

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Unions and the Public Interest. Collective Bargaining in the Government Sector*, by Sandra Christensen, Vancouver, The Fraser Institute, 1980, 95 pp.

William B. Cunningham

Volume 36, numéro 2, 1981

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029175ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/029175ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Cunningham, W. (1981). Compte rendu de [*Unions and the Public Interest. Collective Bargaining in the Government Sector*, by Sandra Christensen, Vancouver, The Fraser Institute, 1980, 95 pp.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 36(2), 461–462. <https://doi.org/10.7202/029175ar>

Compte tenu de la stagnation relative de l'industrie hôtelière au cours des prochaines années, dans l'hypothèse de croissance, même la plus forte, le besoin annuel moyen de recrutement se situe entre 600 et 700 travailleurs et il ne se pose pas de difficultés de recrutement. Aussi, les auteurs du rapport estiment-ils que le principal problème de cette industrie réside dans le coût du roulement de la main-d'oeuvre et l'importance de réduire le nombre des départs volontaires et celui des congédiements pour causes de rendement insatisfaisant. C'est une étude qui pourrait être faite au niveau de l'ensemble de l'industrie en tenant compte à la fois de la situation géographique et de la taille des établissements. La gestion des ressources humaines laissant à désirer dans bien des établissements, il y aurait lieu de former un groupe conseil pour aider dans ce domaine les dirigeants. Il faudrait aussi mettre en place un programme de formation qui leur soit destiné.

Cette étude sectorielle peut être d'une grande utilité à ceux qui oeuvrent dans ce secteur d'activité. Au public, qui s'intéresse aux questions économiques et professionnelles, elle peut apporter nombre de renseignements intéressants sur une industrie dont on parle beaucoup et qui joue tout de même un certain rôle dans l'économie du Québec. Il ne faut pas oublier, en tout cas, qu'elle fournit du travail à autant de travailleurs que l'industrie minière et qu'elle est disséminée sur l'ensemble du territoire.

André ROY

Québec

**Unions and the Public Interest. Collective Bargaining in the Government Sector**, by Sandra Christensen, Vancouver, The Fraser Institute, 1980, 95 pp.

Unions beware! "The Fraser Institute has initiated a series of studies under the general heading 'Unions and the Public Interest', to investigate the behaviour of unions — how they have behaved and how they are likely to behave in the future." (x) This book is the first in the series.

Predictably, given the objective of the Institute — the redirection of public attention to the role of competitive markets in providing for the well-being of Canadians — this book finds that bargaining by public sector unions for wages and other monetary benefits should be eliminated. From this it follows, of course, that "strikes to win increased compensation would be prohibited." (59) In place of bargaining, arbitration or conciliation, Christensen proposes an independent wage board, with a mandate to maintain public sector compensation on a par with the private sector.

The purpose of the study is "to determine whether further constraints on public sector union activity are justified by the public interest." (1) Chapter One briefly deals with the growth of union membership in the public sector (two pages), and then emphasizes the growing incidence of work stoppages (five pages). The figures show that "public sector unrest remains disproportionately low", (7) and that "the duration of strikes in the public sector is considerably shorter, on average, than in the private sector." (8) The quality of the study is illustrated by the argument that follows this evidence.

This evidence, she argues "is consistent with one of the arguments made by those who favour a return to more restrictive labour legislation for the public sector; i.e., that the political costs of strikes... are so great that the public employer quickly accedes to union demands..." The study gives no independent evidence in support of the central assertion that governments quickly accede to union demands. What if the evidence had shown a disproportionately high level of stoppages and a longer than average duration? That evidence would also be consistent with common arguments for more restrictive legislation. This is a heads-I-win, tails-you-lose approach.

With this approach it is not surprising to find in Chapter Two that the "public sector advantage with respect to wages and salaries is in the order of six to eight per cent..." (21) This evidence comes from Gunderson's study of 1971 Census data. Christensen uses the

evidence to support her view that bargaining generates excessive pay in the public sector. She ignored an alternative explanation that is at least equally plausible. Ten years ago public employment was growing much more rapidly than employment in the private sector. To bring about this reallocation of labour required a pay differential in favour of the public sector. Conventional labour market theory would predict this result, even if there were no unions or bargaining in the public sector.

A reader may also be annoyed by encountering such sentiments as "if a service is important enough to be provided publicly, then it is important enough to be provided

without interruption." (8 and 65) To this slogan a unionist might reply that "if a service is important enough to be provided publicly, then it is important enough to pay above average compensation to compete successfully for the best qualified employees." Argument by slogan adds little to knowledge.

It is a small book. A nineteen page summary precedes the sixty-nine pages of argument and fifteen pages of tables. Much of it is a repetition of the author's recent article in **Canadian Public Policy** (VI:4:605-613). There is no need to buy the book.

**William B. CUNNINGHAM**

Mount Allison University

**INDEX ANALYTIQUE**  
**CUMULATIVE INDEX**  
**RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES**  
**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**  
 Volume 26 — Volume 35  
 (1971-1980)

**Rapport des — Proceedings of**  
**CONGRÈS DES RELATIONS INDUSTRIELLES**  
**(1971-1980)**

Numéro spécial de Relations industrielles  
 264 pages  
 Prix: \$10.00

**Les Presses de l'Université Laval**

**Cité universitaire**

**Québec, P.Q., Canada, G1K 7P4**