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Perspectives on Contemporary Professional Work, Edited by Adrian Wilkinson, Donald Hislop and Christine Coupland (2016) Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. ISBN: 978-1-78347-557-5

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Recensions / Book Reviews

Framing Work: Unitary, Pluralist and Critical Perspectives in the Twenty-first Century

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Perspectives on Contemporary Professional Work

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These books both offer perspectives on work, big picture perspectives, but from very different lenses. Heery is concerned to trace how the Unitarist, Pluralist and Critical frames of reference for viewing work have played out—both in terms of research and practice—over the past four decades. The book edited by Wilkinson, Hislop and Coupland examines the professions as a form of work organization, trying to identify their critical characteristics and the impact of competing pressures like managerialism. The books have very different agendas making direct comparisons difficult. However, they both raise a number of important issues and themes about how work should be approached, including common gaps in contemporary research and writing. I will deal with each book in turn before drawing out some unifying themes.

British scholar Alan Fox coined the terms unitary and pluralist frames of reference in 1966 and, self-critiquing his earlier work, added the critical frame of reference in 1974. Fox's work had particular resonance as the late 1960s and early 1970s were a period when those studying, teaching and researching industrial relations were looking for a unifying model or theme with which they could both differentiate and promote the contribution to the field (it was seen as too multidisciplinary to be a discipline in

its own right). Fox's contribution was not seminal, but it was influential. Heery has set himself the task of examining how research, practice and prescription played out over the next four decades viewed through each of these frames, including documenting the rise of human resource management (HRM) though, unfortunately, not so much on the commensurate collapse of industrial relations as an academic field. It would have been useful had Heery spent a little time examining the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Fox's frames of references as others have done and continue to do (see, for example, Fry and Mees, 2017).

A chapter is devoted to each frame followed by a thematic analysis of each with regard to debates on four key issues, namely participation, customers, equality and the recent economic crisis. Heery takes great care to present a balanced view of each frame, but in his efforts to be even handed, some things get lost. At one point, he observes that the fields of economics and psychology contain a wide spectrum of views. This is true, but the dominant modes of discourse within both portray workers essentially in individualised terms. Similarly, while HRM contains soft and hard streams, both take an essential intra-organizational perspective on work, which leaves unions at best as the margins and, more easily, accommodates to a unitarist perspective. Moreover, however HRM may view the world as anyone who has taught the subject should know, there is often a major tension between its prescriptions and what corporate management business strategies dictate. Do not get me wrong. Heery has views and these points are to be found. However, the reader must work to find them.

Heery's account of the rise of HRM and its shifts over time has value but, even here, there are diplomatic silences. For example, Heery points to the role some IR scholars played in initiating several HRM journals, but does not wonder whether this was

not actually contributing to the decline of IR. Industrial relations journals continue to flourish; many of my generation have adapted to the new terrain in their teaching and research; and have enjoyed successful even privileged academic careers to reach professorial rank in good universities. On the other hand, the teaching of IR has all but collapsed to a rump of residual service subjects in HR majors. Advertized academic jobs in the field are exceedingly rare/non-existent, and appointments into schools of management (all but a few IR Departments having been rebadged) dominated by psychologists, with little understanding of the role of regulation, let alone unions in the world of work.

As mentioned earlier, Heery does examine the respective frames of reference within wider debates about work and the ones he chooses are not unimportant. However, some warranted a more critical touch. I was somewhat perplexed by the space devoted to debating on the customer even though it contains valuable elements like the marketization of public services. Of course, the argument IR was too concerned with producer relations could have been turned on its head. I distinctly recall the arguments for greater customer focus emanating for marketing and HRM academics and the business sector. To anyone standing in a long queue, trapped on an automated telecall system loop, angry at the lost time spent doing things online or at a supermarket checkout that used to be done by actual people (you may remember them as service workers), the argument for a new era of 'customer focus' rings as sick joke. In the end, it was not about servicing customers, it was about servicing the business, and this became an argument for workers not counting. One of the starkest examples of this warranting attention in this chapter was how 'customer focus' arguments were used to bolster notions that businesses owed no obligation to communities bar that posited in public relations spin-doctored advertis-

ing. The loss of jobs associated with factory closures, offshoring and outsourcing which have blighted towns and regions are now portrayed and accepted by governments as unfortunate, but essential, collateral damage of businesses who, in practice, owe little or no loyalty other than to their shareholders and customers (including those losing their jobs—a trade-off seldom debated).

On the other hand, the chapter on debating equality is annoyingly thin. The world of work has undergone profound changes since Fox wrote and not in the direction of equality. In most, if not all rich countries (with similar trends in others, but from a lower base), precarious/insecure work has grown along with unemployment/under-employment, labour's share of national income which was rising when Fox wrote has gone into sharp reverse, the slow decline in working hours has stalled (with a growing bifurcation between those working extended hours and those whose hours are too few/irregular) and a wealth of evidence that these changes are having profound adverse effects on the health, safety and well-being of workers (see, for example, studies using the Effort Reward Imbalance and Job Strain models). Wilkinson and Pickett's *The Spirit Level* is referred to, but overall changes in work and substantive working conditions (wages, hours and health) which characterise the world of work since the mid-1970s find no place in the book (check the index!). It seems a little odd for a book assessing three frames of reference perspectives' on work can ignore such basic evidence on outcomes—outcomes that provide a ready basis for assessing their respective relevance. For those like myself who spent years trying to convince our colleagues that the health and safety of workers should be a central concern of IR scholarship—it is depressing (note too how few articles in IR journals refer to working hours or wage theft).

Heery does deal with the rise of Neoliberalism, which drove these changes

and created the low-wage economies that are stifling consumption, flooding labour markets and hollowing out communities. I think the framework of the book both delivers a wealth of useful information—for both those of us who lived this period and those trying to understand it—but for my part, at least the overarching critique needed to be stronger. By its very nature industrial relations is a normative subject—as indeed are all other subject terms used to cover this space whether they acknowledge this or not. The values IR encapsulated notably recognizing the legitimate interest workers have in organizing to protect their working and living conditions are arguably central to a civilized society. In 1944, as nearly two decades of social upheaval, depression and war drew to an end, the International Labour Organization declared that labour was not a commodity. Fox coined frames of reference at the height of the post-war accord dominated by Keynesian redistributive economic policies and collective regulation of working conditions (at least in the old industrial countries). It was a point in time where pluralism seemed to mark a new orthodoxy in workplace relations and it was, not coincidentally, a time when industrial relations emerged and flourished as an academic discipline. It was and remains the only term to describe worker/capital relations in a pluralist, inter-organizational or non-managerialist manner.

However, by the time Fox added the critical perspective, those pushing for a renewed counter-offensive by capital had seized the opportunity afforded by the oil crisis to begin their attack. Keynesianism was overthrown by Neoliberalism and government policies reshaped in profound ways that advantaged capital. These shifts, and changes to regulation and policy are partly explored by Heery. However, in understanding this period, context is everything and I do not think this aspect is brought to the fore as it could have been.

The changes spilled over to academia. Industrial relations and other subjects that looked at society in more collectivist ways, such as sociology and history, went into retreat while business schools and subjects pushing a more individualised discourse compatible with new regime (like psychology) gained in numbers and influence. It is an obvious but too little commented on irony that IR was replaced by HRM—a term which portrayed workers and its role in the most explicitly commodified way. You are no longer a worker you are a human resource! Heery deals with the commodification of service work but not the wider commodification of workers that the rise of HRM as a discipline and practice entailed. More united opposition amongst IR academics to these developments is unlikely to have altered outcomes where such powerful forces were in play. But maybe it was a losing battle worth fighting harder. It was certainly part of a wider and more profound battle, which IR academics should have documented for future generations. Heery's book contributes, if incompletely, to this project.

Turning to the Wilkinson *et al.* book on professions, my comments will be shorter. This book is the result of an international collaboration led by scholars at Griffith University (Australia) and Loughborough University (UK) bringing a body of contemporary research into the professions and professional work together. The contributions cover a number of professions, a number of countries (though predominantly English-speaking) and there is a nice mixture in terms of themes and theoretical versus empirical emphasis. For anyone doing research or teaching on the professions, this book will be very welcome. The editors acknowledge the difficulties of seeing professions in terms of precise definitions, but rather in terms of an array of characteristics. There are valuable contributions on the impact of managerialism on professions,

globalization and the changing nature of professional work, discourse and identity amongst professional workers. I also found some contributions on professions seldom written about (architects, for example) especially interesting. On the other hand, some large professions such as engineers barely rate a mention. While selectivity is inevitable with such a diverse array of vocations that might be labelled as professionals, the editors could have spent more time trying to place their work into a wider context. Indeed, this is one of the major limitations of the book. The editorial introduction chapter spends only four pages describing the overall thrust of the book and key themes, with the remainder of the chapter providing roughly half-page summaries of each of the contributing chapters. To be fair, these descriptions do point to key themes, but the reader is largely left to tease the unifying or overlapping themes for themselves—something the index only partly makes up for. In my view, a more synthesized introduction or final chapter was needed and would really have enhanced the value of the book.

My other quibble, which may flow on from the last, is that the book suffers from two glaring and probably related omissions, namely there is little reference to the regulation/certification/licensing of professions and the historical context of this, especially debates over public safety. This is a book locked very much into contemporary discourse including identity analysis, if one looks at the only explicitly historical chapter, which deals with how a family moved into the professions over time. The latter was interesting but hardly a substitute for a historical analysis of the critical role played by public safety concerns in regulating certain professions requiring technical expertise before completing tasks (mine managers, shipmasters, airline pilots, engineers, medical practitioners to name but a few). Economists portray this as rent

seeking and I would like to suggest they test their convictions by opting to take a cheaper flight in a plane with an unlicensed pilot and maintained by unlicensed aircraft engineers and being treated by unlicensed medical professionals if they survive a crash. The point is that licensing professions occurred for a reason, and after long campaigns (see, for example, Turner, 1989), although now under attack from economists and those who argue safety systems can safeguard people. In short, the history of regulation of professions is important; not only to understanding the past, but also in helping us take a more critical view of contemporary debates. The editors would have assisted readers, I think, by covering this terrain even if briefly.

In a sense, notwithstanding their value, both books share a flaw in that in the current discourse on work history and regulation do not seem to matter as much as, in my view, they should.

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Conflits et résistances au travail

Par Yvan Sainsaulieu (2017) Paris : Presses de Science Po, 180 pages.

ISBN : 978-2-7246-2080-1.

Publié dans la collection « Contester » des Presses de Sciences Po, ce treizième opus — qui fait suite à des ouvrages comme *La Grève* (de Guy Groux et Jean-Marie Pernot, 2008), *La Manifestation* (d'Olivier Filleule et Danièle Tartakowsky, 2008), *La Désobéissance civile* (de Grame Hayes et Sylvie Ollitrault, 2012) ou encore *Le Boycott* (d'Ingrid