

## **Managerial Attitudes Toward Industrial Relations : Public and Private Sectors**

### **Attitudes patronales en matière de relations professionnelles : secteurs public et privé**

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#### Article abstract

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# Managerial Attitudes Toward Industrial Relations

## Public and Private Sectors

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and

**Larry F. MOORE**

*The authors analyse possible differences in managerial attitudes toward unionism and collective bargaining in the public and private sectors in Canada. Distinct patterns of attitudes emerge showing more favorable views in the public sector.*

No recent change in the conditions of employment among public employees in Canada has been more profound or pervasive than the arrival of collective bargaining. Following the lead of the Public Service of Canada, most government agencies have modified long-established civil service procedures for determining pay and conditions of employment to incorporate negotiations with independent labour organizations.<sup>1</sup> Government now may be the most heavily unionized «industry» in Canada, and virtually all eligible members of the Public Service are covered by collective agreements. While the conversion to collective bargaining was initially rather smooth, the rising incidence of strikes and other manifestations of labour unrest have provoked criticism of the system among the public.

Collective bargaining in the Canadian federal government arrived largely because of the influence of senior politicians who acted boldly, but with little data on many specific aspects of labour

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<sup>1</sup> 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; J. FINKELMAN, *Employer-Employee Relations in the Public Service of Canada: Proposals for Legislative Change*, vol. I, Ottawa: Information Canada, 1974, 244 pp.

relations in the Public Service of Canada.<sup>2</sup> Thus, there has been no formal assessment of managerial attitudes on this subject. However, research in the private sector has shown that line managers' views of unionism and collective bargaining do affect the tenor of labour-management relations.<sup>3</sup> Analysis of managerial attitudes toward labour relations should identify any resistance by managers to the new system of collective bargaining. These attitudes, if they exist, would be a likely cause of present or future difficulties with collective bargaining. If managers in the Public Service are found to have less favourable attitudes toward labour relations than their counterparts in the private sector, this factor would militate for higher levels of conflict than prevail in the private sector. Conversely, greater acceptance of unionism and collective bargaining in the Public Service should promote more harmonious labour relations.

Earlier research has shown that role occupancy is correlated with attitudes toward labour relations in government, and that appointed officials close to contract administration are likely to have more favourable views of unionism and collective bargaining than elected officials.<sup>4</sup> Since parliamentarians favour collective bargaining, there is a logical inference that members of the public service would have favourable views on these subjects, though no inference on comparisons with the private sector would be drawn. Conversely, managers in the private sector confronted by the need to bargain collectively initially tend to resent and resist this change in their status, though their views moderate in time.<sup>5</sup> Given the recent origins of collective bargaining in the Public Service, many managers might

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Marc LAPOINTE. «Règlement des différences du travail dans la fonction publique.» in The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, *Collective Bargaining in the Public Sector*, Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1974, pp. 85-94.

<sup>3</sup> Ross STAGNER. «Do Management Attitudes Determine Union-Management Relationship?» *Current Economic Comment*, Champaign, Ill., vol. 7, no. 2, February 1968, pp. 3-9; 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.; Allan FLANDERS, «Measured Daywork and Collective Bargaining,» *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. II, no. 3, November 1973, pp. 368-392.

<sup>4</sup> H. George FREDERICKSON, «Role Occupancy and Attitudes toward Labor Relations in Government,» *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 4, December 1969, pp. 595-606.

<sup>5</sup> Richard A. LESTER, *As Unions Mature: An Analysis of the Evolution of American Unionism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, 171 pp.

have more negative attitudes than those found in the private sector, where bargaining has a much longer history.

The only survey of Canadian managerial attitudes toward collective bargaining is based on a sample drawn from the private sector.<sup>6</sup> Using factor analysis, this study found a two-factor split in the response pattern. Respondents accepted the *institutional* aspects of labour-management relations, i.e. that unions are a legitimate part of Canadian society and serve a useful purpose. But they were dissatisfied with the *operational* aspects, such as the demands unions make in bargaining, the union shop, or sharing of managerial power with labour. Demographic and social characteristics such as age, contact with unions, salary, etc. had no impact on responses. These results could explain the lack of extreme or violent opposition to the establishment of unionism and collective bargaining in Canada, as well as the persistently high levels of labour unrest in this country.

This paper attempts to measure the attitudes of managers in the Public Service toward unionism and collective bargaining, contrasting these findings with a sample drawn from the private sector.

### Sample and Method

Questionnaires were given to administrators employed by the Public Service of Canada (N = 99) scheduled to attend one of four separate management development programmes operated by the Bureau of Staff Development and Training in Western Canada, and to business administrators (N = 92) attending a recent session of the Banff School of Advanced Management (BSAM). Although the instructional programme being conducted at BSAM was one half completed at the time the questionnaire was administered, topics previously examined had no connection with labour-management relations, hence business managers' sample attitudes relevant to the investigation were not considered «contaminated» by course content.

Both samples seemed to be reasonably representative of the middle level of English-speaking Canadian managers in the Federal Government and business organizations. Table 1 compares both samples across a number of demographic variables.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark THOMPSON and Larry F. MOORE, «Managerial Attitudes Toward Industrial Relations: A U.S.-Canadian Comparison.» *Relations Industrielles — Industrial Relations*, Québec, vol. 30, no. 3, Aout 1975, pp. 331-342

TABLE I

**Demographic Comparison of Public Service Administrator  
and Business Administrator Samples**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>PSC Administrators</i> N=99 %	<i>Business Administrators</i> N=82 %
Age		
20-29	06	02
30-39	33	35
40-49	33	59
50 +	28	13
Time employed by firm		
<5 years	30	11
5-10 years	31	26
10+ years	39	63
Managerial level		
Top	04	20
Middle	59	78
Lower	36	02
Type of management position		
Line	25	56
Staff	27	15
Combined	44	29
Personal experience dealing with unions		
Yes	50	47
No	50	53
Have unionized subordinates		
Yes	95	33
No	05	67

While approximately comparable in age, the greater proportion of the business administrator sample (63 percent compared to 39 percent) had been employed more than ten years in their respective organizations. Concomitantly, a greater proportion of the business administrators (20 percent compared to 4 percent) classified themselves in the top managerial level. A greater proportion of the public service administrators saw themselves as performing staff or combined line-staff functions. Members of both samples were comparable in terms of personal experience dealing with unions; about half of each sample had personally dealt with union officials in the past, although almost all Public Service Commission administrators had unionized subordinates, whereas two thirds of the administrators in the business

sample did not. Nevertheless, 82 percent of the business administrator sample came from firms which engaged in collective bargaining.

Attitudes towards labour unions held by managers in each sample were assessed using a seven-item questionnaire originally developed by Alsikafi, *et al.*<sup>7</sup> This instrument was originally designed as a Guttman scale and was successfully tested with a sample of 90 middle managers from the American South. Thompson and Moore<sup>8</sup> were unable to replicate Guttman scaling properties when using the instrument with a sample of Canadian business managers; however, through factor analysis, they postulated the existence of a two-factor structure in the seven items. The questionnaire items are as follows:

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

Each of the attitudinal items contained four response categories in order to measure the extent of agreement or disagreement. The categories were strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree and strongly disagree. Items 1, 2 and 3 relate to the importance, the legitimacy and social contributions attributed to labour unions (*the institutional* aspect of labour-management relations) and constitute Factor 1. Items 4 through 7 related to the *operational* aspects of the labour-management relationship, i.e., demands made by unions in bargaining and constitute Factor 2 in the questionnaire.

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<sup>7</sup> M. ALSIKAKI, 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>8</sup> THOMPSON and MOORE, «Managerial Attitudes Toward Industrial Relations: A U.S.-Canadian Comparison,» *loc. cit.*

## Results

For analytical purposes, responses to the seven items were dichotomized into favourable — unfavourable response categories. Table 2 demonstrates the existence

**TABLE 2**

**Comparison of Public Service Commission Administrators' and Business Administrators' Labour Attitudes Using the Alsikafi Scale**

Item	Marginal Frequencies Per Cent				Chi-square difference	Rank order of means	
	Business Administrators N=82		PSC Administrators N=98			Bus.	PSC
	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>			
1	39	61	32	68	NS	3	3
2	22	78	25	75	NS	1	2
3	26	74	08	92	9.57**	2	1
4	70	30	46	54	10.11**	5	5
5	78	22	50	50	14.35**	6	6
6	66	34	47	53	5.98*	4	4
7	74	26	49	51	11.45**	7	7

\* $X^2 .05$ ,  $df 1 = 3.84$

\*\* $X^2 .01$ ,  $df 1 = 6.64$

of significant differences between the public and private sector samples on five of seven items, although the two-factor split in responses found in the private sector responses persisted. However, the scale order of favourability — unfavourability is quite similar for the two groups ( $\rho = .96$ ). Concerning the *institutional* aspects of the labour-management relationship, Public Service Commission administrators and the business administrators did not differ appreciably in their agreement that labour unions contribute to the welfare of the society (Item 1) and that the drive to organize workers is a legitimate right (Item 2). However, a much greater proportion of administrators in the Public Service Commission sample agreed (92% agreed) that collective bargaining is a necessary and important function of labour unions.

Turning to the *operational* side of the union-management relationship, attitudes held by respondents in the private sector sample were uniformly less favourable (significantly less favourable on Items 4 through 7). Attitudes of Public Service Commission administrators towards the operational aspects of the union-management relationship are interpreted as neutral (roughly as many respondents agreed with Items 4 through 7 as disagreed and the mean response scores clustered around 2.5 on a 4.0 scale for those items).

The two factor split previously found by Thompson and Moore is again present in the response patterns of both samples in this study. The majority of Canadian business administrators (about two thirds or more) agreed with Items 1, 2 and 3. The Public Service administrators tended to agree with Items 1 and 2 and almost all agreed with Item 3, that collective bargaining is a necessary and important function. On the other hand, the predominantly negative response by Canadian business administrators to Item 4 — 7 and the neutral response of PSC administrators to the same items indicates a comparable attitudinal split, but with distinct results for the Public Service and business samples.

When intrasample analyses were performed on both samples using demographic characteristics, no important significant relationships between any of the seven items and time employed, position type, position level, or organization size were found. Therefore, within each sample, attitudes towards labour unions seemed to be consistent enough to suggest generalizable attitude profiles.

## Discussion

Based on these samples, Public Service administrators appear to be more positive than business administrators towards collective bargaining and tend not to be as skeptical or disenchanted with labour unions and their demands or practices. The high degree of acceptance of the institutional aspects of industrial relations is consistent with the rapid spread of collective bargaining in the public service. While the change from a civil service system may have been a political decision, middle managers in the public service have accepted collective bargaining readily in a relatively short time. The substantial acceptance of the operational aspects of labour relations in the public service, in contrast with private sector, augurs for less antagonistic relations in the public service than prevails in the rest of the economy. Although strikes in the public service have been well-publicized, they in fact have been few in number. Finally, the more favourable views of labour relations by officials with no personal involvement in negotiations and little connection to contract administration tends to contradict any conclusion that role occupancy, in terms of proximity to labour relations processes, is a major determinant of attitudes towards labour relations.

These data raise a number of questions concerning possible reasons for the rather sharp division between the two samples in responses on the operational aspects of industrial relations. The back-



ground of employee relations in the Public Service of Canada, which has a history of consultation and a paternalistic civil service system, may have softened managerial resentment against the growing influence of unions. Another explanation may lie with the differences in budgetary controls over management in the two sectors. Despite recent innovations in public administration, the relative stability of government revenues may permit less stringent controls on public managers than those regulating private business administrators, whose enterprises often face wide variations in their revenues. Managers operating in a stable economic climate may feel less threatened by the operational features of industrial relations than persons in an unstable environment. Answers to these and similar questions must await further research using larger or more stratified samples.

The existence of a two-factor split in attitudes in two rather different samples of Canadian managers, plus a similar though weaker, division in a group of Southern U.S. managers,<sup>9</sup> gives further weight to the concept of differing attitudes towards institutional and operational aspects of labour relations, at least for Canada. The Alsifaki scale has proved useful and valid for research of this nature, and further research using groups of managers should permit greater refinement of the theory.

### **Attitudes patronales en matière de relations professionnelles : secteurs public et privé**

Le passage, en matière de fixation des traitements et des conditions de travail, des politiques de la Fonction publique à la négociation collective, s'est fait rapidement. Cependant, les décisions-clés à l'origine de ce changement furent l'œuvre d'hommes politiques qui ont agi sans connaître les sentiments des cadres moyens sur la question. D'autres études ont montré que les vues des cadres fonctionnels sur le syndicalisme et la négociation collective pouvaient avoir une influence considérable sur la qualité des relations professionnelles. La proximité des cadres de la direction pouvait disposer ceux-ci en faveur des relations professionnelles, mais pas nécessairement davantage que dans le secteur privé. Par contre, la nouveauté de la négociation collective dans la fonction publique incline à première vue à penser que les cadres y auraient montré plus de résistance que leurs collègues de l'industrie privée, où la négociation collective y a une plus longue histoire.

Une enquête antérieure concernant les attitudes patronales en matière de négociation collective était fondée sur un échantillonnage tiré du secteur privé. On y avait

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, ALSIFAKI, *et al.*, *loc. cit.*

\* The Institute of Industrial Relations, U.B.C., funded the research on which this paper is based.

trouvé un sectionnement entre deux facteurs, c'est-à-dire que les réactions étaient différentes selon qu'il était question des aspects *institutionnels* ou *opérationnels* des relations du travail. Cet article reprend l'étude antérieure en comparant les attitudes des cadres du secteur privé et celles des cadres de la fonction publique. Les deux échantillonnages étaient autant que possible similaires, chacun comportant un questionnaire en sept points auquel on pouvait répondre en se déclarant d'accord ou en désaccord.

On y retrouve le même fractionnement. Les réponses de l'un et de l'autre échantillonage ne diffèrent pas sur les deux points où il était question de l'aspect *institutionnel* des relations professionnelles, mais les cadres de la fonction publique étaient plus enclins à accepter le rôle nécessaire et important de la négociation collective et du syndicalisme. Les cadres de la fonction publique se sont montrés plus favorables que leurs collègues du secteur privé au sujet de l'aspect *opérationnel* des relations de travail.

Les cadres de la fonction publique semblent réagir d'une façon plus positive que les cadres du secteur privé à la négociation collective et ils montrent moins de scepticisme et de désenchantement envers les syndicats, envers leurs revendications et envers leurs tactiques. Le degré élevé d'acceptation des aspects *institutionnels* des relations professionnelles est conforme au développement rapide de la négociation collective dans le secteur public. Cette constatation augure bien en ce qui a trait à l'établissement de relations professionnelles harmonieuses dans la fonction publique.

Il n'existe pas d'explications toutes faites à l'attitude généralement plus favorable des cadres de la fonction publique. On peut y aller de quelques hypothèses: la tradition de consultation sous les anciens systèmes en vigueur dans la fonction publique et la stabilité des budgets.

Cette étude est la troisième où l'on a découvert ce phénomène du fractionnement des attitudes des cadres au sujet des relations professionnelles, ce qui donne encore plus de poids à l'existence de concepts *institutionnels* et *opérationnels* dans le domaine des relations de travail.

## **POUVOIR ET « POUVOIRS » EN RELATIONS DU TRAVAIL**

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