

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



U.S. Industrial Relations 1950-1980: A Critical Assessment,
Edited by Jack Stieber, Robert B. McKersie and D. Quinn Mills,
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de conflit. Le chapitre 9, qui porte sur les grèves et les débrayages, appuie d'ailleurs cet argument principal des auteurs.

Si l'analyse des différentes facettes du contrôle sur le procès de travail est plus qu'adéquate dans ce volume, il nous semble cependant que les auteurs auraient pu exploiter davantage les possibilités du procès de travail lui-même comme instrument d'explication de différents phénomènes. En fait, cette réserve est davantage une question d'emphase. Bien sûr, le lecteur comprend que ce n'est pas le procès de travail lui-même (et encore moins la technologie) qui a l'effet le plus déterminant, mais bien le contrôle sur cette activité de production. Par ailleurs, le procès de travail, même dans son sens le plus technique, peut contribuer à expliquer certaines réalités. Par exemple, il semble que le contraste quant au contrôle managérial exercé sur le travail des femmes et celui des hommes s'explique dans une certaine mesure par 'the different ways that the labour processes of male and female workers were organised' (p. 45). Les informations présentées aux pages 43 et 49 font effectivement ressortir des différences réelles quant au degré de mécanisation et à la parcellisation et la décomposition du travail. Dans la mesure où la division sexuelle du travail suit les contours de la division du travail, cela fournit une explication additionnelle du comportement différent des femmes ouvrières sur des aspects tels le roulement et l'absentéisme.

Il faut insister sur l'importante contribution de cet ouvrage sur le plan théorique. À cet égard, deux éléments retiennent plus particulièrement notre attention. Le premier consiste en l'application d'un cadre d'analyse conciliant l'étude des *processus* par lesquels se développe l'action et celle des *structures* ou des conditions objectives qui délimitent l'action. Une telle approche, fondée sur le postulat qu'il existe une interaction entre 'action' et 'structure', semble favoriser une meilleure compréhension de la réalité sociale et, dans le cas de cet objet d'étude, des aspects subjectifs et objectifs du conflit. Au cours de l'intéressante discussion sur cette question présentée

en conclusion, les auteurs précisent ainsi leur position: 'by taking account of structural influences it is possible to locate idealist approaches' (p. 278). Le second élément, et il s'agit certes de la contribution la plus marquante, a trait à la démonstration de cette relation entre le contrôle sur le procès de travail et les différentes manifestations du conflit, dont nous avons déjà fait mention.

Edwards et Scullion ne sont pas les premiers à faire ressortir, sur le plan théorique, la pertinence de l'étude du contrôle sur le procès de travail pour la compréhension des relations du travail. Ils sont toutefois, à notre connaissance, ceux qui en ont fait la démonstration la plus convaincante par la recherche empirique. Soulignons finalement qu'outre sa cohérence et son apport très substantiel sur le plan théorique, la qualité exceptionnelle de cet ouvrage repose aussi sur la richesse et la densité de l'information qualitative sur le travail en usine, sur la façon dont se vit le rapport de production.

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U.S. Industrial Relations 1950-1980: A Critical Assessment, Edited by Jack Stieber, Robert B. McKersie and D. Quinn Mills, Madison, Industrial Relations Research Association, 1981, 361 pp.

This volume in the Industrial Relations Research Association series is a collection of papers prepared on the premise that the period 1950-80 "represented a very important period of reckoning for the U.S. system of Industrial Relations". The subjects covered in this book are: Economic impact of Unions (articles by Professors David J.B. Mitchell and Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff); management's response to unions (article by Professor D. Quinn Mills); non-unionized employers (article by Professor Fred K. Foulkes); labor law (article by Professor Theodore J. St. Antoine); social issues in collective bargaining (article by Professors

Phillis A. Wallace and James W. Driscoll); industrial conflict (article by Professors Peter Fouille and Hoyt N. Wheeler); an evaluation of the American industrial relations system in the context of the developments in the Western European industrial relations system (article by Professor Andrew Thomson). In the last chapter, Professors Jack Stieber and Richard N. Block summarize the major conclusions of the authors and present an overall assessment of the U.S. Industrial Relations system.

Mitchell's study suggests that wage differentials between union and non-union workers widened and these union-induced differentials were achieved through collective bargaining. According to him the strike or threat of strike is the main cause of union-nonunion wage and nonwage differentials. Also, escalated contracts reduce the sensitivity of wage changes to labor market conditions and increases the sensitivity to price changes. Thus, he argues that the main impact of the unions is on wage differentials rather than on the disruption of output. Mitchell also discusses the impact of such special characteristics of unions as insensitivity to labor-market conditions, long term contracts, escalator clauses, etc. on anti-inflation policies.

Freeman and Medoff examine the micro effects of unions on economic performance. This examination is based on a review of a significant body of literature as well as on their own study. They describe and discuss the illusion-reality debate, i.e. whether union/non-union differences represent illusion or reality. Their examination of longitudinal as well as cross-sectional data supports the reality of the union impact on economics performance. They also suggest that many of the real union effects are the result of institutional factors. When it comes to examining the nonwage effects, the evidence indicates differences between unionized and non-unionized workers and firms in the areas of fringe benefits, labor turnover, job satisfaction, human capital investment, productivity, and return on capital.

It is one of the pioneering papers in this volume and this reviewer hopes that labor economists and social scientists will follow the advice of the authors: "the search for a valid answer to the question of what unions do should involve more than just manipulating existing data with sophisticated techniques; it should have at its heart the collection of new evidence concerning the functions and operations of trade unions and their interactions with firms and employees".

Mills presents an overall assessment of management's performance in industrial relations. He examines the philosophy and objectives of management in industrial relations, noting the difficulty in this undertaking due to the diversity of firms and attitudes among managers. He limits his discussion to three overall industrial relations objectives: (1) to hold down labor costs; (2) to encourage high employee productivity; (3) to preserve non-union status. "Union avoidance" is the result of the belief in the management that they: (1) are an important contributing cause of inflation (This is contrary to Mitchell's findings); (2) introduce inefficient work practices and have negative effects on productivity; (3) are a reflection of management's "failure" to manage their human resources properly, (4) oppose corporate interests in various public deliberative bodies (He forgets to mention that one can also find examples of labor-management cooperation, e.g. Loan to Chrysler, Protective legislation, etc.). Mills' assessment of the quality of the union-management relations is mixed. It is relatively satisfactory if one considers only the time lost due to strikes. It is unsatisfactory if one considers the "union avoidance" policies even in companies where the union-management relations are good. It is important to note that "union — avoidance" policies may not be separable from other collective bargaining issues in the future as they have not been in the past!

Foulkes discusses the role of large non-union employers in industrial relations. He examines the personnel policies of 26 large companies. He attributes the decline in

unionization to an underlying management philosophy which says that if the firm is managed properly, employees will find a union unnecessary, combined with well executed politics and procedures to actualize that philosophy. Thus, the "driving force" behind many of these policies seems to be the fear of unionization. The author predicts that barring any drastic economic environmental changes, the decline in unionism in the private sector is likely to continue. Foulkes rightly asks the question: will there be this much commitment to human resource management in the absence of the threat of unionism? Some of the large nonunion companies studied by Foulkes resemble the large unionized companies!

St. Antoine assesses the role of law in industrial relations. He begins the discussion with the soundness of the power balance between unions and employers and then focuses on the high priority accorded individual rights during the past 20 years, both in the workplace and within labor organizations. He would like the NLRB and the courts to pay less heed to "armchair speculation" and more to facts in assessing union and employer conduct. According to his findings a thorough reexamination of the law on secondary boycotts is needed. Some of the other observations and recommendations made by St. Antoine are: the distinction between "mandatory" and "voluntary" issues is unrealistic; Landrum-Griffin Act has advanced the cause of union democracy; the emphasis on individual rights in labor relations has the prospect of granting the nonunionized workers protection against unjust discipline and discharge; "Federal Preemption" Doctrine or a policy on federal uniformity may help in not weakening the labor laws in different parts of the country; the different approaches to "successor" employers by the Warren Court and the Burger Court reflect a clash of fundamental values in the American industrial law; and in considering anti-trust cases, the primary reliance should be on labor laws rather than the anti-trust laws since the labor and anti-trust laws are "premised on fundamentally opposing philosophies of competition".

Wallace and Driscoll examine how collective bargaining has responded to the challenge of the following three social issues: equal employment opportunity (EEO), occupational safety and health (OSHA) and the quality of work life (QWL). The first two issues are the product of legislation and union support. The third issue has not been the focus of legislation and is largely a nonunion phenomenon. There has been a limited collective bargaining response to these social issues. It is possible that the government action on EEO and OSHA has reduced the role of collective bargaining on these issues. Since QWL has been pursued more vigorously by nonunion companies, it has become suspect in the eyes of many unions. Given the limited response of collective bargaining to these issues, the authors raise two very important questions: (1) Do these three social issues signal the decline of collective bargaining in favor of government regulation of working conditions? and (2) Does participative management represent a successful management strategy to deal with industrial conflict on the individual and small group level at the expense of collective bargaining?

Feuille and Wheeler would like to see industrial conflict more broadly defined and researched. They are dismayed that the industrial relations researchers have used the "iceberg" approach to the study of industrial conflict. For them the industrial conflict is a multifaceted phenomenon and therefore should be researched in broad terms (i.e., go beyond the analysis of strike statistics and arbitration awards and analyze other types of conflicts among the parties). The authors make an interesting distinction between the "Conflict School" (conflict is not only inevitable but is desirable) and the "Cooperation School" (consensus is not only possible but desirable) approaches to the conflict in the workplace. This is an important area of research in industrial conflict and deserves the profession's attention.

Thompson provided an evaluation of the U.S. industrial relations from abroad. He compares the U.S. experience with that of Western Europe, focusing upon the relative

structures of collective bargaining, the roles of the industrial parties, the operation of collective bargaining and the relative efficiencies of the American and West European systems in terms of wage inflation, productivity and industrial conflict. For the most part his findings coincide with those of other authors in the book. He does point out at least two very important weaknesses in the U.S. System of Industrial Relations; namely, (1) labor movement has no coherent philosophy; (2) unions lack political power and the credibility within the American society. This reviewer would have preferred some discussion in this article of the impact of the changes in the international economics climate on the U.S. industrial relations. The recent developments in the international economic arena may also determine the nature of the direction of the U.S. industrial relations system in the future.

The reviewer agrees with the overall assessment of the U.S. industrial relations system by Stieber and Block that the changes described above "so far have not been of sufficient magnitude to threaten the viability of the U.S. system of industrial relations". However, the trend in the early 1980's do not augur well for the U.S. system of industrial relations given the government withdrawal from a vast array of economic activity pertaining to the employment relationship, the decline in unionization, the non-union option, etc.

Overall the articles in this book provide a fairly comprehensive picture of the U.S. industrial relations over the last three decades. For those interested in the U.S. Industrial Relations System, this volume is strongly recommended.

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Le coeur à l'ouvrage par Gérard Lefebvre, Montréal, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 1982, 120 pp., ISBN 2-7619-0188-6.

On m'a souvent demandé si je connaissais un livre simple, écrit pour tout le monde,

bref et pas cher, qui puisse introduire à ce qu'on pourrait, en gros, appeler une approche organisationnelle des relations industrielles. Ce livre, je viens de le lire: il est québécois, il est clair, bien écrit et prêt à être adopté -avec un égal bonheur, ce qui est rare- des deux côtés de l'Atlantique.

L'auteur, conseiller en gestion et médiateur dans les conflits d'entreprises, aborde dès l'entrée le problème de la qualité de la vie et de travail, «problème de fond» comme il le dit, qui appelle un changement de perspective supposant l'acceptation d'un concept différent d'organisation du travail. Cette face de la médaille, plus politique (au sens managérial du terme), qui tenait jusqu'à présent -ou jusqu'il n'y a pas longtemps- du pouvoir discrétionnaire du chef d'entreprise -se situant en dehors de l'interaction, conflictuelle et contractuelle, des acteurs du système de relations du travail, limitée à l'autre face: les conditions de travail- est lentement pénétrée par une forme de participation directe qui suppose, et requiert, une évolution intellectuelle commune des syndicats et du management. C'est ce que Lefebvre appelle «un second front».

Une deuxième partie est consacrée aux champs de la satisfaction au travail: rémunération, sécurité physique et santé, le travail posté, la sécurité d'emploi, un travail intéressant, des équipes de travail solidaires, des règles de régie, connues et justes, l'intégration de l'entreprise dans le milieu. La troisième, intitulée "design organisationnel", définit et explique les notions essentielles d'organisation du travail et d'approche systémique. La quatrième traite de l'intervention organisationnelle sous le jour de la qualité de vie et de travail, et présente notamment le développement organisationnel comme mode d'intervention fondé sur la collaboration. La cinquième, «la dure épreuve du changement», est suivie d'un examen de «trois obstacles à un changement»: la méfiance patronale/syndicale, le partage des bénéfices et le vieux mythe selon lequel la responsabilité ne se délègue pas. Ce qui amène l'auteur, dans la septième partie, à lancer, dans une «lettre