

**Managerial Attitudes Toward Industrial Relations : A  
U.S.-Canadian Comparison**  
**Les attitudes des employeurs canadiens et américains en  
matière de relations professionnelles**

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Article abstract

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# Managerial Attitudes Toward Industrial Relations

A U.S.-Canadian Comparison

Mark Thompson  
and  
Larry F. Moore

*This paper analyses possible differences in managerial attitudes toward unionism and collective bargaining in Canada and the United States. Divergent patterns of attitudes emerge that are consistent with other observable differences between Canadian and U.S. industrial relations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Canadian and American industrial relations systems share so many common features, much of the literature on labour-management relations in Canada refers to U.S. practices.<sup>1</sup> However, several recent studies comparing individual elements of the two industrial relations systems, including strike pattern,<sup>2</sup> labour's political action,<sup>3</sup> and incomes policies,<sup>4</sup> have demonstrated that the broad institutional similarities in Canadian and American in-

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, H.D. WOODS, *Labour Policy in Canada*, 2d. ed. Toronto, MacMillan, 1973, 377 pp., a comprehensive analysis of Canadian public policy contains frequent comparisons of Canadian and U.S. practice on specific issues.

<sup>2</sup> John VANDERKAMP, « Economic Activity and Strikes in Canada », *Industrial Relations*, Berkeley, California, vol. IX, no. 2, February 1970, pp. 215-230.

<sup>3</sup> Jean BOIVIN, « L'action politique du CTC et de la FAT-COI, une comparaison depuis 1956 », *Relations industrielles - Industrial Relations*, Quebec, vol. 26, no. 3, Août 1971, pp. 541-574.

<sup>4</sup> Mahmood A. ZAIDI and Calvin SIEBERT, « Wage-Price Experience in the United States and Canada: A Discussion of the Issues and Policy Implications », Industrial Relations Research Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Meeting*, Madison, Wis: IRRRA, 1973, pp. 23-32.

dustrial relations may obscure important variations in the two systems. Not only are strike patterns, experience with incomes policies, and the political role of unions demonstrably different, but public sector labour relations and the degree of union membership vary in the two countries.

Despite this growing appreciation for the unique features of each system, little attention has been directed to possible differences in the roles of management in Canadian and U.S. industrial relations. Moreover, most studies of comparative management neglect Canada completely, or treat the English-speaking areas of North America as a homogeneous unit, without empirically testing for Canadian-U.S. differences.

Earlier research on the impact of management on American industrial relations produced the view that management attitudes toward unions and labour relations could have a substantial impact on the quality of labour relations in a firm, though union power could be an offsetting factor.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore probable that attitudinal differences between Canadian and U.S. managers could contribute to the observable differences in the two industrial relations systems.

Available statements on Canadian managerial views towards industrial relations are based completely on informed speculation. Two broad views emerge, one proposing that Canadian managers are more hostile to unionism and collective bargaining than Americans, the other that Canadians are more willing than Americans to accept these institutions. The first theory holds that Canadian managers, operating in industries generally dominated by a small number of firms with a conservative outlook, have been more hostile than Americans to unionism. This hostility has been expressed in subtle discrimination against unions and recalcitrance in bargaining, rather than the violence or lawless behaviour that characterized U.S. industrial relations for many years. After observing the industrial relations systems of the two countries for many years, Stuart Jamieson asserted, « Canadian employers have been even less willing than their counterparts in the United States to recognize and make concessions to unions . . . »<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Milton DERBER, W. Ellison CHALMERS, Ross STAGNER and Murray EDELMAN, *The Local Union-Management Relationship*, vol. II, Urbana, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Illinois, 1960, 208 pp.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart JAMIESON, *Industrial Relations in Canada*, 2d ed., Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1973, 156 pp.

A contrary position emerges from an examination of the broader social characteristics of the two nations. The American emphasis on achievement, individualism and egalitarianism is thought to produce an undercurrent of hostility to unionism in collective bargaining.<sup>7</sup> Though U.S. managers now accept the existence of unions and the right of workers to bargain collectively, it appears their attitudes toward union are « situationally induced », i.e., responses to environmental considerations such as the law or labour's bargaining position, and do not represent any substantial change in basic attitudes.<sup>8</sup> Since unions are perceived as threats to managers' success, are collectively oriented and carry certain connotations of class struggle, U.S. managers have resisted unions far more vigorously than British or European executives with more traditional and ascriptive value systems.

Students of Canadian society have described Canada as « somewhat less egalitarian, less achievement-oriented and less individualistic than the U.S. », thus leaning toward a European value system and away from American attitudes.<sup>9</sup> According to this view, the values thought to produce anti-union sentiments among American managers are weaker in Canada than the U.S., so it is hypothesized that Canadian managers are more favorably disposed toward unions than Americans. The present study attempts to test this hypothesis using an attitude survey.

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<sup>7</sup> M. BURRAGE, « Democracy and the Mystery of Crafts: Observations on Work Relationships in America and Britain », *DAEDALUS*, New York, vol. 101, no. 9, 1972, p. 148; Seymour Martin LIPSETT, « Trade Unions and Social Structure », *Industrial Relations*, Berkeley, California, vol. 1, no. 1-2, October 1961 and February 1962, pp. 75-89, 89-110.

<sup>8</sup> See Francis X. SUTTON, Seymour E. HARRIS, Carl KEYSON, *The American Business Creed*, New York, Schochen Books, 1956, 414 pp.; Georges W. ENGLAND, « Personal Value Systems of American Managers », *Academy of Management Journal*, Seattle, Washington, vol. 10, no. 1, March 1967, pp. 53-68; M. ALSIKAFI, W. J. JOKINEN, S. L. SPRAY, and G. S. TRACY, « Managerial Attitudes Toward Labor Unions in a Southern City », *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Washington, vol. 52, no. 6, December 1968, pp. 447-453.

<sup>9</sup> LIPSETT, « Trade Unions and Social Structure », p. 103; see also Seymour Martin LIPSETT, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Change and Persistence in Social Structures*, rev. ed., New York, Doubleday, 1970, 466 pp.; John PORTER, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 626 pp.; Kaspar D. NAEGLE, « Canadian Society: Further Reflections » in Bernard R. BLISHEN, Frank E. JONES, Kaspar D. NAEGLE, John PORTER, eds., *Canadian Society: Sociological Perspectives*, rev. ed., Toronto, MacMillan, 1969, 541 pp., esp. pp. 501-503.

### SAMPLE AND METHOD

The sample apparently represented the middle stratum of English Canadian management. Fifty four per cent of the subjects were line managers ; the remainder considered themselves to be staff or some combination of line and staff. Three fourths were middle managers while one fourth held « top level » positions. One third of the managers were aged between 30 and 39, almost two thirds were over 40 and 16 per cent were over 50. Most were long-time employees of their firms — 61 per cent had been with their firms more than ten years. The firms represented were among Canada's largest. Three fourths came from companies with over 500 employees but only 10 per cent were from firms considered large by U.S. standards (over 10,000 employees). The type of firm varied widely, with 32 per cent of the sample coming from manufacturing and 20 per cent working in government positions. All were employed in an English-speaking environment.

The overwhelming majority of the sample had some contact with labour relations ; 82 per cent of the sample came from firms which engaged in collective bargaining. Forty four per cent of the managers had been involved in personally dealing with unions and 43 per cent had subordinates who were union members. In firms with unions, only 10 per cent of the respondents considered the labor-management climate to be hostile ; moreover, 24 per cent saw the relationship to be cordial and 66 per cent saw it as businesslike.

To assess attitudes towards labour unions held by managers in the sample and to furnish a base for comparison with a United States sample, the seven-item Guttman scale developed by Alsikafi, *et al.*<sup>10</sup> was administered as a portion of the questionnaire. This instrument was tested with a sample of 90 middle managers from the American South, based on the assumption that the respondents would be less favorably disposed to unionism than their counterparts in other regions. Unfortunately, the survey has not been replicated elsewhere in the U.S. The questionnaire items are :

1. Labor unions not only better their members' economic and social conditions but also contribute to the welfare of society.
2. The drive to organize workers is a legitimate right for labor unions.

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<sup>10</sup> ALSIKAFI, *et al.*, *loc. cit.*

3. Collective bargaining is a necessary and important function of labor unions that should be preserved.
4. Labor unions are reasonable in their drive to recruit workers into their organizations.
5. Labor unions' demands regarding wages, hours of work, and working conditions are, in most cases, fair and reasonable.
6. Labor's demand for the union shop is a legitimate right for them.
7. Labor unions should have a share in making decisions in the corporation.

Each of the attitudinal items contained four response categories in order to measure extent of agreement or disagreement. The categories were strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree and strongly disagree.

After administering the instrument to their sample of southern U.S. industrial managers, Alsikafi *et al.*<sup>11</sup> found that the seven items satisfied the requirements for a « true scale » described by Guttman.<sup>12</sup> The seven-item scale was adopted for use in the study reported here.

## RESULTS

### Tests of the instrument

The seven-item Guttman scale found to be acceptable by Alsikafi *et al.*<sup>13</sup> failed to meet standards of reproducibility and scalability when subjected to scalogram analysis with the Canadian data (the coefficient of reproducibility was .79 and the coefficient of scalability was .28), casting doubt on this measure as a « true scale » of managerial favorability toward labor unions, at least in a Canadian context.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as indicated in Table 1, the scale order of favorability/unfavorability of items is somewhat different for the U.S. and Canadian managers (Spearman rho = .75).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> L. GUTTMAN, « The Basis for Scalogram Analysis » in S. A. STOFFER *et al.* (eds.), *Measurement and Prediction*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1950, 756 pp.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> As indicated in Table 1, the marginal frequencies per cent for items 4, 6 and 7 are highly similar. By dropping items 4 and 6 an acceptable five-item Guttman scale may be constructed for use in Canadian business settings. With the present data a coefficient of reproducibility of .92 and coefficient of scalability of .62 was indicated when items 4 and 6 were removed from the analysis.

**TABLE 1**  
**Canadian-Southern United States Comparison of Marginal Frequencies**  
**of the Alsikafi Managerial Attitude Scale Items**

| Item | <i>Marginal Frequencies Per Cent</i> |              |                     |              | <i>Chi-square difference</i> | <i>Scale order</i> |             |
|------|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
|      | <i>S. United States N=90</i>         |              | <i>Canada N=102</i> |              |                              | <i>U.S.</i>        | <i>Can.</i> |
|      | <i>Disagree</i>                      | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i>     | <i>Agree</i> |                              |                    |             |
| 1    | 18                                   | 82           | 37                  | 63           | 7.77**                       | 1                  | 2           |
| 2    | 23                                   | 77           | 22                  | 78           |                              | 2                  | 3           |
| 3    | 52                                   | 48           | 24                  | 76           | 16.56**                      | 3                  | 1           |
| 4    | 72                                   | 28           | 69                  | 31           |                              | 6                  | 6           |
| 5    | 58                                   | 42           | 75                  | 25           | 7.13**                       | 4                  | 4           |
| 6    | 61                                   | 39           | 68                  | 32           |                              | 5                  | 7           |
| 7    | 93                                   | 7            | 70                  | 30           | 20.22**                      | 7                  | 5           |

\*\*  $\chi^2$  significant at .01 level.

On the other hand, as shown in Table 2, most of the item inter-correlations are significant but not strong (median  $r = .25$ ). Thus the items may be judged as measuring reasonably independent dimensions of managerial attitudes toward labor unions.

**TABLE 2**  
**Correlations of items in the Alsikafi Managerial**  
**Attitude Scale — Canadian Sample**

| <i>Item</i> | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1           |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2           | .29 * |       |       |       |       |       |
| 3           | .21 * | .36 * |       |       |       |       |
| 4           | .19   | .32 * | .22 * |       |       |       |
| 5           | .32 * | .15   | .06   | .35 * |       |       |
| 6           | .20 * | .25 * | .06   | .33 * | .31 * |       |
| 7           | .30 * | .11   | .28 * | .21 * | .39 * | .21 * |

#### Comparison of attitudes

Distributions of responses from the Canadian managers were significantly different for four of the seven items. As indicated in Table 1, a smaller percentage of the Canadian managers agreed that labor unions contribute to the welfare of society but a larger percentage (more than three fourths) of the Canadians agreed that collective bargaining is a necessary and important function of unions which should be preserved. Significantly fewer Canadian managers (only one fourth) agreed that labor unions demands regarding wages, hours of work and working conditions are, in most cases, fair and reasonable. A smaller proportion of the Canadian sample disagreed with the proposal that labor unions should have a share in corporate decision making. Canadian managers' attitudes do not seem to be as polarized on items 1 and 7.

A more significant finding was the existence of a two-factor split in the response pattern of the Canadian sample (Table 1). The majority of Canadian managers (about two thirds or more) agreed with items 1,

\* significantly different from zero.  $p = < .05$



2 and 3. These items relate to the importance, legitimacy and social contributions attributed to labour unions. Most Canadian managers seem to agree that unions serve a useful social purpose. The predominantly negative response by Canadian managers to items 4-7, however, would seem to indicate that Canadian managers see labour unions as unreasonable and unfair in their demands and efforts. Factor analysis<sup>15</sup> shown in Table 3 revealed that items 2 and 3 cluster, as do items 5, 6 and 7. Using a cut off criterion of .60, items 1 and 4 were interpreted as ambiguously located. The analysis therefore lends support to the existence of a two-factor structure in Canadian managerial attitudes toward labor relations.

**TABLE 3**  
**Rotated Factor-Loadings Matrix**  
(Principal components analysis with varimax rotation)

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Factor</i><br>1 | <i>Factor</i><br>2 |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1               | .52                | -.31               |
| 2               | .16                | -.80               |
| 3               | .05                | -.79               |
| 4               | .48                | -.43               |
| 5               | .82                | -.05               |
| 6               | .58                | -.16               |
| 7               | .68                | -.10               |

We conclude that Canadian managers tend to accept the *institutional* aspects of labor-management relations (i.e., the existence of unions and collective bargaining), but seem to be dissatisfied with the *operational* aspects (i.e., the demands made by unions in bargaining). Although not as clearly observable, a similar pattern was found in the southern U.S. sample.

An intra sample analysis was performed on the Canadian data using demographic characteristics. Item 3 was significantly but not highly correlated ( $r = .22$ ) with managers' age; item 7 was significantly but not

<sup>15</sup> Principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

highly correlated with organization size ( $r = .21$ ). No other significant relationships between any of the seven items and age, time employed, position type, position level or organization size were found. Attitudes toward labor unions seem consistent among managers in the Canadian sample, suggesting a generalizable attitude profile.

## DISCUSSION

The Alsikafi *et al.* study was based on the assumption that southern American managers were more likely to oppose unionism and collective bargaining than their counterparts elsewhere in the U.S. Although this assumption has never been tested empirically through an attitude survey, most observers would likely agree with it, given the continued resistance to unionization, right-to-work legislation, etc. in the South. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that English Canadian managers may be more hostile toward union activities than most of their U.S. counterparts. However, Canadians seem somewhat more willing to accept the existence and legitimacy of unions than the southern U.S. group. This consideration (Factor I — Institutional Relations) would be consistent with the assumption that Canadian society is more ascriptive than the U.S. More vigorous resistance to union demands in Canada (Factor II — Operational Relations) may result from economic causes, e.g., the greater importance in Canada of export-oriented primary industries, which are subject to wide variation in price and demand. Stated simply— English Canadian managers accept unions as integral parts of modern industrial society, but would prefer that they restricted their activities, thus confirming managers' ascriptive values.<sup>16</sup>

The existence of two factors may explain a number of characteristics of the Canadian industrial relations system, since other research has shown that managerial attitudes can be valid indicator of the position of a labour-management relationship on a conflict-cooperation continuum.<sup>17</sup> Public sector unionism has spread more quickly and encountered fewer legislative obstacles in Canada than in the U.S.<sup>18</sup>, while in the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Prime Minister's Task Force on Labour Relations, *Industrial Relations*, Privy Council Office, Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Milton DERBER, *et al.*, *The Local Union-Management Relationship*, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H. W. ARTHURS, *Collective Bargaining by Public Employees in Canada Five Models*, Ann Arbor, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, The University of Michigan — Wayne State University, 1971, 166 pp.

private sector legislation requires grievance arbitration and other items left to the parties in the U.S. — facts consistent with Factor I. Similarly, there was less violence and illegality associated with early labor disputes in Canada, probably due to less severe opposition by Canadian employers to the establishment of unions.<sup>19</sup> Canadian governments have been less inclined to regulate unions' internal affairs than the U.S. Congress.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, continuing high levels of industrial conflict,<sup>21</sup> the greater extent of legislative controls over Canadian collective bargaining, especially the numerous requirements that precede legal strikes, and the persistent use of injunctions and strike breakers in labor disputes, all seem consistent with the resistance of Canadian managers to the operational aspects of industrial relations indicated in Factor II.

Overall, Canadian managers' attitudes toward unions and labor relations appear to be patterned differently than their U.S. counterparts, although this conclusion must remain tentative until comparable research can be conducted outside the southern U.S. and over longer time periods in both countries. Moreover, additional samples from different regions of Canada, especially Quebec, are necessary to confirm the existence of a general Canadian managerial attitude profile.

### **Les attitudes des employeurs canadiens et américains en matière de relations professionnelles**

Puisque les régimes canadien et américain de relations professionnelles possèdent plusieurs caractéristiques communes, une bonne partie des écrits sur le sujet s'en remettent aux pratiques des Américains. Cependant, certaines études récentes ont démontré que de simples ressemblances sont de nature à masquer les différences sous-jacentes. Aussi, personne n'a examiné les nuances que l'on peut remarquer dans les attitudes des employeurs canadiens et américains au sujet de la négociation collective. Les recherches faites en cette matière aux États-Unis ont montré que ces attitudes peuvent avoir un impact considérable sur la qualité des relations professionnelles et qu'elles peuvent expliquer quelques-unes des divergences perceptibles entre les deux systèmes.

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<sup>19</sup> S. M. JAMIESON, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966*, Ottawa, Privy Council Office, 1971, 542 pp.

<sup>20</sup> H. D. WOODS, « United States and Canadian Experience: A Comparison », in Joseph SHISTER, Benjamin AARON and Clyde SUMMERS, eds., *Public Policy and Collective Bargaining*, New York, Harper & Row, 1962, pp. 212-240.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. VANDERKAMP, « Economic Activity and Strikes in Canada », *loc. cit.*

Les exposés disponibles du point de vue des employeurs canadiens touchant les relations professionnelles sont théoriques. Une opinion, exprimée par Jamieson, prétend que les administrateurs canadiens sont plus traditionalistes que leurs collègues américains et, par conséquent, plus hostiles aux syndicats et moins enclins à leur faire des concessions. On soutient aussi que les Canadiens accordent moins d'importance que les Américains à la réussite et au succès personnels, d'où le fait que ceux-là sont plus disposés que ceux-ci à accepter l'action collective et à mettre en question leur autorité. L'étude précédente vise à vérifier cette hypothèse par voie d'enquête.

#### ÉCHANTILLONNAGE ET MÉTHODE

L'échantillonnage représentait la couche médiane des administrateurs canadiens de langue anglaise, la plupart d'entre eux ayant été pendant longtemps des employés de leur firme. Les employeurs ont généralement plus de cinq cents salariés et négociaient collectivement.

Pour inventorier les attitudes, on a utilisé une échelle Guttman de sept points, qui avait été précédemment expérimentée dans le sud des États-Unis, comprenant les rubriques suivantes :

1. Les syndicats non seulement améliorent les conditions sociales et économiques de leurs membres, mais ils contribuent aussi au bien-être de la société.
2. Les campagnes de recrutement auprès des travailleurs sont un droit légitime pour les syndicats.
3. La négociation collective est une fonction importante et nécessaire des syndicats qui doit être préservée.
4. Les syndicats se montrent raisonnables dans leurs démarches pour recruter les travailleurs dans leurs organisations.
5. Les réclamations des syndicats en matière de salaires, d'heures et de conditions de travail sont, la plupart du temps, équitables et raisonnables.
6. La revendication de mesures de sécurité syndicale est un droit légitime pour les syndicats.
7. Les syndicats devraient jouir d'un certain pouvoir décisionnel dans les entreprises.

On a divisé les réponses données à chacune de ces affirmations en quatre catégories de manière à mesurer le degré d'accord ou de désaccord. Bien que les auteurs de l'échelle aient trouvé qu'elle satisfait aux exigences d'une « véritable échelle » de Guttman, les rubriques n'étaient pas conformes aux normes de reproduction et d'étalement d'un échantillonnage canadien. Cependant, les mesures *intercorrélatives* ont indiqué que les rubriques pouvaient donner une mesure raisonnablement significative de l'éventail des attitudes patronales à l'égard des syndicats.

#### LES RÉSULTATS

Les réponses des administrateurs canadiens différaient sensiblement de celles de leurs collègues américains dans quatre des sept rubriques. On a trouvé que ces

différences se regroupaient en deux facteurs. La majorité des administrateurs canadiens se sont montrés d'accord avec les rubriques 1 à 3 relatives à la légitimité des syndicats et à leur contribution au mieux-être de la société. Les réponses négatives aux rubriques 4 à 7 démontrent qu'ils considèrent exagérées les revendications des syndicats.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Nous pouvons conclure que les administrateurs canadiens sont mieux disposés que ceux du sud des États-Unis à accepter l'existence des syndicats, ce qui confirme l'hypothèse selon laquelle la société canadienne est plus réceptive que la société américaine. L'opposition marquée des Canadiens aux revendications syndicales, que mesure le deuxième facteur, peut être attribuable au fait que l'économie canadienne est davantage orientée vers les marchés d'exportation dont la demande et les prix sont sujets à de grandes variations.

L'existence de ces différences dans les points de vue des employeurs peut aider à expliquer plusieurs des caractéristiques du système de relations professionnelles au Canada, notamment le développement rapide du syndicalisme dans le secteur public, l'incitation à l'arbitrage dans les lois du travail, et l'absence de réglementation des affaires internes des syndicats. D'un autre côté, le taux élevé des conflits industriels, la réglementation légale des grèves et le recours fréquent aux injonctions sont tous compatibles avec l'opposition des employeurs canadiens aux réclamations des syndicats.

En résumé, les attitudes des administrateurs canadiens à l'égard des syndicats et des relations professionnelles semblent être différentes de celles de leurs collègues américains, quoique cette conclusion doit être prise sous réserve tant qu'une enquête comparable n'aura pas été faite dans diverses régions des deux pays, particulièrement, en ce qui concerne notre pays, au Canada français.

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