

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



International and Comparative Employment Relations. National regulation, global changes, By Greg J. Bamber, Russell D. Lansbury, Nick Wailes and Chris F. Wright (2015) 6th edition, London and Thousand Oaks : Sage, 418 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4739-1155-0

Anthony Gould

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impôts, et transferts) du centile supérieur ayant augmenté, entre 1982 et 2012, de 87 et 103 % respectivement tandis que les revenus des 99 % restant n'avaient augmenté que de 5 et 19 %.

Marc Lavoie

Département de science économique
Université d'Ottawa

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The sixth edition of *International and Comparative Employment Relations* edited by Bamber, Lansbury, Wailes and Wright continues a lineage that has been a mainstay for serious students of comparative employment relations for more than two decades. Over the years I have kept up with these edited volumes. They were always my principal go-to source when it came to getting a sense of a particular country's circumstances and developing a comparative perspective on where that country may be headed and/or how influences like globalization may impact its trajectory. To put this current appraisal in context, I should note that the bar for the 6th edition was always going to be high. As I have said in previous reviews, earlier versions of the book were excellent (see, for example, the review appearing in edition 67-4 of *Relations industrielles*). They were packed with detail and sound interpretations but, at the same time, accessible and even interesting. Hence, in reviewing the latest edition and in light of my background with these books, I saw my task as an exercise in determining how far the various contributors could push the envelope. I am pleased to report that the latest volume is, once again, really very good—and, yes, probably even a little better than its predecessors. It continues to have the edge over rival publications in

the following areas: macro-level analysis of trends and evaluation of theory in light of evidence; detail offered about individual countries; accessibility and writing style; and focus. For analytic purposes I deal with these things separately although they are inevitably somewhat intertwined considerations.

Insofar as the book's big-picture analysis of trends is concerned, the work is clear-headed and replete with informed and well defended interpretations. Its first and last chapters cut to the heart of some challenging issues about convergence in particular. The authors stay on message about relevant theory whilst simultaneously making sense of data from disparate sources and countries. The reader gets a strong sense of, for example, how Hall and Soskice's (2001) view of *Varieties of Capitalism* is looking tired and how somewhat naïve late 20th century notions about emerging similarity emanating from Clark Kerr's industrialization thesis falls short in reconciling phenomena. Indeed, the emphasis on Varieties of Capitalism theory has been beefed-up in the 6th edition; but not as might be expected. Rather, in their latest work, the authors competently explain the original framework, put it in a historical context and critique it in light of subsequent incoming evidence. I found this kind of willingness to examine the shortcomings of theory to be refreshing. The writers implicitly invite readers to think deeply about their subject matter. They reveal their deft touch as educators by placing us in the position of being theory creators. This aspect of the book (as well as some others which I will get to) makes the work especially suited to teaching. On a related note, throughout the discussion, the authors reveal landmark works like Katz and Darbishire *Converging Divergences* as having explanatory value for interpreting unfolding phenomena. However, much of such explanation offered in this revised volume—particularly

that presented in the conclusion—further develops Katz and Darbishire's, already nuanced, thesis. Here again the authors are leading us through a process which entails theory being presented, explained and then thoughtfully critiqued—or at least “stress-tested”—in light of evidence. Their facility with communication plants a real seed with the reader; subtly enticing the student to challenge ideas and be confident in revising schemas.

Each of the book's chapters dealing with individual countries is written to an exemplary standard. Such material is obviously thoroughly researched, up-to-date, and well structured. The country chapters each follow a similar—and well-adapted—format. They mostly give an overview of each nation's economic and historical circumstances followed by a detailed account of the substance of its approach to employment relations. These chapters are easy to follow and present an unambiguous narrative about where nations have come from and where they appear to be headed. The authors stay on message; striking entirely the right mix (at least in my opinion) between data presentation/observation and interpretation. In this latest edition again there are chapters devoted to the emerging economic heavy-weight countries of India and China. It appears that some of the comparative data appendices which were present in previous editions have been omitted in the latest version in order to include space for greater geographical coverage. Such a refinement seems entirely warranted. Compared with previous editions, this latest one, gives many more web addresses for the interested reader to access salient material, particularly including relevant data. This kind of focus has instructional value for all of us in the writing business.

One of the things I have been impressed with in this series of books is their writing quality. The editors especially are master

penmen; possessed of a knack for delivering their message with punch and without verbiage. They deal with complex ideas with aplomb; competently communicating the meaning of data and never getting lost (or allowing the reader to get lost). They remain in control of the narrative and, as noted, even manage to make the material interesting. I said in a review of a previous edition that students from a variety of social science disciplines, particular graduate students, would do well to read the book. I suggested that the earlier volume had as much to offer as an exemplar of how to write as it did about its content. This remains true of the latest work. Put simply, each of the contributors—including especially the editors who bring the game together with their overview—have a rare degree of aptitude for communicating trends about work, employment and the labour market.

I struggle greatly to find anything important to criticize in the 6th edition of *International and Comparative Employment Relations*. In a sense, I feel defeated in not being able to say something negative but, on the other hand, it is somewhat unsurprising. Each of the contributors to the work are world class scholars. The editors are similarly elite at their game. In addition, all parties have had a chance to refine their act to the point (now) where they have created something truly indispensable for the serious student of comparative employment relations—or those merely interested in same. Read it! You will learn a lot about its subject matter and how to write. You may even enjoy the experience of viewing real and important scholarship (and, as has always been the case with this series, royalties from the sale of the book will contribute to cancer research—something which I often think only real scholars would countenance).

Anthony Gould

Département des relations industrielles
Université Laval