

A Critique of Industrial Relations Theory Critique de la théorie des relations professionnelles

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Volume 37, numéro 1, 1982

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029230ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/029230ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Hameed, S. M. (1982). A Critique of Industrial Relations Theory. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 37(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.7202/029230ar>

Résumé de l'article

On tente d'examiner ici, de façon critique, les développements théoriques qui se sont produits dans le domaine des relations professionnelles. Pluralisme, notion de système et perspectives radicales sont identifiés comme les contributions principales aux divers courants de pensée qui existent dans la théorie des relations professionnelles de travail.

Le concept de pluralisme a été énoncé aux États-Unis par John R. Commons qui considérait la société comme une combinaison d'intérêts de groupes, chacun luttant pour atteindre ses objectifs. On retrouve implicitement dans cet aménagement pluraliste deux postulats importants: 1° le processus de concurrence entre les divers groupes assure un accommodement volontaire, la liberté et la stabilité dans le contexte politique et une situation de marché; 2° les différents groupes poursuivent leurs objectifs à l'intérieur de certaines limites et en disposant de freins et de poids qui créent une protection contre l'abus de pouvoir.

John T. Dunlop, en empruntant beaucoup à l'approche structurale fonctionnaliste de Talcott Parsons, a introduit la notion de système dans la théorie des relations professionnelles. On relève trois principaux supports dans la structure imaginée par Dunlop, soit les acteurs, les contextes ambiants et l'idéologie. Selon Dunlop, ce qui maintient le système des relations professionnelles, c'est une compréhension partagée, c'est-à-dire l'idéologie. En mettant l'accent sur les règles comme variable dépendante, Dunlop définit le sujet et les contours des relations professionnelles comme une discipline.

La théorie radicale des relations professionnelles possède plusieurs modalités, mais elle s'inspire d'abord de la pensée marxienne. Contrairement aux deux autres approches, la théorie radicale s'oppose aux fondements même du pouvoir capitaliste, soit la propriété et le contrôle des moyens de production. La théorie radicale des relations professionnelles adopte une approche sociétale de telle sorte qu'une théorie du syndicalisme ou de la démocratie syndicale se transforme bientôt dans un concept de contrôle social, d'exploitation et de conscience de classe radicale dont le but ultime est l'élimination du capitalisme.

L'article a fait ressortir les points forts et les points faibles de ces différentes approches de la théorie des relations professionnelles. Sans minimiser les mérites de chacune de ces formulations théoriques des relations professionnelles, on peut souligner que les pluralistes acceptent l'égalité des chances pour tous les groupes dans l'acquisition du pouvoir. Cependant, lorsqu'on tente d'appliquer ce concept à la notion de système, il devient impraticable parce que le pouvoir détenu par les propriétaires et les dirigeants ne peut être obtenu par le travail. C'est précisément pour ce motif que la théorie radicale insiste pour que le pouvoir soit inévitablement transmis à la classe ouvrière.

L'article reconnaît que les trois façons de concevoir théoriquement les relations professionnelles se réfèrent, dans une certaine mesure, au partage du pouvoir dans la société ou dans le régime des relations professionnelles. Cependant, le but de l'article est de faire de la notion de pouvoir le thème central de la formulation d'une structure théorique des relations professionnelles, d'où ressortent les quatre postulats suivants:

1. Dans la théorie de système, on devrait remplacer les règles et les procédures par la satisfaction des besoins humains. En conséquence, on considérerait les besoins humains comme une variable dépendante.
2. La satisfaction des besoins humains devrait être considérée comme une fonction du partage du pouvoir dans une multitude de contextes, comprenant les rapports non structurés au lieu du travail, sur le marché, dans le milieu social, dans les relations de travail proprement dites et dans l'environnement politique. Ainsi, le degré, le niveau et la nature de la distribution du pouvoir seraient considérés comme une variable indépendante et les contextes ambiants deviendraient des variables intervenantes.
3. Le conflit est engendré parce que certains individus et certains groupes détiennent pouvoir et contrôle sur les moyens de satisfaire les besoins humains, contrôle et pouvoir qui sont disproportionnés par rapport à ceux dont disposent d'autres individus et d'autres groupes.
4. Le partage du pouvoir disproportionné dans la société a sa source dans des facteurs de comportement personnel autant que dans l'histoire et la tradition.

A Critique of Industrial Relations Theory

Syed M.A. Hameed

The author critically examines theoretical developments in industrial relations. Pluralism, the systems approach and the radical perspectives are identified as the main contributions to the stream of thought in industrial relations theory.

Attempts have been made in this paper to provide an overview of theoretical developments in Britain, the United States and Canada which seem to open new vistas for conceptual synthesis and possible inter-disciplinary cooperation in working out a research methodology, applicable both to organizations and societies at different stages of development. The concept of power is put forth as a viable and potentially operational tool in bridging the gap between organizational behaviour and industrial relations. A major part of this paper is devoted to analyzing the trends and developments in industrial relations theory which, in my opinion, have taken three distinct and identifiable approaches:

Pluralist approach:

The perspective of pluralism was first developed in the United States, by John R. Commons¹ who regarded society as a composite of a multitude of interest groups, each competing to obtain its goals. He identified the process of conflict and compromise among these groups in the labour market, product market and money market. Pluralism as expounded by Commons became widely accepted among British industrial relations theorists, notable amongst them being Allan Flanders².

Systems approach:

While the pluralist approach is societal in scope, systems theory deals specifically with industrial relations. John T. Dunlop borrowed heavily from the Parsonian model³ to develop a systems framework which is

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broader than the collective bargaining process but narrower in scope when applied to the analysis of social institutions other than industrial relations.

Radical approach:

Systems approach is consistent with managerial interests, whereas radical theory advocates the economic and political interests of the working groups⁴. Compared to the systems approach, radical theory is closer to reality, as it does not assume consensus among management, unions and government over procedural rules.

It may be observed that pluralism and systems perspectives have many commonalities: they derive their conceptual and philosophical substance from a capitalistic system of production and a liberal political ideology; they believe that liberty should be upheld even at the expense of social inequality; they also repose their faith in institutionalization of conflict through legal foundations. But the main difference, as I see it, is in terms of theoretical scope and application. I will analyze each of them separately to bring out their respective contributions to industrial relations theory and point out certain theoretical inadequacies which lead to a new synthesis in the concept of power.

PLURALISM AS A THEORETICAL CONCEPT IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

In his monumental work, *Legal Foundations of Capitalism*, John R. Commons historically examined the Anglo-American experience in which sovereignty gradually became limited and individual liberties became expanded. The process of social development through customs and common law ensured distribution of political power and private economic power amongst a multitude of groups which made conflict atomistic; and resolution of conflict became possible through a bargaining relationship⁵.

Progressive legislation and public policy, from 1850 onward, have helped Western Capitalism in its 'Self-Recovery' and 'Forced Recovery'. Through corporate and property laws, ownership became diffused and through collective bargaining, conflict became institutionalized. The concept of pluralism thus became relevant for the analysis of social processes in the broader society as well as in industrial relations.

Collective bargaining became a specialized process for resolving conflict between labour and management but, according to Commons, there is bargaining involved in all social relationships, such as those between buyers and sellers, landlords and tenants, money lenders and borrowers. These and other pressure groups help the government and market processes to ensure

voluntary accommodation, freedom and stability in the society. Implicit in this pluralist arrangement of the society is a notion that groups pursue their goals within limits, and with proper checks and balances there emerges a safeguard against abuse of power. "Though such a theory need not imply a roughly equal balance of power between interest groups (though this has been a common presumption) Pluralism does tend to deny the existence of a small group of dominant interest groups with broadly common interests which tend to form a stable coalition along class lines. In other words, Pluralism tends to reject the notion of a ruling class or a series of closely aligned strategic elites which dominate society and the state on the basis of private property."⁶

Pluralism as a macro concept of the society, offers an excellent theoretical base for industrial relations. It provides analytical tools for the understanding of fundamental western values reflected in the liberal democratic political system and free market capitalistic system of production. The function, structure and philosophy of the trade union movement, in the context of these basic values, lend support to a system of free collective bargaining, although other forms of bi-lateral or tri-lateral mechanisms of conflict resolution, including several variations of industrial democracy, are not precluded.

The conceptual implication of Pluralism, as I see it, is to be found in a logical integration of several partial theories of industrial relations, such as a theory of the labour movement, a theory of collective bargaining and industrial conflict, a theory of wage determination on one hand and a theory of society on the other. However, having developed several positive dimensions of Pluralism, one must also examine it critically for its relevance to research and to public policy, and for its wider application to systems which are unlike western capitalistic societies.

A CRITIQUE OF PLURALISM

In assessing Pluralism and its theoretical rigor, the first criterion is to examine its explanatory power as a theory of the society. Stephen J. Frenkel writes that "The Pluralist theory of society is essentially a theory of politics. It is reasonable as far as it goes. But does it go far enough?"⁷ Because it envisages a multitude of pressure groups, it leaves itself open to questions of inequality of power among these groups. Some groups, by themselves or in alliance with others, may wield an influence on public policy which may not be in the interest of other groups. Furthermore, as a political theory of society, it is deficient because legislation and other public policy decisions are not entirely dependent on pressure group politics and lobbying, but work

through an intricate and complex process of political party structure, interest groups within the legislature, executive council, civil service and perceptions of individuals in power. "These complexities suggest that the Pluralist view of politics requires considerable elaboration."⁸

Pluralism as an economic theory of society has found adherents like Kerr *et al.* who talk of pluralistic industrialism, projected as "a society where diversity and uniformity still struggle for supremacy and where managers and managed still carry on their endless tug of war; but where the titanic battles which mark our period of transition have already passed into the pages of history."⁹ The inequality of power which was left vague in the political theory of Pluralism is also underplayed in Kerr's interpretation of declining conflict among the major groups in society, namely, labour and management.

Assuming equality of power or disappearance of conflict among groups is unrealistic in a practical world. In a judgemental or moralistic sense "the real difficulty of the Pluralist ethic lies in its incompleteness."¹⁰ The Pluralists have an obvious choice between seeking greater social equality or greater avenues of liberty. But it appears that there is a built-in bias for liberty at the expense of equality.

Pluralism as a theory of society fails on three major counts:

- (1) As a political theory it assumes equality of power amongst various constituent groups in the society which help the government in evolving a public policy based on mutuality and consensus. This assumption is unrealistic and erroneous.
- (2) As an economic theory, Pluralism underplays conflict among various economic groups in the society whereas history reveals a continuing battle over scarce resources. Conflict is in fact a natural product of scarcity.
- (3) Undoubtedly, liberty and freedom are coveted goals and important elements in the moralistic philosophy of Pluralism, but if liberty is pursued at the expense of egalitarianism it gives birth to an ethical dilemma. Why should one group enjoy more power, freedom or privilege in the society than any other group? Pluralism shows bias or an almost deliberate vagueness on this issue.

There is a conceptual and logical continuity between Pluralism as a theory of society and Pluralism as a theory of industrial relations. As indicated earlier, there is an explicit reference to Pluralism as a bargaining model. Because there is a multitude of interest groups in the society, they learn to accommodate through a negotiational psychology. In the realm of

industrial relations, the specific accommodative process is collective bargaining. The success of this process in resolving conflict between labour and management depends on an unconditional acceptance of certain broad societal values such as industrial control by minority private property interests, managerial prerogatives and bargaining in good faith. Furthermore, "The Pluralist bargaining model appears to assume that there is generally (though not always) room for concessions."¹¹ If any of these elements are not present, the bargaining process may run into a serious impasse. For instance, if the unions begin to question the minority private property rights, Pluralism as a theory of industrial relations begins to crack up. Even a minor disagreement over the list of bargainable issues could bring about serious threat of economic sanctions.

Stephen Frenkel suggests that "the Pluralist theory of bargaining requires greater specification of the contingent environments which may endorse its validity."¹² The statement implies that 'contingent environments' are dynamic; therefore it is difficult to validate the Pluralist theory. However, the inter-relationship between the changing societal environment and the bargaining arrangement makes the Pluralist theory broad enough in scope to integrate different theoretical strands which can facilitate research and analysis. It is granted that the hypotheses thus generated will have to conform with the Liberal-Pluralist values discussed earlier.

SYSTEMS THEORY OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Two important facets of Pluralism must be acknowledged before making a departure to examine systems theory. First, the early development of industrial relations theory, based on Pluralism, confined itself to the analysis and understanding of trade union structure and philosophy and the functioning of the collective bargaining process. The field of study was dominated by empiricism and public policy considerations with an "almost contemptuous disregard of theory"¹³. Secondly, there was an implicit assumption that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with prevailing institutional practices. The second element provided an explicit support to managerial theory¹⁴.

A major theoretical development in industrial relations become evident with Dunlop's model, borrowing heavily from the structural functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons which viewed society as "self-regulating and self-maintaining"¹⁵. Dunlop's contribution is in applying social systems analysis to industrial relations by developing "an analytical construct which 'produces' rules that 'govern' the production system."¹⁶ There are three main constructs of Dunlop's framework, namely actors, contexts and ideal-

ogies. The group of actors consists of workers and their organizations, managers and their organizations, and government and its agencies. These actors interact within a technological, market, budgetary and power context to make rules such as agreements, statutes, awards and regulations. What binds the industrial relations system together is a shared understanding which Dunlop calls ideology. In his framework, rules are a dependent variable. Blain and Gennard¹⁷ have expressed this relationship algebraically:

$$r = f(a, t, e, s, i)$$

where

r = the rules of the industrial relations system

a = the actors

t = the technical context of the workplace

e = the market context or budgetary restraints

s = the power context and the status of the parties

i = the ideology of the system

Dunlop's emphasis on rules was echoed in England by Flanders, who avoided some of the obscurities of the structural-functional approach. The Dunlop-Flanders contribution is significant in two major respects:

- (1) They provided industrial relations with a theory which made it a distinct discipline. This advantage did not exist under Pluralism, which was on one hand, a theory of the society and on the other a bargaining theory, not broad enough to encompass several aspects of unstructured work relationships. By focusing on the web of rules, Dunlop and Flanders defined the subject matter and contours of industrial relations as a discipline.
- (2) The Dunlop-Flanders theory helped to break away from Pluralist empiricism, which was confined to issues of collective bargaining, unionism and arbitration proceedings. Research became broader in scope due to a conceptual framework which included environmental context, ideology and rules.

Alton Craig¹⁸ refined the Dunlopian framework in at least three major dimensions:

- (1) He introduced 'withinputs' which included the goals, values and power of the actors in the industrial relations system.
- (2) Outputs of the industrial relations system were shown to have an impact on the environmental inputs through a feedback mechanism.
- (3) Instead of the technological, market and budgetary context in Dunlop's framework, Craig defined broad societal environment in terms of economic, social, political and legal inputs into the IR system.

In line with Gerald Somers'¹⁹ thinking, Hameed attempted to combine Dunlop's functional structuralism with behaviourism. Somers had emphasized that for industrial relations to become truly multi-disciplinary, it was important to unite the theoretical and research endeavours of economist-lawyers (externalists) with sociologists-psychologists (internalists). Recognizing that in the Dunlop and Craig models there was no behavioural explanation for individual inducement to join the industrial relations system, Hameed²⁰ developed an integrated theory with personality-behavioral elements combined with environmental inputs. He developed the following four equations which constitute a conceptual framework, applicable to the economic, social, political and legal systems in any society:

$$I_1 = f(P)$$

$$C = f(I_1, I_2, I_3, E)$$

$$E = f(I_1, I_2, I_3)$$

$$O = f(I_1, I_2, I_3, E, C)$$

where

P = personality factors, including knowledge, education and past experience helping in the establishment of an inducement-response equilibrium;

I_1 = inputs i.e. participation of individuals;

I_2 = inputs from other systems in the same society such as economic social, political, legal systems;

I_3 = inputs from outside the society;

C = conversion mechanism;

E = internal environment of the industrial relations system under investigation;

O = output of the industrial relations system.

A CRITIQUE OF THE SYSTEMS THEORY

In developing a critique of the systems theory, two observations are essential at the outset:

- (1) It generally has received a wide acclaim for being able to explain a variety and range of facts in industrial relations, and therefore has been considered beyond reproach or criticism.
- (2) Its strength or weakness is inexorably linked with the Pluralist assumptions and, as such, all the credit and blame that have been attached to

Pluralism are equally applicable to systems theory. However, I will attempt to provide an appraisal of the systems theory, separately from Pluralism.

The most crucial and fundamental criticism of systems theory is found in its concept of the ideology which supposedly is shared by all the actors. But the question is: "Is it really possible to argue that there are commonly held values in relations to the distribution of income and power within any industrial relations system?"²¹ The ideology that the systems theory seems to hold out as commonly acceptable by all the actors is in fact "consistent with managerial interests"²². In some cases, it may also be argued that maintenance of industrial peace and promotion of productivity are objectives also shared by the government. But the worker interest with respect to distribution of income and power or industrial peace is at variance with both management and government.

A related criticism to the one above is the inability of systems theory to deal with conflict and change. Dunlop could not avoid it because he depended on Parsonian analysis, in which conflict is not adequately incorporated²³. Parsons' preoccupation with the forces which hold the society together made him underplay disruptive or conflictive elements in society. Order is considered normative and desirable; Disorder or disension is deviant behaviour and therefore must be avoided. Such assumptions make systems theory inoperative in an empirical world in which consensus does not prevail all the time. According to Fatchett "one is still faced with the fundamental, consensual nature of the model, with its theoretical, and to an extent, ideological inability to deal with conflict."²⁴ It makes the systems approach conservative and biased towards stability rather than change.

The systems approach lacks personality-behavioural dimension to the extent that no theoretical explanation is provided for the way in which particular actors behave in the system. Their motives and interaction patterns, in both the structured and unstructured workgroup relations, are lost in the preoccupation for structural determinism. The systems approach sheds no light on trade union behaviour. Walton and McKersie²⁵, through their organizational behaviour approach to labour negotiations, made a valuable contribution to industrial relations theory and research. But unfortunately there has been no subsequent "effort to bridge the gap between the typical IR approaches and those of the behavioural sciences — this despite the fact that within the behavioural sciences there has been continuing interest in conflict in areas outside IR."²⁶

The systems approach is not predictive; it says little about the future of industrial relations. It does not generate causal propositions such as: if A changes then B changes. This criticism can be countered by going back to

the Blain and Gennard equation of Dunlop's framework, which shows a causal relationship between rules, actors, context and ideology. But if we examine the hierarchies of actors, complexities of technical, market, and budgetary contexts and the vagueness or realism of consensus on ideology, we cannot generate simple and operational hypotheses, indicating relationships. It makes the systems approach more of an heuristic device than an operational theory.

RADICAL THEORY OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The radical theory of industrial relations has several variations but is primarily inspired by Marxian thought²⁷. As opposed to the liberal-pluralist or systems approach, radical theory objects to the capitalistic source of power, namely, ownership and control extends beyond the corporate limits to the labour market itself, where the worker has to sell labour for his livelihood. Undoubtedly, the capitalistic system allows certain fundamental rights, such as the right to associate, which make it possible for the workers to form trade unions and assert a degree of power through the process of collective bargaining. However, John R. Commons argued that unions in the capitalistic system have accepted the private property rights of owners and have no intentions to take over the management. They have learnt to bargain within an institutional framework which limits the bargaining scope to the job territory. Radical theory disagrees with this contention and points out that trade unions in the capitalistic system become "the means by which 'control is wielded not by the rank and file but for and on behalf of them, and moreover, is a source of control over them in the interests of officials and external parties'." ²⁸

The State, far from being neutral, helps in the consolidation of power for the employers and managers. Policies of economic growth and programs to counter the business cycles inherent in the capitalistic system have gradually increased government intervention in labour-management relations. This intervention has taken several forms which have directly or indirectly helped the capitalistic class. In Britain, the State has managed to "integrate the union with the State, thus to make them function as a 'mechanism of social control', i.e. a 'means of integrating the working class into capitalist society'." ²⁹ Richard Hyman maintains that although unions have been successfully incorporated with the State, the rank and file continue to resist the strategy of incorporation³⁰.

Hyman argues that the institution of collective bargaining is not functioning well in several countries because of the "international accentuation of the economic contradictions of capitalism"³¹ and "the suppression of

workers' discontent through a generation of post-war 'job regulation' ''³². As a result of growing worker discontent, the militancy is assuming political dimensions with a view to eliminate capitalism. However, union leaders, apprehensive of this impending confrontation between the consolidation of the rank-and-file and the capitalist classes, would try to refuse the situation. What Hyman is accentuating in his argument is the absence of union democracy, which is responsible for the gap between rank-and-file members and the union officials; the rank-and-file remain potentially radical while the union officials retain their interest in collective bargaining and therefore are willing to collaborate with the Government.

Hyman's thesis may be further elaborated by what he calls "control processes" which work from within the trade unions through the control exercised by the union officials and external forms of control which emanate from capitalist motivation for profit maximization and government's concern for economic growth and avoidance of business cycles. Despite these control processes, the underlying assumption of the radical theory remains that there is conflict between classes due to ownership and control of the means of production, buttressed by market conditions. The development of the working-class consciousness in the capitalistic system is tenuous because it vacillates through time between radicalism and subordination. For instance, strikes and other expressions of grievance often may be motivated by economic factors but may at times assume potentially radical or political expression.

In summary, it may be pointed out that the radical theory of industrial relations takes a macro or societal approach, in which a theory of unionism or union democracy soon develops into a concept of social control, exploitation and radical class consciousness with an ultimate goal of eliminating capitalism. By contrast, Pluralist theory of industrial relations starts with a liberal-democratic ideology but narrows it down to unionism and collective bargaining.

A CRITIQUE OF THE RADICAL THEORY

The greatest contribution of the radical theory is its delineation and treatment of ideology and conflict; both of these concepts are inadequately handled in the systems theory. The radical theory rightly interprets the empirical world, where the actors do not hold common ideology (as a result of which there is irreconcilable conflict). However, it is the idea of reconcilability, compromise and accommodation, between classes in the radical theory and among a multitude of groups in the Pluralist theory, which is a

behaviouristic contention and evidently in search of empirical evidence. The basic question is: How do individuals and groups behave when they are confronted with conflicting interests? The radical theory will maintain that a class struggle is inevitable because the means of production are controlled by the capitalist class. Undoubtedly, we have witnessed such struggle in the real world. But we also have witnessed the resilience of the capitalistic system, in which workers have made economic gains as well as political gains in the form of the right to organize and the right to strike. The radical theory overlooks the flexibility of the capitalistic system, in which unions have acquired a consumptionist function which bolsters the economy and therefore are regarded as positive institutions in the society.

Radical theory, as expounded by Hyman, has overplayed the gap between the rank-and-file and the union officials. Although he concedes that workers in the capitalistic system are incorporated with the state, he insists that workers still are potentially radical. It is the trade union officials who are interested in maintaining the collective bargaining relationship. In my opinion, there are problems of union democracy but they are due to membership apathy and not always due to the vicious control of the union officials.

Hyman, in the development of his radical theory of industrial relations, has also neglected to bring out the organic relationship which exists between the labour-oriented political parties and the trade union movement. Many of these political parties have voluntarily accepted the liberal-pluralistic ideology and do not consider a class revolution as an inevitable social phenomenon.

Radical theory fails to analyze the new social forces which have modified the laissez-faire capitalistic system to a welfare state. Undoubtedly, there still are inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power, but various social security measures, minimum wage laws, unemployment insurance and protective labour standard legislation have improved the socio-economic conditions of the working class to the extent that there is a sizeable and growing middle class.

In the radical theory, the "rank-and-file are presented in a romanticised and sentimental way for, according to Hyman, it is they alone who have stood up to the increasing encroachment of the State and incorporation of the trade unions into it."³³ This bias is a serious impediment to an objective treatment of a theoretical concept.

There is an evident misperception by radical theorists of all industrial conflict. Strikes, lockouts and sit-ins are interpreted as symptomatic of "new found political consciousness"³⁴ leading to an inevitable "revolution-

ary socialism”³⁵. There may at times be political overtones in an industrial strife, but the intent of the workers is misconstrued as being revolutionary or directed towards a virtual takeover of the plant.

Lastly, I feel that a radical theory which predicts “the abolition of industrial relations as it exists today through working class struggle”³⁶ hardly can be relevant as an industrial relations theory for the capitalistic society. It can be a theory of the society, which is what it is.

CONCEPT OF POWER AS A THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS

The liberal-pluralist approach makes it possible for all groups to acquire power by giving them equal opportunity. However, when this concept is applied in systems theory it becomes impractical because the power which owners and managers possess cannot be acquired by labour. In the systems theory, management is vested with the power to control and develop procedural rules which are biased in their favour and not compatible with the goals of the trade union movement. That is where the systems theory is at variance with the radical thinking in which power must inevitably pass on to the labouring class. The purpose of this discussion is to show that all three approaches make some oblique or even direct reference to power distribution in the society or industrial relations system. But none of them makes power a central theme in its analysis.

Gerald Somers used ‘exchange’ as a conceptually viable theme for uniting behaviorists and economist-lawyers³⁷. I visualize a greater potential in using ‘power’ as a meaningful concept in bringing about a theoretical synthesis. “In the recent industrial relations and industrial sociological literature there has undoubtedly been a revival of interest in, and recognition of, the salience of power as a major explanatory variable in research investigations at workplace level.”³⁸ However, according to Michael Poole, despite this renewed interest in power, the concept has been “loosely and inconsistently formulated”³⁹. Its understanding and analysis both at the societal as well as the organizational and bureaucratic levels demand a concerted effort by all social scientists, including what Somers has called the internalists and externalists.

Having surveyed three major theoretical approaches to industrial relations, I want to develop the basic contention of this paper, which is to place power as a central theme in the formulation of a general and comparative framework for industrial relations. Primarily, the concept of power will provide a link between pluralism, systems approach and radical theory by analyzing human behaviour, motivation, perception and attitude, elements

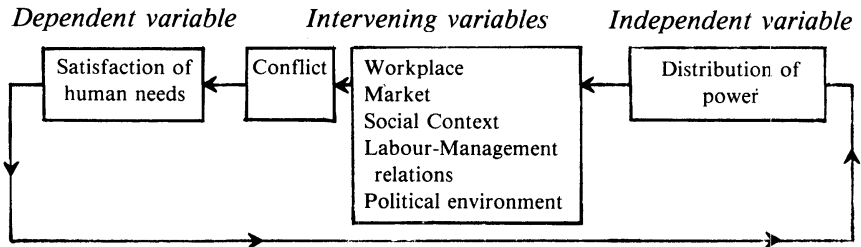
which have been neglected, underplayed or misinterpreted in these theories. It also will develop a theoretical synthesis in analyzing conflict and social relations in a non-ideological and neutral frame of reference.

Using “power as a strategic explanatory dimension for an analysis of workplace industrial relations”⁴⁰ is not new; Weber’s reference to power in bureaucracy and Tannenbaum’s attempt to operationalize the concept of power in a variety of organizations have existed in the sociology of work for a long time. However, its use in labour-management relations and in the development of a general theory of industrial relations has only been alluded to, not rigorously employed.

It is my understanding that pluralists and radicals have one thing in common, apart from their obvious and oft-repeated differences; that is their inability to develop a viable theory of industrial relations and collective bargaining. On the other end of the continuum systems adherents, following Dunlop’s framework, have difficulty in broadening the industrial relations systems framework to encompass social relations in the society at large. Perhaps it is a bit premature to talk of a general theory of industrial relations, collective bargaining, work science and society in precise, logical and coherent statements or propositions, but I believe a tentative beginning has to be made. I venture to offer the following constructs of a conceptual framework:

- (1) The focus of the systems theory should be changed from rules and procedures to satisfaction of human needs. Human needs therefore should be viewed as a dependent variable.
- (2) Satisfaction of human needs should be considered a function of power distribution in a variety of contexts, including the matrix of unstructured relationships at the workplace, market, social context, structured and formal labour-management relations and political environment. Thus the degree, level and nature of power distribution should be considered an independent variable and the contexts should become intervening variables.
- (3) Conflict is generated because certain individuals and groups wield power and control over means of satisfying human needs which are disproportionate in relation to what other individuals and groups possess.
- (4) Disproportionate power distribution in the society has its roots in personality-behavioural factors as well as in history and tradition.

The statements outlined above are generalized and contain common elements for developing theories of collective bargaining, industrial relations, wage determination, human motivation, conflict and society. Schematically, they may be presented as follows:



Several academic disciplines including sociology, psychology, economics, history, political science and industrial relations can pool their resources to analyze and operationalize sources, motive and nature of power in the society. If their analysis is to terminate with conflict, conflict resolution or bargaining theory, conflict can become a dependent variable, instead of being an intervening variable. If they are interested in extending their analysis to theories of motivation, industrial relations, wage determination or society, they should utilize conflict and other contexts as intervening variables and treat satisfaction of human needs as their dependent variable.

CONCLUSIONS

I have examined pluralism, the systems approach and the radical perspective for their contributions to industrial relations theory. Although some writers have argued that there are clear advantages in unifying conceptual and empirical research efforts under pluralism and radical theory⁴¹, they have not developed a central focus for such a unifying approach. For that reason and for reasons of theoretical synthesis in social sciences, I wish to argue that by borrowing from earlier and contemporary writers such as Weber, Marx, Tannenbaum, Mills, Winter, Clark and others we can develop a general theory of industrial relations and society by using power as a central theme. The immediate advantage will be to benefit from conflict research developed in OB and combine it with IR⁴², although I prefer to go beyond this immediate advantage to suggest that in the analysis of power there is a strong potential for unifying all the social sciences.

Footnotes

- 1 COMMONS, John R., *Legal Foundations of Capitalism*, Macmillan, 1924, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1957.
- 2 FRENKEL, Stephen J., "Industrial Relations Theory: A Critical Discussion", Research Paper 3/1977. See Footnote No. 40.
- 3 FATCHETT, Derek, "Trends & Development in Industrial Relations Theory", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Spring 1976, p. 53.
- 4 WOOD, Stephen, "The Radicalization of Industrial Relations Theory", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1976.
- 5 See Kenneth H. PARSONS, "The Basis of Commons' Progressive Approach to Public Policy", in G.G. Somers, ed., *Labour, Management & Social Policy: Essays in Commons Tradition*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963.
- 6 FRENKEL, Stephen J., *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 9 KERR *et al.*, *Industrialism & Industrial Management: The Problems of Labor & Management in Economic Growth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 2.
- 10 FRENKEL, Stephen J., *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 13 FATCHETT, Derek, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- 14 GUEST, D. and D. FATCHETT, *Worker Participation: Individual Control & Performance*, I.P.M., 1974.
- 15 ROCHER, G., *Talcot Parsons & American Sociology*, Nelson, 1974.
- 16 FRENKEL, Stephen J., *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- 17 FATCHETT, Derek, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 18 CRAIG, A.W., "A Model for The Analysis of Industrial Relations Systems", in H.C. Jain, ed., *Canadian Labour & Industrial Relations*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill, 1975.
- 19 SOMERS, Gerald, "Bargaining Power and Industrial Relations Theory", University of Wisconsin, 1962.
- 20 HAMEED, Syed M.A., "An Integrated Theory of Industrial Relations, in S.M.A. Hameed, ed., *Canadian Industrial Relations*, Toronto, Butterworth & Co. (Canada) Ltd., 1975 and S.M.A. HAMEED, "A Theory of Responsive Bargaining", *Labor Law Journal*, August 1974 & *IRRA Spring Proceedings*, 1973.
- 21 FATCHETT, Derek, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 25 WALTON & MCKERSIE, *Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations*.
- 26 STRAUSS, George, "The Study of Conflict: Hope for a New Synthesis Between Industrial Relations & Organizational Behavior?", *Proceedings of the 29th Meeting of the IRRA*, p. 329.
- 27 FRENKEL, Stephen J., *op. cit.* See Footnote No. 18.
- 28 WOOD, Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 37 SOMERS, Gerald, *op. cit.*

38 POOLE, Michael, "A Power Analysis of Workplace Labour Relations", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Autumn 1976, p. 21.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

41 See the concluding section in Stephen J. FRENKEL, *op. cit.*

42 STRAUSS, George, *op.cit.*

Critique de la théorie des relations professionnelles

On tente d'examiner ici, de façon critique, les développements théoriques qui se sont produits dans le domaine des relations professionnelles. Pluralisme, notion de système et perspectives radicales sont identifiés comme les contributions principales aux divers courants de pensée qui existent dans la théorie des relations professionnelles de travail.

Le concept de pluralisme a été énoncé aux États-Unis par John R. Commons qui considérait la société comme une combinaison d'intérêts de groupes, chacun luttant pour atteindre ses objectifs. On retrouve implicitement dans cet aménagement pluraliste deux postulats importants: 1° le processus de concurrence entre les divers groupes assure un accommodement volontaire, la liberté et la stabilité dans le contexte politique et une situation de marché; 2° les différents groupes poursuivent leurs objectifs à l'intérieur de certaines limites et en disposant de freins et de poids qui créent une protection contre l'abus de pouvoir.

John T. Dunlop, en empruntant beaucoup à l'approche structurale fonctionnaliste de Talcott Parsons, a introduit la notion de système dans la théorie des relations professionnelles. On relève trois principaux supports dans la structure imaginée par Dunlop, soit les acteurs, les contextes ambiants et l'idéologie. Selon Dunlop, ce qui maintient le système des relations professionnelles, c'est une compréhension partagée, c'est-à-dire l'idéologie. En mettant l'accent sur les règles comme variable dépendante, Dunlop définit le sujet et les contours des relations professionnelles comme une discipline.

La théorie radicale des relations professionnelles possède plusieurs modalités, mais elle s'inspire d'abord de la pensée marxienne. Contrairement aux deux autres approches, la théorie radicale s'oppose aux fondements même du pouvoir capitaliste, soit la propriété et le contrôle des moyens de production. La théorie radicale des relations professionnelles adopte une approche sociétale de telle sorte qu'une théorie du syndicalisme ou de la démocratie syndicale se transforme bientôt dans un concept de contrôle social, d'exploitation et de conscience de classe radicale dont le but ultime est l'élimination du capitalisme.

L'article a fait ressortir les points forts et les points faibles de ces différentes approches de la théorie des relations professionnelles. Sans minimiser les mérites de chacune de ces formulations théoriques des relations professionnelles, on peut souligner que les pluralistes acceptent l'égalité des chances pour tous les groupes dans l'acquisition du pouvoir. Cependant, lorsqu'on tente d'appliquer ce concept à la notion de système, il devient impraticable parce que le pouvoir détenu par les propriétaires et les dirigeants ne peut être obtenu par le travail. C'est précisément pour ce motif que la théorie radicale insiste pour que le pouvoir soit inévitablement transmis à la classe ouvrière.

L'article reconnaît que les trois façons de concevoir théoriquement les relations professionnelles se réfèrent, dans une certaine mesure, au partage du pouvoir dans la société ou dans le régime des relations professionnelles. Cependant, le but de l'article est de faire de la notion de pouvoir le thème central de la formulation d'une structure théorique des relations professionnelles, d'où ressortent les quatre postulats suivants:

1. Dans la théorie de système, on devrait remplacer les règles et les procédures par la satisfaction des besoins humains. En conséquence, on considérerait les besoins humains comme une variable dépendante.
2. La satisfaction des besoins humains devrait être considérée comme une fonction du partage du pouvoir dans une multitude de contextes, comprenant les rapports non structurés au lieu du travail, sur le marché, dans le milieu social, dans les relations de travail proprement dites et dans l'environnement politique. Ainsi, le degré, le niveau et la nature de la distribution du pouvoir seraient considérés comme une variable indépendante et les contextes ambiants deviendraient des variables intervenantes.
3. Le conflit est engendré parce que certains individus et certains groupes détiennent pouvoir et contrôle sur les moyens de satisfaire les besoins humains, contrôle et pouvoir qui sont disproportionnés par rapport à ceux dont disposent d'autres individus et d'autres groupes.
4. Le partage du pouvoir disproportionné dans la société a sa source dans des facteurs de comportement personnel autant que dans l'histoire et la tradition.