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New Employment Actors: Developments from Australia Edited by Grant Michelson, Suzanne Jamieson and John Burgess. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008, 285 pp., ISBN 978-3-039114-61-0 (alk. paper).

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lisation du syndicalisme communautaire (*community unionism*), particulièrement pertinente pour répondre aux besoins d'une portion importante de la main-d'œuvre. Le syndicalisme communautaire se situe à l'intersection de deux axes principaux, selon le lieu où s'enracine l'action (milieu de travail ou communauté) et le processus (hiérarchique ou participatif) et suppose une participation très active des travailleurs à plusieurs niveaux. Les auteurs présentent également une étude de cas pour démontrer la pertinence de la conceptualisation proposée.

Cet ouvrage propose une compréhension originale et intégrée de la précarité d'emploi en traitant à la fois ses dimensions statistiques, sociales, juridiques, politiques et économiques. L'ouvrage est rigoureux et remarquablement bien structuré. Le fil conducteur apparaît clairement du début à la fin, ce qui constitue un défi pour une publication réunissant autant d'auteurs et abordant autant de perspectives d'analyse. La documentation scientifique est abondante et diversifiée et chaque chapitre apporte une contribution spécifique au développement des connaissances dans le domaine. On ne peut que souligner la pertinence, la qualité et la richesse des informations que contient cet ouvrage. Il intéressera autant les chercheurs et les étudiants que les décideurs, les responsables de programmes publics ou d'organisations syndicales.

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New Employment Actors: Developments from Australia

Edited by Grant Michelson, Suzanne Jamieson and John Burgess. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008, 285 pp., ISBN 978-3-039114-61-0 (alk. paper).

New Employment Actors: Developments from Australia is an edited book about how the employment relationship is changing to embrace participation by new actors. In the first chapter, the concept of actors is explored. Subsequent essays make the case that the State; and, the community and labour market are spawning agents that have the status of actors. The final section addresses emerging employment relations "processes." In these chapters, there is analysis of how certain agenda-driven new institutions, such as the

Corporate Social Responsibility Movement, are influencing the world of work and employment. The book is written in the Australian context and mostly uses examples from that country's experience.

The work begins with an overview of the notion of employment relations actors. The discussion here is set against the backdrop of Dunlop's (1958) systems theory perspective which formed the mainstay of much industrial relations research throughout the latter half of the 20th century. This conception is augmented by increasingly elaborate views—and an increasingly organic perspective of post-industrial society's employment-related institutions emerges. The rhetoric establishes a need for more high-tech theoretical/analytical frameworks for understanding modern worker-management interactions. Two kinds of changes are implied about the employment relationship. First, the roles of traditional actors have become more complex. Second, new actors have emerged. These changes are eloquently presented as "the emergence of new spaces".

After gaining a sense of who should count as an actor, the book gives a sensibly structured appraisal of the actors themselves. However in certain of the volume's chapters I felt duped. I was sometimes unconvinced that we were really talking about new actors. A case in point is in the discussion about the *Australian Fair Pay Commission (AFPC)*. Here the author appears to lack confidence about exactly what is being argued. The name of the chapter hints at part of the problem (*The Australian Fair Pay Commission: A New Actor Performing an Old Function*). After finishing the essay, I was persuaded that the new agency had fresh sympathies and orientations as well as a name change. However, I wasn't convinced that it is, indeed, new. Perhaps, what was needed in this chapter was some more theory. A solid discussion of the distinction between structures and strategic orientations/priorities would have helped.

I thought that chapter three, which is about police as a new actor, suffers from a slightly different conceptual problem to Chapter Two. This narrative centres on the role police officers have played in recent high-profile employment disputes. I was convinced that the functions

of police *vis-à-vis* strikes are more complex in the modern era than had typically been the case “*pre-Workchoices*.” However, I couldn’t overcome my pre-conception that the State has agencies which (at least in theory) execute its intentions. If this is so, police involvement in industrial disputation only amounts to heavy-handed State intervention and does not qualify as autonomous behaviour. In the second part of the chapter, the focus switches to consideration of private security forces. This discussion, at least for me, came closer to discovery of a new actor. I note in passing that I found the section about high levels of union density in police agencies somewhat off-message. I didn’t see what it had to do with the book’s object of analysis.

I consider that several latter chapters in the book have conceptual problems. It is hard to identify an overall theme for these because the content of what is discussed varies from author to author. Perhaps it would be reasonable to say that the essays, at times, try too hard to force phenomena to conform to the “new actors” paradigm. I thought that there were often more elegant/parsimonious explanations for the contemporary employment-related changes being described.

I was impressed with Jennifer Sappey’s chapter which was about how the notion of customers is impacting higher education. In describing this matter, she makes progress towards unearthing a genuinely new actor. In her exposition she takes care to link insights to orthodox theory. I found it hard to be critical of her conclusions and consider that, somewhat unlike the authors of the other essays, she has not attempted to put square pegs in round holes. In short, “a new actor’s explanation” seems a best-fit model for the phenomenon being analyzed.

Overall, I remain unsure why the Australian context was such a central concern of the book’s authors. I understand that, at least from a superficial reading of events, the Howard government’s blueprint appears to have shaped much of the recent change in the way labour relations is done. However, many of the trends identified appear to not be exclusively Australian phenomena but would have been better considered as an outgrowth

of globalization. Although it could be argued that certain agendas have been pursued more vigorously in Australia, the publication would have made a better theoretical contribution if identified phenomena were presented as generic subject matter illustrated with reference to Australian examples.

On the upside, one feature of the book which deserves special praise is the way it reinterprets the industrial relations perspective of the employment relationship. This achievement is innovative and lays some new foundation for considering the more awkward facets of labour-management relations. Readers are not encouraged to surrender to a view that says that the modern world poses new threats for employers and employees and therefore non-aligned interests have diminished importance. This thesis has emerged as a popular, and in my view, misleading conception. By contrast, refreshingly the book’s case studies are about attempts to deal with systemic conflict. They take the issue head on and draw conclusions which, perhaps serendipitously, reinvigorate a pluralist perspective.

Although I have conceptual problems with some arguments put forward in this work, overall I think that the book is a thoughtful exploration of structural changes in labour management-relations. It provides novel schemas for thinking about how the modern employment relationship is created and sustained. Although it falls short of achieving its implied goal of delineating a new array of employment relations actors, it does update understanding of the nature of work in free-market economies. When you read the book you should remind yourself that finding genuinely new employment actors in capitalist and increasingly deregulated societies is probably as easy as finding a replacement for Newton’s laws of motion. In our field, the search for new actors is somewhat akin to the quest to break free from the individualism/collectivism dichotomy that pervades industrial relations theory. I wanted to read this book because I thought the title was audacious. In hindsight, I think I was right.

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