

**Kaufman, Bruce E., *The Origins and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United States***

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## RECENSIONS BOOK REVIEWS

**The Origins and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United States,** by Bruce E. KAUFMAN, Ithaca, New York, ILR Press, 1993, 286 p., ISBN 0-87546-191-3 (alk paper), ISBN 0-87546-192-1 (pbk.: alk paper).

Bruce Kaufman sets out three objectives for this volume: to provide a detailed account of the intellectual history of the field of Industrial Relations in the United States; to assess the reasons for the marked decline in the field's intellectual and organizational fortunes in the U.S.; and to develop a strategy for change that will preserve and strengthen Industrial Relations as a field. I believe he has admirably succeeded in achieving the first two objectives, and, with respect to the third objective, he has provided a framework and set of recommendations for consideration by all academics and practitioners interested in the future of industrial relations (IR) in the United States.

The exploration of the origins of the field of industrial relations shows how little the central issues in IR have changed in the seven decades since the establishment of the field which he dates to 1920, when the University of Wisconsin introduced an IR program and when the short-lived Industrial Relations Association of America (IRAA) was founded.

Kaufman suggests that these two events were symbolic of the establishment of two divergent approaches to industrial relations. The first he labels Institutional Labour Economics (ILE), while the IRAA was representative of the second approach, that of Personnel and Human Resources Management (PM). Kaufman traces the evolution of the ILE and the PM schools of thought, first within industrial relations as a field of study and then the factors that led to the separation of PM from ILE and the emergence of the HRM field as a separate field. Throughout the discussion, including the exploration of the future of IR, Kaufman does not abandon the possibility that a constructive link between IR and HR can be re-established.

One of the major sources of difference between the two schools of thought centred on the role of unions and collective bargaining. For PM unions were not only incapable of solving the underlying problem, which was poor management, but they also reduced efficiency through their restrictive practices. For ILE unions had a constructive role to play in eliminating low wages and motivating employers to operate more efficiently. Both schools of thought were concerned with efficiency, equity and personal development. Where they differed was the role of government in attaining these goals. For ILE the government and legislation was seen as a positive force since their focus was on the impact of external factors. For the PM school the most important change factor was the individual organization. The emphasis here was internal, that is on education and motivation though encouraging the use of best practice in human relations.

With these central themes Kaufman traces the evolution of the academic and practitioner institutions over the seventy plus years since 1920, through the Golden Age of IR and the recent lean years. Kaufman makes clear that the intellectual themes and divergence are not only still with us, but have to be confronted if IR is to reverse its recent decline (as measured by student enrollments and number of operating units) and advance in the future.

The decline in IR's intellectual and organizational fortunes is attributed to two developments. One outside the control of academic or IR practitioners, and one directly controlled by the leaders of the IR field. The internal source of the decline of IR is attributed by Kaufman to the intellectual view of what IR encompasses. Kaufman posits that a fatal error in judgment occurred with the attempt to make IR a science. The first major attempt in the U.S. to establish IR as an academic discipline, focused on union-management relations, excluding in the process human relations concerns. The defining volume *Industrial Relations Systems* by one of the giants in the field, John Dunlop of Harvard, is viewed by Kaufman as, in effect, reading the PM school out of the intellectual discipline of IR. A separation of views and approaches had occurred well before 1958, but Kaufman sees this as putting the stamp of legitimacy on the separation with its implications for the membership of the academic and practitioner association, the Industrial Relations Association, that had been founded in 1947. By 1960, most behaviouralists had ceased to be members of the IRRA.

The external source of the decline in the field of IR flows from the internal source. Once IR was identified as union-management relations, as the rate of unionization declined then plummeted in the United States, it carried with it not only less opportunity for the practice of IR, but also less interest in the study of IR.

Having set the stage by analyzing the causes of the decline in IR in the U.S., Kaufman uses the themes to provide a basis for his suggestions as to what might strengthen IR in the future. As would be expected a major issue is how the ILE school of thought which is central to the current mainstream of IR, is to relate to PM. Kaufman explores this by considering the future role of IR schools and the role of the professional association, the IRRA. Just as his analysis of the evolution of the field follows developments in a number of themes, so too does the proposed solutions. These relate to IR as a field of study, IR institutes and academic programs, research, and the IRRA.

Kaufman puts the major emphasis on linking PM and ILE by having IR focus on the outcomes of the employment relationship that affect efficiency, equity, and individual growth and well-being (p. 168-169). This approach would link the external orientation that has characterized the ILE school and the internal approach that has characterized the PM school.

No matter to what extent Kaufman's proposals for the future are acted upon, this volume is a defining moment in the history and evolution of the field/discipline of industrial relations. At the very least, academics and practitioners of IR in the U.S. will have to confront their relationship with Human Resource Management, a field that is thriving. Is IR to be broadened to do more to cover the entire scope of employment relations for both unionized and non-unionized employees? The academic institutions in IR already include HR subjects. The major aspect that hasn't been confronted and that Kaufman

is urging us to confront is the separation of the field into two distinctive and largely unrelated approaches to research and professional practice.

In the beginning, in 1920, there was both a text book that linked IR and HR and an organization of practitioners that did the same. Kaufman is calling for a return to the roots, IR as an intellectual discipline linked intellectually and organizationally with HR but open to the other disciplines that have something to contribute to and learn from IR. Kaufman has provided a strong challenge based on an understanding of the evolution of the field in the U.S. Clearly this book is written about and for those involved in IR in the United States. The analysis and the prescriptions are, however, relevant well beyond the American borders. For Canadians, there are lessons to be learned even though on the surface, IR is still in a growth mode with the overall stability of union density (though patterns differ between the public and private sector).

The most important lesson is the strengthening of ties with HR and the broadening of the *employment relations* field. This has already been the approach followed in the most active centres of IR study and practice on the continent, in the universities and practitioner organizations in Quebec. Kaufman's book will undoubtedly be of wide interest not only in the U.S. but certainly in Canada as well. While the institutions and debates are most relevant to these two countries, the central themes that are explored will be important well beyond North America to all industrialized communities.

This book is a classic.

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**From Uniformity to Diversity: Industrial Relations in Canada and the United States**, by Pradeep KUMAR, Kingston, IRC Press, Queen's University, 1993, 195 p., ISBN 0-88886-369-1.

This book provides a comprehensive review of industrial relations developments in Canada and the United States. Specifically, it presents trends in union membership and density, compares the behaviour, goals and strategies of employers and unions, examines similarities and differences in labour policies between the two countries, and chimes in on the debate over whether there is convergence or divergence between the U.S. and Canadian industrial relations systems.

Broadly defined, the book considers the extent of divergence between industrial relations systems. As is evident from Kumar's review of previous research and available data, the "convergence-divergence" debate has produced a vast research literature. Kumar's analysis of the evidence leads him to conclude there is overwhelming support for concluding there is divergence in the U.S. and Canadian industrial relations systems. He makes a persuasive case. Kumar concludes divergence can be found "in all spheres of industrial relations activity — in patterns of union and management behaviour and strategies, collective bargaining approaches and outcomes, and in the scope and coverage of labour legislation and its administration" (at p. 143). Unions in Canada not only recorded larger membership gains and higher density rates, but they were more active