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Article abstract

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# ***Employee Participation Plans in the U.S. How Far Can They Go?***

**Martin M. Perline**  
**and**  
**David J. Poynter**

*In order to deal with the intense competition, both from international and domestic sources, there has been a movement among unions and management in the U.S. to forge a new cooperative relationship. While the notion of cooperation has taken numerous forms, one such approach involves labor participation in some phase of the production process through various programs. Their progress up the hierarchy is such that they are more likely to step on traditional managerial prerogatives. Does this lead management to re-evaluate its position on these prerogatives?*

As we enter the 1990's there is a belief on the part of many industrial relations scholars that a new era of labor-management cooperation is at hand in the United States<sup>1</sup>. Such a belief is based on the fact that intense competition, both international and domestic, deregulation of certain industries, and widespread technological change are putting immense economic pressure on the parties which will ultimately force them into a more cooperative relationship in order to survive<sup>2</sup>. This belief is reinforced by the apparent success of Japanese industrial relations wherein a more cooperative relationship has long been practiced.

The notion of labor-management cooperation means different things to different people and can be short term or long term in nature. Examples

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of short term cooperation would be efforts of labor and management in the steel and auto industries to work together to seek import quotas on steel and autos, or the communications industry to lobby for rate increases. On the other hand long term cooperation, the cooperation at issue here, would involve labor participation in some phase of the production process. Examples of such cooperation would include broad scaled quality of work life projects, or more narrowly defined quality circles, autonomous work groups, or joint union-management committees; but whatever the approach there is often an emphasis on profit or productivity sharing as a form of compensation, and the adoption of more flexible work rules to better meet the demands of the competitive marketplace.

While the idea of such cooperation is certainly not new<sup>3</sup>, and there are many skeptical of such an approach<sup>4</sup>, the increasing interest in these participation plans can be attested to by the dozens of books, plethora of articles, and numerous seminars being held locally, regionally and nationally which deal with the many aspects of these plans. Indeed, most recently the National Association of Manufacturers, whose members account for 85 % of U.S. manufacturing output, issued a strong endorsement of such programs. They predicted that in the 1990s we would witness "a revolution of employee participation — a revolution that will transform the way work is organized and managed"<sup>5</sup>.

Further evidence that this interest in such programs is quite widespread is apparent from a report issued by the AFL-CIO Committee on the Evolution of Work. In reference to such plans, the report states:

In this regard, the survey data suggest, and our experience indicates, that there is a particular insistence voiced by workers, union and non-union alike, to have a say in the 'how, why and wherefore', of their work. These needs and desires are being met in some cases by union-management programs affording greater worker participation in the decision-making process at the workplace. Several unions have developed such programs and report positive membership response. The labor movement should seek to accelerate this development<sup>6</sup>.

Examples of significant programs involving unionized companies would include AT&T with the Communication Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Xerox with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union; and several steel companies with the United Steelworkers of America<sup>7</sup>. Possibly most noteworthy is the United Autoworkers and General Motors agreement covering the G.M. Saturn Plant being built near Spring Hill, Tennessee. In this instance all staff would be salaried rather than paid on an hourly basis; there would be only four to six job classifications; and part of everyone's salary would

be tied to profit and productivity goals. This agreement calls for more participative decision making, more communication, and less of a bureaucratic hierarchy<sup>8</sup>.

Most probably, there is more such participation taking place today than is even suspected, as many instances are not being reported for fear of raising unrealistic expectations<sup>9</sup>.

Since most of these plans give non-supervisory workers responsibilities for many aspects of the workplace traditionally reserved to management, often including such things as designing the work, pay, and hiring and teaching of new employees, one would expect the unions involved in such plans to want a greater say over various collective bargaining issues, and consequently challenging traditional managerial prerogatives. This point was made by Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld when he pointed out that

shop floor participation can not only facilitate accommodation to change, it can serve to redefine management rights and union responsibilities, as well as bump job security, work rule, and gainsharing issues into the collective bargaining arena<sup>10</sup>.

Although these programs have become a larger part of the industrial relations environment, there is some question as to the likelihood of their continuation, for as they progress from solving minor problems on the shop floor to dealing with more important matters higher up in the corporate hierarchy, they are more likely to step on traditional managerial prerogatives; and unless management is willing to sacrifice some of these prerogatives, many of these participation programs may very well be abandoned. This point was stressed by participants at a 1988 State-of-the-Art Symposium on labor-management cooperation,<sup>11</sup> as well as by Charles Heckscher who indicated that

[a]s the QWL process matures, however, it increasingly encroaches on domains that have been defined as 'management prerogatives', arousing sharper resistance, .... after an initial round of successes they reach a 'plateau', discouraged at every turn from proceeding to more ambitious projects<sup>12</sup>.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MANAGERIAL PREROGATIVES**

To be sure, the question of management rights is age old<sup>13</sup>. Wherever the relationship of master and servant, or in more modern times, employer and employee has existed, there is some effort on the part of the managed to challenge the authority of the manager; and of course an effort on the part of the manager to maintain control<sup>14</sup>.

The early employer's position was one which indicated an unwillingness to share any of his authority with "outside" groups. This position was well stated in 1902 by George F. Baer when as president of the Philadelphia and Reading railroad he was urged "as a Christian gentleman" to make concessions to the striking workers on his railroad. He responded as follows:

The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for — not by the labor agitators, but by the Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of the country, and upon the management of which so much depends<sup>15</sup>.

In other instances management, though not going so far as to rely on the "Almighty", has attempted to link its authority to the preservation of the free enterprise system and has suggested that its continued control over these prerogatives is nothing less than a patriotic duty to preserve the "American way of life"<sup>16</sup>. As firms became publicly owned management's claim to virtually unlimited authority was reinforced by reference to its claimed primary obligation to the stockholders to manage efficiently<sup>17</sup>.

Such an authoritarian position finally began to weaken considerably in the 1930s due both to the growth of organized labor and the concurrent growth of government intervention, particularly in the form of the *National Labor Relations Act*; but while management's strong position on the rights issue weakened, it hardly faded away. Although significantly watered down since that time, the determination of "who's in charge" has been a major issue in everything from the question of free agency in professional football to the long enduring enmity between the unions and Eastern Airlines. According to Cullen and Greenbaum in their study of management rights and collective bargaining, if one examines any of the most controversial aspects of collective bargaining over the years, be they wages and hours, the closed shop, featherbedding, seniority or similar issues he/she will usually discover "that each is but a variation on the same underlying theme, a clash between management's 'right' and its need to run its business efficiently, and the 'right' and need of workers to have a voice in the decisions affecting their jobs"<sup>18</sup>.

## **POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION PLANS ON MANAGERIAL PREROGATIVES**

While historically management has been very protective of its managerial prerogatives, it is possible that given the dynamic nature of industrial relations systems, that the changes brought about by the advent

of various employee participation plans could change the manner in which management perceives these prerogatives. For instance, it appears possible that once such plans are put into place, and management has the opportunity to become involved in their operations, it might re-evaluate its position on management rights and be more willing to permit union input into those issues which have traditionally been determined solely by management.

This point was suggested by Paula Voos whose research indicated that various participation plans have positive effects on union-management relations. If this is so one might further suspect that this could lead to a willingness on the part of management to permit greater input into the determination of various bargaining issues<sup>19</sup>.

A similar point was stressed by D. Quinn Mills when he emphasized that

when managers fully realize that concessions and the participation of unions in corporate decision making have imposed a new employee relations strategy on the company, there is the chance that the loss of managerial prerogatives may be accepted<sup>20</sup>.

To what extent does management still strongly adhere to these managerial prerogatives and to what extent might such a position interfere with the progress of various attempts at cooperative bargaining which often call for an increased union input into the collective bargaining process? Is it possible that some of the mutual trust established by involvement in employee participation plans has brought about a changed perception on the part of management as concerns these traditional managerial prerogatives? It is an answer to these questions that our research addresses.

## DATA SOURCE

In order to gain some insight into the above questions a questionnaire was sent to the executive in charge of the labor relations function at 213 major U.S. corporations<sup>21</sup>.

The questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate whether they believed each of twenty-eight different bargaining issues should be jointly determined by the parties or was a managerial prerogative and should be solely determined by management<sup>22</sup>. Because such issues often could be qualified, the respondents were asked to view each issue in its most limited context. Further, the questionnaire asked the respondents among other things to indicate whether their organization was "very involved", "somewhat involved", or "not involved" in various employee participation plans. Ninety-three corporate officials responded, for over a forty-three percent response rate.

It was our belief that the manner in which the respondents perceived the determination of the bargaining issues would give us some indication as to management's perception of these traditional managerial prerogatives. Further we believed that the differences, if any, between the respondents based on their level of involvement in various employee participation plans, might give us some insights into whether those who have been involved with such plans, might perceive these prerogatives differently, than those who had less involvement with such plans<sup>23</sup>.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In Table 1 we have indicated the responses to the questionnaire by issue and the percentage of respondents reporting that the issue should be solely determined by management. The data contained therein indicate that eighty-five percent of the respondents believed the "typical issue" should be solely determined by management. Furthermore, as would be expected, management believed that certain prerogatives were more sacred than others. In the case of eight issues, there was complete agreement among the respondents. They all believed that these issues should be exclusively determined by management. These included decisions on the management of the organization (1), size of the workforce (5), products to be manufactured (9), determination of financial policies (11), pricing of goods (12), distribution of the product (16), determination of control and use of plant property (18), and determination of the location of the business (19). At the other extreme, less than 20 percent of the respondents believe that the determination of the application of seniority provisions of the contract (6) should be solely determined by management.

While the managerial perceptions on the remaining nineteen issues fell somewhere between these extremes, in most instances a substantial majority of respondents believed the issue should be determined solely by management. In only two cases did a majority of respondents believe the issue should be jointly determined. These included the aforementioned application of seniority provisions of the contract (6), as well as the determination of the transfer of workers within plants (8).

That a large majority of respondents strongly believed that most issues should be determined solely by management is understandable. Certainly, one would expect managers to believe that most decisions should be left to the discretion of management. This is one reason most companies make every effort to remain unorganized.

**TABLE 1**  
**Management Views of**  
**The Appropriate Determination of Collective Bargaining Issues**  
**(Ranked by the Perception of Managerial Determination)**

<i>Issue Number</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Rank*</i>	<i>Managerial Decision (Percent)</i>	<i>Joint Decision (Percent)</i>
1.	Management of organization	3	100.0	0.0
2.	Discharge of employees	18	87.0	13.0
3.	Disciplinary action	20	81.7	18.3
4.	Promotion to supervisory	10	97.8	2.2
5.	Size of work force	5	100.0	0.0
6.	Seniority provisions	28	19.6	80.4
7.	Promotion non-supervisory	26	51.1	48.9
8.	Transfer of workers	27	47.8	52.2
9.	Products to be manufactured	1	100.0	0.0
10.	Services to be rendered	12	96.7	3.3
11.	Financial policies	2	100.0	0.0
12.	Pricing of goods or services	4	100.0	0.0
13.	Customer relations	15	93.5	6.5
14.	Contracted work	25	66.3	33.7
15.	Means of manufacture	13	95.6	4.4
16.	Distribution of product	6	100.0	0.0
17.	Materials and inventories	9	98.9	1.1
18.	Control of plant property	8	100.0	0.0
19.	Business location	7	100.0	0.0
20.	Lay-out and equipment	16	92.5	7.5
21.	Job content	24	67.7	32.3
22.	Assignment of work	23	68.8	31.2
23.	Quality of workmanship	17	90.3	9.7
24.	Scheduling of operations	14	94.6	5.4
25.	Scheduling of shifts	21	77.4	22.6
26.	Safety and health	22	69.9	30.1
27.	Property protection	11	96.8	3.2
28.	Selection of employees	19	86.0	14.0
	Mean	---	85.0	15.0

\*The overall rank of the 28 bargaining issues is based on the percentage for each respondent's view of each issue considered to be a managerial decision. In the event of a tie in ranking, we analyzed the percentage of responses for the respective issues weighted by five issues we asked the respondents to select as those they believed most appropriate for managerial and/or joint determination.



Although a majority of respondents believed that almost all issues should be determined solely by management, there were differences in the degree to which there was such a consensus. As would be expected there was a tendency for the respondents to most strongly believe in the managerial determination of those issues which were farthest removed from the "shop floor", and to perceive those issues most closely related to the "shop floor" as more appropriate for joint determination.

To gain further insight into this question, we selected from the twenty-eight issues listed in Table 1 the ten issues which we believed were most closely associated with "entrepreneurial control", and thus most *prima facie* managerial prerogatives. Further, we selected the ten issues which appeared to most closely revolve around the "shop floor", — those which could have the most effect on the membership<sup>24</sup>. A comparison of management's perception on these issues indicated that while 98,7 percent of the respondents believed the "typical issue" among the former group of issues should be determined solely by management, only 66,6 percent of the respondents believed the "typical issue" among the latter group should be managerially determined. A t test suggested the differences were statistically significant at the ,01 level.

Thus while management showed little inclination to share any of their prerogatives with labor, they did show the most willingness to share the decision making process on those issues which are closest to the "shop floor". To others than strict "reserved rights" proponents this should come as no surprise, for these issues are less *prima facie* managerial rights and thus less likely to be those to which there is some strong philosophical attachment by management. Furthermore, the "shop floor" is the area where the workers' first hand knowledge might allow them to make a contribution toward increased efficiency. Similarly, from the union perspective, these are the issues which most directly affect the workers and thus those, which on principle, they would be most inclined to want some input<sup>25</sup>.

In general, our results suggest that management still believes very strongly in its right to manage, and would probably be most reluctant to compromise this right by permitting additional union erosion of these prerogatives. The fact that so many employee participation plans have been negotiated — plans which permit greater union/worker input into the decision-making process — is not necessarily inconsistent with these conclusions. As our results suggest, management is more willing to share its prerogatives on those issues which most closely involve the "shop floor", and many of these plans do not extend beyond this level of participation.

Because of the dynamic nature of industrial relations systems, and the survey results of writers such as Voos<sup>26</sup> and Quinn,<sup>27</sup> we compared the manner in which those who were "very involved" in employee participation plans viewed managerial prerogatives when contrasted with their colleagues who were "less involved" in such endeavors. The results are contained in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**The Appropriate Determination of Collective Bargaining Issues**  
**Based upon Respondents Involvement in Employee Participation Plans**

<i>Issue Number</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Managerial Decision (Percent)</i>		
		<i>Very Involved</i>	<i>Somewhat Involved</i>	<i>Not Involved</i>
1.	Management of organization	100.0	100.0	100.0
2.	Discharge of employees	85.2	90.0	82.6
3.	Disciplinary action	77.8	87.8	73.9
4.	Promotion to supervisory	96.3	97.6	100.0
5.	Size of work force	100.0	100.0	100.0
6.	Seniority provisions	7.7	22.0	21.7
7.	Promotion non-supervisory	40.7	53.7	54.5
8.	Transfer of workers	37.0	51.2	50.0
9.	Products to be manufactured	100.0	100.0	100.0
10.	Services to be rendered	100.0	92.5	100.0
11.	Financial policies	100.0	100.0	100.0
12.	Pricing of goods or services	100.0	100.0	100.0
13.	Customer relations	85.2	95.1	100.0
14.	Contracted work	61.5	73.5	56.5
15.	Means of manufacture	100.0	92.5	100.0
16.	Distribution of product	100.0	100.0	100.0
17.	Materials and inventories	100.0	100.0	100.0
18.	Control of plant property	100.0	100.0	100.0
19.	Business location	100.0	100.0	100.0
20.	Lay-out and equipment	92.6	90.2	95.7
21.	Job content	66.7	70.7	60.9
22.	Assignment of work	66.7	70.7	65.2
23.	Quality of workmanship	85.2	92.7	91.3
24.	Scheduling of operations	92.6	97.6	91.3
25.	Scheduling of shifts	66.7	82.9	78.3
26.	Safety and health	70.4	78.0	52.2
27.	Property protection	100.0	95.1	95.7
28.	Selection of employees	85.2	87.8	82.6
	Mean	82.8	86.5	84.0
	Standard Deviation	23.5	18.7	21.4

Much to our surprise, there appeared to be very little difference in the manner in which the respondents viewed these bargaining issues. While a smaller percentage of those "very involved" believed the typical issue should be determined solely by management, these differences were very small. A test of significance for all combinations of employee involvement indicated they were not statistically different at the .01 level of significance.

The belief of Mills that the participation of unions in corporate decision making may lead managers to an acceptance of the loss of managerial prerogatives has not been verified by our results. Further, Voos' conclusions that participation plans lead to better union-management relations apparently has not carried over to a greater willingness on the part of managers to share traditional managerial prerogatives with their union counterparts<sup>28</sup>.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Historically one of the most divisive factors in the labor-management relationship has been the efforts of management to protect its managerial prerogatives. Since such a position can suppress efforts to bargain collectively with labor on a more cooperative basis we attempted to measure the extent to which management still attempted to protect these prerogatives. Further we investigated whether the involvement of management in various employee participation plans would affect the manner in which it viewed such prerogatives.

The basic conclusion reached was that management is still very protective of its perceived rights. On almost all issues surveyed, an overwhelming majority of respondents believed that the issue should be solely determined by management. As a matter of fact on only two issues, out of the twenty-eight possible, did a majority of managers believe a joint labor-management decision was the appropriate manner in which to resolve the issue. Possibly more surprising was the fact that those "very involved" in employee participation plans were as protective of these rights as were their "less involved" counterparts. Such a position by management could further destabilize the relationship as it's likely that unions which become involved with employee participation plans may be more insistent on having input into traditional managerial prerogatives<sup>29</sup>.

Since there was considerably more managerial willingness to allow joint determination of those bargaining issues which involved the "shop floor", our results cannot be interpreted to indicate that employee participation plans which involve basic labor-management cooperation at the

“shop floor” level are doomed to failure. Quite the contrary. It is at this level where there is most agreement that the sharing of the decision making process is appropriate<sup>30</sup>.

Although this study does not address this question there is every reason to believe that participation at the “shop floor” level is likely to increase over time. Not only will the future require a more flexible, problem solving worker, but a more educated future worker may demand more opportunities for participation. This is coupled with the fact that the replacement of old production units and the expansion of newer ones will present opportunities to design new work facilities with more extensive opportunities for participation<sup>31</sup>.

On the other hand, the respondents were almost unanimous (98,7 %) in agreeing that issues dealing with upper level corporate strategy should be solely determined by management. Such a conclusion suggests that management’s continued protection of these prerogatives could potentially inhibit the progression of cooperative efforts to higher levels of the corporate hierarchy. Further research from other perspectives would be necessary to more definitively confirm these conclusions.

Such a conclusion is, of course, not surprising as outside “interference” at the top has always been resisted by management. In fact with all the cooperative movements afoot, those which include union input at the upper level of corporate management, even on a limited basis, are rare. In those few cases where such a relationship has been established, it has been due to an overriding need for cooperation because the corporation was on the brink of bankruptcy or in other financial disarray. Furthermore, these few instance of “extended partnership” usually involve a company that is almost completely union organized and has been seriously damaged by competition<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, as history has illustrated, once the particular problems are solved the cooperative relationships do not often survive<sup>33</sup>.

An initial reaction to these conclusions might be disconcerting to those who believe that cooperation and participation should be extended well beyond the “shop floor” — possibly even into the far reaches of management; but since the mainstream of organized labor in the United States has never been anxious to extend its control far beyond the “shop floor”, this position by management should not create any particular problems. As a matter of fact, some union leaders are often as suspicious of “too much” cooperation as are managers, and often are very hesitant to participate in the higher reaches of the decision making process<sup>34</sup>. This point is evident from the current disagreement within the United Auto Workers Union concerning the “jointness” efforts of the UAW and the big three U.S.

automobile companies<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, it's quite possible that the unions may feel most comfortable merely continuing their historical role of reacting to the actions of management. Our results suggest, that with some exceptions, such a role for the unions would be most satisfactory to management.

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For a more specific reference see Martin M. PERLINE and David J. POYNTER, "Union and Management Perceptions of Managerial Prerogatives: Some Insight into the Future of Co-operative Bargaining in the USA", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, July, 1990, p. 179-196. In this earlier research we attempted to determine the likelihood that labor and management in the U.S. could reach a cooperative relationship given the historical struggle between the parties over the issue of managerial prerogatives. Responses from 23 union research directors and 93 corporate officials suggested that while there was some disagreement over whether each of 28 bargaining issues should be jointly determined by the parties, or solely determined by management, this disagreement became smaller on those issues which dealt with matters related to the "shop floor". Further there was surprising agreement between the parties on the five issues which each considered "most appropriate" for joint or sole managerial determination. Our overall conclusion was that the issue of managerial prerogatives should not deter a new era of cooperation in U.S. labor relations. The present research extends this analysis into the specific area of employee participation plans and investigates the question as to whether the issue of managerial prerogatives will prevent such plans from advancing labor-management cooperation to levels beyond the "shop floor".

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11 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Bureau of Labor-Management Relations and Cooperative Programs, *Labor-Management Cooperation: 1988 State-of-the-Art Symposium*, BLMR 124, 1988.

12 C. HECKSCHER, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

13 For a more extensive review of this historical background see M.M. PERLINE and D.J. POYNTER, 1990, *op. cit.*

14 While we considered it beyond the scope of the present study there is an extensive body of literature on the nature of control as part of the capitalist labor process. For an excellent review of this literature see amongst others Paul THOMPSON, *The Nature of Work*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989.

15 "Mr. Baer on Management Responsibilities", reprinted in E. Wight BAKKE, Clark KERR and Charles W. ANROD, *Unions Management and the Public*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 3rd Edition, 1967, p. 212.

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19 Paula B. VOOS, "The Influence of Cooperative Programs on Union-Management Relations, Flexibility, and other Labor Relations Outcomes", *Journal of Labor Research*, Winter, 1989, p. 103-117.

20 D. QUINN MILLS, "When Employees Make Concessions", *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, 1983, p. 113.

21 The sampling frame for the study consisted of a judgment sample of 213 companies selected from a listing of corporations contained in *Standard and Poors 500 Largest Corporations* and a special issue of *Business Week* which contained a list of the 1000 largest companies. The goal of the selection process was to solicit responses from major employers in traditionally unionized industries who had thus engaged in the collective bargaining process.

The questionnaires were originally mailed in late 1986 and 1987 and a follow up was mailed shortly thereafter. Responses were received from ninety-three corporations representing some twenty-three industries.

22 Each respondent would need apply his/her particular definition as to whether an issue was a managerial prerogative or one which should be jointly determined. Given the very strong consistency among the respondents this definitional issue did not appear to be a problem.

23 As a matter of clarity our use of the term "employee participation" has reference to programs such as Quality Circles, Joint Union-Management Committees, etc. which may or may not be part of the collective bargaining process, but are often operated separately from this process. On the other hand we use the term "joint determination" in reference to those issues involved in the collective bargaining process. More specifically this research is attempting to discover whether the use of various "employee participation" plans will ultimately lead management to permit more "joint determination" of the various collective bargaining issues.

24 The *prima facie* managerial prerogatives would include issues 1, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, and 18; and the issues most closely related to the "shop floor" would include issues 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 21, 22, 24, 25, and 26. Issues which appeared to be *prima facie* managerial prerogatives and also could have strong impact on union membership, i.e., business location

and contracting out, were excluded from both lists. While such a selection is somewhat arbitrary those identified as *prima facie* managerial prerogatives would likely be identified as "permissive" by U.S. labor law. Those issues most closely related to the "shop floor" would likely be identified as "mandatory". See *NLRB v Wooster Division of Borg-Warner Corporation*, 356 U.S. 3421 (1958).

25 Martin M. PERLINE and David J. POYNTER, "Union Versus Managerial Prerogatives", *Personnel Journal*, September, 1988, p. 126-134.

26 P.B. VOOS, *op. cit.*

27 D. QUINN MILLS, *op. cit.*

28 If we had found that those "very involved" in employee participation plans had viewed the issue of managerial prerogatives differently than those "less involved" we still would have the problem of causation. While our hypothesis was that involvement in such programs would lead management to a greater willingness to "jointly determine" various bargaining issues, it is quite possible that causation runs the other way; having a weaker view on managerial prerogatives causes firms to adopt participation plans. Given the fact that we found no relationship the issue is moot. Our results suggest that there is no relationship between management's attitude toward managerial prerogatives and participation plans in either direction.

29 Martin M. PERLINE and David J. POYNTER, "The Effects of Worker Participation Plans on Union Views of Managerial Prerogatives", *Labor Law Journal*, January, 1989, p. 37-44.

30 For union views on these issues see M.M. PERLINE and D.J. POYNTER, 1988, *op. cit.*

31 Hy KORNBLUH, "Work Place Democracy and Quality of Work Life: Problems and Prospects", *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, May, 1984, p. 93.

32 C. HECKSCHER, *op. cit.*, p. 120-121.

33 S.M. JACOBY, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

34 See Donna SOCKELL, "Toward A Theory of the Union's Role in an Enterprise", in *Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations*, Vol. 1, David B. Lipsky and Joel M. Douglas (eds.), Greenwich, CT.: JAI Press Inc., 1983, p. 221-282.

35 See "UAW Hotly Debates Whether It Is Too Cozy With Car Companies", *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 1989, p. A1 and A9.

## *Les programmes de participation des travailleurs aux États-Unis*

Afin de relever le défi d'une forte concurrence, tant internationale que domestique, on a vu aux États-Unis les employeurs et les syndicats s'efforcer de mettre en place un nouveau modèle de rapports de coopération. Si cette coopération peut revêtir diverses formes, une telle approche consiste en la participation des travailleurs dans quelques-unes des phases du processus de production. On pourrait y inclure, à titre d'exemples, des initiatives se rapportant à la qualité de la vie au travail au sens

large ou définies d'une façon plus spécifique, des cercles de qualité, des groupes de travail autonomes ou encore des comités paritaires de collaboration syndicale-patronale.

Bien que ces programmes aient touché largement le milieu des relations professionnelles, force est de s'interroger sur la probabilité de leur continuation. En effet, au fur et à mesure qu'ils progressent, de la solution de problèmes mineurs au niveau de l'atelier vers des questions plus importantes susceptibles d'atteindre les paliers supérieurs dans la hiérarchie organisationnelle, il est vraisemblable que ces programmes heurteront de front les prérogatives patronales et, à moins que les directions d'entreprises ne soient disposées à sacrifier quelques-unes de leurs très anciennes prérogatives, il se peut que plusieurs de ces programmes de participation doivent être finalement abandonnés.

Alors que, dans le passé, les employeurs se sont montrés très jaloux de leurs prérogatives, certains spécialistes croient que l'expérience des programmes de participation puisse les inciter à réévaluer leur point de vue à ce sujet et, donc, à permettre aux syndicats d'intervenir dans des domaines qui, traditionnellement, ont été la chasse gardée du patronat.

Afin d'approfondir cette question, on a fait parvenir un questionnaire aux directeurs des relations du travail de 213 entreprises importantes des États-Unis. Ce questionnaire demandait aux répondants d'indiquer s'ils croyaient que chacune des vingt-huit matières soumises à la négociation entre les parties devait faire l'objet de décision conjointe entre les syndicats et les employeurs, ou encore demeurer dans le champs des prérogatives patronales. De plus, le questionnaire demandait aussi de signaler si l'entreprise où ils travaillaient était 'très engagée', 'modérément engagée', ou 'aucunement engagée' dans certains programmes de participation des employés. On a reçu 93 réponses.

La constatation principale qu'on peut en retenir, c'est que les employeurs tiennent toujours à conserver ce qu'ils perçoivent comme leurs droits. Sur presque tous les points une majorité écrasante des répondants estimaient que la décision finale devait revenir aux patrons uniquement. De plus, l'étude démontre que ceux qui se disaient 'très engagés' dans des programmes de participation se montraient aussi attachés au maintien de leurs prérogatives que ceux qui l'étaient moins. Cette dernière conclusion est particulièrement étonnante, étant donné que la confiance mutuelle résultant de leur participation dans divers programmes de ce genre pouvait être de nature à modifier la perception des employeurs concernant leurs prérogatives traditionnelles. Même si l'enquête effectuée ne peut permettre de conclure que les efforts dans le sens de l'établissement de programmes de participation à un niveau plus élevé de la hiérarchie se trouveront ainsi freinés, elle laisse soupçonner que la sauvegarde persistante des prérogatives patronales pourrait potentiellement inhiber une telle progression. De nouvelles études, envisagées selon d'autres perspectives, sont nécessaires pour confirmer plus définitivement ces constatations.