

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



### Van den Berg, Axel, Bengt Furåker and Leif Johansson, *Labour Market Regimes and Patterns of Flexibility: A Sweden-Canada Comparison*

Richard Chaykowski

Volume 54, numéro 3, 1999

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/051258ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/051258ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

#### Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

#### ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

#### Citer ce compte rendu

Chaykowski, R. (1999). Compte rendu de [Van den Berg, Axel, Bengt Furåker and Leif Johansson, *Labour Market Regimes and Patterns of Flexibility: A Sweden-Canada Comparison*]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 54(3), 615–618. <https://doi.org/10.7202/051258ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1999

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

États-Unis et pratiquement inexistantes en Angleterre. Deux études de cas l'amènent à conclure que pour réussir, le partenariat doit absolument correspondre aux trois exigences suivantes : être paritaire, être renforcé par la négociation collective et, finalement, produire des résultats tangibles pour les salariés dont la sécurité d'emploi. Ces conditions n'étant pas faciles à réunir, il est plutôt illusoire de miser sur le partenariat pour pallier la crise de la représentation.

La crise de la représentation ne peut donc être résorbée de façon significative par ces deux mécanismes supplémentaires. Est-il possible alors de croire dans la relance de l'institution syndicale pour rétablir son rôle-clé joué historiquement dans chaque système de relations industrielles ? La conclusion identifie quelques facteurs favorables. L'auteur met en garde toutefois contre une vision trop optimiste, surtout parce que les politiques publiques ne semblent pas poursuivre cet objectif. L'auteur déplore la situation et termine en soulignant l'importance du syndicalisme comme mécanisme de représentation indépendante des intérêts des salariés. Le recul de la démocratie industrielle est peut-être l'indice de la diminution générale progressive du caractère démocratique de chacune des deux sociétés.

Cet ouvrage a pour but de plaider le libre accès des salariés à la représentation indépendante de leurs intérêts. Il a forcément un caractère normatif (que l'auteur reconnaît d'ailleurs) concentré sur l'institution syndicale. La thèse qui est

très bien présentée avec moult détails sur chacun des deux pays souffre légèrement des défauts de sa qualité. À trop vouloir privilégier la représentation indépendante des intérêts des salariés et par conséquent l'organisation syndicale, le lecteur a parfois l'impression, surtout dans le chapitre huit et la conclusion, d'assister à une analyse subordonnée des deux autres mécanismes de représentation. Le lecteur veut bien reconnaître que l'organisation syndicale est le meilleur mécanisme institutionnalisé pour assurer la défense indépendante des intérêts des salariés mais la lecture de cet ouvrage ne le convainc pas que la représentation indépendante représente aujourd'hui ni le seul, ni, dans tous les cas, le meilleur moyen de défendre les intérêts des salariés. Malgré cet irritant, cet ouvrage qui, au demeurant est très bien fait, devrait intéresser tous ceux qui s'interrogent sur l'avenir du syndicalisme. Comme la situation a attiré récemment l'attention de nombreux spécialistes dans les deux pays et notamment aux États-Unis à l'occasion des travaux de la Commission Dunlop, l'ouvrage sera surtout apprécié par les Nord-Américains qui veulent connaître la situation anglaise et par les Anglais qui veulent connaître celle des États-Unis. Le lecteur régulier de la revue *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* y trouvera un intérêt supplémentaire dans les nombreuses références à la situation canadienne.

MICHEL BROSSARD  
Université de Montréal

*Labour Market Regimes and Patterns of Flexibility: A Sweden-Canada Comparison*

by Axel VAN DEN BERG, Bengt FURÅKER and Leif JOHANSSON, Lund: Arkiv, 1997, 264 p., ISBN 91-792-4099-2.

The basic question posed in his book by the authors is "does labour market security raise or lower workers' adaptability to various forms of industrial change?" (p. 25). The authors' attempt to

understand this issue is framed within the context of a Canada-Sweden comparison and makes use of a variety of data sources such as labour force surveys, plant-level interviews of employees in

several major industries, and several surveys of individual manufacturing workers. The introduction to the volume sets out the context by examining some of the alternative meanings of flexibility in labour markets as well as some of the important assumptions underlying alternative concepts and views of flexibility and considers briefly why a Canada-Sweden comparison makes sense. Since most western industrialized economies have been undergoing a prolonged period of substantial industrial restructuring, and appear to be entering a period in which their economies are more dynamic (from a restructuring standpoint) studying the issue of flexibility in the context of restructuring is both timely and important.

In the second chapter, the authors make the case for the major differences (and similarities) between Canada and Sweden along the institutional dimensions of industrial relations and collective bargaining, labour market policies, and labour legislation pertaining to employment protection. In turn, the third chapter draws out a description of Canadian and Swedish industry and labour markets, focussing on population demographics, labour force characteristics, trade dependency and industrial structure, employment structure, and unemployment. This latter comparison of broad labour market dimensions is intended to show how Sweden and Canada are quite comparable and similar along a number of key dimensions. Taken together, they argue that, on the one hand, a number of key institutional characteristics differ between the countries – while a variety of similarities in the labour market make Sweden and Canada strong candidates for an international comparative study.

These two chapters, by necessity, cover a great deal of ground. Clearly, any one of these characteristics of the labour market or any one of these institutional arrangements (e.g., collective bargaining) could be (and indeed have been) the subject of individual studies in and

of themselves. Institutional arrangements, such as systems of industrial relations, are very complex in nature; hence, what the authors attempt to do is to draw out the key characteristics “that matter.” Thus, those institutional arrangements and labour market characteristics that are most germane to the issue of flexibility are examined because this is the focus of their analysis. The authors note (p. 56) that “our intention is not to present a very detailed or comprehensive account, but rather to provide the general background needed for purposes of the study.” Indeed, their discussion of both institutional arrangements and industry and labour market characteristics is more of the flavour of a survey of broad trends and developments, and therefore supports only broad conclusions about what the similarities/differences are between the labour markets of the two countries.

The authors conclude that the similarities and differences that they find between the two countries, taken together, serve to support their comparative analysis. However, I would have been much more comfortable with this had a short chapter been added to this volume which focussed on how the various *differences* between the two countries would be expected to affect the results of their analysis as well as their conclusions. Comparisons of aspects of national economic systems is notoriously difficult, and this study would have benefited from more attention being explicitly directed toward the issue of the inherent limitations to this study – even granting that a Canada-Sweden comparison is perhaps among one of the “best” that might be obtainable.

From this basis, the volume proceeds with the actual comparative analysis of Canada and Sweden. This is prefaced by a discussion of the “neoclassical economic” versus “institutionalist” theories of the labour market, the theory of “neocorporatism,” and how each of these relates to issues of flexibility in the labour market. This underpins the volume

because it allows the authors to develop hypothesis regarding expectations about security and flexibility in the labour market that can be followed through in their comparative analysis. However, just as the authors' presentation of the various theories of efficient labour market allocation is somewhat broad in scope, so too are the empirical predictions that they draw from each of the respective theories.

When macro labour market indicators (such as indicators of job creation, unemployment, labour mobility, or job tenure) are examined to determine whether or not there are systematic patterns that exist between the countries then, not surprisingly, little in the way of systematic differences are uncovered. The authors rely upon aggregate data for each of these indicators, their comparative analysis is essentially a descriptive one, and they are unable to utilize statistical tests of similarities or differences. So, the comparisons remain broad and yield indeterminate results. The authors, therefore, conclude that "the best that can be said of the data... is that they quite simply fail to support either of the theories we wanted to test." (p. 124)

The analysis then shifts to the micro level along two dimensions. First, the authors assess data collected from interviews of employees in the pulp and paper, steel and telecommunications industries in Canada and Sweden, respectively. *Aside from some perceived differences in union attitudes between the two countries, the analysis of the interviews yielded results which reinforced the nature of the similarities between Canadian and Swedish respondents.* While the authors note that the interviews are based on samples that are not statistically representative, it would have been useful to learn more about the samples themselves, as well as the characteristics of the individuals. Second, the authors analysed data that they collected from surveys of employed workers in the manufacturing sectors of Canada and

Sweden in the years 1992 and 1991, respectively. The resultant data samples were large enough to sustain rigorous statistical analyses so that this phase of the authors' analysis is the most rigorous component of the book. While the Canadian data was only available for one year, the Swedish attitudinal data was also available for a second year (1993), which also allowed for a longitudinal dimension to the analysis of Swedish attitudes towards change. What did they find? While the analysis of the Canadian and Swedish survey results do yield some empirical regularities, the results do not point concretely towards support for either one theory or the other. Two problems arise here. First, as the authors themselves admit, at times, much of their analysis is somewhat "ad hoc" in nature. This occurs because the authors are not explicitly testing (in any statistical sense) hypothesis generated by the underlined theories themselves. Second, and more generally, the difficulty is that the theories being examined are quite broad in scope and yet the data being brought to bear in examining them are much more narrow.

The authors conclude by noting that neither the neo-classical nor institutionalist theories are supported by the data; rather, they suggest that the results of their analysis are most consistent with the neocorporatist theory. In all of the analysis, the key words are "most consistent with." The authors are, themselves, quite aware of the limitations of their own data and analysis as well as the complexities associated with attempting to examine which of these theories holds. As a result, they are careful in qualifying their results. Nonetheless, the reader is left with a somewhat unsatisfied feeling because the data and analysis are not up to the task of fulfilling the original objectives of the study. Alternatively, one may have viewed the original objectives as simply being too ambitious. What this study does successfully contribute is a very accessible discussion of the important

debate over flexibility in labour markets and some of the key competing theories relevant to this debate. In addition, the Canada-Sweden comparative analysis itself highlights the importance of understanding the role of alternative forms of

institutional arrangements in the functioning of the labour market.

RICHARD CHAYKOWSKI  
Queen's University

*International and Comparative Employment Relations*

edited by Greg J. BAMBER and Russell D. LANSBURY, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, London: Sage Publications, 1998, 442 p., ISBN 0-7619-5592-5 (hbk) and 0-7619-5591-7 (pbk).

When I reviewed the first edition of this book in *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* way back in 1988, I gave it rather short shrift since, in the space of a single review, I was also commenting on Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre's *The Social Foundations of Industrial Power*. For obvious reasons, the latter was a much more provocative read, and I therefore passed over the Bamber and Lansbury volume rather hastily. So, I now have an opportunity to redeem myself by taking a fresh look at this new edition of what has become a venerable textbook in the field of industrial relations... or rather, as the editors now prefer to say, "employment relations."

*International and Comparative Employment Relations* opens with a brief word of welcome from Tom Kochan, followed by a preface in which the editors explain the purpose of the book and its internal structure. Chapter 1 then provides a general introduction to "comparative and international" employment relations, including a definition of the field, an enumeration of the reasons for engaging in comparative and international research, and a discussion of some of the methodological issues facing comparativists.

The next eleven chapters are individual country studies on Great Britain (by John Goodman, Mick Marchington, John Berridge, Ed Snape and Greg Bamber), the United States (by Hoyt Wheeler and John McClendon), Canada (by Mark Thompson), Australia (by Edward Davis and Russell Lansbury), Italy (by Claudio Pellegrini), France (by

Janine Goetschy and Annette Jobert), Germany (by Friedrich Fürstenberg), Sweden (by Olle Hammarström and Tommy Nilsson), Japan (by Yasuo Kuwahara), and Korea (by Park Young-bum and Chris Leggett).

The final chapter, authored by the editors and Oliver Clarke, seeks to draw some general conclusions. The book is rounded out by an appendix that, at first glance, appears to be a mere compilation of statistics (twenty-five tables of them to be precise), but actually turns out to offer a wealth of information about the strengths and weaknesses of international statistics, as well as useful commentaries on how these statistics are used (and occasionally misused) in the industrial relations literature.

A side-by-side collection of this sort serves two basic purposes — as a teaching tool and as a sourcebook of concise country studies for the harried scholar. On both of these counts, this 3<sup>rd</sup> edition scores high points. The individual chapters are generally well written (or competently translated) and are reasonably up to date. Moreover, the editors have clearly made an effort to ensure that the authors follow a roughly common structure, which greatly aids in comparison. My own students find the volume useful as an introduction to the broad array of national systems in the industrialized countries, though they also find it necessary to supplement it when, for example, they wish to explore a particular country's experience in more depth or when they begin to think about explicitly