**Relations industrielles**
**Industrial Relations**

## James W. RINEHART : *The Tyranny of Work Alienation and the Labour Process.* (2nd ed.), Toronto, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987, 226 pp., ISBN 0-7747-3067-6

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Third, as Morris points out, the whole thrust of state policy in Britain is to make alternative arrangements in the case of strikes in the essential services rather than to deny the right to strike. Whatever one thinks of this emphasis — and the book makes clear that it is open to abuse — it does serve to remind us that the right to withdraw one's labour is a crucial ingredient of a truly democratic society. In this country, that is too often conveniently forgotten. Perhaps it is time that industrial relations experts begin to take issue with governments over this question, rather than while away their time describing how the present «system» works.

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**The Tyranny of Work Alienation and the Labour Process**, 2nd ed., by James W. Rinehart, (with the assistance of Seymour Faber), Toronto et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987, pp. X + 226, ISBN 0-7747-3067-6

This is a comprehensive review of alienation suffered by the wage and salary earners particularly in Canada. After the presentation of **work** as a social problem and the nature of alienated labour from the Marxist perspective, the history of the labour exploitation and struggle in Canada is reviewed. The recent experience is also acknowledged. White-collar worlds are presented with a special attention to clerks, professionals and the civil servants. Dealing next with the blue-collar work the difficulties are presented with which workers have to deal and the various forms of collective and individual struggle with the employers are discussed: strikes, restriction of output, sabotage. The last chapter deals with various solutions to alienated labour: extended leisure, automation, participative management, improved human relations, job redesign, activisation of unions in the quality of working life.

The author arrives at the conclusion that only workers' control acquired in the struggle against the employers may lead to the actual change. «It would entail a transfer of power from elites to working people. Decisions about the power purposes of work could thus be aligned with the interest, values and needs of workers and their communities. Technology would be designed and deployed not to enhance profits and class power but to fulfill the needs of workers and the broader community (...) The only genuine solution to alienation involves a total restructuring of the workplace, the economy, and the state; that is, the establishing of a truly collective mode of production — a democratically planned economy and worker-managed enterprises. No less than such a radical change can overcome alienation. The most intransigent source of alienation is the market...» (pp. 209-10).

Pity that the experience of the state socialist societies has not been taken into consideration. Of particular importance is the Yugoslav case where the introduction of the workers' self-government has not prevented the deterioration of the whole economy to the stage endangering the unity and integrity of the Yugoslav state. One party rule may be at least partly blamed, but this is not the only factor. There are several other issues worth much attention in order to judge the feasibility of the whole workers' role alternative.

There is the phenomenon of a **collective egoism**. For example, in Yugoslavia some self-governed enterprises succeed on expense of other enterprises which for variety of reasons are not competitive enough. The distribution of investment funds depends on the local and regional power relations and much funds have been wasted due to the noneconomic investment allocation.

Self-government at the enterprise level does not necessarily assure proper management; there are major cleavages between various interest groups inside the enterprise leading to waste and corruption. Weaker occupational groups lose in the struggle with the stronger occupational groups. Management preserves its privileged position and manipulates in a variety of ways the outcomes of the self-governmental bodies.

Blue collar workers, especially the young ones, have a very limited interest in the self-governmental activism. The lower categories of personnel are actually underrepresented and their vital interests are neglected.

Similar phenomena appear also in the other state socialist countries which have introduced at least a partial self-government at the enterprise level.

Also in capitalist countries there are evident limitations of the various workers' councils. For example, in FRG these councils are much dominated by the trade union officials who have only limited interest in the grass-root initiatives. The formalization of the self governmental bodies alienates them from the shop floor personnel and dimishes their socio-political role as the agents of innovation.

In Sweden and other Scandinavian countries there is a positive experience of the **autonomous work groups** on the shopfloor but this is mostly due to the innovative spirit among the management tolerated by the trade unions, which are strong enough not to be afraid of a grass-root challenge. So far probably the most successful experiences of workers' self-government in a peaceful situation are exactly the above mentioned autonomous work groups in the Western factories, as well as the Israeli collective farms which become more and more industrialized. In the communist countries there have been for many years various forms of the work self-government but they are directly controlled by the party and state agencies.

The revolutionary workers' bodies mentioned by the author were not necessarily representative because they temporarely substituted institutions revolutionally abolished and actually they did not prove themselves as suitable for the peaceful conditions. In the communist countries, and particularly in the USSR, in the first stage after the abolishment of previous regimes there were tendencies to elect managers but they were later abandoned. The new reform promoted by M. Gorbachev is still only in the preliminary stage and now it is difficult to predict how the internal power arrangement in the enterprises will look.

The economically and socially successful forms of workers' self-government, as for example the collectivity of cooperatives in Mondragon (Spain), have grown slowly on the basis of painful organizational experience and the gradual socialisation of people to new forms. In the economically developed countries the much leisure oriented masses do not show understanding for the time consuming participation in decision making. Management people and organizational consultants have a direct interest in the improvement of working life and they promote various forms of collective decision-making which more or less prove themselves as beneficial not only for the enterprises but also for the employees. The Japanese experience in this respect is encouraging and illuminating even if it actually has a limited application to the other democracies.

The revolutionary development in the West is probable only in the case of a major economic or military catastrophy but even under such exceptional conditions it would be rather more probable to expect a reinforcement of the authoritarian forms of management, and not a wide spread grass-root democratization. A gradual transfer to the dictatorship of the working class in the West is improbable. In the developing countries several regimes call themselves socialist but actually they are authoritarian and very oppressive. The genuine workers' democracy cannot develop under these regimes.

Alienation is a very serious matter and there is much need to overcome it. The promotion of management participation and self-governmental forms at workplaces is one of the means which may be effective for socialization and education. The way how people are organized at work and how they are led, motivated, rewarded, and acknowledged has much to do with the psychological comfort. Conflicts of interest within the workplaces are actually unavoidable and the total elimination of them is neither needed nor possible.

The question is how to handle conflicts successfully using the social energy produced by them for the common benefit. In the modern societies there is more and more objective need or even necessity to reinforce the factor of cooperation at the expense of the factor of conflict. This is much dictated by the progressively complicated nature of the organizational and technical basis, as well as by the necessity to overcome waste.

The evolutionary process of a piece-meal reconstruction of society appears as much more effective than the revolutionary change, which changes radically the political and ideological superstructure, but actually is not suitable for the in-depth reconstruction of values, manners, petty interests, and semi-private affiliations. For example, the Yugoslav form of the enterprise self-government so for has not contribute much to better work habits and higher output of local workers.

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**Industrial Relations and New Technology,** par Annette Davies, UWIST/Croom Helm, London, Sydney, Dover NH, 1986, pp., ISBN 0-7099-0882-2

Voici une recherche qui permet de lever le voile sur les impacts des changements technologiques vécus à l'intérieur d'une industrie anglaise, soit celle des brasseries. À première vue, le titre peut apparaître comme étant bien présomptueux pour une recherche empirique réalisée au sein d'un secteur industriel limité. Il s'explique cependant par la portée plus générale que l'auteure a bien voulu donner à sa recherche: la première moitié du livre en effet est consacrée à diverses considérations théoriques sur le débat entourant les changements technologiques, ainsi que sur le contexte des relations du travail en Grande-Bretagne. Ce n'est que dans la seconde moitié que l'auteure, pour illustrer ses considérations, analyse le cas des brasseries.

L'auteure part, comme bien d'autres, de la thèse de Braverman qu'elle critique à son tour pour la situer dans le contexte particulier des relations patronales-syndicales de la Grande-Bretagne (pp. 41 et ss), surtout en ce qui touche les motivations patronales pour l'imposition d'une forme de rationalisation du travail, qui ne découlent pas entièrement d'une volonté de contrôle liée au seul «management scientifique». En revanche, les formes de rationalisation, en particulier celles qui sont permises par l'implantation de technologies de la micro-électronique, sont pour Annette Davies autant d'occasions pour les syndicats de négocier leur coopération conflictuelle avec l'entreprise. Voilà où se trouve en particulier l'intérêt principal de la recherche et son originalité, l'auteure tentant de voir si cette coopération peut être ou non l'objet d'une négociation à travers une multitude de stratégies. Parmi les stratégies en question, qui pourraient être visualisées sur un axe allant de la participation nulle à la pleine participation, toutes les méthodes traditionnelles des relations du travail se trouvent représentées. Elles sont critiquées tour à tour et l'auteure en arrive à une certaine idéalisation des méthodes qui placent la participation et un fort degré d'implication des employé(e)s au coeur même des stratégies.