

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



John P. WINDMULLER, Alan GLADSTONE : *Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations : A Comparative Study.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, 370 pp., ISBN 0-19-827260-X

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Volume 44, Number 1, 1989

L'avenir des relations industrielles dans les Amériques  
The Future of Industrial Relations in the Americas  
El Porvenir de las Relaciones Industriales en las Americas

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050490ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/050490ar>

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Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)  
1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Thwaites, J. (1989). Review of [John P. WINDMULLER, Alan GLADSTONE : *Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations : A Comparative Study.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, 370 pp., ISBN 0-19-827260-X]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 44(1), 295–297. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050490ar>

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There are several obvious advantages in the promotion of active labour market policies instead of alleviating the consequences of market malfunctioning. In Sweden in comparison with Canada there is much more emphasis on matching (information, counselling, and placement), supply measures (training and translocation) and the reinforcement of labour demand (job creation, relief works).

Most of Swedish governmental funding goes to these active policies when in Canada most is consumed by unemployment benefits. The Swedish employment service officers have a hand in helping to fill a half of all vacancies (in Canada 15-20%). Canada spends on labour market policy actually the same per cent of GNP as Sweden (3%) but the Canadian services seem to be much less effective. There is much to be learned in Canada from the Swedish experience, especially because the relatively high unemployment level in several parts of the country is a major nuisance and cost. Would it be better to make the labour market policies more entrepreneurial instead of the continuation of a bureaucratic muddle through?

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**Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations: A Comparative Study**, by John P. Windmuller and Alan Gladstone (eds.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, xii-370 p., ISBN 0-19-827260-X

Windmuller and Gladstone's **Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations**, although first published in 1984 and reprinted in 1986, has not yet been reviewed by this journal. The present commentary proposes to fill the information gap and reflect on the merits of this study.

The book is a collective work involving several authors and is coordinated by J.P. Windmuller and A. Gladstone. It starts with a statement and an enquiry:

"In almost every Western industrialized country and Japan, employers' associations hold a key position in the industrial relations system... Yet curiously enough the industrial relations literature offers little of substance about them..." (v).

On the first point, there are exceptions, according to the authors, "in the United States and perhaps Canada". (I shall return to the "perhaps Canada" reference later in this text.) On the second, the reasons for this paucity of information are laid at the door of employers' associations themselves: "being less than generous in responding to serious non-hostile inquiries about their activities and their internal affairs..." and their "general distrust of researchers in the social sciences" who generally undertake this sort of enquiry. They admit, however, that there has been a tendency on the part of IR students and researchers to be oriented toward union subject-matter, where information was more readily available and themes possibly more enticing.

There may, indeed, be another reason, unforeseen by Windmuller and Gladstone. Given the supra-enterprise level of activities, and the interaction between organization and government, necessary for reasons of efficient operations, it is quite possible that IR students and researchers tended to dismiss such organizations and areas of enquiry as the proper of political science. Concerned with such phenomena as lobbying, and other pressure group tactics, employers' associations may have been considered "beyond the pale". Curiously, a similar limit seems to have been imposed on the study of labour political action within IR circles, in spite of its obvious link with such areas as labour legislation (formulation and adoption) and

reglementation in general. Strangely, political scientists, although a little more active, have certainly not exhausted the subject either. And in case the reader is thinking that researchers in our faculties of administration are perhaps involved, it would be useful to note that they are almost totally absent from this area of enquiry.

As far as models are concerned, that used by Windmuller and Gladstone is bipartite and simple to use. Employers' associations are either of the commercial type (with economic or trade preoccupations dominant), or they are of the employment-relationship type (fundamentally concerned with IR and human resource questions). Often these two fonctions are combined.

There is a certain resemblance between this type of classification and that used much earlier by sociologist Gérard Dion in the Québec and Canadian context: "general employers' associations" and "true employers' associations". The essential difference between the two, according to Dion, was the IR function, the latter having a distinct role in IR, and the others being essentially trade oriented. Dion subdivided his second group into "all-purpose intersectorial or sectorial associations", "cohesive sectorial associations" and "employers' movements" (Thwaites, *Industrial Relations*, 1981). Similarly, Windmuller and Gladstone point to their second type as the most relevant for the IR function, and, indeed, put the accent on this sort of association throughout their study. (Other classifications, such as that by Bauer — horizontal and vertical, are not concerned with the IR function as a particular distinguishing characteristic, but rather with type of industrial grouping.)

Throughout the rest of this book, we are treated to a series of in-depth analyses of various national contexts: the U.K. (Armstrong), the U.S.A. (Derber), Australia (Dufty), Sweden (Skogh), Germany (FRG, Bunn), the Netherlands (Van Voorden), France (Bunel, Saglio), Italy (Treu, Martinelli), Israel (Shirom), and Japan (Levine), in that order. These analyses are generally well done, although individualized slightly doubtless because of the specific viewpoint of particular authors. Each contains an historical overview, an overview of present organizations, an analysis of the major associations and general observations on the present and near future. Evidently, the exact choice could be questioned, and the accent on Europe rethought. We could ask, what about the industrialized countries of Latin America? For this reviewer, however, the real question is not a new selection, but an enlarged, perhaps a much enlarged, sample.

Obviously, for a Canadian author, one major hole is our own experience. And this comment is not simply chauvinism, for the longevity and variety of the Canadian experience is well worth noting. The oldest associations in this country go back to 1822, and there was a particularly explosion of new associations during the two or three decades preceding the First World War. Sectorial, industry-wide, negotiations were first attempted in 1906. Furthermore, the current pattern of an overall horizontal organization in Québec (the Conseil du patronat de Québec), other lesser horizontal organizations, and a host of vertical organizations — most of which combine commercial (trade) and human resource-IR preoccupations, provide the elements of a stimulating national portrait. Most are involved in the IR function, in a variety of ways — extending from negotiations to furnishing expertise and information. The French-English question has also played a role in terms of different orientations and sometimes parallel structures. In short, in the next (larger) version, Canada should find its place.

In conclusion, this is a solid piece of work on a subject which has too often been ignored in IR circles. Windmuller and Gladstone have provided us with a sound "pensez-y bien". With

the resurgence of interest in the business community and the policies and role of companies in the national economic, social and political contexts, employers' associations may be on the point of coming into their own as field of study. Governments and unions cannot afford ignore them. Can the IR community?

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**Human Resources and the Performance of the Firm**, by Morris M. Kleiner, Richard N. Block, Myron Roomkin, Sidney W. Salsburg (eds.), Madison, Wisconsin, Industrial Relations Research Association Series, 1987, pp. 343, ISBN 0-913447-382

This is an excellent review of research in several areas that are presumed to affect the performance of the firm: industrial relations strategy: labour relations practices; compensation; employee participation; grievance procedures; pensions; hiring procedures; turnover and employment security. For each area there is an extensive review of recent research conducted almost entirely in the United States. For some topics, such as pensions and retirement, the experience in the United States does not seem entirely appropriate to Canada, although conditions could change if early vesting of pensions and the abolishment of mandatory retirement come to Canada. Industrial relations specialists in Canada, Anil Verma and David Peach, participated in significant research studies concerning employee participation and grievance procedures, respectively.

The purpose of this monograph becomes clear in the final chapter. Performance of companies was not of great concern in the past when American companies faced little international competition and could pass on increased labour costs to their customers. However, in recent times the performance of these firms has become much more uncertain and the American government has become concerned about how various factors, including human resources, affect corporate performance.

The monograph supplies no easy answers. Corporate performance is hard to measure and also difficult to relate to human resources. Even relating human resources to more immediate outcomes such as absenteeism and productivity has been difficult. Some of the contributors to this volume recognize that research in labour economics is not completely adequate for predicting corporate performance and that researchers should also consider process-oriented or managerial research with particular firms or industries.

The contributors to this monograph have summarized very well recent research, mostly by labour economists, which relates personnel and labour relations practices to corporate performance. While it is difficult to show that any particular practice makes firms more successful, there is much evidence that more successful firms have more up-to-date practices. For example, a more problem-solving approach to grievances, high pension coverage, employee participation or productivity sharing programs set forth in labour contracts, and even simply union representation are found among more productive and profitable companies.

As businesses and unions achieve more progressive practices in human resources, they may be willing to do evaluation research themselves or support research by academics. Five or ten year from now a more conclusive piece of research should be possible on the performance of the firm. Until then, the monograph prepared by the IRRA should be a useful guide to making research on human resources more rigorous and also relevant to industry.

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