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European Unions: Labor's Quest for a Transnational Democracy

By Roland Erne. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, 260 pp., ISBN 978-0-801446-48-1 (cloth: alk. paper).

The reviewer should begin by explaining his relationship to this book, as I was present at some meetings described by the author and provided him with one or two tiny tiles in the elaborate evidential mosaic that he presents here.

Roland Erne poses two main questions: has a European trade union movement emerged? And to what extent and under what conditions do European trade unions contribute to the making of a more democratic European Union? He follows a bold line of argument and suggests that a means of addressing the European Union's "democratic deficit" is emerging in the form of trans-national European labour politics. He examines two important areas, i.e. attempts to co-ordinate wage bargaining policy within the Eurozone and efforts by trade unionists to save jobs within two major companies in the course of which they adopted different but equally European political approaches. He concludes that a European trade union movement is under construction and that a crucial industrial democratic element is emerging within the EU.

Erne builds and uses a theoretical model based on a four-part typology of union politics which he calls "Euro-democratization," "Euro technocratization," "democratic renationalization" and "democratic renationalization." Broadly, the technocratic possibilities are to operate within the existing laws, norms and structures and the democratic ones involve mobilizing members. Both can be conducted in either the European or national arenas, and are not mutually exclusive but rather possible routes that can be taken according to the concrete situations unions face. These situations can arise from pressures from the nation state to co-operate to improve national competitiveness as well as from the legal underpinnings of collective bodies like European Works Councils. He examines the "European versus renationalization" options in the context of national level wage bargaining, where the European TUC and the European Metalworkers' Federation have attempted

weak forms of bargaining co-ordination. In an examination of national level bargaining in Germany Italy and France, Erne finds that this succeeded only at the level of the experts advising the unions rather than in the unions themselves ("The more we analyze the wage-bargaining policy of a national union, the more we realizes (*sic*) that most unions do not have a single consistent bargaining policy," p. 111). Under pressure from other actors at the national level, unions therefore certainly did not follow European policies to any visible degree. Although these results rather deflate the author's overall argument, he finds more evidence for it in his case studies.

His case studies show the same unions pursuing "Euro-democratic" and "Euro-technocratic" strategies in the context of significant mergers that threatened job loss. The first case was that of ABB Alstom Power and the second was that of Alcan-Pechiney-Algroup. Although European Union law envisages no role for unions in this sort of merger, the European Works Council in the first case challenged this and mobilized workers to demonstrate around the issue with some success (even though job loss did eventually result). Effectively, they followed a strategy of Euro-politicization, with sizeable demonstrations in 2000 and 2003. The resistance was assisted by the European Works Council's steering group following an "open-minded" method, allowing time to debate, reconcile and aggregate interests. In the second case, a more "Euro technocratic" response was in evidence and lobbying occurred although the EU's competition policy was not challenged. The merger was rejected by the EU and although another later merger occurred, this showed that such a policy could be successful. In short, the same unions followed quite different policies but both were to some extent successful. Of the two strategies, the author comes out firmly in favour of the first, arguing that competition policy needs to be politicized in the European public sphere.

The book is a very useful, well-constructed and welcome contribution to a growing literature on the co-ordination of unions at the European level and is particularly valuable for its case studies. There are too few such studies, but Erne handles the complexities of his subject well, applies his theoretical framework

in a convincing way and provides enough well-marshalled detail to persuade the reader of at least parts of his case. The contribution is to show how national differences can be overcome and are not determinant in union affairs. His broader “democratizing” argument is also justified, but in a more qualified way. Whether the evidence he presents adds up to a significant contribution to democratizing the European project (an elite project if ever there has been one) is open to question. The question is one of scale. In other words, the activity is clearly “Euro democratic” but how typical are these cases? There have been many other cases where no such efforts have been made, after all. One interesting issue here is that of agency. As in almost all accounts in the industrial relations tradition, it would be helpful to read more about the political backgrounds, personal formations and even personalities of the key actors in these cases. Those involved were exceptional individuals and their interventions were, I suspect, important factors in achieving the outcomes he describes. It may, on the other hand, be that these individuals were simply part of a much wider activist stratum or milieu.

Both the author’s more optimistic evaluation and this reviewer’s questions reflect the wider and ongoing debate about the broad significance of these and similar events. On the evidence of this book, I feel sure that the author will be too intellectually honest to point to the reviewer’s nationality as evidence of the origins of his scepticism even if he is wrong to describe me as an expert advising the British unions in ABB rather than as a researcher working on behalf of the European Metalworkers’ Federation (p. 140).

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La face cachée des conditions de travail : les situations d’atteintes à la santé psychologique

Par Lucie France Dagenais en collaboration avec Sabrina Ruta. Cowansville : Éditions Yvon Blais, 2007, 350 p., ISBN 978-2-896351-07-7.

Le présent ouvrage traite des risques émergents des changements qui ont caractérisé le travail au cours des dernières décennies et de leurs effets sur la santé psychologique

des travailleurs. Selon l’auteure, les changements organisationnels récents favoriseraient l’émergence de facteurs de risques qui porteraient atteinte à la santé psychologique des travailleurs, plutôt qu’à leur santé physique. La relation entre ces « nouveaux » risques et leurs atteintes psychologiques serait encore mal cernée et mériterait d’être documentée davantage. Au surplus, l’auteure mentionne que, selon l’article 46 de la *Charte des droits et libertés de la personne du Québec* (L.R.Q., c. C-12) : « toute personne qui travaille a droit à des conditions de travail justes et raisonnables et qui respectent sa santé, sa sécurité et son intégrité physique ». Or, le manque d’information sur la relation entre ces « nouveaux » facteurs de risques et leurs atteintes à la santé mentale rendrait actuellement difficile l’interprétation et l’évaluation de cet article. Cet ouvrage représente donc une tentative de contextualisation de cette disposition. Il mène conséquemment à des recommandations quant au droit à la santé appliqué au domaine du travail en regard de ces risques émergents.

Le volume découle d’un travail de recherche et il se divise en deux parties. Dans la première partie, l’auteure recense les écrits sur les facteurs de risques au travail ainsi que leurs effets sur la santé des travailleurs. Cette recension permet subséquemment le développement d’une grille d’indicateurs de facteurs de risques à la santé associés aux récents changements organisationnels. Enfin, cette grille est utilisée pour réaliser une étude sur des dossiers d’enquête de la Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (appelée, ci-après, la Commission). Au total, 51 dossiers ont été l’objet d’analyse. Il s’agissait de dossiers de plaintes déposés à la Commission entre 1994 et 1999 par des victimes, des témoins ou des accusés d’un acte allégué de discrimination ou de harcèlement. L’analyse des dossiers a été complétée par des entrevues semi-dirigées menées auprès de 10 enquêteurs-médiateurs de la Commission. Pour conclure, l’auteure discute de l’obligation de protection et de mise en œuvre du droit à la santé. Elle traite de ce droit en regard des recours déjà existants et propose, le cas échéant, des solutions de rechange aux procédures déjà en place.

Ainsi, dans la première partie de l’ouvrage, l’auteure recense les principaux effets sur