

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Work in Tumultuous Times: Critical Perspectives, edited by Vivian SHALLA and Wallace CLEMENT, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, xx + 427 pp., ISBN-10: 0-7735-3141-6 and ISBN-13: 978-0-7735-3141-3.

Braham Dabscheck

Volume 62, numéro 3, été 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/016498ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/016498ar>

[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

Dabscheck, B. (2007). Compte rendu de [*Work in Tumultuous Times: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Vivian SHALLA and Wallace CLEMENT, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, xx + 427 pp., ISBN-10: 0-7735-3141-6 and ISBN-13: 978-0-7735-3141-3.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 62(3), 581–583. <https://doi.org/10.7202/016498ar>

movement, enabling it to better resist the pressures for concessions in the 80s.

A particular strength of the book is Vair's account of the organizing efforts of local activists in Saint John. He describes in detail the various activities and events used to develop opposition and convincingly demonstrates that the successful protest in Saint John did not happen of its own accord but was the result of an enormous commitment of time, energy and careful planning by local activists. The book also deepens our understanding of the differences that existed within the labour movement on how to oppose the controls, frequently drawing on personal conversations with various key figures with telling effect. Moreover, the author tells the story in a charming and principled manner, with limited "editorializing" on the positions of others. He forthrightly acknowledging his own mishaps and misjudgements. That said, the book would have been strengthened by giving more attention to the debates among local activists over how to proceed and some reflection on the merits of various activities undertaken.

The most questionable aspect of Vair's account concerns the conclusions he draws. While there is some evidence that unions were able to circumvent the controls (Vair cites a study by the UAW/CAW to this effect), there is also much indication, including, that provided in the book, to suggest otherwise. Indeed, the scale of the October 14 protest is hard to imagine if the controls weren't

having a real impact on workers. And as for the controls being temporary, it is so often the case that "c'est seulement le provisoire qui dure". The wage and price controls were not the first measure temporarily suspending workers' trade union rights in Canada; nor, more importantly, were they the last. The list here is lengthy but to cite one example, just days after the end of the controls the federal government passed legislation temporarily suspending CUPW's right to strike, and abridged the freedom of speech of its president Jean-Claude Parrot—ordering him to instruct his members to return to work (and jailing him for his hesitancy to act on this instruction).

This is not to say that Vair is wrong to suggest that the labour movement was strengthened in some respects by the struggle against controls. Were this not the case, various federal and provincial governments might not have found it necessary to suppress their rights so frequently in the subsequent years. Strength, however, is a relational term that has to do with the balance of social forces. The labour movement has not found the means to successfully resist assaults on its rights; a state-of-affairs that has contributed to organized labour's diminished influence. Far reaching changes in the consciousness and practices of the labour movement will be necessary to reverse this situation.

DONALD SWARTZ
Carleton University

Work in Tumultuous Times: Critical Perspectives,

edited by Vivian SHALLA and Wallace CLEMENT, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, xx + 427 pp., ISBN-10: 0-7735-3141-6 and ISBN-13: 978-0-7735-3141-3.

Neo-liberalism and globalization have shifted the balance of power in favour of employers. The never ending drive of employers for flexibility and profit have resulted in a reduction in the welfare

and living standards of "substantial" numbers of workers in Western style societies, such as Canada. Vivian Shalla, one of the editors to this book of readings, in her introductory chapter

states that it “continues the tradition of critically examining and analyzing the changing nature and conditions of work in turbulent times... The focus... is on work and its transformation during the past few decades, with particular attention to the world of work in Canada and comparatively” (pp. 4-5).

Work in Tumultuous Times comprises thirteen chapters. The first is a theoretical overview of recent, essentially sociological writings on work by Vivian Shalla. In it she pays homage to the pioneering de-skilling thesis of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). In the process she notes that it was criticized by second wave feminists and postmodern writers. To the extent that *Work in Tumultuous Times* makes a contribution, it is how feminist writers have eschewed previous criticisms and taken on board the insights of Braverman's pioneering work. None of the chapters makes use of postmodernism, that recent phenomenon which has blighted the social sciences and humanities. Having empirically discovered that the work and lives of many workers have been downgraded, the authors found little need to enter into lengthy discussions concerning the meaning of “language and texts” (p. 8). Within industrial relations scholarship, this has been the province of human resource managers, those servants of power, who seek to convince workers that their lot in life is improved by doing whatever it is that employers want of them.

The second chapter provides a fairly conventional approach to research methods and methodology. It doesn't say anything that couldn't be obtained from writings across a range of social science disciplines. The next chapter, the first of many which focuses on women, examines the different experiences of precarious employment in Australia (part-time work), Canada

(self-employment) and America (low paid full-time employment). The next three chapters, respectively examine the employment strains and associated poor health experienced by workers who make use of temporary employment agencies, how workers skill levels are underutilized (à la Braverman) and how, despite writings on lean and post-Fordist production, employment in Canadian manufacturing still accounts for a large percentage of the workforce.

Chapters seven and eight highlight racial dimensions of the operation of the Canadian labour market, and how the employer driven demand for flexibility, negatively impacts on the lives, in terms of time management, of workers. The next three chapters are concerned with unpaid labour. They respectively examine broad dimensions of this phenomenon and its impact mainly on women, issues associated with the commodification of household work, and how official statistics understate the number of health care workers. The final two chapters examine issues associated with social citizenship with a call to eschew the logic of the market and a general discussion of issues confronting the Canadian labour movement in these turbulent times. The latter chapter does not contain anything that would not be found elsewhere in discussions on Canadian unions.

As already noted this volume is inspired by the work of Braverman. One of the problems with this is that even when the respective authors produce new “facts” and “information” it is not as if they are saying anything new. A reader reasonably well versed in sociological, let alone, industrial relations, analyses of work will not be surprised by the contents of the respective chapters. The individual chapters and the volume as a whole have an overwhelming feeling of anti-climax.

Other problems with the volume should be noted. Because of the

volume's linkage to Braverman, an expectation is created that there will be a series of labour process studies which will examine, for want of a better term, micro aspects associated with different types of work. This hardly occurs. The volume mainly combines literature surveys (and please note the problem in the above paragraph) with examinations of mainly government provided statistical data and surveys. In short, the respective chapters in *Work in Tumultuous Times* have a distinctive "top down" approach which, it could be argued, is the antithesis of Braverman's legacy. Moreover, in the five chapters, which make use of micro "grass roots" research they constitute, to be kind,

reworkings, or to be less generous, recycling of previous research. In addition, the numbers used in these micro based chapters are "low".

At best, *Work in Tumultuous Times* draws together previous research which has been published on some aspects of the impact of globalization and neo-liberalism on work in Canada. It is doubtful, however, if provides information and insights that are not already well known to researchers and scholars of the Canadian labour market.

BRAHAM DABSHECK
University of Melbourne

The Workforce Scorecard: Managing Human Capital to Execute Strategy,

par Mark A. HUSELID, Brian E. BECKER et Richard W. BEATTY, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005, 288 pages, ISBN-10 : 1-5913-9245-4.

L'ouvrage de Huselid, Becker et Beatty intitulé *The Workforce Scorecard: Managing Human Capital to Execute Strategy* sera probablement un jour reconnu comme l'un des incontournables du paysage gestionnaire américain. Bien écrit, imagé (du moins au sens figuré!) et foisonnant d'exemples « rendus » convaincants, ce livre publié par Harvard Business School Press s'inscrit en parfaite ligne avec la vision libérale véhiculée par l'institution.

Ouvrément utilitariste, l'ouvrage prône un certain nombre d'idées stimulantes dont l'intérêt est notamment d'entrer directement en conflit avec une vision pluraliste de l'organisation et de la gestion des ressources humaines. Insistant sur le principe que la main-d'œuvre se doit impérativement d'être segmentée puis traitée avec plus ou moins d'attention selon l'importance qu'elle occupe dans la réalisation de la stratégie organisationnelle, les propos des auteurs ne laissent personne indifférent.

Oubliant jusqu'à un certain point qu'en gestion tout ne peut pas être mesuré, les auteurs invitent sans cesse le gestionnaire des ressources humaines à ne rien laisser au hasard et à tout faire pour créer entre les pratiques RH et la stratégie organisationnelle la plus grande des cohérences. Ne se gênant pas pour émailler leur texte d'idées « à la mode » pas toujours bien appuyées par la recherche scientifique et les récents développements en éthique des affaires, on ne peut faire autrement que parfois sourire à la lecture de certaines incantations faciles que d'aucun qualifierait de « japonaises américanisées ». Ceci dit, le propos des auteurs reste accrocheur, notamment lorsque ces derniers abordent l'importance relative que devrait prendre les notions d'égalité et d'équité. À ne pas en douter, Huselid, Becker et Beatty les considèrent comme étant mutuellement exclusives et ne se privent pas de privilégier ouvertement la seconde à la première.