proprietary capitalists were less successful in enlisting the aid of the courts than is commonly believed.

The final two chapters of the book appear under the heading of "Comparative Perspectives". Chapter 7, written by Gerald Friedman is entitled "The Decline of Paternalism and the Making of the Employer Class: France, 1870-1914". Friedman stresses the importance of environmental and contingent factors in the growth of French employer organizations. He argues that a benign and sometimes positive attitude by the French government towards organized labour played a critical role in the mobilization of French employers.

Chapter 8, "American Exceptionalism Revisited: The Importance of Management" by Sanford Jacoby addresses the uniqueness of the American industrial relations system from the employer's perspective. Jacoby argues that: low union density rates; decentralized unions; support for employers by the state; and the cultural value of individualism, all combined to explain why American employers have been more successful in combatting unions than have their counterparts in other countries. In fact, Jacoby believes that the absence of a credible radical labour movement actually hindered the extension of collective bargaining. This is because U.S. unions could not point to a radical threat to capital that would exist if collective bargaining was not adopted.

The volume as a whole, and the editor in particular, have succeeded in making a valuable contribution to the industrial relations literature. Contemporary employers in both the union and non-union sector are facing and will continue to face difficult labour issues because of structural change. This book is tremendously useful because of the historical perspective it provides. Structural change is not new, and the volume reveals the wide variety of ways of adapting to change that have been used in the past.

Overall, my enthusiasm for the book is high. The editor has done a masterful job of making a coherent whole out of eight very different studies. Each contributor, in turn, has produced a well researched and well written chapter.

The only major criticism I have is that I believe that the book does not adequately address issues surrounding how employers have dealt with women and with people of colour. Labour history teaches us that union policies toward these two groups were not always the same as policies directed towards white males; is it not reasonable to assume similar differentiation by employers? If so, it would be instructive to learn more about how and why employer policies differentiated these groups. Perhaps this issue could be the subject of as fine a volume as that reviewed here!

Norman A. SOLOMON

University of Windsor

Paradigm Shift. The New Promise of Information Technology, by Don Tapscott and Art Caston, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1993, 337 p., ISBN : 0-07-062857-2

Un vade-mecum ?

Tout est paradigmatique dans ce livre. Tout est transfert (*shift*).

Si, au moment de lire ces lignes, cet ouvrage n'est pas encore devenu un best-seller, c'est que cela ne tardera pas ! Il est étonnant de voir le nombre de personnes qui « voyagent » avec ce livre et qui profite d'occasions pour le montrer à un collègue (« Vous avez vu ce livre ? ») ou, encore, pour en lire quelques pages. On a l'impression que plusieurs managers en ont fait leur livre de chevet.

Il faut admettre que *Paradigm Shift*, dont le sous-titre se traduit par : *La nouvelle promesse des technologies de l'information* vise le manager. Écrit par deux vice-présidents de la célèbre firme canadienne de consultants de management et de technologie de l'information : Ducros, Meilleurs et Roy (DMR), il se veut le fruit de recherches réalisées auprès de milliers d'organisations américaines, canadiennes et étrangères. S'agit-il du *vade-mecum* des managers en la matière de technologie de l'information (TI) ?

Un livre condensé qui se veut englobant

Les premières lignes du livre risquent d'apeurer le lecteur. Dès sa préface on peut lire qu'une mutation fondamentale est en cours dans le monde des affaires quant à la nature et à l'instauration de la technologie et que cette évolution risque d'avoir des