

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*The Social Organization of Industrial Conflict. Control and Resistance in the Workplace*, by P.K. Edwards and Hugh Scullion, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982, XIII, 314 pp. ISBN 0-631-13127-2.

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**The Social Organization of Industrial Conflict. Control and Resistance in the Workplace**, by P.K. Edwards and Hugh Scullion, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982, XIII, 314 pp., ISBN 0-631-13127-2

This study was done in the late 1970s and deals with a range of British plants selected according to their patterns of shopfloor control: two plants from each of two engineering companies, two plants in the clothing industry, a process factory. The engineering companies differed much from each other in how much actual control of operations remained in the hands of the shopfloor and how managerial control was exercised. The two clothing plants, a hosiery factory and an underwear factory, both operated on straight piecework and they were marked by intense managerial control over all aspects of work and by a limited union presence on the shopfloor. However, they differed from each other in the forms of control exerted over men and women. In the process factory a joint consultation was practiced. Workers were rewarded quite well for performing mundane tasks in a hot and noisy environment and subject to the substantial dislocation of continuous shift work (p. 51). This shows what kind of a broad spectrum of social organization cases was included. The main task taken by the authors was to «compare different factories to explore the ways in which workplace behaviour is constituted into various 'forms of conflict' under various types of control systems' (p. 52).

According to the authors, any labour process contains elements of co-operation as well as conflict, and it is necessary to consider both these strands how they gain significance in various settings. The dominant form of control exercised in a given setting is the major factor. «By taking account of patterns of control we, then, can explain why certain activities are possible only in certain circumstances (...). The analyst needs a measure of the ability of workers to resist management and to attain their own ends» (p. 271). It is necessary to look into multi-faceted nature of workers' relations with manage-

ment; the struggle for control may be conducted very differently under the same general type of management structure (p. 273).

The frontier of factory control is much shaped by the interaction between employer strategies and the particular strategies followed by workers. These both kinds of strategies affect each other and produce some particular patterns of control. «Workplace activities have to be related to the frontier of control before their significance as forms of 'conflict' can be understood» (p. 274). Forms of social control over the structural constraints are crucial in understanding how the constraints work in practice. Within the existing constraints, the management rules primary among them, the workers have some freedom to act and they choose between various alternatives depending on the variety of circumstances. «The shopfloor has to develop a very particular form of control before certain forms of action, and the systems of argument that go with them, become possible» (pp. 279-80). Actions and structure interact and actors have certain freedom of choice occurring in the context of constraints located at various levels of the structure. At the most general level the structure of market relationships permits some forms of workplace control to develop and inhibit others (p. 280).

The main point made by the authors is that «patterns of behaviour reflect patterns of control, and that actions gain their significance as forms of conflict within particular structures of control» (p. 282). The biased, inoperable or counter-productive policy suggestions arise very often from the neglect to recognize the underlying patterns of control. It is necessary to accept the fact that conflict is part of a continuing struggle of vested interests and collective strivings. «The struggle for control takes a variety of forms and has a variety of consequences, and it is the outcome of the struggle, and not the implementation of this or that policy recommendation, which is crucial» (p. 284). Conflict must be understood in context, and the

general socio-economic situation of the country plays a major role in this respect.

The focus on conflict may lead in sociological research to the neglect of the phenomenon of co-operation and this study has suffered to some extent in this respect. The factories selected for this study appear to be relatively 'peaceful' and the assumption that some elements of conflict have to be found in them seems to be a little risky. In the subtitle of the book the word 'resistance' was included but in the content not much justification for it can be located. Probably the authors would gain more by selecting for their study the much clearer an convincing cases of conflict-ridden factories.

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**Work Hazards and Industrial Conflict, by**

Carl Gersuny, University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H., 1981, 162 pp., Lib. of Congress Catalog Card No 80-51506

Ce volume, à saveur et contenu exclusivement américains, tente de situer le problème de la santé et de la sécurité du travail dans le contexte plus large du conflit industriel, voire même de la lutte des classes. Le premier chapitre intitulé **A Part of the Class Struggle** pose la problématique de base qui sert à l'analyse de tout le volume. Les chapitres 2 à 5 décrivent et analysent le problème des dangers du travail aux États-Unis et particulièrement dans les filiales de la Nouvelle Angleterre au début du siècle. Le chapitre 2 décrit le climat des relations du travail à cette époque aux États-Unis. Les chapitres 3 et 4 analysent le rôle des parties et des tiers (médecins, avocats, détectives privés, etc.) dans un certain nombre de dossiers d'accidents et de maladies industrielles. Le chapitre 5 présente brièvement l'évolution de la situation de 1910 à

1970 et le dernier chapitre tente de faire le point sur la situation actuelle «continuity and change», suite au Workmen's Compensation Act et surtout à l'Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Cet ouvrage n'a que 162 pages. Les chapitres 2 à 5 en occupent près de 100. Mais leur lecture est tellement pénible, fastidieuse et non-pertinente qu'on ne voit pas le jour d'en sortir. L'argument principal n'est pas dénué de fondement et pourrait prêter à une analyse intéressante: dans les relations du travail, la santé et la sécurité des travailleurs représentent un objectif secondaire par rapport aux profits de l'employeur. Elles ont donc toujours été sacrifiées et monnayées à l'avantage de ce dernier. Mais pourquoi se cantonner à la Nouvelle-Angleterre, dans les filiales, avec des études de cas dont la plus récente a connu son dénouement en 1912? Le volume présente sans doute un intérêt historique certain. Mais pour celui qui est intéressé aux relations industrielles, à la santé et à la sécurité du travail, les pièces versées au dossier et apportées en preuve dégagent une forte odeur de boule à mites ancestrale.

Les deux derniers chapitres tentent de rattrapper le morceau, mais il est trop tard. L'auteur finit par admettre que les pires abus du tournant du siècle (au moment où le bras d'un garçon de 14 ans valait \$4.60, p. 55) sont pratiquement impossibles suite à la montée du syndicalisme et aux modifications apportées aux lois. Mais comme ceci risque de perturber trop sérieusement la preuve historique développée par l'auteur, il n'insiste pas outre mesure.

Bref, un volume dont les chapitres 1 et 6 méritent d'être lus et les chapitres 2 à 5 peuvent être examinés rapidement, à moins qu'on ne se complaise dans un «musée des horreurs».

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