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Mark Thompson

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Les systèmes de représentation au travail : à la  
mesure des réalités contemporaines ?  
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## Recensions / Book Reviews

### Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations, Vol. 17

Edited by David Lewin, Bruce Kaufman and Paul J. Gollan, Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2010, ISSN: 0742-6186; ISBN: 978-1-84950-932-9.

Many readers of this Journal are familiar with previous volumes in this series. The series typically presents an eclectic collection of papers on subjects in the field of industrial relations, broadly defined.

One role of a reviewer of such a volume is to observe what the collection says about the state of the field. It is no secret that industrial relations as a subject is under attack. The very term is being abandoned by professional associations and academic units in favour of "employment relations." Are these developments defensive manoeuvres to retain resources while the influence of unionism and collective bargaining are shrinking, or the adaptation of the field and its scholars to the changing economic, legal and political conditions within which industrial relations system operate?

Evidence of the latter perspective is the chapter "Paradigm Shifts in Industrial Relations" by G. Steven McMillan and Debra L. Casey. The authors analyze citation patterns in industrial relations journals and articles to describe the field by its parameters and paradigms, i.e. the accepted sets of research questions and methodologies over 40 years, 1968-2007 and sub-divided into shorter time periods. Their statistical analysis shows that for most of that period, industrial relations research was dominated by applied labour economics. For example, of 64 clusters of research topics during 40 years, 12 of the first 15, most important, were economic. The last three clusters concerned worker representation and mobilization. The authors conclude that the field has moved toward employment relations in the last decade,

with growing emphasis on the effects of human resource practices, workplace surveys, union and employer commitment and the like.

This paper is sobering for scholars who see their field as "industrial relations." Even more sobering is the lack of any new dominant paradigm to analyze employment relations in an era of union decline.

Further evidence of adaptation in the field is the paper by Rebecca Givan, Ariel Avgar and Mingwei Liu who examined the relationship between human resources practices and organizational performance in British healthcare facilities. Not only is this chapter evidence of the expansion of industrial relations, it produced results counter to other research on HR practices. The authors tested the impact of HR practices on patient satisfaction, medical outcomes and employee reactions. They found, for instance, that high involvement human resources practices were negatively related to patient satisfaction and mixed effects on medical outcomes. However, appraisal functions were associated with positive effects on financial management. This model is more nuanced than many others and produced challenging conclusions. One lesson for hospital management might be wary of adopting human resources practices developed in non-medical settings where fewer stakeholders are affected.

Two papers illustrate the possible impact of international labour standards/corporate codes of conduct on labour practices in developing countries. Again, the incorporation of these external rules in the regulation of employment is relatively new to industrial relations, reflecting the expansion of international trade.

One paper proposes an "institutional approach to labor-related human rights compliance." This model treats international legal norms as complex institutions, i.e. composed of rules, enforcement, social norms and actual behaviours. The

test cases are maquilas in Nicaragua and Honduras, and the behaviours are compulsory overtime. The author, Diane F. Frey, compares compliance with ILO standards that bind both countries. Unfortunately, the data on compliance is drawn from ILO committee reports, which are imprecise. Despite this drawback, the author found that institutions do matter. Workers in both countries are forced to work overtime, but Nicaraguans do so without apparent fear to dismissal for refusals. In Honduras, employer coercion to work overtime is much more common. The reasons for these differences range from national legislation to enforcement to judicial action to social conventions. Nicaraguan workers accept obligatory overtime while other rights are respected. Labour conditions in Honduras are harsh, and mandatory overtime is only one of many violations of labour rights.

This chapter does expand the scope of industrial relations research, but it leaves the reader to face a large number of variables without knowing their relative importance or impacts.

A continuation of the theme of internal standards is the paper by Chikako Oka on buyer influence on compliance with labour standards in the Cambodian garment industry. It examines the results of an ILO monitoring scheme accepted by the Cambodian government. The author focuses on pressure from reputation-conscious foreign buyers of Cambodian clothing. How do buyers influence employment conditions in the workplace? The main channel for buyer influence is the nature of their relationship with local producers, rather than formal compliance mechanisms. Collaborative relationships, where buyers deal directly with suppliers produce better compliance than market-based relationships which include independent agents representing foreign buyers.

These variables resemble some early industrial relations research, the impact

of product market competition on wages, collaborative labour-management relations and the like. The author relied on this dichotomy to explain different compliance rates, but does not fully explain the components of the contrasting buyer-supplier relationships.

The subjects of the three remaining papers in the collection are in more traditional streams of industrial relations research.

The card check has been a significant tool to assess support for unions seeking certification in Canada. Under this system, workers can indicate their preference for union representation by signing a card to that effect. The paper in this volume, written by Steven E. Abraham, Adrienne Eaton and Paula B. Voos, is a follow up of three previous studies comparing card checks and U.S. National Labor Relations Board elections. The data were obtained through telephone interviews with union representatives, employees and employers for the earlier papers, but not previously combined. Canadian experience has been positive, and the authors sought to compare those results with American data from 2003.

The goal of the paper is to determine whether card check organizing campaigns produce better labour relations climates and investor value than campaigns relying on elections. The first set of conclusions fall squarely in the mainstream of industrial relations research: card check campaigns that result in certification are associated with better labour relations climates. More surprisingly, a small sample of employers reported that investor reaction to card check campaign agreements also were positive. The authors present a comprehensive model of the probable contributions of a card check campaign to the subsequent labour relations climate and possible benefits to shareholders.

Monica Bielski Boris's paper examined the response of the largest U.S. national and international unions to sexual diversity

as represented by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members and seeks to explain differences among unions. Readers of this Journal will be familiar with this stream of research done in Canada. The author relied on work done in Canada, Europe and Australia to construct a protocol for telephone interviews with representatives of the 13 largest U.S. unions, accounting for 80 per cent of all members. Her theoretical framework was the extent to which structural and demographic differences among unions explained their varying responses to LGBT issues.

The results were consistent with previous research. Unions in the public sector and with large proportion of female members were more likely to be pro-active on LGBT matters. The author speculates about the impact of education, professions, etc. on the outcomes, but without the benefit of data or a more refined analysis.

A paper on the history of an employers' association in Columbus, Ohio, is remarkably relevant to contemporary industrial relations. The author, Howard R. Stanger, traces the evolution of the organization representing employers of master printers, from a "negotiator," posture to a "belligerent" one. Given the rise of belligerency by American employers in many industries, the fine-grained detail in this study explains the reasons for that evolution in a local employers' association with varying links to national and regional groups during its history. The introduction is an excellent review of the literature of employer associations in the U.S. Initially, the Columbus group sought accommodation with its unions in a sheltered product market and a shared occupational tradition. As Columbus became more integrated into the national economy, market pressures, translated into collective bargaining grew stronger. National organizations, often with a belligerent view of labour relations became more important. Heavy manufacturing, with its

style of industrial relations, expanded in the region. Finally, technological change in the printing industry undermined the status of printers, eliminated many small employers and ultimately decimated the unions. Is this a prototype for other industries in North America? The author suggests this might be true.

This story demonstrates that factors such as economic determinism, union short-sightedness and globalization which are used to explain the decline of American labour are too coarse to capture the subtleties of the shifts in bargaining power.

Overall, this book is not for the general reader. Individual chapters contribute considerably to the varied subsets of industrial relations research. Or is it employment relations research? Perhaps the answer will lie with the next volume.

**Mark Thompson**

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### **Mondialisation et recomposition des relations professionnelles**

Sous la direction de François Aballéa et Arnaud Mias, Paris : Octarès Éditions, 2010, 339 p., ISBN : 978-2-9153-4682-4.

Le présent ouvrage collectif est issu d'un colloque international qui s'est tenu à l'Université de Rouen les 19 et 20 juin 2008 sur le thème de la mondialisation et de ses effets sur les relations du travail et la représentation collective. Il réunit, dans un format « actes de congrès », les contributions de près de 40 chercheurs et universitaires, reconnus pour leurs travaux sur le sujet. L'objectif de l'ouvrage est de jeter un éclairage analytique sur les nouvelles dynamiques des relations du travail à l'ère de la mondialisation et de proposer « de nouvelles ouvertures théoriques et conceptuelles » (p. 2) de manière à rendre compte des transformations en cours.

Globalement, cet ouvrage s'inscrit dans la lignée des développements qui ont cours depuis le milieu des années 1990