

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Industrial Conversion and Workers' Attitudes to Change in Different Industries, by Jan J. Louser and Michael Fullan, Study no 2, Task Force on Labour Relations, Ottawa, Privy Council Office, 1970, 270 pp.

Maxwell Flood

Volume 26, Number 1, 1971

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/028201ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/028201ar>

[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

Flood, M. (1971). Review of [*Industrial Conversion and Workers' Attitudes to Change in Different Industries*, by Jan J. Louser and Michael Fullan, Study no 2, Task Force on Labour Relations, Ottawa, Privy Council Office, 1970, 270 pp.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 26(1), 246–247.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/028201ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1971

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

and the structure of the interviews and the knowledge of the persons interviewed were such as to bring into the discussion a broad range of the current issues as they saw them. Also, the method has to be weighed against possible alternatives. As one whose work for many years involved a seeking after tests of the efficacy of legislation, I know how difficult it is to collect reliable data on which to base an assessment. Such records as there are of the various tribunals in which unfair practice cases have been adjudicated are difficult to come by and, if collected, might provide little more than a quantitative measure. The informality surrounding settlements achieved through accommodative methods leaves the researcher without objective data. Field studies are slow and expensive.

Once the limitations of the method are understood and accepted, the reader can proceed to derive considerable insight from the study. The survey was worth while and has been well organized and reported. An additional contribution is made by the personal work of the two authors.

The comparative study of the relevant United States federal labour law is a useful chapter in the report. The author has wisely confined it to a brief description of the method of handling unfair labour practice cases in the United States and the role of the trial examiner, the National Labor Relations Board, the courts and the arbitrator. It does not purport to do more than point out the main differences from the Canadian system, and suggest areas where further examination of the United States experience would be fruitful.

The project of interviews with management and union representatives who had been directly involved in unfair practices proceedings before the Ontario Board obviously had to be curtailed for lack of time. Among the questions there were some designed to inquire into the effect of the complaint on the work life of the individual involved in the dispute, but no results are reported of this inquiry. Perhaps that would have to be a subject for a case study extending over a longer period of time. The interviews did reveal some sobering facts about the relationships between the

parties after the complaint proceedings. In most cases the union succeeded in getting certified, but only in about half of the cases did the parties eventually make a collective agreement.

In their personal assessment, the authors see the law as reasonably satisfactory, except in the area of picketing where they recommend a codification which would clearly identify what is legal and that is illegal, but they would make changes in administration. Jurisdiction over the whole range of unfair practices, including illegal strikes and picketing and failure to bargain in good faith, should, in their view, be assigned to a specialized tribunal such as a labour relations board. An important advantage would be the opportunity that would be afforded, if the tribunal was required to give reasons for decision, to build up a consistent labour relations jurisprudence that would, in time, clarify such matters as the duty to bargain in good faith. Unfair practices which are also breaches of a collective agreement they would, in general, leave to arbitration. They would retain the accommodative approach in the settlement of unfair practices issues through the use of field officers.

The study makes a useful addition to the scanty Canadian literature on unfair labour practices provisions.

Edith LORENTSEN

Industrial Conversion and Workers' Attitudes to Change in Different Industries, by Jan J. Louser and Michael Fullan, Study no 12, Task Force on Labour Relations, Ottawa, Privy council office, 1970, 270 pp.

This study, like many others in the highly commendable series commissioned by the federal Task Force on Labour Relations, investigates an important area of Canadian labour relations that has been neglected in the past. While the impact of industrial change is a matter of importance to industry, government, labour unions, and the general public in any modern, industrial society, the dynamic nature of our economy and the need to fully utilize and positively motivate our labour force confers an added

importance upon this area of concern in Canada.

The authors state that «the main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of industrial change on workers and their attitudes»: They explicitly identify a number of important premises that underly their approach to the problem:

- (a) that industrial change is a permanent state of industry;
- (b) that attitudes to change are not governed solely, or even mainly, by utilitarian considerations; and
- (c) that attitudes to industrial change are often deeply rooted in factors seemingly remote from the direct impact of the change.

Such considerations lead the investigators to adopt a comprehensive approach to the problem in terms of their general frame of reference which, in the main, utilizes a sociological perspective but does not veer away from the consideration of psychological and social psychological factors where these are felt to contribute to meaningful analysis. This comprehensive approach makes sense in terms of the very complex nature of the phenomenon under study. What the study went after originally was an understanding of the relationship between an industrial change-event and workers' attitudes. What they should have gone after, as they discovered as a result of the research, was a pre-post analysis of workers' attitudes within the context of an industrial change-event. Apparently, the authors realised that their initial failure to conceptualize in terms of a pre-post model, plus sampling and other methodological problems, reduced their study to the level of a «pilot». It appears that the original intention was to conduct something more than a pilot study but since this is the status that is eventually claimed for it then it is in these terms that it must be assessed.

While the study sampled some categories of employees of sixteen firms from six industries — automobile, chemical, electrical products, oil, printing, and steel — it is pointed out that industries, as such, were not sampled, nor were firms within industries sampled. The consequence of this, recogniz-

ed by the authors, is that the findings cannot be generalized to the various industries nor to Canadian industry as a whole. Another serious methodological problem here is that unskilled workers were excluded from the sample.

The procedure used in the study was to survey a sample of employees by mail and while the response of 50.3% is claimed to be «an excellent rate» of response for this kind of procedure, it cannot be claimed that it is generally satisfactory.

The study describes the change events in the sixteen firms that they used and here it becomes clear that a major error was made in failing to locate impending changes in advance. This is underscored by the fact that they are hard pressed to claim significant change had occurred at all in many of the firms. This will be a factor of major importance to be considered in any future research in this area.

The survey tapped perception of change, attitudes to change, attitudes to the job, technological differentiation, workers' relations to the company, and workers' attitudes to the labour relations atmosphere and their unions. Throughout, are used the three control variables of age, education, and structural atmosphere.

All that can be claimed, and, indeed, all that is claimed is that a few trends emerge from the data: job satisfaction tends to be correlated with positive attitudes to change; a positive labour relations atmosphere tends to be correlated with positive attitudes to change; and job satisfaction and positive atmosphere in the plant are correlated. In summary, then, it was found that job satisfaction, atmosphere of labour management relations, and evaluation, of the company are all related. As the authors state the important task now is to ascertain the relative strength and direction of these important relationships.

The study has merit as a pilot study and should be closely examined by anyone doing research in this area. The authors have cleared the way for further, empirical work.

Maxwell FLOOD,