

Union and Employer Confederation Views on Current Labour Relations in 21 Industrialized Nations

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Article abstract

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Union and Employer Confederation Views on Current Labour Relations in 21 Industrialized Nations

**RICHARD B. PETERSON
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This study reports the results of a cross-sectional mail survey sent to top officials of union and employer confederations in twenty-one industrialized market economies in Western Europe, North America, and Japan. The results regarding their assessment of the current labour relations situation in their own country show some significant differences related to employer vs. union side and by economic groupings (EEU, EFTA, and other). We conclude that the relatively stable labour-management relationships during the 1960s and 1970s has apparently given way to greater divergence among the major industrial nations in recent years.

There has been a growing interest in the field of comparative industrial relations in recent years throughout the industrialized world. This trend is particularly noticeable in the United States. During the early postwar period American scholars were very much in evidence (e.g., Dunlop 1958; Kerr et al. 1964), but from the mid-1960s through approximately the mid-1980s most of the literature came from academics in Western Europe, Canada, and Australia. The International Industrial Relations Association and the Institute for Labour Studies at the ILO have been facilitating mechanisms for maintaining interest in the comparative field over the last 20-25 years.

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The current interest in comparative industrial relations is based on several factors. First, the integration of the European Economic Union (EEU) on January 1, 1993 melded the economies of twelve Western European countries for the first time.¹ The "open borders" will practically mean that citizens of one country can seek employment in other member nations with a minimum of difficulty. While a full social contract has not yet been reached, the EEC nations are now entering a new economic era (Addison and Siebert 1991; Silvia 1991). Second, the EEC has expanded to include Austria, Finland, and Sweden. The other EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries would then likely ask for EEC membership. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary have applied for associate membership.

Finally, beginning in the mid-1970s, major upheavals have occurred in the power relationship between unions and employers in some industrialized economies (e.g., Britain and the United States). During the past decade there were political shifts from left- to right-of-centre governments, corporate restructuring and downsizing (particularly in the manufacturing sector), and shifts of power from unions to management caused by growing international competition and economic malaise. According to Alan Gladstone:

Industrial relations, in the second half of the eighth decade of the twentieth century, are in a period of transition and, some would say, turmoil. Trade unions have had to assume a defensive posture. Employer associations are seeing the erosion of a part of their *raison d'être*. The institution of collective bargaining is undergoing a radical change in structure and substance (Gladstone et al. 1989: xi).

Much is known about the role and functions of union and employer confederations in most of the industrialized market economies (Ferner and Hyman 1992; Rothman, Briscoe and Nacamulli 1993). However, less is known about how key officials of these confederations view contemporary labour relations. This paper reports the results of a survey of key employer and union confederation officials in twenty-one major industrialized market-driven economies throughout the world.

The following section provides a brief overview of the field of comparative industrial relations since World War II. Next, we present the major features of the research design and then highlight the major findings of the study. Finally, we offer some conclusions and identify steps for future research on these key labour relations institutions in the industrialized countries.

1. The name European Economic Community (EEC) was changed to the present European Economic Union (EEU) after the Maastricht meetings in late 1992.

COMPARATIVE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SINCE WORLD WAR II

Early Postwar Period

A number of single-nation studies were published during the ten years following the end of World War II. The focus was on the industrialized world including such countries as Denmark (Galenson 1952), Norway (Galenson 1949), Sweden (Myers 1951), and France (Lorwin 1954). During the next decade, additional books on national labour movements included those focusing on Italy (Horowitz 1963), Germany (Hartmann 1961), Great Britain (McGivering, Matthews, and Scott 1960), and Japan (Levine 1958). The focus, in almost all cases, was on the particular country's labour movement rather than the employer's role in industrial relations. A number of these studies were funded under the Ford Foundation's Inter-University Program on Economic Development.

Most of the comparative industrial relations literature at the time was favourable towards the role of unions in the industrializing world. The studies were highly descriptive, with little attention given to theoretical constructs. The exceptions were Dunlop's *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958) and Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myer's *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (1964). The first book developed a framework for studying the field by identifying the influence of such factors as the key actors, the web of rules, and the impact of power, technology, and market forces on a given country's industrial relations system.

The second book used industrial relations system theory as an organizing framework for studying labour relations systems in the developed and developing worlds. On the basis of their field work, the authors were able to discern commonalties in the industrial relations features of a given nation based upon the type of ruling elites. The authors' view was that there would be a convergence in IR systems over time due to the imperatives of the industrialization process. However, a later reexamination by Dunlop et al. (1978) showed that further industrialization had not accomplished this goal of greater uniformity of IR systems among those countries that shared a similar stage of growth.

How can we summarize industrial relations systems in the industrialized nations at the end of the 1960s? The dominant features at the time included: relatively strong or strong labour movements; improving real wages; rising standards of living; relatively low strike experience (not counting the United States and Canada); union access to the political process; the expansion of the welfare state throughout most of Western Europe; fairly high labour productivity, relatively high union density; and generally low levels of unemployment.

The radicalism of the Japanese labour movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s gave way to more conservative enterprise unionism by the mid-1950s. The Scandinavian model, and particularly the "Swedish Model" (Peterson 1968), was viewed as the most successful approach to union-management relations at the time. Labour relations in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark were characterized by high levels of union density, low strike experience, and free collective bargaining.

However, things were not ideal in all of the industrialized countries at the time, as evidenced by the continuing factionalism of the labour movement based on ideology (e.g., France and Italy), and religion (e.g., Belgium and The Netherlands). Radical student politics in the late 1960s played a role in labour relations and industrial democracy debates in Italy and France as well.

The More Recent Scene

The 1970s, but particularly the 1980s, were far more difficult economic times for both employees and unions in most of the industrialized world. Japan was one of the notable exceptions to the general malaise of stagflation, rising unemployment, declining productivity, and overproduction (e.g., steel) that affected much of Western Europe and North America. Early evidence of this shift is shown in the works of Barkin (1983), Juris, Thompson and Daniels (1985), and Edwards, Garona and Todtling (1986). However, the current scene has been most recently captured in Ferner and Hyman's *Industrial Relations in the New Europe* (1992) and Kochan, Katz, and McKersie's *Transformation of American Industrial Relations* (1986) for Western Europe and the United States respectively.

Environmental forces in the past 20 years or so have had, and continue to have, major ramifications on employers, unions, and governments in the increasing integrated global economy. Many of the economic forces have weakened the previous stability of labour relations in most of the countries of Western Europe, Japan, and North America. Some of the most notable forces include rapid technological change, highly competitive product markets, and overcapacity in some product lines (e.g., steel and auto). Politically, the end of the Cold War and the disillusion of many with most social institutions has reduced the commonality of goals within and across countries. In addition, West Germany has had to shoulder the burden of integrating the former East Germany into a united state.

The economic forces mentioned above have resulted in two major recessions since 1980. More particularly, today we see: greater employer demands for worker flexibility; major corporate restructuring and downsizing; higher levels of unemployment; very modest real pay increases or real pay decreases; and pressure for reducing welfare state benefits.

More specific to the field of industrial relations, we find evidence of anti-unionism and/or advocacy of nonunion models (e.g., Thatcher in Great Britain and some employers in the United States). There is greater diversity regarding the presence of corporatism (although Austria continues to use it, most of the Scandinavian countries have shifted away from corporatist relationships). Centralized bargaining has given way at times to industry-level bargaining in a number of Western European countries. In Britain, the trend has been towards company- and plant-level bargaining as one still finds in the United States. There also has been some shift from "collectivist" to "individualistic" values that emphasize competitive behaviour between the public and private sectors and between blue- and white-collar union confederations. The impact of the integration of the EEC (Teague and Grahl 1992; Roberts 1992) and the growing role of multinational corporations (Marginson 1992) in industrial relations provide other discontinuities. Finally, the OECD has reported a loss of 18 million jobs during the 1980s. This has been especially hard on the manufacturing sector where union density was particularly high (OECD 1991). Interestingly enough, while American union density has dropped from 33% to 14.7%, all of the Scandinavian countries have experienced slight increases from already high levels (see Ferner and Hyman 1992²).

Turner's study of the auto and telecommunications industries (1991), shows considerable diversity in how unions and employees have responded to the same factors. Turner notes that the German labour movement has so far been spared many of the pains that American unions have faced in the past ten years or so. He also argues that the crucial factors that have protected unions in Germany, Sweden, and Japan — as compared to their counterparts in the United States, Britain, and Italy — are the presence of favourable legislation and the integration of the labour movement into the political process.

What is truly surprising, given the major changes and greater diversity across national IR systems, is that we know relatively little about the views of key officials of employer or union confederations who either develop and/or implement policies and programs covering industrial relations. Even Windmuller and Gladstone (1984) and Sisson (1987), who specifically looked at employer confederations, provided limited insights into the thinking of the leadership of the employer groups they studied. The present study is aimed at gaining insights from the key officials of both employer and union

2. Ferner and Hyman (1992) report on the current industrial relations systems in 17 European countries. In addition, the reference section identifies other recent articles covering Britain (Poole and Mansfield 1991; Towers 1989), Canada (Smith 1989; Troy 1992), France (Bridgford 1990), Italy (Terry 1993), Spain (Lawler and Rigby 1986) and Sweden (Peterson 1987a; Ahlen 1989).

confederations in light of the current forces facing both of the labour market parties in the industrialized nations. How do these officials assess the current labour relations scene?

METHODOLOGY

To answer this question, the top official at the principal employer and union confederation in twenty-two industrialized market economics nations was sent a questionnaire. Two questionnaires were developed: one for employers, the other for unions. Most of the questions were the same: 21 questions asked the respondent for background and organizational information, and 46 additional questions and statements sought their assessment of current labour relations in their country. A number of statements were based on variables identified earlier by Peterson (1987b).

The survey was sent to the top official of 68 union and employer confederations in all the EEC and EFTA nations, as well as to their counterparts in the United States, Canada, and Japan. The first mailing was sent out in June 1991. A follow-up mailing to non-respondents was made in August 1991. During the fall of 1991 we contacted directly the top official of nine confederations whom we wanted to make sure were included in our study, but who had not responded to our earlier mailings.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows union membership for 1970, 1980 and 1989 as reported by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for all but one of the countries in our study. The 1989 figures were the latest reported at the time of the study.

The initial contact and follow-up requests produced 43 usable responses, or a return rate of 63.2%. The breakdown by party was 25 of 44 (56.8%) for union confederations and 18 of 24 (75.0%) for employer confederations. For only one of the twenty-two countries did we fail to receive a completed survey, and that was a small country. There were only three countries from which surveys were returned by only one of the two parties.

Background Characteristics. The vast majority of union confederations had members in both the private and public sectors. Those respondents reached no consensus in terms of their assessment of the general public's view of their nation's labour movement. Only four had close ties with a political party. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents perceived their unions as having their greatest strength at the federation and confederation levels.

TABLE 1
Recorded Union Membership in 21 OECD Countries (1970, 1980, 1989)

	1970	1980	1989
Canada	2 231.0	3 487.2	4 030.8
United States	21 248.0	22 377.0	...
Japan	11 604.8	12 369.3	12 230.0
Austria	1 520.3	1 661.0	1 644.4
Belgium	1 606.0	2 310.0	2 291.4
Denmark	1 143.4	1 795.8	2 033.6
Finland	950.3	1 646.4	1 895.0
France	3 549.0	3 374.0	1 970.0
Germany	8 251.2	9 645.5	9 637.0
Greece	...	556.6	650.0
Iceland	...	60.6	103.1
Ireland	422.9	544.5	474.0
Italy	5 224.5	8 772.0	9 568.2
Luxembourg	52.4	72.0	75.0
Netherlands	1 585.4	1 740.8	1 635.9
Norway	759.2	1 049.1	1 203.5
Portugal	730.9	1 669.7	1 463.0
Spain	...	1 703.0	1 163.0
Sweden	2 546.4	3 486.4	3 855.1
Switzerland	824.9	954.3	899.9
United Kingdom	11 178.0	12 947.0	10 238.0

Source: OECD (1991: 101).

All but one of the employer confederation responses stated that their organization covered a combination of small, medium and large employers in their country. Unlike the union confederations, only three reported substantial public sector management membership. Like the union confederations, employer confederations did not have strong institutional ties to a political party and did not consider that their strength lay at the firm or workplace levels.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents said that, during the 1980s, their country adhered to a combination of market capitalism and social welfare policies. Eight of the respondents identified with market capitalism alone. No respondent reported that socialism represented the dominant economic system, though some countries were ruled by socialist party leaders for part or all of the 1980s.

Industrial democracy schemes were widespread. Works councils, joint consultation, and shop-floor participation programs were mentioned by over

55% of our respondents as being present in their country. But keep in mind that we had at least one response from both parties from the vast majority of the twenty-one nations. In two cases, we had multiple responses from both employer and union confederations in the countries concerned. Labour courts were the most prevalent form of final grievance resolution, with binding arbitration by a neutral third party somewhat less common.

In general, our respondents reported that the ruling political parties in their country during the 1980s were more likely to be conservative than during the 1970s. Table 2 reports mean scores for the respondents' views as to the seriousness of various problems in their country during the previous ten years. The employer and union confederation representatives viewed unemployment, government deficits, inflation and international competition as the most pressing problems during the 1980s.

TABLE 2
The Seriousness of Various Problems in Own Country During the 1980s

Issue	Mean Score	Issue	Mean Score
Inflation	3.40	Mismatch of Skills	
Unemployment	4.10	and Demand	3.07
Labor Scarcity	2.90	Stagflation	2.54
Trade Deficits	2.93	Decline in Real Earnings	2.45
Government Deficits	3.88	Low Productivity	2.31
Poor Education/Skills	2.71	International Competition	3.17
Quality of Work Force	2.50		

Note: The choices ranged from 1 (no problem) to 5 (major problem).

We ran step-wise regressions between the specific problems and the two outcome measures of union growth and change in level of union membership. Stagflation and poor education/skills were linked to a decline in union growth. Specific problems (unemployment, a decline in real earnings, worker/employer skill mismatch, stagflation, poor education/skills and inflation) were significantly associated with a decline in union growth (%) during the 1980s from their 1970 membership base. These six independent variables accounted for almost 55% of the variance in the dependent variable using the adjusted R^2 statistic (see table 3). However, there was no significant relationship between the number of problems mentioned and change in the level of union membership.

Assessments. We now turn our attention to the common themes regarding the 46 statements which were the heart of the survey. Table 4 reports the statement and mean score for each assessment of what the

respondent believed was then occurring in the area of industrial relations in their country in the early 1990s. Their response was on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

TABLE 3

**Stepwise Regressions: Problem Issues and Percent of Decline in Union Growth
1970 to 1989**

	SE B	BETA	t	Sign.
Unemployment	.144	-.430	-3.44	.001
Decline in Real Earnings	.126	-.387	-3.05	.004
Mismatch of Skills and Demand	.215	-.264	-1.84	.076
Inflation	.134	-.371	-2.63	.013
Stagflation	.158	.391	2.58	.015
Poor Education/Skills	.147	.848	5.86	.000
Multiple R	.7906			
R Squared	.6251			
Adjusted R ²	.5475			
Standard Error	.8659			

We will comment here only on those questions where the mean score was strongly in one or the other direction. The strongest agreement was voiced for the following statements: the right of employees to join unions is clearly provided by law ($\bar{X}=1.31$); unions have the legal right to strike in the private sector ($\bar{X}=1.31$); the primary orientation of unions is towards protecting and enhancing the economic interests of their members ($\bar{X}=2.02$); collective bargaining is characterized by considerable freedom of employers and unions with minimal involvement of government ($\bar{X}=2.02$); wildcat strikes and other unauthorized work stoppages have been quite rare in recent years ($\bar{X}=2.05$); and, when strikes take place, they are likely to be of short duration ($\bar{X}=2.05$).

Conversely, there was strong disagreement with the following statements: strike frequency is increasing in the past few years ($\bar{X}=4.14$); there is an increasing use of government mediators to help the parties reach key bargaining settlements ($\bar{X}=3.81$); unions do not have the legal right to strike in the public sector ($\bar{X}=3.78$); and, the increasing level of international competition in recent years has had a minimal effect on employers' labour relations policies at the national level ($\bar{X}=3.69$). What is striking about some of these findings is the level of general consensus across respondents from both sides of the bargaining table.

TABLE 4

Assessment of Present Labour Relations Situation in Own Country

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
The trend during the last 10 years in union membership as a share of the total labour force is decreasing.	2.88	1.37
The labour movement exerts considerable influence on the present government.	2.95	1.17
Employers exert considerable influence on the present government.	2.52	.99
The primary orientation of labour unions is towards protecting and enhancing the economic interests of their members.	2.02	.96
The level of bureaucratization in the labour movement is very low.	3.12	1.03
Labour unions suffer from the lack of financial strength to provide support for all of their programs.	2.95	1.25
There is a considerable extent of inter-union cooperation at the national level.	2.23	.90
The labour movement tends to be proactive, rather than reactive, in responding strategically to industrial relations issues.	3.00	1.15
Employers tend to be proactive, rather than reactive, in responding strategically to industrial relations issues.	2.88	1.23
Unions have less economic and political power to shape events than was true ten years ago.	2.70	1.23
The labour movement is quite effective in the passage of favorable labour legislation at the national level.	2.86	1.17
Labour unions accept the legitimacy of management to run the enterprise.	2.24	.91
The competency of the union leaders at the national level is quite high.	2.31	1.00
The labour movement encourages a high degree of internal union democracy.	2.37	1.07
The level of management resistance to union political goals is increasing in recent years.	2.51	1.10
Increasing product market competition within our country is decreasing the power of labour unions.	3.00	1.28
The increasing level of international competition in recent years has had a minimal effect on employers' labour relations policies at the national level.	3.69	1.02

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
The increasing level of international competition in recent years has had a minimal effect on union power at the national level.	3.21	1.05
The competency of employer association leaders at the national level is quite high.	2.17	1.00
Management is increasingly taking a proactive strategy to what it wants to see happen in the area of labour relations.	2.29	.96
The right of employees to join unions is clearly provided by law in our country.	1.31	.84
Employers take on active role in trying to discourage their employee from forming or joining unions.	2.37	1.37
Unions have the legal right to strike in the private sector.	1.31	.78
Unions do not have the legal right to strike in the public (governmental) sector.	3.78	1.52
Wildcat strikes or other unauthorized work stoppages have been quite rare in recent years.	2.05	1.23
Employers have considerable power to influence the passage of favorable labour legislation.	2.78	1.01
Collective bargaining in our country is characterized by considerable freedom of employers and unions with minimal involvement by government.	2.02	1.14
If unions are unable to gain employer concessions at the bargaining table, they are likely to push for passage of favorable labour legislation that will cover the issue.	2.78	1.17
If employers are unable to gain union concessions at the bargaining table, they are likely to push for passage of favorable labour legislation that will cover the issue.	3.10	1.18
Government officials are likely to place strong pressure on unions and employers to reach key pay settlements consistent with government economic goals.	2.79	1.26
There is an increasing use of government mediators to help the parties reach key bargaining settlements.	3.81	1.20
Wage or salary drift is not a major problem in our country at the present time.	3.03	1.31
There are increasing pressures on management to decentralize bargaining to the industry, company, or plant level.	2.88	1.33
There are increasing pressures on unions to decentralize bargaining to the industry, company, or plant level.	3.07	1.21

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
The trend is towards more difficult times for collective bargaining given the problems that impact the national economy.	2.49	1.08
The labour movement is under increasing membership pressure to enlarge the programs designed to increase industrial democracy and worker participation.	3.24	1.10
Employers are under increasing employee pressure to enlarge the programs designed to increase industrial democracy and worker participation.	3.31	1.07
There is today less pressure for unions to negotiate pay that will result in a narrowing of differentials between low and high pay sectors.	3.02	.95
There are increasing demands on collective bargaining to narrow the pay differences between the private and governmental sectors.	2.95	1.11
Strike frequency is increasing in the past few years.	4.14	1.00
Strikes in recent years have largely been restricted to a limited sector of the overall economy.	2.43	1.42
When strikes take place, they are likely to be of short duration.	2.05	1.10
There is a low level of formal grievance activity in unionized organizations.	2.97	1.20
The number of formal grievances is increasing in the past 5-10 years.	3.26	.79
There is little interest presently in labour-management cooperation programs that operate somewhat independently of collective bargaining.	2.87	1.06
The recent trend is for bargaining power to favor unions rather than management.	3.39	.97

Note: Usable survey responses represented an N of 43. The questionnaire scaling ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

So far, our findings combine union and employer confederation responses, with no attempt to judge whether both sides see the present industrial relations scene similarly or differently. Table 5 shows that less than one-third of the statements evidenced significant differences (using t tests) between union and employer confederation responses.

TABLE 5
**Significant Difference in Union and Management
 Confederation Assessments of Present Labour Relations Situation
 in Own Country**

Variable	Union Conf. Score	Employer Conf. Score	Sign. Level t Test
Employer Influence	3.00	2.17	.01
Union Bureaucratization	2.52	3.56	.05
Union Financial Strenght	2.52	3.56	.01
Proactive Employers	3.35	2.28	.01
Union Effectiveness	3.16	2.44	.05
Union Leaders' Competency	2.00	2.72	.05
Union Internal Democracy	1.96	2.94	.01
Employer Leaders' Competency	2.50	1.71	.01
Role of Employer in Union			
Organizing	2.92	1.59	.001
Union Legislation	3.12	2.29	.05
Employer Legislation	2.58	3.82	.001
Narrow Pay Differentials	2.64	3.39	.05
Limited Sector Strikes	2.92	1.71	.01

Note: Union confederation responses = 25; Employer confederation responses = 18.

Union confederation respondents, compared to their employer counterparts, were significantly more likely to see employers as: exerting strong influence on government for their agenda; taking more active steps to discourage employees from joining unions; and using the legislative route when the employers could not gain concessions at the bargaining table. On the other hand, employer confederation respondents were significantly more likely than union respondents to see unions as: more bureaucratic; more effective in gaining passage of favourable labour legislation; encouraging less internal union democracy; and seeking favourable labour legislation when unions failed to reach their goal through collective bargaining.

Interestingly, the union confederation representatives perceived less financial strength to carry out their programs. They also saw themselves as more competent than did employer confederation respondents. The employer respondents saw themselves as more proactive on industrial relations issues, and viewed their confederation leadership as more competent than did the union side. Looking at collective bargaining, union confederation respondents viewed the current collective bargaining scene as involving greater pressures to reduce private and public sector pay differences. Employer respondents felt that recent strikes were more likely to be limited to specific sectors or industries than to be national in scope.

Next, can we discern any noticeable differences in the respondents' answers when we analyze the answers by groupings of countries? Table 6 reports results by grouping the countries into EEU countries, then EFTA countries, and the heterogeneous group of the United States, Canada, and Japan. Admittedly, we feel the least comfortable about the last grouping because of some important differences in the industrial relations system of the three countries. However, there were not enough respondents within each of the three countries to assure any confidentiality of the responding confederations if we reported the results separately.

There are far too many statistically significant differences across the economic groupings to discuss separately. It should also be noted that we use a few of the background characteristics in our analysis as well as significant summary variables in the EEU vs. EFTA comparison. Perusal of the data shows rather convincingly that responding union and employer confederation respondents in the seven EFTA countries: saw their countries as having fewer serious economic problems; had much higher union density; and saw the union movement as being more effective in terms of favourable labour legislation compared with the EEU nations. On the downside, from the union perspective, employers were seen as resisting union political goals more strenuously. Other features were greater evidence of wage drift, pressure for decentralized bargaining, and more grievance activity in recent years in the EFTA nations than previously (when compared to the EEU respondents).

Looking at the other comparisons, it is clear that recent years have not been bright for unions in the U.S./Canada/Japan (USCJ), when compared either to the EEU or EFTA respondent groupings. While the number of responses from USCJ were small ($N = 4$), the future road for unions, economic and labour market concerns are more pronounced than in either of the Western European economic groupings. The only encouraging significant difference is the lower level of grievance activity in unionized organizations outside the EEU and EFTA industrialized market economies. However, the responses may have been heavily weighted by the extremely low formal grievance activity in Japan and the possible reluctance of union members to grieve during a time of serious recession in Canada and, to a lesser extent, the United States.

Officials from the union and employer confederations were asked to explain why there had been an increase (or decrease) in trade union membership in their country in recent years. If we look at their responses to the open-ended questions, we find that in one EFTA country the employer confederations cited the following reasons for union membership growth: rapid industrialization; unification of trade unions; and the fact that employers now collect union membership fees through payroll deduction.

TABLE 6
Significant Differences Between EEU, EFTA and USCJ
Assessments of Present Labour Relations Situation in Own Country

Variables	EEU Mean	EFTA Mean	Sign. Level of t Test
Unemployment	4.72	2.84	.001
Poor Education/Skills	3.00	1.84	.01
Mismatch of Skills/Demand	3.32	2.62	.05
Percent Belong to Union	40.00	73.30	.001
Producer Cooperatives	.46	.08	.05
Works Councils	.81	.23	.001
Labour Courts	.50	1.00	.001
Legislative Effectiveness	3.12	2.15	.01
Management Resistance	2.79	1.92	.05
Problem of Wage Drift	2.65	4.08	.001
Bargaining Decentralization	3.24	2.23	.05
Increasing Grievance Level	3.50	2.83	.05
<i>Summary Variables</i>			
Union Strength	18.58	15.38	.01
Union Orientation	7.68	6.08	.01
Management Environment	5.68	4.46	.05
Grievance Level	6.87	5.58	.05
	EEU Mean	USCJ Mean	Sign. Level of t Test
Government Deficits	3.88	4.75	.05
Low Productivity	1.92	3.75	.05
International Competition	2.92	4.75	.01
Percent Belonging to Union	40.00	23.25	.05
Producer Cooperatives	.46	.00	.01
Works Councils	.81	.00	.01
Binding Arbitration	.34	1.00	.01
Employer Discouraging Union Activity	3.52	1.67	.05
Low Level of Formal Grievances	3.39	1.33	.01
Bargaining Power/Union	3.24	4.67	.05
	EFTA Mean	USCJ Mean	Sign. Level of t Test
Unemployment	2.84	4.25	.01
Government Deficits	3.55	4.75	.05
Poor Education/Skills	1.84	3.75	.05
International Competition	3.15	4.75	.01
Level of Public Support/Union	3.53	2.50	.05
Percent Belonging to Union	73.30	23.25	.001
Union Membership Trend	3.38	1.50	.05
Employer Discouraging Union Activity	4.30	1.67	.01
Low Level of Grievances	2.75	1.33	.05
Bargaining Power/Union	3.38	4.67	.05

Employer confederation officials cited a number of factors contributing to union membership decreases in recent years. European respondents often mentioned such factors as: economic recession; lack of union adaptation; introduction of new technologies; decline of heavy manufacturing (where union density is strongest); polarization of unions; union links to left-wing political parties; growth of the service sector; less interest by younger workers in unions; and higher unemployment.

Outside of Europe, employer confederation officials mentioned the increasing use of part-time and women workers and insufficient organizing by unions of new employees and of the service sector specifically.

Union confederation respondents often agreed with most of the above reasons for union membership decline. In addition, European union confederation officials cited the marginalization of trade unions in the early 1980s in one country, while neoliberal policies were indicated as a factor in another country. The union confederation official in one of the non-European countries specifically mentioned the weakness of labour laws and their enforcement.

Union confederation respondents mentioned a number of reasons for increases in membership (where that was the case). Officials from the EEU cited the following reasons: women increasingly more willing to join unions; a response to higher unemployment and job insecurity; improving services and image of unions; greater feelings of solidarity; and growth of white collar and professional unions. Their EFTA counterparts noted such factors as: continuing acceptance of unions by a growing population; understanding of trade union goals; union role in incomes policy; union membership linked to unemployment benefit payments; and union fees deductible from taxes.

Finally, one of the goals of our study was to determine if various factors in the labour relations environment were significantly linked to important labour relations outcomes. Therefore, we grouped individual questions into broader variables. The independent variables included: union strength; employer strength; union orientation; employer orientation; union functioning; union environment; management environment; current collective bargaining; and internal pressures on each party.

The dependent or outcome variables with which they were linked included the following: strike frequency; strike range; strike duration; grievance level; bargaining power; trend in union membership; and public support for unions. The only significant correlations (t tests) were for the associations between both employer and union strength *and* trend in union membership. In both cases, the stronger the bargaining power of the unions, the greater likelihood that union membership increased between 1970

and 1990. We did not run regressions because of the few significant correlations between our summary variables.

CONCLUSIONS

Before discussing our conclusions, some caveats should be noted. The survey captures the *perceptions* of key union and employer confederation officials regarding the current labour relations scene in their country at one point in time. We have no objective data that can verify the accuracy of their responses to the individual statements. Furthermore, we cannot assume that there would have been a unanimity of viewpoint if we had had responses from several key officials of each confederation. Moreover, we do not know whether our assessments would be consistent with those of employer or union officials at the federation or company levels.

The study is cross-sectional in nature. Therefore, we are unable to compare our answers to those of similar respondents in the late 1960s. We would have preferred to analyze the data within-country and within-party/within-side, but we did not have enough responses from each country. Such an analysis would also imply that each union or employer confederation was equally powerful. We know this is not true. Finally, we could not report individual employer or union confederation responses, because we had assured anonymity and confidentiality to our respondents.

What broad conclusions can we make, based on the survey findings? First, in many cases, our results are generally consistent with many of the points made by the current literature on comparative industrial relations (Ferner and Hyman 1992). What is clear is that the last ten years or so have been far different than the relatively stable industrial relations systems in almost all of these countries twenty or thirty years ago. There are more unanswered questions today than in the 1960s when economic performance in most of these countries was more favourable. For instance, most of the EEU and EFTA nations had much lower unemployment in the 1960s than they do in the 1990s. Within the Common Market countries unemployment averages about 12%. International competition, particularly from Japan and the Four Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) has contributed to major industry restructuring in the West. As stated earlier, this has resulted in a loss of 18 million jobs within the OECD nations during the 1980s. Only in the United States can part of the explanation rest heavily on the actions of some employers to encourage the nonunion option (Ferner and Hyman 1992).

Second, employer and union confederation respondents did not entirely agree on what was happening in the area of labour-management relations. Neither party is totally dispassionate in reporting either what they

see or why it is so. Furthermore, providing causal explanations for our linkages is not always easy, and our study is not able to prove such possible causal relationships. Third, the comparisons between the three groupings (EEU, EFTA, and USCJ) show very different responses. Until very recently, economic conditions have been much better in the EFTA countries than either in the EEU or in parts of the third grouping. The labour movements in the EFTA countries are stronger in terms of membership, and have less to fear from employers. However, that does not mean that those nations' labour relations systems have been trouble-free. Wage drift, grievance levels, and pressures for decentralizing bargaining were significantly greater in the EFTA countries than in the EEU.

Our findings corroborate much of the literature (e.g., Weiler 1990) about the difficulties that U.S. unions, and to a lesser extent, Canadian private sector unions have experienced in recent years. Union membership in the U.S. has dropped from approximately one-third of the non-agricultural workforce in 1955 to about 15%. While the Canadian labour movement has experienced less dramatic changes in recent years, Troy (1992) argues that the strength of public sector unions has masked the loss of private sector membership. Even Japanese union membership has dropped from about 33% to 25.9% since the early 1980s. One suspects that the restructuring of the economy has moved faster in North America than in Western Europe because of stronger political shifts to the right and less contractual and legal restrictions to management restructuring, but Ferner and Hyman (1992) show that almost all European countries have felt some restructuring pressure.

The results of our survey have been useful in understanding what broad developments are taking place in national and regional industrial relations systems. Our next step is to study federation-level bargaining in three or four representative industries by means of both surveys and face-to-face interviews in the major EEU and EFTA countries, Japan, Canada, and the United States. The interviews would help us both to corroborate these survey findings and gain insights into the reasons for what is happening in those industries and countries. In addition, we encourage other scholars to focus more specifically on comparative public sector developments, since we did not specifically address labour relations issues in that sector.

We would encourage future research in comparative industrial relations that would identify key variables that are useful across a large number of countries, so that we might improve our ability to predict what are the crucial factors that result in such outcome measures as (1) stable labour relations, (2) low strike frequency, and ultimately, (3) successful national economic performance.

Case studies, such as the one used by Turner in studying the auto industry in West Germany and United States (1991), have been useful, but

they involve considerable costs when one studies a number of countries. Interviews with key union and employer officials are also helpful in understanding both similarity and diversity in national industrial relations systems. However, surveys provide a reasonably inexpensive method of gaining insights across a larger number of union and employer officials, and across a large number of countries. Finally, questionnaires, when used concurrently with other methods such as interviews, case studies and primary and secondary data, provide the best chance that we will have high reliability and validity.

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RÉSUMÉ

Points de vue syndicaux et patronaux sur les relations du travail dans 21 pays industrialisés

Cet article présente les résultats d'une enquête postale effectuée auprès des hauts dirigeants de confédérations syndicales et patronales dans 21 pays industrialisés en Europe de l'Ouest, en Amérique du Nord et au Japon. Nous avons trouvé les noms et adresses de ces diverses confédérations dans plusieurs bottins différents.

Nous avons utilisé deux questionnaires : l'un pour les confédérations patronales, l'autre pour les confédérations syndicales. Les 21 premières questions cherchaient de l'information contextuelle et organisationnelle. Les 46 autres questions et énoncés visaient une évaluation des relations du travail contemporaines dans le pays du répondant. Certains de ces énoncés reflétaient des variables déjà identifiées par Peterson (1987). Le questionnaire fut envoyé à 68 hauts dirigeants de confédérations patronales et

syndicales dans tous les pays de la Communauté économique européenne (CEE) et de l'Association européenne du libre-échange (AELE) ainsi qu'aux États-Unis, au Canada et au Japon (EUCJ).

Les questionnaires retournés et utilisables proviennent de 43 confédérations syndicales et patronales. Le taux de réponse est de 56,8 % pour les confédérations syndicales et 75 % pour les confédérations patronales. Nous avons reçu les réponses d'au moins une confédération syndicale et une confédération patronale dans 18 des 21 pays. Ayant assuré l'anonymat et la confidentialité, nous ne présentons pas nos résultats par confédération ou pays spécifiques. Nous avons regroupé les réponses.

Nous tirons trois grandes conclusions des données colligées. D'abord nos résultats concordent généralement avec les points déjà soulevés dans la littérature sur les relations industrielles comparées (Ferner et Hyman 1992). La situation est considérablement moins stable dans ces pays que celle perçue par les syndicats et les employeurs dans les années 1960. La concurrence internationale, les restructurations d'entreprises, la récession et des taux de chômage plus élevés ces dernières années justifient, sans doute, plusieurs réponses.

Ensuite, nous trouvons tant accords que désaccords lorsque nous comparons les réponses syndicales et patronales. Il semble que ces dirigeants peuvent être sans parti pris lorsqu'ils décident et, en même temps, offrir des raisons différentes sur la performance moins heureuse de l'autre partie sur certains aspects des relations du travail (v.g. succès de l'organisation syndicale).

Finalement, les comparaisons entre les trois groupes de pays (CEE, AELE et EUCJ) démontrent des réponses très différentes quant à l'état actuel des relations du travail. Pour différentes raisons, les syndicats dans les pays de l'AELE ont connu un peu plus de succès au début des années 1990 que leurs collègues des groupes CEE et EUCJ. En effet, les syndicats de l'AELE sont plus forts, en termes de membership et ils ont moins à craindre des employeurs, ils ne sont cependant pas sans problème. La situation aux États-Unis, au Canada et au Japon montre plus de tension sur la scène nationale des relations du travail que cela pouvait être pour la plupart des autres pays dans la période d'après-guerre.