

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Employment with a Human Face: Balancing Efficiency, Equity, and Voice* by John BUDD, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004, 263 pp., ISBN 0-8014-4208-7.

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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d'une formalisation tout à fait originale et stimulante, car la perspective qui lie l'institution à la rationalisation nous montre aussi les conflits, les ratés et l'effet désorganisateur de la flexibilité

sur la production et sur l'organisation des autres activités sociales.

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***Employment with a Human Face: Balancing Efficiency, Equity, and Voice***

by John BUDD, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004, 263 pp., ISBN 0-8014-4208-7.

A series of oddly shaped dots floats, somewhat haphazardly, across the cover of John Budd's latest book, but this is hardly an accurate picture of the balancing act that he achieves in *Employment with a Human Face*. Instead, Budd's view of Industrial Relations is a roughly aligned triangle, which despite its symmetry, does not avoid the messy bits that are part and parcel of employment relations research.

It's a tall order to bring together the past century of labour relations research into a cohesive picture, especially if the system in question operates at various levels, from grievances on the shop floor to the globalization of labour standards. But Budd gives it the best shot in recent memory. *Employment with a Human Face* is really a book out of the blue. As the author admits, it grew not from any specific research agenda but simply from his "effort to create a richer, deeper and more engaging way to teach labour relations and labour policy to his students at the University of Minnesota."

Still, *Employment with a Human Face* is not a textbook, nor is it for those who insist that employment and work are obvious and well understood concepts. While most industrial relations texts serve as an introduction to existing processes, such as the functioning of collective bargaining or the nature of so-called "work rules", this book kicks it up a notch by successfully weaving together a picture of what the field of pluralist industrial relations is really about—the pursuit of a balance

between efficiency, equity and voice in employment.

Budd is an engaging writer with a talent for describing arcane IR topics in a way that is accessible not only to university students, but to anyone with even a passing interest in labour relations. He draws on works as disparate as Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*, the *United Nations Human Development Report* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to advance his ideas, a device that works well most of the time, but which can sometimes be distracting.

There are problems in weaving together a pluralist picture of the world of work, the author notes, beginning with the fact that there are competing claims about "the operation of markets, conflict and power . . . and the role of employment in a democratic, capitalist society." These competing streams of thought—from Marxism to Management—share the virtue of being at extreme ends of a spectrum. The Critical or Marxian school views employment as a fundamentally unequal relationship, in which conflict between employer and employee is endemic and where organized labour is a natural and inevitable counterbalance. Human resource management theories assume that the interests of employers and employees can be aligned, thereby mitigating conflict and the need for unions. Pluralist industrial relations scholarship, however, is situated between these extremes and hence is more agnostic about the best way to

model the employment relationship. It acknowledges the benefits of markets and efficiency, but recognizes that interests do in fact diverge and that there is a necessary role for what Budd calls “non market interests—such as government regulations and unions—to balance unequal . . . power between employers and employees and to . . . produce outcomes that create economic prosperity and respect for human life.”

The first chapter of the book argues that the central interests of the employment relationship are equity, efficiency and voice. Budd graciously acknowledges the great debt owed to his immediate predecessors in this regard, namely Jack Barbash, Bruce Kaufman, Tom Kochan and Noah Meltz. But he advances their arguments in subtle but sophisticated ways. For instance, he demonstrates that in contrast to Barbash and Meltz’s notion of equity-and-efficiency, voice is a separable concept distinguished from equity, that does relate to how one is treated but which is also an activity that workers engage in. He also blends the insights of disciplinary-distinct, but methodologically consistent industrial relations approaches. Richard Hyman’s idea of a “Geometry of Trade Unionism” is nicely appropriated by Budd to present the three faces of pluralist IR—equity, efficiency and voice—as opposite points of a triangle, with balance achieved in the middle. This is both a great metaphor and an excellent teaching tool, again reinforcing the multiple aims of the book.

Chapters 2 to 5 challenge the reader by covering much territory—from moral philosophy to the “science” of human agency and behaviour. The key to following these chapters is to understand the centrality of balance in creating and maintaining viable industrial

relations outcomes. It is Budd’s central contention, again echoing the work of earlier IR theorists, that any complex system—from the human brain to the polity—breaks down under extreme conditions. The employment relations system in this respect is no different, yet the application of “efficiency-only” solutions as advocated by neo-classical economics or equity-only as advocated by human relationists will never offer long-lasting solutions to problems encountered in the world of work.

In later chapters, Budd uses his version of the balancing-framework inherited from pluralist IR, to understand the past (chapter 6), to explain differences in employment relations systems across countries (chapter 7) and to offer alternatives to job control unionism (chapter 8). It is remarkable how satisfactorily this works; all the threads eventually wind their way back to the balancing framework and the foundations of pluralist IR as embodied by the Webb’s and John R. Commons. In some ways, this is the most successful part of the book—a formidable feat, given the educational aims of the book, the breadth of territory to be covered and the number of pages the author had to work with (197 not including endnotes).

*Employment with a Human Face* offers much that is new. It is a work of original scholarship whose explanations of complex ideas are as clear as they are relevant. On the run up to the centenary anniversary of the publication of Commons’ (1905) *Trade Unionism and Labor Problems*, readers could do no better than to let John Budd reinvigorate their interest in the study of Industrial Relations.

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