

Sharma, Baldev R. *Managerial Unionism : Issues in Perspective*

A.V. Subbarao

Volume 48, Number 3, 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050889ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/050889ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Subbarao, A. (1993). Review of [Sharma, Baldev R. *Managerial Unionism : Issues in Perspective*]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 48(3), 592–595.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/050889ar>

the future of the movement depends on leaders and editors coming to terms with this question and the credibility/control issue.

As with other chapters, this is dealt with frankly and openly in an interview with three national union leaders conducted by Solowey. In the interview, the United Mineworkers' Richard Trumka notes that he sees his union's journal when the members see it. "Leadership is the same thing as the credibility of your newspaper," he says. "You lead when the membership trusts you. If you squander that trust, then you lose the ability to lead."

Pizzigati and Solowey revisit the theme in their concluding chapter when they quote Tom Donahue, secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO: "We all believe that a free press is what makes democratic institutions thrive and a controlled house press is not a free press."

Other chapters deal with the struggle to create a community labour press such as *Racine Labor*, the debate about a national labour daily or weekly, and the failings of union media relations. One chapter focuses on the local union newsletter press. Another deals with labour cartoons, another technology and still another the labour TV show *We Do The Work*. There are also chapters on racism, multiculturalism and women in the labour press. But the central theme is unavoidable: the union press must renew itself as a credible, uncontrolled membership press.

The New Labor Press is not a how-to guide to transforming the union press. The editors and authors know that each union has to work out its own direction. What they are saying is, with only 16 per cent of the American workforce in unions, a new communications strategy is critically important to the very survival of the American movement.

Can Canadian unions remain complacent about this question? If the answer is no, as it surely must be, then *The New Labor Press* is a welcome guide to a badly needed discussion on the renewal of the labour press. In fact, it's a must-read by every labour leader and union editor who cares about empowering members by giving them the information they need to fight the union battles of the 1990s.

Ron VERZUH

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Managerial Unionism: Issues in Perspective, by Baldev R. Sharma, New Delhi, Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, 1993, 291 p. (pas de ISBN)

The book presents the results of empirical research of Officers' Associations (OAs) in India. The purpose of the research was to provide answers to the eight questions listed in Chapter 1. "What is the history and extent of OAs? What factors prompted the officers to form OAs? What are the activities of OAs? What type of methods are employed by OAs in the pursuit of their objectives? What is the background profile of the rank-and-file membership of OAs and what are their experiences at the workplace?"

What are the reasons for some officers to be more active than others in the activities of OAs? What is the response of corporate management to OAs? What legal protection is available to and needed by managerial employees?"

Chapter 1 also describes briefly the research methodology employed for this exploratory study. A brief questionnaire was mailed to 1500 Indian companies that were on the mailing list of the Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, New Delhi, for the purpose of identifying the OAs in the Indian industry. As the response from the private sector companies was insignificant, a sample of 40 public sector enterprises (PSEs) of the universe of 246 PSEs was chosen for this investigation. 400 top managers such as the directors and general managers of the 40 PSEs and 210 leaders of the OAs in those 40 PSEs were interviewed by the investigators, to find answers to seven of the eight questions. In order to develop a profile of the rank-and-file membership of the OAs and to study their experiences at the workplace, the investigators issued a structured 101 item questionnaire to 7266 of the 53,193 junior and middle level officers of the 40 PSEs and they completed the questionnaire in the presence of the members of the research team. The investigators considered the junior and middle managers as the rank-and-file membership of the OAs as they constituted over 90 % of all the managers in the 40 PSEs.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire data, the investigators developed a typical profile of the rank-and-file membership of the OAs and their satisfaction with pay, job characteristics and organizational climate in the 40 PSEs (Chapter 7). "The typical junior/middle manager is 42 years old, is an officer promoted twice or thrice, holds a college degree, hails from some village or a small town, belongs to a middle class family, is the son of an educated father, has a total work experience of 19 years (of which 16 years are spent in the present organization and only 11 years in a managerial position) and finally, is drawing a gross monthly salary of Rs.4154" (p. 142).

The members of the OAs were dissatisfied with their jobs as "the junior and middle level managers in the Indian public sector are managers only in name, not in substance" (p. 148). They also "have to function within a rigid set of rules and procedures and that information about important matters is conveyed to them only through multi-layered formal channels" (p. 150). Workers, on the other hand, had better access to information as they and their leaders participated in works councils and collective bargaining. Workers had better employment security, too, than that of the managers who had no protection of the labour legislation. They were also dissatisfied with pay, particularly in comparison with the wages of workers in the PSEs, as the wage differential between the two groups has been narrowing. Collective bargaining kept the workers' wages increasing while the revision of the officers' salaries was pending with the government of India for a long time (p. 70).

The junior and middle level managers' perceptions of relative deprivation made them active in OAs (Chapter 8). Researchers relied on multiple regression and path analysis of the questionnaire data for determining the causes of relative deprivation and OA activism. Members' perceptions of relative deprivation with employment security, organizational influence and pay contributed to their activism in OAs (p. 185). Researchers relied on rigorous methods of statistical analysis of the questionnaire data for providing

answers to the research question relating to the profile of the rank-and-file membership and the causes for their activism in OAs.

The author offered, in this book, answers to the other seven research questions, too. However, they were based on content analysis of the investigators' interviews with the leaders of OAs, corporate managers of the 40 PSEs and leaders of the seven national trade union federations. The author cautioned that this type of data "can potentially be influenced by the likes and dislikes of the researcher" (p. 10). Nevertheless, the author repeatedly emphasized that the results were reliable. "Lest this gives the impression that the write-up is based entirely on the author's impressions and predilections, it seems necessary to point out that only the interpretations are those of the author whereas the facts reported here are culled from the massive data base in the form of interview notes and documents from official files" (p. 194).

The dominant concern of the OAs, according to their leaders, is "to protect, preserve and improve the occupational interests of their members" (p. 48). They would like to improve the employment conditions of their members through collective bargaining (Chapter 4). However, the labour legislation in India does not extend the bargaining rights to those officers and managers whose salaries exceed Rs.1600 per month. The minimum monthly salary of a junior manager in the PSEs was Rs.2000. Having failed to remove the salary limit of the employees from coverage of the collective bargaining legislation, the National Confederation of the Officers' Associations complained to the International Labour Organization in June 1991 (Chapter 11). Six of the seven national trade union federations were sympathetic and they would like to see the collective bargaining rights extended to the membership of the OAs. The Indian National Trade Union Congress that is affiliated with the ruling Congress political party and that had exercised significant influence on the development of labour legislation in India, however, did not feel that the officers and managers should have collective bargaining rights (Chapter 10).

The chief executives of the PSEs, too, were opposed to the extension of collective bargaining rights to members of the OAs (Chapter 9). "In India, the private sector managements continue to frown upon organizations of officers/executives" (p. 192) and it is not surprising that there were very few OAs in the private sector (Chapter 2). The OAs survived in the public sector since "the main thrust of the OA activities is on fighting the government rather than the local management" and "the local management of a public enterprise is viewed virtually as powerless" (p. 60). However, the leadership of the OAs "pointed out that the management generally does not forgive people who become officer-bearers of OAs" (p. 117). Perhaps because of this attitude of the top management, senior managers of the PSEs did not opt to become leaders of the OAs as that might jeopardize their career advancement opportunities. Instead, the junior and middle level managers became leaders of the OAs and the CEOs of the PSEs were not happy to deal directly with those at the bottom of the managerial hierarchy (Chapter 6). Confronted by the uncompromising top management and in the absence of collective bargaining rights, the OAs in the PSEs functioned more like "social clubs" than as trade unions and they, occasionally, organized agitations when their members were unjustly treated (Chapter 5).

The author preferred to call the OAs in India managerial unions. The evidence presented in the book, however, suggests that the members of the OAs do not perform managerial duties and the title manager in their designations was given only for the "name-sake". The author also reviewed the comparative literature in Britain and North America and most of it referred to professional associations such as engineers, nurses and scientists. The professional associations in North America are certified as bargaining agents of their members. They are certified because they do not perform managerial duties and the North American labour legislation accords collective bargaining rights to those employees that do not perform managerial duties, irrespective of their salary levels. Until the OAs are legally recognized as the bargaining agents, they can not function as unions, which they are expected to do to fulfil their mandate, just because they are called managerial unions.

The OAs can not be recognized as bargaining agents until the Indian labour legislation is amended. Even if the legislation is amended, the OAs might not be as effective as the trade unions of workers in the PSEs, which are invariably led by "outsiders" and "politicians". Those trade union leaders could negotiate with the political masters and government bureaucrats in charge of the PSEs and they could protect and improve the employment conditions of their members. The author, on the other hand, suggests that if more senior managers become the leaders of the OAs and if a quota system for election of senior managers is provided in the constitution of the OAs, the OAs might function as effective managerial unions. The senior managers that constituted less than 10 % of all the managers in the PSEs and who were concerned of victimization by the top management could not effectively lead the OAs even if they were elected through a quota system.

The title managerial unionism is a euphemism for OAs and they are professional associations without collective bargaining rights. The investigators undertook an interesting and in-depth empirical research of the OAs, the first of its kind in India. They attempted to provide answers to eight broad research questions relating to the functioning of the OAs. The author presented in this book important and reliable information on the membership of the OAs and the causes for the members' activism in the OAs. The causes are very similar to those that prompted the workers to become active in trade unions. However, the OAs are not trade unions and they could not function as bargaining agents of their members because of their exclusion from the labour legislation in India and also because of the politicians' influence on management of the PSEs. In any case, the book has presented valuable information that significantly contributes to the understanding of the Officers' Associations in the Indian public sector industry.

A.V. SUBBARAO

University of Ottawa