

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



### ***Industrial Relations Theory : Its Nature, Scope, and Pedagogy,*** **Roy J. Adams and Noah M. Meltz, eds. Introduction : Jean** **Boivin. Commentaires — Comments: Mark Thompson, Richard** **B. Peterson, Jean Boivin**

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# Symposium

## *Industrial Relations Theory: Its Nature, Scope, and Pedagogy*

Introduction by Jean Boivin

Roy Adams and Noah Meltz have edited a book on industrial relations theory. Given the importance of the subject and the relative scarcity of information on theorization in industrial relations, the Journal *Relations industrielles-Industrial Relations* decided to organize a symposium on the book.

Mark Thompson, William M. Hamilton Professor of Industrial Relations at the Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration of the University of British Columbia, Richard B. Peterson of the Department of Management and Organization at the School of Business Administration of the University of Washington, and myself from the Département des relations industrielles, Université Laval, agreed to write in-depth appreciations of the book.

I hope that the readers of *Relations industrielles-Industrial Relations* will find the symposium useful in evaluating the contribution of the book to the understanding and development of the discipline of industrial relations.

*Roy Adams et Noah Meltz ont édité un collectif d'auteurs sur la théorie des relations industrielles qui se doit d'être souligné d'une façon particulière pour les lecteurs de la revue Relations industrielles-Industrial Relations étant donné le peu de littérature disponible sur un sujet aussi important. C'est pourquoi la direction de la revue a décidé d'organiser un symposium à propos de ce volume.*

*Les professeurs Mark Thompson, William M. Hamilton Professor of Industrial Relations à la Faculté d'administration de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique, Richard B. Peterson de la Faculté d'administration de l'Université de Washington à Seattle ainsi que moi-même du Département des relations industrielles de l'Université*

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\*\* *Industrial Relations Theory: Its Nature, Scope, and Pedagogy*, Roy J. ADAMS and Noah M. MELTZ, eds., Metuchen, NJ and London, IMLR Press-Rutgers University and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993, 403 p., ISBN 0-8108-2678-X.

*Laval avons accepté de procéder à une évaluation en profondeur du volume d'Adams et Meltz.*

*J'espère que les lecteurs de la revue trouveront le symposium utile à la compréhension et au développement de la discipline des relations industrielles.*

## Comment by Mark Thompson

Industrial relations has an atheoretical tradition. Very few books or articles explicitly deal with theory, and only a handful of major theoretical works have stimulated research. Adams ("Desperately Seeking Industrial Relations Theory," *International Journal of Comparative Labor Law and Industrial Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1988), however, proved that the industrial relations literature is rich in theoretical propositions. Taken together, these statements are a substantial body of theory, but still lacking the power of works dedicated to the subject.

Roy Adams and Noah Meltz have edited a book that addresses this deficiency by presenting a variety of perspectives on industrial relations theory. Their work comes at a crucial juncture in the development of the field. Research is more consciously theoretical and deductive than ever before. The case study tradition is enjoying a revival, while quantitative data are subjected to more sophisticated analyses. Despite these advances, the field as it is generally known is shrinking, especially in the United States. Senior university faculty are not being replaced when they retire. Membership in the Industrial Relations Research Association (IRRA) is declining. To state the obvious, the status of the industrial relations field mirrors the state of American labour movement, aging, ever less central to public concerns and in danger of becoming a relic of another era.

No book, and perhaps not even a shelf of books, could arrest these trends. A book on industrial relations theory in the 1990s should explain the development of the field and provide some bases for viewing its future.

The problem orientation of industrial relations research and theory is a central theme in the volume. Thomas Kochan discusses this subject extensively in his chapter. When he was a graduate student in the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of collective bargaining in the public sector was the major development in industrial relations. After studying collective bargaining in city governments, Kochan concluded that private sector bargaining models did not apply and developed the theory of multilateral bargaining. He tested that theory with a substantial body of data, using statistical procedures more skillfully than any of his predecessors. Paula Voos deals with problems in higher graduate industrial relations theory course, in particular the growth of the nonunion sector of the labour force. She speculates whether a system in which employees are unrepresented by independent organizations can serve employee needs. Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld's

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students examine the impact of "flexible specialization" production methods on industrial relations in his theory course.

This focus has given industrial relations studies an immediacy and link to practical issues that many academic disciplines lack. The attention industrial relations devotes to substantial issues, even at the cost of methodological rigour, is part of the appeal of the subject for many scholars.

If a problem orientation is a given for most of the authors in this book, another characteristic is the association of practitioners and academics in industrial relations research in North America. Practitioners seldom carry out research. They do frequently appear at conferences and symposia to describe developments in their organizations or industries and to discuss the relevance of academic research to their work. Thus, the president of the IRRA in 1994 is Lynn Williams, the president of the United Steelworkers of America. Two years earlier, Ernest Savoie, the vice president of industrial relations for Ford Motor Company, was the president. Many industrial relations scholars, including Kochan, Voos and Adams from this volume, have stepped outside of their academic positions to play significant roles in the development of public policy. Others are active labour relations neutrals. Most industrial relations scholars believe that the presence of influential and dynamic practitioners and the opportunity to shape policy adds greatly to the quality of discussion in industrial relations forums.

These two characteristics of industrial relations research have direct consequences for the evolution of theory in the field. The first consequence is ethnocentricity. Almost all industrial relations theory discussed in this book is *American*, i.e., United States "theory". Theoretical statements explain the development of American industrial relations and problems which have arisen there.

Several chapters in this book illustrate the relatively narrow focus of North American industrial relations studies. Apart from works by and about Marx and the Webbs, the readings on the two theory courses taught by Voos and Cutcher-Gershenfeld focus almost exclusively on American issues. Except for theories of industrial conflict, industrial relations outside the United States is not examined closely.

The perspectives of non-U.S. scholars in the volume also make this point. Kevin Hince, an expatriate Australian academic in New Zealand, illustrates the difficulties of applying American theories elsewhere. Drawing on the work of William Howard, another Australian who was educated in the United States, Hince shows that the theories of Pearlman, Commons and Tannenbaum do not apply to Australasia. Michael Poole tackles the issue of diversity in comparative industrial relations and examines the forces producing divergence in the development of industrial relations systems. The collapse of centrally-planned economies has revived the debate about convergence in industrial relations. Poole argues convincingly that the actors in national industrial relations systems will produce different solutions to common problems. Braham Dabscheck examines the application of theories of interest group regulation to industrial relations. Several of his sources are American, but these works are seldom found on industrial relations reading lists there. They are very relevant in the Australian context, however.

The treatment of Australasia illustrates another impact of the concentration on U.S. industrial relations problems. The role of the state, broadly defined, is neglected.

The Hince and Dabscheck chapters focus on the role of the state, which was so central in the development of unionism and industrial relations in Australia and New Zealand. The main body of industrial relations theory says little about this issue. Remarkably, none of the authors in the book discusses corporatism in any detail. This concept is the basis for significant research in European and Latin American industrial relations, and to a lesser extent in Canada. The United States lacks corporatist forms of interest group mediation, and industrial relations theory there accordingly finds this concept relatively unimportant.

Furthermore, it is rare to find political scientists who are interested in North American industrial relations. This gap extends to public sector industrial relations, where the connection between political decisions and traditional industrial relations institutions is extremely close. The role of the law in the development of North American industrial relations is not analyzed in the theories used in this book, although legal regulation is extensive there. The current debate over labour law reform in the United States offers interesting insights into this theoretical vacuum. Many participants in these discussions have had difficulty in framing alternatives to the mode of regulation required by the *Wagner Act*.

The problem focus and role of practitioners have also influenced the scope of industrial relations in North America, a subject several authors in this volume raise. Presidents of the IRRA and eminent American scholars have called for an expansion of the scope of industrial relations. In general, they have proposed that industrial relations cover all aspects of work, including such diverse topics as motivation, small group behaviour, human resources management and the like. To date, these appeals have had few results. The focus of industrial relations research and theory in North America continues to be the organized sectors of the labour force. This is much less the case in other nations and theoretical traditions. Again the North American tradition of industrial relations explains part of this development.

By law and custom, North American industrial relations is based on exclusive representation of workers in a single work place by one union. It is illegal and usually contrary to the parties' expectations that management should deal with groups other than unions. In most of enterprises, employers have developed parallel systems for managing human resource issues, one for blue collar workers based on the collective agreement, and another for white collar workers based on corporate policies. In the nonunion sector, consultation takes place with individual workers or small groups without any external support, so that managerial authority is really not affected. Certainly, no groups other than unions function as formal representatives of employees except in the most sophisticated union avoidance systems.

Not only are the union and nonunion personnel systems distinct, management normally goes to great lengths to keep them separate. American employers in particular are known internationally for their implacable hostility to unionism. While they may accept unionism among blue collar workers, they resist expansion of union influence among white collar workers. Major American firms without union representation formerly made remaining nonunion a major objective of their personnel policies. Only the decline of unionism in many American industries has diminished the importance of this goal.

Academics who study organizational behaviour and human resources management tend to accept a unitary view of organizations on which managerial policies are based.

What then do scholars and practitioners from the traditions of union-based and employer-controlled human resources management have in common? For example, a central question examined by industrial relations scholars from the time of the Webbs has been why workers join unions. To this day, papers on the decline in union membership or correlates of organizing success are staples in industrial relations research. Theory courses address these subjects in depth. Industrial relations scholars have a pluralistic orientation, with the assumption that union representation is a good thing for workers and society. Scholars from organizational behaviour and human resources management work in a unitarist tradition, typically assuming that union representation is a sign of poor management performance and a negative factor for employers. Practitioners who are active in organizations like the IRRA are either managers from unionized firms, union leaders or government officials in agencies involved with collective bargaining. Would they be comfortable appearing on a panel with representatives from companies like IBM which take pride in the total absence of union representation among their employees? Are scholars from organizational behaviour and human resources management ready to confront publicly a fundamental premises of their fields, that independent collective representation for employees is unnecessary and dysfunctional? Any industrial relations scholar who has attempted to gather data from firms which are intent on staying nonunion knows their reluctance to provide data. Employers in these settings may fear that their policies skirt the boundaries of the law. They also know that their policies have objectives which are seldom stated to the public, their shareholders and most especially their employees.

These divisions are not inevitable. When national industrial relations systems permit multiple representation in the same work place and levels of recognition of employee organization, the distinction between union and nonunion workers, collective bargaining and human resources management is blurred. Employers may negotiate some policies with majority unions, consult with minority and majority unions on other issues. Unions or quasi-unions may achieve a level of recognition for white collar workers which falls short of that required for full collective bargaining with legally-binding collective agreements found in blue collar work places.

When the distinctions between the organized and unorganized sectors of the labour force are blurred, academic enquiry is affected. Forms of consultation and bargaining can be promoted and studied without fear of legal consequences. For instance, compensation systems may be the subject of negotiation and consultation in single organizations. Greater integration of corporate compensation policies is possible when barriers between two segments of the labour force are lowered. Personnel policies provide for discussion with organizations representing employees which do not have the right or desire to strike, but can impose informal sanctions if they are displeased with management action. These settings force scholars interested in recruitment, compensation, training and the other staples of human resources management to address the pluralistic assumptions of industrial relations. When industrial relations scholars examine these behaviours, they have to confront the possibility that employee representation can take forms that are quite different from traditional unionism. Scholars from other fields,

industrial sociology, psychology and anthropology, for instance, are encouraged to examine collective representation of workers outside the legal structures of unionism and collective bargaining. All of these influences would produce a far different body of industrial relations theory than exists today.

From an organizational point of view, the merging of interests removes the study of industrial relations from its dependence on the status of unionism. Moreover, the efforts of scholars from several disciplines can produce richer theoretical insights than would be possible from industrial relations alone. The British industrial relations literature reflects these influences. For instance, it is no accident that a book on public sector industrial relations in the United Kingdom (P.B. Beaumont, *Public Sector Industrial Relations*, London, Routledge, 1992) would contain many references to studies in political science, economics and sociology. The only studies from these disciplines available in North America are analyses of public-private sector wage differentials. Coming from the British tradition, Craig Littler reviews the political economy literature in this volume. Work by economists and sociologists explains labour relations in terms of the evolution of capitalism. As Littler concludes, the mainstream of industrial relations thinking has not incorporated this material, especially in North America.

If industrial relations theory has the limitations suggested here, what is its future, and indeed the future of the discipline? If industrial relations is focused on the unionized sectors of the labour force, it is hard to see change. Union density is declining in most countries. Where rates are stable, as in Canada, this is due in part to gains in the public sector while employment in those areas of the private sector most susceptible to unionization declines steadily. In terms of the number of scholars, the availability of resources and strength of institutions in the field (associations, academic institutes), stability would represent success. In the North American context, this situation may change if the Dunlop Commission provokes a thorough restructuring of the American industrial relations system. The problem orientation of industrial relations then will serve it well. If the North American environment remains basically stable, another scenario may emerge.

Industrial relations scholars tend to underestimate the theoretical insights their discipline offers for employment relationship, broadly defined. Principles derived from collective bargaining are used widely in employment law and the practice of management. As groups representing women, visible minorities and persons with disabilities become more active in seeking greater participation for their members in the labour force, the skills and insights of industrial relations become more significant. Negotiation, conflict resolution, the incorporation of an agreement into a written document that must be interpreted, are all functions central to industrial relations. Many of the theoretical propositions derived from this field are relevant to employment generally. If other fields show no interest in the traditional domain of industrial relations, industrial relations is free to expand into theirs. Steve Hills' chapter in this volume is a useful example of the theoretical bases for expanding the scope of industrial relations.

Overall, this book contributes in many ways to the development of industrial relations theory. In addition to the chapters that address the issues raised in this review, other chapters are worthy of attention and should be part of a reading list on the subject. Adams contributes a chapter that explains what a theory is or should be. Meltz

summarizes the evolution of Dunlop's systems theory. Viateur Larouche and Michel Audet review several score articles on industrial relations theory. John Godard puts industrial relations theory into a broader context of social sciences. Jack Barbash and Hoyt Wheeler provide very personal views of the subject. Barbash gives an overview of the founders of American industrial relations, while Wheeler takes the reader through the process by which his very ambitious book on industrial relations theory was completed.

The variety of perspectives in this volume virtually guarantees that any reader interested in industrial relations theory will find something of value.

### **Comment by Richard B. Peterson**

I was asked by Professor Jean Boivin to write one of the reviews of *Industrial Relations Theory: Its Nature, Scope, and Methodology*. The title of the edited book intrigued me, given that I had been exposed to Jack Barbash's Industrial Relations Theory Seminar in its earliest years while a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin. I also remembered reading and discussing essays on whether it was critical that the field of Industrial Relations have a theory or not. Thus I looked forward to reading the papers that emerged out of the Industrial Relations Theory Study Group chaired by Roy Adams and Noah Meltz.

For those readers who have not yet read the book, it consists of sixteen chapters broken down into the following sections: Introduction and Overview; Teaching IR Theory; Nature and Scope; the Link of IR with the Social Sciences; Paradigmatic Approaches; and Constructing Industrial Relations Theory.

What did this reviewer gain from having read the book? First, I will give some personal thoughts in response to various points brought out by the authors of the individual chapters. Second, it seems helpful to make some assessment of the individual contributions of each author. Finally, I will make some suggestions concerning the direction that future work on industrial relations theory might take.

### **Personal Thoughts and Reactions**

Many of us trained in Industrial Relations were attracted to the field because of its interdisciplinary approach and the focus on policy and practice, rather than theory building. We were reconciled to the fact that most, if not all, of our theory would be drawn primarily from the field of economics, secondarily from sociology, psychology, and to a lesser extent political science. We could live with that reality in the early post-war years. However, those of us teaching in business schools today are given periodic

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jolts by our colleagues in Organizational Behavior, Organizational Theory, and Economics when they ask us what theory drives our research? What are the theoretical questions? This book reminds us that we may have been remiss in discounting the utility of theory in framing our research.

I am reminded of a research methods course I took from Milton Derber at the University of Illinois in my masters program. That course gave me a better sense of what theory is than any other course or text since then. He required us to read a major book in Industrial Relations and then identify if the authors had an underlying theory, set of hypotheses, and whether or not his or her basic premise (theory) was supported. I can still remember trying to answer these questions as they related to Selig Perlman's *History of the American Labor Movement until 1932*. Wow! That experience reminds me of the value of pursuing the possibility that there may be a model or theory that could guide much of our Industrial Relations research.

Even if we never get beyond the theorizing of John Dunlop and his colleagues (Clark Kerr, Charles Myers, and Fred Harbison) about our field, we need to be reminded of the fact that Industrial Relations draws from the contributions of multiple disciplines, all of which have developed a number of macro, mid-range, and micro theories. I suspect that we would benefit from being more open to testing their theories in our own research.

This leads me to another point; namely, the teaching of an Industrial Relations Theory course is beneficial not only to those of us choosing IR, but to our academic colleagues who profess interest in workplace relations. The chapters by Paula Voos and Joel Cutcher-Gerhtenfeld were very good as they laid out the framework of how they teach the IR Theory course at Wisconsin and Michigan State respectively. I was excited by their wide-ranging coverage of relevant literature from many disciplines (economics, sociology, psychology, history, and law). I was particularly fascinated by the way that Cutcher-Gershenfeld structured his course across the conflict, alignment, and pluralistic assumptions underlying employment relations. At a time that academia is often criticized for its narrow specialization, the same cannot be said for the field of Industrial Relations. If you don't read any other chapters, by all means read over these two chapters on teaching IR Theory.

Their sections on conflict as an underlying reality in workplace relations helps many of us to understand some reasons for tension between the teaching of IR and HRM classes — something many of us do. The HRM field assumes the right of management to define how they will use their human resources, with little or no real input from employees — either individually or collectively. Industrial Relations, on the other hand, rests on the assumption that tension, and even conflict, is inevitable in the employment setting and that employees should have the right to be heard through unions and other collective action.

Finally, if I had to choose the most enjoyable chapter, it would be Hoyt Wheeler's personal story of how he, as a lawyer and industrial relations scholar, developed his interest in conflict theory as an overarching theme for understanding IR. As co-coordinator of the Nijenrode Conference in the Netherlands in 1980, I was glad that the late Gerard Bomers and I provided an avenue for Hoyt to lay out his ideas that led eventually to publication of his book *Industrial Conflict: An Integrative Theory* by the University of

South Carolina Press in 1985. Truly, the book was a worthy step in trying to see the “big picture”.

### Assessment

Roy Adams does a nice overview and outline of the central theme of the individual chapters in his chapter “Understanding, Constructing, Teaching Industrial Relations Theory” at the beginning of the book. He shows some common themes and, at times, shows the connections between points made by the author in one chapter that have relevancy to the discussion in other sections of the book. We agree on the essentially problem-solving focus of many IR academics, but hopefully, the reading of this book will spur us to look more globally in terms of the questions we ask and the underlying model or theory that can guide our research.

If any one doubts the utility of offering an IR Theory course, I would strongly encourage them to carefully read the two chapters on teaching the subject (“Designing on Industrial Relations Theory Curriculum for Graduate Students” by Paula Voos and “A Framwork to Organize Theory” by Joel Cutcher - Gershenfield). Paula Voos states:

IR Theory courses reflect both the past and the future of the field of industrial relations. They transmit to a new generation the great ideas of our discipline and of the social science disciplines which gave birth to the field of industrial relations. They also point to the future and must change as industrial relations itself changes. ... (p. 30)

I came away from reading these chapters with the wish that I could take either course when it is offered next. Furthermore, our field would gain considerably in stature if we would take on the task of modelling workplace relations in a way conducive to rigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis. The IR Theory course offers a wide-ranging set of theories and constructs that are in the spirit of the multi-disciplinary perspective of our field.

Jack Barbash, in his chapter “The Founders of Industrial Relations as a Field of Study: An American Perspective”, presents a nice succinct summary of the founders of IR as a field of study from an American perspective. Barbash makes an important point at the end of his chapter when he says “In addition to being a vocation and profession industrial relations is a field of study that takes on many aspects of a liberal education.” (p. 77). Seen in that way, the field of industrial relations is at the core of understanding the workplace.

Michael Poole, in his chapter “Industrial Relations: Theorizing for a Global Perspective” covers, in summary, many of the points covered by his 1986 book *Industrial Relations*. He raises the question whether there will be more or less diversity in national industrial relations systems in the near future. He briefly cites examples that support both convergence and diversity. The one unanswered question is whether globalization and market forces will, in time, overwhelm the present diversity.

Noah Meltz’s chapter, “Industrial Relations Systems as a Framework for Organizing Contributions to Industrial Relations Theory”, lays out a modified model of Dunlop’s IR Systems framework — an approach similar to that taken by Poole in his theory of the field. While one has to be impressed with his Industrial Relations Systems

Framework of Employment Relationships (Figure 1, p. 166-167) identifying a conceptual framework, it is so encompassing that any attempt to test hypotheses or research questions based upon the Framework would be overwhelming. Perhaps we need to start with mid-range theories, rather than grand theories of IR?

Roy Adams' chapter "All Aspects of People at Work: Unity and Division in the Study of Labor and Labor Management," dealing with unity and division in the study of our field is one of the most worthwhile contributions to this volume. While many of us are aware of the historical development of the field (Bruce Kaufman's *The Origins and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the Untied States*, Ithaca, N.Y., ILR Press, 1993), Adams is particularly helpful as a reminder of how the history of IR explains our present state. It might have been better to place the chapter after the overview chapter for those readers who weren't trained in Industrial Relations.

Stephen Hills is to be commended for his recommendations on integrating industrial relations with the social sciences. Hills, unlike most of the other authors in this volume, uses a labor market perspective. By doing so, he frames the question within the broad meaning of the employment perspective. It is not desirable to limit our understanding of IR to the unionized sector, given that more than 80% of the American workforce, and approximately 60 % of the Canadian labor force are not union members. While his conceptualization of industrial relations is not all-encompassing, his focus on: everyday activities of the workplace; the impact of government policy; recognition of both Marxist and non-Marxist theory; a central role of the dynamic negotiation process; and the need to link IR back into the social sciences has considerable appeal. This framework allows us to see industrial relations from a much broader perspective than collective bargaining, labor markets, or dispute settlement. His diagrams (Figures 2-5) show visually how limits are placed between market control, on the one hand, and government, labor, and or firm control on the other when addressing HR development, allocation, utilization, and maintenance activities.

Hills' conceptual framework allows for greater inclusion of labor market, collective bargaining, HRM, and organizational behavior faculty within a broader conceptualization of the field of Industrial Relations. While his ideas are thought-provoking, I wish that Hills had been more explicit in terms of what the broader field of IR would look like under his central idea of the employment relationship. It seems to me that even when faculty from three or four of these areas are located in the same department, there is no assurance that there will be commitment to holism — partly due to the disciplinary preferences of each of these sub-areas (economics, industrial relations (narrow view), and psychology). These areas within a business school, I believe, would benefit from a central focus on the employment relationship.

The fifth section of the book has four papers with the integrating theme of Paradigmatic Approaches to Industrial Relations. For those readers, like myself, who don't regularly read the political science literature, Braham Dabscheck's review of regulation theories is of interest. The theories he briefly covers include public-interest theory, life-cycle theory, capture theory, and bargaining or activist theories. I felt that he might have been wiser to limit his chapter to discussing those theories, than also trying to test them against the experience of industrial tribunals in Australia. The short

discussion of the Australian tribunal system left me feeling quite uncomfortable with his summary judgments in support of bargaining theory.

“Theorizing Industrial Relations: the Dominance of Logical Positivism and the Shift to Strategic Choice” by Viateur Larouche and Michel Audet offers a useful conceptual framework for identifying various approaches to IR research from a functionalist paradigm (Burrell and Morgan). These functionalist approaches, as modified by Larouche and Audet, include the disciplinary, institutional, system, pluralist, and strategic models. The authors then placed 158 theoretical articles, chapters of books, and other material on industrial relations published between 1897 and 1988 into these categories. Not surprisingly, they found that industrial relations had, and continues to have, a strong functionalist tradition focusing on regulation and an objective viewpoint. The researchers found a paucity of subjective analysis from either a humanist or interpretive paradigm in the industrial relation literature they reviewed. Logical positivism is alive and well, even though recent studies have used the strategic choice framework of Kochan and his colleagues at MIT.

John Godard’s chapter on modernist and post-modernist theories is highly critical of the use of the scientific method in much of our industrial relations research. He finds that few of the major questions have provided clearly supporting results from our use of experimental methodology. He also shows the shortcomings of the social action approach, but for other reasons. He favors theoretical realism that integrates elements of the scientific and social action approaches. I, for one, was not impressed by the arguments of the postmodernist theories that Godard discusses. Perhaps his most useful contribution was his position that while not giving up on logical positivism, researchers should become more critical of our so called scientific findings. He is in favor of greater use within Industrial Relations of grounded theories.

Craig Littler’s chapter begins with a discussion of the exchange and political economy paradigms, but finds both having shortcomings when applied to the field of Industrial Relations. The author argues for the value of seeing our field from a labor process or regulation theory perspective.

One of my disappointments in the papers in this section was the heavy weighting of political science theories and perspectives in several of the chapters. The section would have been stronger if there had been more equal representation of the alternate viewpoints. Theories drawn from mainstream economics and social psychology that link with industrial relations were given no real advocacy by any of the authors.

“Theory Construction and Assessment: A Checklist” doesn’t fit well with the other chapters in this book. I appreciate Roy Adams’ humor in using the electric light bulb analogy in discussing his key items related to theory construction, but the insights would have been greater had Adams more closely linked the checklist with our field of Industrial Relations.

Kochan’s “Teaching and Building Middle Range Industrial Relations Theory” is a welcome addition to our literature. We need not apologize for what Tom Kochan identifies as the essential historical features of our field (problem-centered orientation, multidisciplinary perspective, importance and appreciation of history, and multi-method approach). Nor should we flinch from our taking a normative approach. What makes the

chapter particularly inciteful is Kochan's sharing of the evolution of the way he taught the industrial relations theory course and his shift towards middle range theory building and testing in his research on strategic choice. Only by taking this historical view can we see how the field is changing.

Kochan sees our field in crisis because recent events have partially undermined the reality and legitimacy of pluralism as the defining mode for resolving basic tensions and conflict between employers, unions, and employees in the workplace. It is my opinion that both the acceptability of unions by many employers, and even employees, and the legitimacy of conflict in workplace disputes are in question. Trust, as a bonding mechanism in the employment setting is perhaps as weak as it has been in the U.S. since the Depression. What are the implications both in terms of future American economic competitiveness and the place of employees as one of the critical shareholders in economic enterprises?

I share Tom Kochan's advocacy for developing and testing middle range theories in Industrial Relations. On one hand, many of the micro-level theories from social psychology, however well crafted, provide us with limited usefulness in the employment setting. On the other hand, the broad integrative theories, however conceptually useful, are so complex, that empirical testing by either experimental or grounded theory approaches is well nigh impossible. Strategic choice theory offers us an understanding of the change in the behavior of many American employers during the last twenty years. Will it be useful as a theoretical framework 25 years from now? It remains to be seen.

I have not yet commented on Kevin Hince's chapter "Is Euro-American Union Theory Universally Applicable?: An Australian Perspective". Based on the experience of the State in both Australia and New Zealand, he argues that labor scarcity is not the central premise that best describes the case studies in these two countries. Somehow, I didn't see a clear fit of this article with the Barbash and Poole chapters in the second section.

In his opening essay, Roy Adams states the following: "One of the major purposes of this book is to help clarify the term (IR theory) and thus, hopefully, to assist meaningful discussion about the strengths and deficiencies of the body of thought to which it refers." (p. 2). How well was this purpose met by the editor and authors? My judgment is that this purpose was only partially fulfilled. Some of the chapters were quite effective in broadening our understanding of social science theories and their possible application to the field of Industrial Relations. Others provided a useful historical or personal professional perspective.

Perhaps there was too much dwelling on the negative features of particular methodologies, theories, or the present state of our field in some of the chapters. The larger question is whether the reading of this book will lead to real discourse among industrial relations scholars. I am not optimistic that this will take place, because only several of the authors spelled out positive steps that might be taken to strengthen both the field and the conceptualization of industrial relations theory. For this to take place, a concluding chapter that framed the debate more clearly would have helped.

Am I glad that I read the book? Definitely, yes. First, I learned about some theoretical streams that were largely unknown to me. Second, I was made conscious of the

fact that we need to address the question of whether Industrial Relations is about the employment setting, broadly defined, or about the union-management relationship. Several of the authors (Adams and Hills) were clear advocates of the former view. Third, I received a very useful update from the chapters by Voos, Cutcher-Gershenfeld, and Kochan of how they teach the IR Theory course. Finally, I hope that Roy Adams' first two chapters will generate debate within the Industrial Relations Research Association and its Canadian counterpart. It would be a shame if we continued about our work, without grappling with the questions he raises for those of us in the field. Now, let me offer some action steps that should be taken regarding the issues of industrial relations theory and the conceptualization of our field of Industrial Relations.

### **Future Steps (Onward and Upward)**

Looking at the field of Industrial Relations in the coming years, there is one important issue that has been triggered by having read the Adams and Meltz book. Some of the authors argue that Industrial Relations recently has been too narrowly defined as labor-management relations (e.g. collective bargaining, union organizing, and dispute settlement).

I concur with their viewpoint that those of us in IR need to expand our approach to seeing the centrality of the field in the employment setting, not only to those situations where a union is present. In fact, Paul Weiler in his recent book, *Governing the Workplace: The Future of Labor and Employment Law* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1990), suggests that the implementation of works council and employee-management committees may be the first step in providing employee "voice" where unions are not present. Why is this enlarged view appropriate for Industrial Relations?

First, such broadening of our domain would bring us closer to the situation that existed in the early postwar years when our field of study came into existence. Most of us could still be advocates for employee rights, but it would require us to test collective (union) models against non-union or civil service alternatives in such areas as joint consultation, grievance procedures, and so forth. Thus, public policy might be driven more by sound research than primarily by the power of union or management in the political process.

Second, our colleagues in human resource management and industrial-organizational psychology might be encouraged to realize that most of their prescriptions about the employment process are conservative in nature. Why so? Most of them accept the right of the employer (based on ownership of private property or agency) to define largely the "rules of the game". Even if the HR staff are more balanced in their viewpoint, any new innovations are limited to those that top management is willing to approve. In a period where many top executives are inclined to give primary attention to the stockholder, the financial community, and their customers, managerial and employee needs take a fairly low priority. Recent events raise serious questions if the so-called "New HRM" is a suitable replacement for pluralistic models in democratic nations.

Third, focusing on the work setting may spur those of us in the field of Industrial Relations to explore whether the adversarial model, as we find it both in Canada and the United States is the best model for employees or the broader society. There has been enough criticism of that model by both academicians and practitioners IR academics to question the assumptions favoring the status quo model. What would such a model of collective action look like? Would a different model provide both higher national competitiveness in the global economy and effective employee voice?

Finally, our willingness to re-define IR as the entire workplace would, most likely, attract considerable interest by disciplinarians in doing research on the employment setting. Economists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, and political scientists would see Industrial Relations as a central focus that can only grow more important in the coming years, given the current problems for the work force in responding to globalization, computerization, technological change, mis-match of job skills, and job insecurity. This expanded vision would likely enhance the multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary focus of our field as well.

My closing remarks pertain directly to the issue of Industrial Relations Theory — the underlying theme of the Adams and Meltz book. I commend our colleagues who participate in the IR Theory Study Group. This, and other recent books, have been generated out of the Study Group discourse. I would encourage members of the Study Group to write another book as a follow-up to this one. Each chapter contributor, whether a disciplinarian or IR faculty, would write a separate treatment of the theories in his or her particular social science discipline that might be useful to the study of the employment setting. Then within the same chapter the author would present examples of already published articles, books and monographs that are at the interface of the discipline and the workplace (expanded IR). The final section would offer a research agenda for further testing of the particular disciplinary theories in the employment setting.

Only at the time that this kind of research is completed, do I believe it is possible to generate a broader theory of the employment setting. We need a systematic ordering of what we know. We need research that deals with both the union and nonunion settings. Finally, we need models that are interdisciplinary. I suspect that we will only be able to discover the “big picture” when we go beyond the limits of any particular disciplinary vision. I thank both the editors and authors for challenging me to look at the field of Industrial Relations more broadly than I have been inclined to do.

### Commentaire par Jean Boivin

Après la parution de *The Origin and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y., ILR Press, 1993) par Bruce Kaufman, voici un nouvel ouvrage portant sur les relations industrielles comme discipline ou champ d'étude. Alors que le livre ci-haut mentionné cherchait à expliquer les facteurs ayant influencé l'apparition et le développement des relations industrielles pour mieux comprendre les défis

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actuels confrontant tant la pratique que la discipline académique des relations industrielles, le livre d'Adams et Meltz nous propose une démarche différente mais complémentaire. Ces derniers, prenant pour acquis que le terme « relations industrielles » ne réfère pas à une réalité identique selon les divers intervenants concernés, se donnent comme objectif d'en clarifier le contenu tout en faisant ressortir les forces et les faiblesses des principaux concepts utilisés.

Leur point de départ a été d'examiner le contenu des séminaires gradués portant sur le sujet « théorie des relations industrielles ». Cet examen leur a permis de dégager quatre dimensions principales qui sont généralement traitées dans ces séminaires : 1- la nature et l'étendue des relations industrielles comme discipline académique; 2- les rapports entre les relations industrielles et les autres disciplines qui s'intéressent au travail humain; 3- les paradigmes utilisés pour expliquer les phénomènes de relations industrielles; 4- la construction de la théorie ou des théories de relations industrielles.

Ils ont ensuite fait appel à différents collaborateurs et collaboratrices pour traiter de certains aspects de chacune de ces quatre dimensions tout en demandant à deux responsables de séminaire d'expliquer en détail la démarche exposée dans leur syllabus de cours.

Il faut admettre qu'Adams et Meltz étaient bien placés pour organiser un projet de cette nature puisque, depuis le milieu des années 1980, ils coprésidaient le groupe d'étude sur la théorie des relations industrielles de l'Association internationale des relations professionnelles (AIRP). Le groupe d'étude se réunit régulièrement à l'occasion des congrès mondiaux et régionaux de l'AIRP de même que lors des réunions annuelles de l'Industrial Relations Research Association (IRRA).

Les textes de Paula Voos « Designing an Industrial Relations Theory Curriculum for Graduate Students » et de Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld « A Framework to Organize Theory : The Structure of Doctoral-Level Seminar on Industrial Relations Theory » sont excessivement bien faits. On y retrouve tous les éléments permettant d'identifier les principales approches utilisées en relations industrielles (pluraliste, marxiste, unitariste) tout en soulignant la contribution des disciplines connexes telles l'économie, la sociologie et l'histoire. Ces deux textes contiennent également des bibliographies très détaillées et fort pertinentes.

La première des quatre dimensions — celle concernant la nature et l'étendue du champ des relations industrielles — fait l'objet de trois textes écrits par des auteurs provenant de pays différents, ce qui permet d'élargir la perspective nord-américaine. Cette dernière est d'ailleurs très bien rendue par le texte de Jack Barbash « The Founders of Industrial Relations as a Field of Study : An American Perspective ». On y présente la contribution des « fondateurs » de la discipline des relations industrielles, en partant de Karl Marx et Max Weber, en passant par Frederic Taylor et Elton Mayo, pour en arriver aux Webbs, à John R. Commons et Robert Hoxie.

Le texte de Kevin Hince « Is Euro-American Unions Theory Universally Applicable? An Australasian Perspective » remet en question plusieurs des principes généralement acceptés comme « universels » en Amérique du Nord. Ainsi, l'idée que la création des syndicats est une réaction autonome de la part de travailleurs désirant



se protéger contre l'insécurité engendrée par l'économie de marché n'est pas nécessairement applicable à l'Australie et à la Nouvelle-Zélande où le rôle de l'État semble avoir été beaucoup plus déterminant. En effet, à l'intérieur du système d'arbitrage généralisé qui encadre la négociation collective dans ces deux pays, les syndicats semblent avoir été davantage des instruments de l'État que des représentants autonomes des intérêts des travailleurs. La contribution de Hince est donc d'avoir fait ressortir l'importance du rôle de l'État, une dimension qui est presque totalement négligée dans l'analyse des relations industrielles selon la perspective américaine.

Le texte de Michael Poole de Grande-Bretagne reprend, en lui apportant des nuances importantes, les grandes lignes du livre qu'il avait écrit il y a quelques années (*Industrial Relations : Origins and Patterns of National Diversity*, London, Routledge, 1986) et dont l'objet principal était de démontrer la très grande diversité des systèmes nationaux de relations industrielles. Ce livre apportait des nuances à l'hypothèse de convergence développée par Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison et Myers (*Industrialism and Industrial Man*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1960) et selon laquelle les systèmes nationaux de relations industrielles en viendraient inéluctablement à se rassembler sous la pression des forces homogénéisatrices liées à l'industrialisation, telles la technologie, l'éducation, les valeurs démocratiques, l'interdépendance des pays. Dans son ouvrage, Poole avait très bien démontré la persistance de différences importantes entre les systèmes nationaux de relations industrielles qu'il attribuait à des facteurs culturels, idéologiques, socio-politiques ainsi qu'à ce qu'il appelait « l'instinct de survie » des institutions du travail comme la négociation collective qui réussissent à développer un degré d'autonomie vis-à-vis les conditions de l'environnement.

Même s'il reconnaît que l'accroissement de la concurrence internationale crée des conditions favorisant à nouveau une plus grande convergence des systèmes de relations industrielles, Poole souligne qu'il existe des réactions très diversifiées dans la façon de s'adapter à ces changements. (Que l'on pense aux efforts de collaboration patronale-syndicale qui sont plus répandus au Québec que dans le reste du Canada où le mouvement syndical continue de refuser officiellement toute concession, ou encore aux stratégies d'élimination des syndicats en vigueur aux États-Unis.) Il en est de même de la façon très variée dont les divers gouvernements ont réagi à la récente crise économique.

La deuxième dimension mise en évidence par les séminaires gradués en « Théorie des relations industrielles » concerne les rapports entretenus par les relations industrielles avec les autres disciplines (de sciences sociales surtout) qui s'intéressent aux phénomènes du travail.

Roy Adams y consacre un chapitre dont le titre est fort évocateur « All Aspects of People at Work : Unity and Division in the Study of Labor and Labor Management ». On retrouve dans ce texte un historique du développement de la discipline des relations industrielles qui reprend en quelque sorte la démarche utilisée par Bruce Kaufman dans le livre déjà mentionné plus haut. On y ajoute cependant des considérations sur le Canada, la Grande-Bretagne et l'Australie.

L'auteur insiste pour dire que malgré les espoirs initiaux de développer une véritable science interdisciplinaire pour analyser les problèmes au travail qui aurait dû permettre d'élaborer une théorie holistique et unificatrice, cet objectif n'a jamais été atteint.

Selon Adams, puisque le terme relations industrielles n'a pas réussi à s'imposer comme concept unificateur, il serait opportun de le remplacer par un autre concept qui, pour faire plus sérieux, devrait se terminer par « ologie », comme sociologie. Il propose donc le terme « Faberology » pour désigner la réalité à laquelle réfèrent les relations industrielles. Celui-ci provient de l'expression latine *homo faber* — homme créateur par analogie avec *homo sapiens* — homme penseur ! Je laisse au lecteur le soin de juger de la pertinence de cette suggestion.

Le texte suivant est aussi écrit par un des coéditeurs, Noah M. Meltz. Comme le titre l'indique « Industrial Relations Systems as a Framework for Organizing Contributions to Industrial Relations Theory » est une adaptation de l'approche systémique développée par John T. Dunlop et raffinée par la suite par plusieurs auteurs dont Alton Craig. Cette adaptation possède cependant la caractéristique fort originale d'incorporer le modèle des choix stratégiques développé par Kochan, Katz et McKersie (*The Transformation of American Industrial Relations*, New York, Basic Books, 1986) qui inclut les trois niveaux d'analyse suivants : le niveau des lieux de travail, le niveau fonctionnel où se déroulent la négociation collective et la gestion des ressources humaines ainsi que le niveau stratégique où s'élaborent les politiques à long terme des trois acteurs, employeurs, syndicats, État.

Il s'agit là de la première tentative, à ma connaissance, de développer un modèle d'analyse qui incorpore simultanément les deux approches — systémique et stratégique. Meltz va même jusqu'à avancer que ce modèle peut également accommoder les approches unitariste et marxiste en y faisant les adaptations nécessaires.

Dans le chapitre suivant « Integrating Industrial Relations with Social Sciences », Stephen M. Hills développe un cadre d'analyse applicable à l'ensemble de la relation d'emploi plutôt qu'aux seules institutions du travail. Ce modèle cherche à intégrer trois dimensions comprenant chacune des pôles opposés qui ont toujours empêché l'unification du champ des relations industrielles. La première concerne l'opposition entre les visions macro et micro de la relation d'emploi ; la seconde, l'opposition entre les approches marxiste et non-marxiste ; et enfin, la troisième, l'opposition entre les objectifs d'efficacité (meilleure allocation des ressources humaines) et d'équité sur les lieux de travail.

Hills fait sien la définition de Hyman à l'effet que les relations industrielles concernent « les processus de contrôle de la relation d'emploi ». Quatre agents ou intervenants sont impliqués dans ces processus : le marché (dans une économie où la compétition existe réellement), l'entreprise (dans une économie à caractère monopolistique), les travailleurs et leurs organisations syndicales, et enfin le gouvernement. Selon que le processus de contrôle de la relation d'emploi sera plus ou moins influencé par l'un ou l'autre des intervenants, les résultats varieront du point de vue des différentes activités fonctionnelles que sont le développement, l'allocation, l'utilisation et le maintien des ressources humaines. Ce modèle est fort original mais il est très complexe et son articulation n'est pas toujours facile à saisir.

Quatre textes composent la troisième dimension qui porte sur les paradigmes utilisés pour analyser les phénomènes de relations industrielles. Braham Dabscheck, dans son chapitre intitulé « Industrial Relations and Theories of Interest Group Regulation »,

adopte une approche de type science politique, peu fréquente en relations industrielles. En utilisant ce qu'il appelle la théorie de la régulation, il analyse l'évolution de la détermination des salaires par les tribunaux industriels en Australie au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

La théorie de la régulation dont il est question ici ne doit pas être confondue avec une autre « théorie de la régulation » dont il sera question dans d'autres textes. Elle est plutôt associée au courant de pensée « progressiviste » qui prévalait au début du siècle aux États-Unis et qui a fortement influencé le développement des politiques de relations industrielles en Australie. Selon cette approche, le gouvernement doit mettre sur pied différents organismes dirigés par des experts indépendants pour solutionner les problèmes associés au fonctionnement et à la gestion de la société. Les tribunaux industriels qui, dans le système australien de relations industrielles, jouent un rôle central dans la détermination des salaires, constituent un de ces organismes. En fait, il est préférable de parler des théories de la régulation puisque Dabscheck en identifie quatre et il les applique successivement à l'analyse du fonctionnement des tribunaux industriels. Il s'avère, selon Dabschek, que la théorie dite « activiste » ou « de négociation » offrirait les meilleures explications pour comprendre le rôle des tribunaux industriels puisque ces organismes doivent non seulement se démener avec les parties syndicales et patronales mais également avec les autres tribunaux et le gouvernement pour faire accepter les programmes et les décisions qu'ils mettent de l'avant.

Le texte de Viateur Larouche et Michel Audet « Theorizing Industrial Relations : The Dominance of Logical Positivism and the Shift to Strategic Choice » utilise le modèle développé par Burrell et Morgan (*Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, London, Heinemann, 1979) pour classer les théories et l'applique aux diverses contributions théoriques associées aux relations industrielles.

Selon Burrell et Morgan, toute théorie sociale, incluant celles s'apparentant aux relations industrielles, peut être classifiée à l'intérieur de quatre paradigmes qui reposent sur la façon pour les chercheurs de se situer par rapport aux deux dimensions suivantes : la nature de la société et la nature des sciences sociales. La façon de concevoir la nature de la société varie selon deux pôles opposés : la régulation et le changement radical tandis que la façon de concevoir les sciences sociales varie également entre deux pôles : le subjectivisme et l'objectivisme. Les relations entre ces deux dimensions permettent d'établir les quatre paradigmes suivants : humaniste (changement radical et subjectivisme), structuraliste (changement radical et objectivisme), interprétatif (régulation et subjectivisme) et fonctionnaliste (régulation et objectivisme).

Burrell et Morgan affirment que la très grande majorité des théoriciens des organisations, des sociologues industriels, des psychologues et des spécialistes des relations industrielles abordent leur objet d'étude dans une perspective fonctionnaliste. Audet et Larouche ne contestent pas cette affirmation mais ils vont plus loin en raffinant la classification des approches à l'intérieur du paradigme fonctionnaliste qu'ils identifient comme : disciplinaire (multi ou pluri), institutionnelle, systémique, pluraliste et stratégique. Ils procèdent ensuite à l'identification des principales contributions théoriques à l'intérieur des différents paradigmes (158 livres et articles ont été recensés).

Les auteurs distinguent ensuite entre les divers objets au sujet desquels les différentes approches ou paradigmes sont appliqués. Ils identifient ainsi six objets qui ne

sont cependant pas mutuellement exclusifs : les relations du travail et la négociation collective, les règles du travail et les mécanismes qui président à leur établissement ; la résolution des conflits ; les conflits de pouvoir ; les relations d'emploi et la gestion des ressources humaines.

Enfin, dans une troisième démarche, Audet et Larouche essayent d'associer les approches ou paradigmes aux six objets précédemment identifiés. Ainsi, les approches disciplinaire et institutionnelle s'intéressent principalement aux relations du travail et à la négociation collective ; l'approche systémique privilégie l'établissement des règles au travail ; l'approche pluraliste touche autant aux règles qu'à la résolution des conflits ; l'approche stratégique porte principalement sur la gestion des ressources humaines et l'approche radicale sur les conflits de pouvoir.

Pour terminer, les auteurs se livrent à une comparaison dans le temps de la popularité des diverses approches. S'il s'avère que l'approche systémique et, dans une certaine mesure, l'approche disciplinaire, étaient les plus populaires avant 1980, on retrouve maintenant l'approche stratégique sur un pied d'égalité avec l'approche systémique comme méthode d'analyse privilégiée en relations industrielles.

Les deux textes suivants « Theory and Method in Industrial Relations : Modernist and Post Modernist Alternatives » de John Godard et « Industrial Relations Theory : A Political Economy Perspective » de Craig R. Littler peuvent être appréciés à partir de la classification des paradigmes de Larouche et Audet.

Le texte de Godard est écrit dans un style pamphlétaire et il soulève un débat ainsi que des questions fort complexes sur la philosophie de la science. En fait, Godard s'érige systématiquement contre ce qu'il appelle la méthode scientifique moderne caractérisée par le positivisme et l'empiricisme logique. N'étant pas davantage satisfait par les approches alternatives qu'il range sous la catégorie générale d'« action sociale » et de « post modernisme », mais qui, en fait, coïncident avec le paradigme interprétatif de Larouche et Audet, il propose une démarche qui se situerait à mi-chemin entre les deux et qu'il appelle le « réalisme théorique ». Cependant, lorsqu'il affirme que cette approche se situe dans la tradition « radicale » ou « économie politique », nous constatons que, malgré tout le verbiage utilisé pour nous présenter une « nouvelle » théorie des relations industrielles, Godard ne fait que se ranger parmi les adeptes du paradigme structuraliste identifié par Larouche et Audet.

C'est d'ailleurs une variation sur le même thème qui nous attend avec le texte de Littler dans lequel l'auteur se donne comme mandat de prouver que le paradigme « économie politique » est supérieur au paradigme qu'il appelle « échange » mais qui, en fait, correspond au paradigme fonctionnaliste de Larouche et Audet. Pourquoi en est-il ainsi, selon l'auteur ? Tout simplement parce que ce dernier paradigme « ne tient pas compte de la reproduction des modèles de pouvoir à long terme » (p. 309).

Après avoir établi la supériorité du paradigme « économie politique » à l'aide de graphiques et d'arguments fort savants, Littler nous présente deux rejets que ce paradigme a engendrés : la théorie du procès de travail (*labor process*) et la théorie de la régulation, l'un se situant au niveau micro et l'autre au niveau macro.

La théorie du procès de travail s'intéresse au processus de gestion des entreprises sous l'angle du contrôle managerial. Les relations industrielles sont alors considérées

comme des processus dérivés de phénomènes plus globaux se déroulant au sein et à l'extérieur de l'entreprise. La littérature sur le procès de travail construit des typologies de systèmes de gestion à un niveau d'abstraction, par exemple : taylorisme/fordisme, néo-fordisme, spécialisation flexible. Cette approche est utile pour comprendre les transformations dans l'organisation du travail.

Quant à la théorie de la régulation (pas celle de Dabscheck mais une autre), « elle cherche à reformuler la logique des relations de pouvoir du système capitaliste sur une base non déterministe » (p. 319). L'auteur utilise un schéma explicatif présentant les principaux éléments de cette théorie qui comprend trois aspects : la nature du système d'accumulation, le mode de régulation sociale et le système de régulation du travail et des relations du travail. Cependant, les explications données ne sont pas suffisamment précises pour que le non-initié s'y retrouve. Ceci est regrettable car l'auteur procède ensuite à une comparaison entre la théorie de la régulation, la thèse de la spécialisation flexible de Piore et Sabel et l'approche japonaise pour expliquer les changements qualitatifs qui sont en train de s'opérer dans les appareils de production des pays capitalistes.

La dernière dimension concerne la construction de théories en relations industrielles. On y retrouve trois textes dont deux sont plus ou moins pertinents, à savoir « Theory Construction : A Checklist » de Roy Adams et « Integrative Theory Building : A Personal Account » de Hoyt Wheeler et l'autre est si important qu'à lui seul il vaut l'achat du volume. Il s'agit de « Teaching and Building Middle Range Industrial Relations Theory » de Thomas Kochan.

Dans son texte, Adams énumère une liste d'éléments que devrait contenir une véritable théorie des relations industrielles et, pour démontrer l'importance de chacun de ces éléments, il utilise un exemple tiré de la vie quotidienne : la variation dans la quantité de lumière générée par une ampoule électrique. La proposition centrale qui fournira la démonstration de l'importance et du rôle de chacun des éléments (i.e. concepts, définitions théoriques, définitions opérationnelles, relations entre les éléments, consistance interne, possibilité de contrôle de l'expérience, etc.) est la suivante : si l'on ajoute des batteries additionnelles, la quantité de lumière produite par l'ampoule augmentera.

Pour Adams, toute théorie des relations industrielles, pour être valable, devra nécessairement suivre les courants méthodologique et épistémologique utilisés dans l'expérience de l'ampoule électrique ! Il ne faut donc pas se surprendre de son pessimisme vis-à-vis la faiblesse du développement scientifique et disciplinaire des relations industrielles. Par contre, même si nous devons changer le terme « relations industrielles » pour celui de « Faberology », je ne crois pas qu'il serait davantage possible d'en arriver à la construction de la grande théorie des relations industrielles qui correspondrait aux exigences de l'expérience de l'ampoule électrique. Adams est donc prisonnier de son positivisme et de son empiricisme logique (comme dirait Godard) en croyant qu'il n'y a pas de différences entre les sciences sociales et les sciences naturelles.

Le texte de Wheeler est écrit sur un ton plutôt humoristique. Il raconte la façon dont l'auteur a cheminé pour en arriver à écrire son livre *Industrial Conflict : An Integrative Theory* (Columbia, SC., University of South Carolina Press, 1985). Plutôt que de commenter les propos de l'auteur, je ne ferai qu'énumérer quelque-uns des sous-

titres utilisés tels : « Why Bother », « How I Spent my Summer Vacation », « Inspiration on the Fall of the Apple », « Hints from Hoyt ». Cela donne un aperçu du sérieux de l'argumentation.

Entre ces deux textes d'utilité douteuse, on retrouve une excellente mise au point sur les enjeux auxquels font face les relations industrielles en cette fin de XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. « Teaching and Building Middle Range Industrial Relations Theory » de Thomas Kochan, dont le titre est déjà une réponse aux ambitions éthérées exprimées par Roy Adams dans « Theory Construction », soulève la question fondamentale qui confronte la discipline actuellement. Kochan se demande si la prémisse normative sur laquelle les relations industrielles se sont toujours appuyées tient toujours, à savoir l'existence simultanée dans la relation d'emploi d'intérêts à la fois conflictuels et communs entre les parties. La conséquence logique de cette proposition est que la recherche en relations industrielles s'est toujours autant préoccupée des considérations d'équité que des considérations d'efficacité.

Selon Kochan, l'acceptation de la présence d'un niveau de conflit dans la relation d'emploi a toujours distingué la discipline des relations industrielles de l'économique et des sciences de l'organisation ainsi que de la perspective radicale, quoique dans ce dernier cas, il y a désaccord quant aux causes profondes de ce conflit et aux prescriptions pour le régler. Il illustre comment, dans les nombreuses recherches qu'il a effectuées ainsi que dans les cours de théorie qu'il enseigne, il essaye de tenir compte de cette prémisse normative ainsi que d'autres caractéristiques importantes telles le caractère pratique des relations industrielles, la multidisciplinarité, l'importance de la dimension historique ainsi que l'utilisation des méthodes quantitatives pour raffiner l'analyse sans toutefois exclure les méthodes qualitatives telles les études de cas ou ethnographiques.

Pour Kochan, les changements récents survenus dans le système économique, notamment l'accroissement de la concurrence suite à une plus grande mondialisation de l'économie, ont provoqué une crise des relations industrielles car c'est la prémisse normative fondamentale identifiée plus haut qui est remise en question. Essentiellement, le débat se présente de la façon suivante. Le développement et le maintien de relations basées sur la confiance réciproque (*high trust*) est absolument indispensable à la reconstitution des institutions locales et macroéconomiques qui permettront de mener à bien la tâche de reconstruction industrielle nécessaire au développement économique et social. Dans ce contexte, les syndicats qui s'enferment dans la logique conflictuelle connaîtront un déclin de leurs membres. Ces derniers ne doivent donc pas se contenter de faire du *distributive bargaining* mais s'impliquer dans des stratégies visant à promouvoir l'utilisation optimale des ressources dans les entreprises et dans l'économie en général. Il est donc essentiel d'étudier les conditions qui rendent possible ces relations de confiance tant au niveau des groupes informels de travail qu'à celui des rapports formels entre les syndicats, le patronat et le gouvernement. Pour cette raison, Kochan affirme que les relations industrielles doivent s'intéresser à la gestion des ressources humaines et ne pas laisser ce domaine d'étude aux seuls spécialistes des sciences de l'administration qui opèrent à partir d'un paradigme unitariste. Il ne se risque pas, par contre, à prédire les chances de succès du paradigme pluraliste à s'adapter à l'étude de la gestion des ressources humaines.

Le principal mérite de ce volume est de colliger dans un même ouvrage des écrits théoriques qui offrent des perspectives variées. On serait tenté, à prime abord, de déplorer le fait que le livre n'ait pas été écrit en entier par les deux auteurs qui ont certainement les connaissances et les aptitudes requises pour mener à terme un tel projet. Par contre, il n'aurait jamais été possible d'obtenir autant de diversité dans les façons d'envisager les relations industrielles.

Je n'hésite donc pas à comparer la contribution d'Adams et Meltz à celle de Gerald Somers qui, il y a environ vingt-cinq ans, avait colligé un ensemble de textes portant sur le même domaine (*Essays in Industrial Relations Theory*, Ames, Iowa State University Press, 1969).

Les textes de Hince, Poole, Adams (« All Aspects of People at Work »), Meltz, Dabscheck, Larouche et Audet, ainsi que celui de Kochan permettent de circonscrire le domaine des relations industrielles en identifiant les éléments théoriques fondamentaux tout en soulignant les phénomènes qui n'ont pas encore été expliqués ou qui présentent des défis majeurs pour l'avenir. Seul le texte de Kochan cependant, discute à fond de l'impact des transformations récentes de l'économie sur les relations industrielles. Les auteurs utilisant le paradigme radical ou structuraliste comme Godard et Littler font bien allusion à ces transformations, mais leurs explications sont confuses et elles cherchent surtout à prouver la supériorité de leur paradigme plutôt qu'à discuter véritablement des enjeux pour la discipline.

D'autre part, on peut souligner quelques faiblesses à ce volume. D'abord, certains textes ne représentent pas des contributions complètement originales puisqu'ils ont déjà été publiés de façon au moins partielle. Il en est ainsi du texte de Barbash qui est un condensé de ce qu'il avait déjà publié dans *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* (vol. 46, n° 1, 1991). On peut en dire autant du texte de Larouche et Audet déjà publié dans la même revue (vol. 43, n° 1, 1988). Il faut noter toutefois que, dans ce dernier cas, les auteurs ont rajouté deux sections fort intéressantes au texte original. Quant au texte de Poole, il reprend bien l'essentiel des idées qu'il avait écrites dans son livre publié en 1986, mais en y ajoutant des considérations nouvelles pour tenir compte de la situation économique actuelle.

Ensuite, on trouve trois ou quatre textes dont l'utilité est fort discutable, soit ceux de Godard, Littler, Adams (« Theory Construction ») et Wheeler. À la limite, le texte de Littler serait acceptable même s'il consiste davantage en un plaidoyer en faveur d'un paradigme et comporte beaucoup de confusion lorsque vient le temps de passer aux explications concrètes. Il est d'ailleurs écrit en prenant pour acquis que le lecteur connaît toutes les subtilités de ce qu'il appelle la théorie de la régulation.

C'est justement cette dernière théorie qui sera l'objet de mon propos final. On doit reprocher aux éditeurs de n'avoir pas clarifié au moyen d'une note particulière ou même d'une annexe, le sens de l'expression « théorie de la régulation » qui est utilisée par quatre auteurs différents dans des contextes fort distincts. Dans son texte « All Aspects », Adams donne une définition de ce qu'est le *French Regulation School* qui semble correspondre au sens que lui donnent Littler et Godard, tandis que le *regulation theory* de Dabscheck réfère à une réalité bien différente qui correspond au sens que lui donne Kochan. C'est là une lacune éditoriale qui aurait pu facilement être corrigée si

les éditeurs avaient relu les textes d'une façon plus serrée. Une telle relecture aurait aussi permis de constater qu'un bout de phrase a été escamoté au bas de la page 257 du texte de Larouche et Audet.

Dans l'ensemble cependant, mon jugement sur ce livre est très favorable et les quelques faiblesses soulignées sont largement compensées par la qualité globale du produit. Il s'agit d'une excellente contribution au développement des connaissances en relations industrielles.

## LA NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE DU TRAVAIL ADAPTATION OU DISPARITION?

Actes du XLVIII<sup>e</sup> Congrès des relations industrielles  
de l'Université Laval

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