This book is the latest contribution to an Open University Press series on feminist educational thinking. It seeks to integrate an analysis of the effects of globalisation on education and training policy with an account of how women, especially working-class women, experience those policies. Brine positions herself as from a working-class background and, in a characteristically engaging turn of phrase, argues she is concerned with the class ceiling rather than the glass ceiling. She explains that ‘in exploring globalisation and global regionalisation, I have tried to keep individual black and white working-class women in my mind, to ask myself what does this mean for her or her? (p. 5).

This is clearly an ambitious task, all the more so as the regions under consideration encompass the European Union, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Association of South East Asian Nations and the North American Free Trade Association. While there is much discussion of the power balance between regionalist blocs and the nation state, regions within nation states are not mentioned, although within the European Union certainly, it can be argued that regions are assuming greater significance in shaping education and training policies on the ground.

Of these global regions, most attention is given to the European Union. I am all too aware of the difficulties of trying to describe, in a succinct, accessible and interesting way, the development of European level policies to an audience that may be unfamiliar with the broad trends let alone the twists, turns and acronyms. However, clearly, to allow the reader to assess the merits of an analysis, such a description is essential. Brine gives a fair account of the complex story of the development of education and training policies in the European Union. However, some of the key concepts, such as social exclusion, warrant further problematising and the highly complex negotiating and bargaining procedures are presented as rather more rational and purposive than is perhaps warranted. This emphasis on agency comes over for example in the analysis of the discourses of equality, of economic growth and of peace in the shaping of policies in these global regions.

Brine draws upon a range of disciplines and influences including of course feminist scholarship but Foucault and Bourdieu are particularly important influences and shape the line of approach. The main drift of the book is that education tends to be gendered, racialised and classed and in particular, that despite having greater access to post-compulsory education and training, the position of working-class women has not been dramatically affected by policy changes. The book is a curious mix of material and approaches. The early chapters provide an impressive coverage of the literature although there are some startling omissions and at times they read rather like Ph.D chapters or edited versions of previously published papers. The giant leap from debating globalisation to reading off effects on very small groups of working-class women requires something of an act of faith on the reader’s behalf. As Brine herself points out, there is a limit to the link that can be made between policy documents and what is delivered on the ground but relatively little empirical evidence is provided to support claims made on a basis of a reading of policy documents. Moreover, we are told very little about the studies upon which the empirical data of studies of women in the UK (or is it Britain?) are drawn.

The main strengths of the book include the way in which it brings together a diverse set of material and insights from different disciplines and adds value through a challenging set of
observations and critical analysis. Despite having to catalogue the history of the European Union’s approach to education, training and equal opportunities policies, the book is accessibly written. Indeed, Brine has a delightful approach to the use of imagery. I particularly liked the idea of replacing the hackneyed phrase (even calling it hackneyed is hackneyed) ‘access to a level playing field’ with the more appropriate image of ‘equal opportunities to climb the Eiger’. This is a much better analogy for equal treatment.

The book introduces some interesting ideas and interpretations but is not entirely convincing. It might have worked better as a series of inter-linked essays. It is however difficult to quarrel with the overall conclusion – that education is gendered, racialised and classed over time and space.

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TERESA REES

Restructuring the Professional Organization – Accounting, Health Care and Law

David Brock, Michael Powell and C. R. Hinings (eds.)


Many areas of professional work are undergoing profound change. One only has to think of education, health or legal aid to understand that the structures and roles of the organisations delivering these services are currently contested. This may always have been true but recently a potentially sharper conflict has arisen. Yet, despite these shifts, surprisingly little work has attempted to pull together similarities of change across professional fields and across borders. This collection attempts to do this for accounting, health care and law which are then taken to be paradigmatic of what is happening in other professional fields. As such, it is to be commended.

The book examines these professions across four English-speaking countries – the UK, USA, Australia and Canada. It is made up of eleven chapters that attempt to span all four states and all three professions. Such comprehensiveness makes it difficult to review and what follows concentrates on themes rather than individual contributions. The major theme of the book is that professional organisations and professional careers are shifting away from the P2 organisational model which stressed collegiality, autonomy and peer review to a new archetype entitled the Managed Professional Business (MPB). This transition entails a move away from the more traditional professional organisational form of the P2 model to a more formalised structure which is increasingly managerialist, specialised, market/customer driven and rationalised. Various contributors suggest that this is occurring across professions and states, although there are different degrees across professions, within professions and across states (for example, Flood suggests UK law firms have altered less than Rose and Hinings’ North American accounting firms). But the drift is generally in the direction of the MPB.

The argument presented suggests that to ensure a successful shift from one archetype to another the interpretive system of the original archetype has to be altered – that is, the values of the professionals have to change in tandem with the organisational structure because the two have a dialectic relationship. Much of the book suggests that this twinned alteration has been problematic. This has made the transition a conflictual one but that those groups in favour of change are now beginning to assert themselves. For example, the chapter by Hinings et al. suggests that within the largest accounting firms the transition to global business advisory firms has been
difficult as the traditional power brokers in these firms – the auditors – have sought to maintain
their position and interpretive scheme despite the restructuring of the firms and their loss of
economic clout. Kitchener highlights a similar picture for changes within hospitals in the UK.
However, he suggests that within the UK, doctors have been better placed than Hinings et al.’s
auditors to ensure their interpretive scheme remains powerful and hence change has been more
contested and less pronounced. Many authors echo these views and take a sedimented view of
organisations arguing that new rounds of change are incremental and build upon previous rounds
thereby ensuring that the transformation is not radical.

Why has this change taken place recently and not before? The editors suggest it is due to a
confluence of factors, especially increased competition and deregulation, technological
developments and the globalisation of services. Such developments have helped to alter state
policies and client behaviour which in turn have encouraged the professionals concerned to
change. However, all stress that this change is reflexive and that these professionals respond to
change and thereby impact upon it. In short, it is not a case of simple cause and effect. Rather,
change is evolutionary and responses to it influence it in directions not originally anticipated.
Thus there is a complex relationship between the external environment, institutional structures
and interpretive schemes that has to be studied closely to be understood.

To its credit, much of the book does this admirably. There is a wealth of information in most of
the individual contributions and researchers in these fields will gain a lot from reading many of
the chapters. However, there are some shortcomings. One, the book is aimed at an organisational
theory audience and as such asks different questions to those a sociologist would ask. This is most
noticeable in its attempts to explain why change is occurring today. These are sociologically
somewhat unconvincing. Why has the state altered its policies towards the National Health Service
in the UK? Why did auditors lose power to management consultants in the 1990s? Who is
purchasing these services and why do they want them now rather than thirty years ago? Why have
legal markets altered and what does this tell us about global economic, political and social activity?
There are two layers of explanation to these questions. One is an organisational layer and the
second is more sociological and links why change is occurring to broader issues about socio-
economic restructuring. However, such a criticism is perhaps unfair because it is an organisational
theory book and answers many organisational theory questions well. However, as a sociological
reviewer I was left asking these sociological questions. The second area of weakness, as the editors
acknowledge, is that not enough is said sociologically about which groups within these
organisations are driving this change and which are resisting. However, these criticisms do not
detract from the fact that the book is informative and highlights degrees of similarity across
nation-states and professional groups which are important because they are reshaping much
middle-class work and potentially the middle class itself.

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GERARD HANLON

Organizations in Action: Competition across Contexts

Peter Clark


Peter Clark’s new book shares a title with J. D. Thompson’s classic text of over thirty years ago, it is
equally ambitious. The book commences by outlining its two key concerns which are, first, putting
action into organisation studies, and, second, examining the theme of competition across contexts. This endeavour is pursued by a ‘journey’ through five perspectives, namely from the modern to the neo-modern political economy (NMPE) through the social constructionist, post-modernist and realist turns. The NMPE approach sees Clark weld together analytical insights from these perspectives whilst being critical of the project of modernity. In terms of the content of NMPE, Clark is clearly taken with the current fashion for critical realism, of which he gives an insightful overview of the work of both Margaret Archer and Andrew Sayer. From his treatment of realism it would appear that his interest lies far more in the analytical equipment of the morphogenetic approach, rather than the emancipatory claims of progress, reality and truth. Of equal importance in the NMPE are insights drawn from post-modernity, Clark goes beyond the more typical coverage of Foucault, to extend his interests into Baudrillard, Bauman and Lyotard. In particular, he is quick to pick up on Bauman’s (1987) thesis of the loss of the legislative role of academia and of Lyotard’s (1984) notion of the performativity of knowledge. Clark engages with post-modernity and demonstrates how concepts such as hyper-reality and simulacra are useful in the study of organisations. This naturally raises the question as to how this assemblage of mutually antagonistic perspectives actually hangs together, and more particularly, how does his perspective impact upon his analytical concern of the study of organisations both in action and across contexts?

Those familiar with Peter Clark’s previous work will recognise many of the themes in the book, which have been developed over a long period. This book is not however a mere restatement of his earlier work, rather, Clark seeks to reinterpret earlier themes, which among other things results in a Burrell (1997) influenced, retro-linear account of the Whipp and Clark (1986) Rover study. That said, many of his enduring accounts are still present, with American football acting as a device with which to explain the American System of Manufacture. The parallels between this analysis and the role of French court society by Norbert Elias are striking; Elias taught Clark at the University of Leicester a long time ago!

The book is packed with interesting vignettes through which to explore his ideas. For instance Clark poses and then seeks to answer the question: ‘Would Henry Ford have succeeded had he set up his factory in the Birmingham/Coventry corridor?’ His argument is that Ford would have been likely to fail, the reason being the absence of the distinct social-cultural and institutional factors that were present in early twentieth century Detroit. The corollary of this argument being that the mass production capability was a manifestation of American exceptionalism. The analysis provided by Clark acts as a caveat to the more evangelical accounts which stress the nature of the borderless world, and the concomitant infinite possibilities that are supposedly open to organisations. Working as he does at Birmingham University, not far from the Rover factory, he can be only too aware of the organisational consequences of not being able to compete across contexts. This analysis is of course broadly concurrent with the ideas promulgated by the Aix group and the more general societal effect movement. Clark’s position is however distinct, this is in the sense that rather than simply using the cultural/institutional explanation he attempts to theorise the differences in terms of a rich conception of organisation, which accords emphasis on temporal reckoning and structural activation within a firm specific, organisational repertoire.

The importance of context leads into Clark’s other preoccupation, that of trying to provide a sophisticated account of process, which following Clegg, he argues is a tortuous undertaking. It is Clark’s view that organizations are recursive, sometimes chronically so, which is something that makes transformation problematic. He rightly points to the way in which there has been a
suppression of process generally within organisation studies, attention instead being paid to fanciful blueprints at the expense of the problems of ‘becoming’. The difficult nature of change and the non-portability of concepts across contexts create difficulties for the concept of strategic choice, an idea that has become axiomatic since its inception in the early 1970s. Clark’s position problematises the notion of strategic choice arguing instead that an organisation possesses a zone of manoeuvre which is largely determined by the broader habitus of the organisation. Clark crafts this position, while distancing himself from the more deterministic of the new institutionalists, emphasising that actors in organisations are knowing subjects or ‘savants’ and moreover that unintended consequences are likely to abound. Other targets include the resource based theory of the firm (see Grant, 1990), which has gained popularity in recent years, and time-line analyses of organisational change (see Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991).

The breadth of Clark’s command of both contemporary sociological and organisational discussions make for interesting reading. At times it is polemic, at other points it engages with high theory. There is considerable humour in this book and Clark is evidently an incisive observer of society. Given the magnitude of this book, it is perhaps a little craven to criticise the poor proof reading in parts of the text, for instance, Bob Dylan becomes Dylon, while Gibson Burrell loses an l. In more substantive terms, Clark does not really engage with the possibilities of the internet and e-commerce, and in particular the implications that they might have for his chosen themes of organisations in action and the competition between contexts. That said, Clark’s position of NMPE should be regarded as an emergent one, and as such rather than aiming for closure seeks to open an important conversation for organisation studies, in particular in terms of drawing insights from both critical realism and the post-modern turn. In this sense his position of NMPE is far more than an awkward bricolage, instead it offers a refreshing attempt to avoid the theological disputes of the paradigm warriors. Furthermore, NMPE is also useful in that it avoids the popular ‘end of history’ proclamations, with it consciously leaving room for the possibility of a resurgence of the left.

This book can be read at a number of different levels. Primarily it will appeal to colleagues within the organisation studies field. The sheer breadth of the coverage coupled with the interesting vignettes make it a challenging but interesting overview of the organisation studies for both advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students. For those serious about engaging with the complexities of organising, Professor Clark’s book is too important to be left unread.

REFERENCES

Terry Cradden


This book provides testament to the members, activists and paid officials of the component parts of the civil service and local authority trade unions and staff associations which, following a series of alliances and eventual merger, came to form the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance – NIPSA. Described as the largest and most significant of ‘home-grown’ trade unions in Northern Ireland, NIPSA evolved from the component organisations, which latterly, following various reorganisations and changes the name were the Ulster Public Officers’ Association (UPOA) for local authority staff, and the two main civil service unions the Northern Ireland Civil Service Association (NICSA) and the smaller Civil Service Professional Officers’ Association of Northern Ireland (CSPOA). While other trade unions in the North were to dwindle or unable to resist mergers with British or Irish based unions, NIPSA obviously flourished, being established as a federation of some 20,000 members in the mid 1970s but becoming a single union, ironically, in response to Conservative industrial relations legislation. The book is informative and thoroughly researched, providing detailed and methodical accounts based primarily on archive material, union/staff association journals, minutes of meetings and annual reports. Cradden charts the development of the constituent unions chronologically, from the partition of Ireland onwards, detailing the intra- and inter-union relations which form the background to the series of co-operative efforts between the organisations.

Several major themes are recurrent throughout the period leading up to NIPSA’s formation, to which Cradden attaches significance in the shaping of the constituent unions’ structures, internal organisation and activities, as they gradually adopted behaviour which was more recognisably ‘unionate’. Firstly, relations with the employers influenced how the unions organised and positioned themselves in defence of pay, conditions and job security. They faced intransigence from the employers centrally, with resistance to Whitley machinery until after the Second World War, and a lack of commitment by Unionist governments to workplace democracy. Government pay restraint from the 1960s, and reorganisation of the public service functions of Northern Ireland were also significant, especially following ‘political disturbances’ from the late 1960s. In local government, the UPOA had a frustrating time with the macho management at Belfast and (London)Derry Corporations, and with the wartime tribunal system set up to deal with grievances. Cradden highlights the role of employers (who appear a far cry from the legendary ‘model employer’ supposedly associated with the public sector) as instrumental in the increased ‘unionateness’ and political astuteness of the various associations; they became more willing to at least threaten industrial action, and learned to utilise political contacts such as Labour MPs, and newspaper campaigns to their advantage.

Secondly, a major influence in the formation of the alliance was the prospect (or threat of) merger with British based unions, mooted as far back as the 1920s when the UPOA made approaches to NALGO. Merger discussions took place with four civil service unions in Britain during the 1960s but the Northern Ireland associations remained intact, wisely Cradden suggests, since problems would have been created by new rivalries and probably a diminished role on the Northern Ireland Whitley Committee. The alliance of the Northern Ireland unions resulted, he concludes, not from any ‘grand design’, but from a combination of the pragmatism and skill of leaders such as Brendan Harkin and George Hodgkins, backed by a core of activists.
A third major theme which the book highlights and which appears influential in each union's development, is the contradiction in self-image, social attitudes and political allegiances of the membership. Wrangles took place continually over the question of equal pay for women, and the marriage bar was supported by some factions even after the employers had abandoned it. Cradden includes some cringe-making extracts from the civil service union journals which reveal attitudes to women and race which were, of course, far from politically correct, including 'cover girl' contests, and racist references. In addition, often revealed was a steadfast loyalty to the British Empire and the king. For example, singing of the national anthem followed a demonstration over threatened pay cuts in 1931! Cradden is at pains to point out, with reference to Bain's *White Collar Unionism*, their shared identity and consciousness in common with that of other white collar union members. Yet there was awareness of the ruling English elite which dominated the upper echelons of the civil service, and the members saw themselves 'certainly as operating in an Irish milieu' (p. 27). Few Roman Catholics however were to be found in the civil service at least until the 1960s. During the eruption of 'the troubles', different sections of the membership were involved in civil disobedience or industrial action in support of Unionist protests on the one hand, while others walked out in protest over the Bloody Sunday shootings.

Fourthly Cradden highlights the continued emphasis on 'professionalism' which the unions maintained, such as the appointment of paid officers, the maintaining of office premises and other features of bureaucratisation. In his chapter 'The Decline of Amateurism' he describes what this meant from the late 1920s when a succession of full-time officers, often with colonial/army backgrounds, was appointed. It was with some consternation therefore that the appointment of Brendan Harkin to NICSA was greeted (by sections of the membership as well as government) in the early 1950s. With a strong background in the labour movement, including experience as a convenor at Harland and Wolff, he was also from a Catholic/nationalist background. Unsurprisingly therefore, opposition by factions of NICSA's membership produced some bitterness especially over some of Harkin's activities. He played a significant part on ICTU's Northern Ireland Committee, participating in the 1972 conference held to launch their peace programme, at which an end to internment was called for. Harkin always remained committed to a unified trade union body, and with his negotiating skills and what Cradden describes as *panache*, survived the disquiet expressed by some of the membership. Ironically, the final stages of the alliance were being completed against a turbulent background, including bomb damage to union buildings, rioting and internment.

Cradden does discuss these developments with a depth and rigour which is deserved, and acknowledges both the role of agents and structures in forming and reforming the unions' reorganisation, and shaping the consciousness and activities of the membership. If anything, however some key developments are perhaps buried within such a wealth of detail. For example, the struggle to gain Whitley machinery for individual government department was finally achieved in 1971 after resistance on the part of the employers for twenty-five years. In addition, the affiliation of the alliance unions to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, was probably instrumental in sustaining the alliance unions, offering a further incentive to remain separate from UK unions since they gained representation on the Northern Ireland Committee and thus, influence on 'social contact' type issues such as social policy and economic planning. Whilst Cradden does justice to some of these developments, they might be overlooked amidst the relatively minor detail which often appears alongside major events in the evolution of NIPSA.

The current General Secretary's Foreword notes that many of the problems encountered by the various unions which came to form NIPSA, and their membership are 'depressingly familiar'. Questions of 'employee representatives' as opposed to trade union representatives, and resistance to union recognition, he rightly reminds us are nothing new. Added to these could be other
resurgent themes of our times such as fragmentation of national bargaining, periodic decline in membership levels, and an emphasis on ‘employee loyalty and commitment’ to the employer.

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JACKIE SINCLAIR

Women and Trade Unions: A Comparative Perspective

Jennifer Curtin

This book is important in that it deals with a neglected topic in the field of industrial relations and gender relations, that of women and trade unions from a comparative perspective. For the topic alone, it is welcome. The broad aim of the book is to examine the extent to which a ‘partnership’ has been developed between women workers and trade unions. More specifically Curtin aims to analyse how women trade unionists have sought to make trade union structures and policy agendas more inclusive of the interests of women workers in four countries: Australia, Austria, Israel and Sweden (chosen because of their similarities in having large trade union membership, strong, centralised union confederations, and close links to parties to the left that have participated in government, although only recently in Australia). Curtin also aims to explore under what circumstances and around what issues have women trade unionists deployed class-based or gender-specific strategies in furthering the interests of women workers. This is related to the history of women’s inclusion and representation by trade unions and the political and cultural environment within which trade unionism has operated. In other words, this is an ambitious and far-reaching book.

The book draws on primary research material that was collected between August 1994 and April 1995 from interviews conducted with fifty women trade union officials (and five male trade unionists) who were equality officers and/or women’s officers. The author also consulted officials from parties of the left, government officials, academics, staff of international labour secretariats and international labour confederations for information and advice. The result is an impressive and detailed picture of women’s struggles, rights and their links with political and trade union structures in the four countries. It is both the similarities and differences between the countries that inform and engage the reader. The book begins with two chapters that map the ground of the work to follow and which identify women-inclusive strategies. Curtin identifies the key themes that inform her work and importantly acknowledges the tensions that exist between class and gendered explanations of the position of women workers, tensions that permeate the analysis of the relationship between women and trade unions. Curtin suggests that ‘the salience of class remains, but that other differences also exist, not parallel to class, nor in a hierarchy with class or gender as primary, but rather in a state of flux, ever-changing, intersecting, and very much conditional on a particular historical context’ (36). Informed by this perspective, Curtin analyses each country in turn.

She begins with Australia, where class politics are described as essentially ‘labourist’ in orientation, focusing primarily on the needs of the wage earners in terms of both economic and social security. Women have sought to have their interests represented in the context of state
regulation and more recently, corporatism in Australia. Curtin shows that ‘the labourist tradition is one in which class has been inherently linked to ideas of masculinity and mateship’ (p. 62). The early exclusion was compounded by the gendered underpinning of the industrial relations system, which structurally reinforced the notion of the ‘family wage’. Women’s representation as women is shown to be critical in undermining the male dominated agenda-setting process of the broader union movement and such strategies to further improve this representation are increasing.

Austria, whilst the labelled (by Curtin) as the most corporatist of states, is presented as having an inherently conservative form of class politics. Its experience is of relevance to many of the debates in Britain on social partnership. The nature of social partnership mitigates against the raising of issues that would be controversial or unacceptable to any of the social partners. Curtin argues that it is likely that these customs will continue to exclude the possibility of gender equality becoming a topic for consideration within this forum. Notions of women as mothers and wives were already embedded in Austrian culture and the renewed emphasis on consensus and maintenance of the status quo allowed these norms to become rigidified.

The contrast with Israel reinforces the importance of understanding the social and political context for an understanding of trade unionism. The chapter on Israel demonstrates how class and gender are overshadowed by Zionism. Curtin argues that the broader solidarity created around national Jewish identity has overshadowed and undermined the usefulness of both class-based and gender specific strategies in pursuing the claims of women. Curtin also shows that Arab-Israeli women have limited visibility and voice in both the Histadrut (the General Federation of Trade Unions) and the broader political culture of Israel. Indeed it is also the case the Histadrut does not represent Palestinians who live in the occupied territories.

The final example used by Curtin is Sweden, where policy directions developed within the Swedish corporatist model are shown to have substantially improved the economic and social position of working women in Sweden and further that recent gender neutral discourse has sought to incorporate men into the domestic sphere. The focus on class in Sweden has led to solutions for both the working class and for working women and has had a considerable impact on the way women themselves have organised their interests. With the more recent shift to the right in public policy rhetoric, there is a resurgence in women’s collective action, which is all the more important because of the resilience of men’s domination of the hierarchies of trade unions.

The book provides a useful conclusion that attempts to pull together the wealth of data on similarities and differences between the countries. The similarity of women’s collective strategies between the countries is striking. Curtin argues that the formation of solidarities around class or gender could be viewed as dynamic and fluid, with the changing boundaries of those included and excluded in the process of interest formation and redefinition, creating new claims and new solidarities: ‘contingent solidarities’ (p. 160), a concept Curtin sees as a useful framework for analysis of class-based and gender specific strategies in a manner that reveals women’s agency regarding the (re)formulating of interests. This analysis is important in that it incorporates the diversity of interests and their dynamic interrelationships that trade unions must now accommodate in their representative structures. However, an important omission is an engagement with the debates on class and patriarchy. Some critical appraisal of the concept of dynamic and fluid interest formation is required, since it appears to deny the importance of enduring structural inequalities that underpin those interests and limit, although not necessarily obviate, their potentially transformative nature. Notwithstanding these points, this book is an important contribution and will be welcomed by scholars of industrial relations and in particular of gender and trade unions.
Work and Pay in Japan

Robert A. Hart and Seiichi Kawasaki


It is best to say at the outset that this is a sociologist’s review of a book by two economists and makes no attempt to assess the adequacy of the economic concepts they use or the contribution made to labour market economics. Most of the book is, however, accessible to reasonably persevering non-economists. It certainly contains both data and analysis of considerable interest to anyone concerned with the distinctiveness of Japanese labour market institutions and practices.

To a non-economist, its strength lies in the careful way it examines distinctiveness, its analysis of the relationships between different aspects of the Japanese labour market, and its presentation of Japanese data in international comparative perspective. Its explanations of the differences between Japanese institutions and those of other comparable societies do, however, beg a lot of questions and sometimes leave the reader nowhere. Its search for rational explanations provides a useful, instructive, and, in some ways, healthy corrective to cultural accounts of Japanese difference but, apart from some reference to the work of Ronald Dore, it does not really engage with those who have explored the specificities of Japanese culture, society, and history.

It certainly deals with a range of important topics that have been much discussed in the broader literature on Japanese work, employment, and industrial relations. It discusses ‘life-time’ employment, seniority wages, early retirement, enterprise unionism, quality circles, spring offensives, company welfare, careers, dualism, sub-contracting, and the relationship between education and work. A whole chapter is devoted to puzzling out the rationale for the highly distinctive role of bonus payments in the remuneration of Japanese labour. The book concludes with a succinct and balanced discussion of the uniqueness of the Japanese labour market. Rather than trying to cover all of this, I will pick out three areas of particular interest.

Taking employment first, in support of the notion of ‘life-time’ employment there is evidence that Japanese companies hold on to male labour in recessions. It is shown that Japanese companies have hoarded labour far more than British and American companies, though, significantly, to a much lesser extent in the 1990s. A nice set of graphs (p. 15) compares recorded unemployment, labour hoarding, and hidden unemployment in these three countries between 1960 and 1996. There is also a useful international comparison of labour market participation rates (p. 12), which brings out very clearly the extremely low rate of female participation in Japan and also its low rate of increase, in sharp contrast with other countries. Some might see this as evidence of patriarchy and a welfare system reliant on unpaid female labour but here it is discussed in terms of ‘hidden unemployment’ and the ‘discouraged worker effect’.

Another important area is the pronounced dualism in the structure of the Japanese economy. This study provides up-to-date evidence of the existence of a much bigger small company sector in Japan, and greater wage differentials between large and small companies, than in Britain. The sub-contract links between large and small companies are considered to have played ‘the key role’ in Japan's postwar economic growth (p. 154). Some have thought that this is because they enable large companies to maintain ‘life-time’ employment by cutting down on sub-contract labour at times of recession. It is argued here that the evidence of long-term and continuous sub-contract relationships between large and small companies refutes this hypothesis. The benefit of these relationships is rather that they facilitate cooperation, maintain the flow of parts to assembly plants, and diffuse information and technology. Dore’s explanation of the prevalence of these relationships in Japan by reference to the Confucianist values of benevolence and trust is rejected
on the grounds that sub-contracting spread relatively recently, after the Second World War, at a
time of intense competition. No alternative explanation is, however, really offered.

The chapter on industrial relations shows that, although the differences between trade
unionism in Japan and unions elsewhere are often overdrawn, the structure of Japanese unions is
distinctively focused at enterprise level. The main explanation provided for this is Japan’s late
industrialisation and the emergence of a system of industrial relations ‘geared to the needs of
workers and managers in large-scale modern corporations and their associated internal labour
markets’ (p. 58). What this essentially functionalist argument misses out is the periodic
destruction of independent unions by the combined efforts of employers and the state, and the
imposition of enterprise unions dependent on the employer, most recently during the late 1940s
and early 1950s. Power relations do not figure in this account of industrial relations. It is suggested
that Japan’s high levels of industrial conflict in the 1950s and 1960s resulted from a break-down in
communications during the ‘steeply rising section of a learning curve’ as new industrial relations
institutions were established. The rapid decline in the days lost through industrial disputes after
the middle 1970s then reflected the levelling off of this curve ‘as the parties learned to understand
the benefits of compromise’ (p. 60).

So how distinctive are Japanese institutions and what about their future? The concluding
chapter argues that many apparently unique institutions are found elsewhere and simply
‘packaged’ differently or given greater emphasis in Japan. The weight of bonus payments, the
extent of enterprise unionism, and the sub-contract network between large and small companies
are, however, considered quite distinctive. So far as the future is concerned, the authors are fairly
cautious and a bit contradictory. Their final paragraph concludes that ‘collective bargaining,
employment and labour payment’ are likely to remain distinct, while ‘work and pay systems’ show
signs of convergence with those of competitor countries.

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JAMES FULCHER

Work, Organisation and Industry: The Asian Experience
Ai-Yun Hing, C. T. Change and R. Lansbury (eds.)

This book examines different trajectories of industrialisation in Asian countries. It draws upon a
collection of papers from varied disciplines. Most of the contributors are Asian or have written a
number of articles in this field. In essence, this book is critically oriented and provides us with
some stories unveiled in the discourse of development.

Beside a short editor’s introduction, the topics addressed in the book can be roughly
categorised into three sections. The first one includes wage conditions and industrial relations
amongst employees, employers and the state, noting their dynamics and struggles in the specific
country at a certain period with a historical and institutional perspective. Moreover, Deyo’s paper
uses a comparative study to identify the changes in labour regimes as a response to political
democracy in the 1980s and this can be seen as an addition to his book Beneath the Miracle (1987).
The second part embraces research around the current issue of ‘trust’ regarding Chinese economic
behaviour and leadership styles in the different context of national cultures. Thomas Menkhoff
identifies the priority of the trust-making process and argues that interpersonal trust cannot
guarantee the success of trade. Monir Tayeb recognises that there are two forms of leadership style: task-oriented and employee-oriented; however, the employees’ perceptions of these depend upon their cultural contexts. The final part is written by Gert Schmidt who briefly draws upon empirical studies in Italy, France and Germany to show the challenge for trade unions in a new world of production enmeshed with new information and communication technologies.

As to the coverage of countries, this book not only includes the ‘Newly Industrialised Countries’ (NICs) (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea), but also the ‘Next Newly Industrialised Countries’, namely, China, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In the case of Hong Kong, David A. Levin and Stephen Chiu use the framework of long waves to differentiate the causes and characters of strategies towards the organisational development of trade unions during three periods: 1920–26, 1946–51 and 1968 to the present. It notes that organisational loyalties and inter-organisational trust have yet to be built up and are mingled with unions’ different missions. To depict the changing faces of labour regimes in Taiwan in the 1950 to 1990s, Jenn-Hwan Wang constructs a typology of labour regimes and further scrutinises the genuine purpose and effect of the reforms evolved. Whether the state will brush off her role in industrial relations to pursue a liberal-pluralist labour regime is left open to question. Hwang-Joe Kim describes the structure of wages and employment along with labour disputes in Korea till 1989. However, the possibility of institutionalising conflicts through political democracy and recognition of trade unions still needs more investigation.

In terms of the emergence of the industrial system in Thailand, the authors set the stage for industrialisation and embrace social and cultural elements in order to discuss peculiarities. The Thai government attempted to play a very important role in industrial relations before the 1980s as did other developing countries. In Indonesia’s case, the authors note the ideology of ‘Pancasila’ in which the value of harmony is of great importance to legitimise the practices of labour relations and argue for sustainability by drawing upon a case from the Export Processing Zone.

There are two articles about China in this book. One is about the political-economic conditions and the development of unions in North China from 1900 to 1949 by Ko Yiu Chung. The author explores the different status and function of labour unions in a changing political regime. Economic reforms in China since 1979 have attracted a great deal of research attention. Nevertheless, few have examined the development and application of new wage policies. To fill this gap, Sukhan Jackson and Craig Littler evaluate the real practices of new wage policies and point to their contradictions.

In analysing the stereotypes of the ‘three pillars’ of Japanese management: lifetime employment, seniority system in salary and promotion, and company-based unionism, Akihiro Ishikawa explores the changing nature of management practices and individualisation in the workplace in contemporary Japan. Regarding the role of foreign investment, Rajah Rasiah confronts Neo-Marxist analysis by emphasising the ‘pro-active’ part of the host state since the LDCs (less developed countries) are not necessarily subject to the terms set by foreign capital from DCCs (developed capitalist countries).

Clearly, the strength of the book lies in its broad coverage of issues and countries within an historical and structural context. Also, it offers an opportunity for western societies to look at the Asian experiences through different and perhaps more accurate telescopes since they have often suggested that these diversities are the product of cultural explanations. Compared to the long history of industrialisation in the West, the experiences of those in the Asian countries are indeed comparatively short and ‘squeezed’. However, the tendency towards convergence is still doubtful. Since the impact of globalisation is profound, more up-to-date research on the issues of capital mobility, labour migration, the changing direction of work organisation, trade unions and management strategies is still required especially in line with recent economic transformations.
Generally speaking, anyone who is interested in the complexities and peculiarities of industrial relations and management practices in Asian countries, will find this book worthy of reading.

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**Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society**  
*Pat O’Connor*  

Changes to the lives of women in Ireland have been occurring at a pace undreamt of by those who took to the streets in the ‘second wave’ of Irish feminism in the 1970s. The 1990 election of Mary Robinson as President, swiftly followed by the emergence of the ‘Celtic Tiger’, laid the foundations for Ireland’s road to modernisation. As Pat O’Connor reminds us, 90 per cent of the growth in employment has occurred in the field of women’s employment, making the Celtic Tigress a more appropriate description of the current economic phenomenon.

It is certainly time for a consideration of the impact of these changes upon the gendered nature of Irish society and an assessment of the extent to which that rigid demarcation has begun to break down. Jenny Beale’s *Women in Irish Society* was published in 1986, and changes over the past decade make that useful work a reflection of a very different era. There have been enormous changes in terms of improved access to the employment market, while previously taboo subjects like abortion and divorce have entered the public arena and popular pressure for legal reform has been a stark reminder that the Catholic Church no longer determines the scope of legislative reform.

O’Connor introduces her study by considering very briefly the question of continuities and changes in the position of women in Irish society over the past thirty years before then embarking on a wide-ranging justification for having written a book focused specifically on women. She declares that she writes from a ‘social constructionist perspective’, arguing that ‘women in Irish society have a culturally and structurally identifiable position’, so that regardless of class and participation in paid employment, their lives are defined by other experiences, for example, because of the primacy given to women as domestic carers (p. 4). Although there is some useful recapping of concepts like patriarchy, which students should find useful, the brief references to Foucault, Gramsci, postmodernism and the role of discourse in the production of competing truths provides a bewildering array of opposing epistemological and ontological views which are not followed through or integrated into the wealth of empirical details presented in the succeeding chapters.

An introductory chapter providing some description of the changes in women’s lives would have been a useful starting point for readers unfamiliar with contemporary Ireland. Indeed, an initial chapter outlining the status of women in post-famine Ireland would have helped readers to grasp the extent of the changes being discussed, particularly in terms of employment opportunities and challenges to clerical power. The absence of any guiding narrative thread makes many of the cultural references difficult to grasp. For example, who outside Ireland could grasp the significance of the Gay Byrne interview with Annie Murphy? There is no mention of Northern Ireland. O’Connor argues that ‘such a discussion would necessitate a far more extended and more complex discussion of church and state’ (p. 6). This self-imposed *cordon sanitaire* around ‘the north’ is familiar to historians and social scientists who are concerned with exploring those difficult issues, but is a regrettable omission, particularly given the important contribution
(eloquently recognised by President Robinson) made by women’s groups from all sides of the sectarian divide to the building of civil society in the province. Neither is there much consideration of the contribution made by the women’s movement in the south to the process of change catalogued in this context. In a work entitled Emerging Voices one would have expected to read the words of those women who have initiated so many of the changes considered by O’Connor. However, this is not an oral history. The only quotations included in the book are those belonging to the academic community. As a textbook it will be of use to students in women’s studies and sociology classes in Ireland. It is less accessible to the outsider.

Different chapters concentrate on the position of women as workers; the problematic nature of distinctions between paid work and the family; the world of paid employment; full-time workers in the home; young women; and women and ‘top jobs’. The focus is on the implications of EU directives, demographic trends, and the extent to which the gendered nature of work in Ireland (and elsewhere) has been modified by changing attitudes in the new generation entering the world of work. O’Connor concludes that Ireland is in a state of flux. Despite optimistic trends, no radical change will be possible unless ‘institutional structures reflect and reinforce a positive valuation of womanhood in all its multifacedness …’ (p. 257). Although she includes in this the institutional church, the state and the economic system, the overall impression conveyed by the focus of her argument is that she has directed her remarks most particularly at those who are in a position to redress the gender deficit by employing more women. The fact that the book is published by the Institute of Public Administration would support that view. Overall, therefore, it is a text which I would recommend be read by politicians, civil servants and managers of Irish industry. There are definite lessons to be learnt from the evidence marshalled by Pat O’Connor.

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MARGARET WARD

The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism

Richard Sennett


Now it has a paperback edition, The Corrosion of Character ought to be bought by every undergraduate who has any interest in what sociology can add to their self-knowledge and their understanding of their world. Sennett’s book takes its place in a luminous tradition of social criticism which seeks to find out not only how we feel about our participation in the capitalist world of work but also how capitalism makes us feel about ourselves. Sennett seeks answers to these questions at what he thinks is a critical juncture marked by the ascendancy of a new kind of capitalism, a new kind of work, and a new relationship to the labour market. He thinks that these changes are so radical that we cannot think of ourselves in the same way we used to do, and he summarises the effect by saying we are fast being deprived of the opportunity to form and transmit character.

By referring to character, Sennett wants us to see that neither material prosperity nor growing inequality tell us all that we need to know about the new economy. Some of the people who most clearly exemplify the tendencies that worry him have fulfilled their parents’ dreams of upward mobility into professional jobs, yet in some ways they are worse off than their parents. Their work
does not make them feel that they are worthwhile people and they are haunted by a fear of losing control. They may be paid a great deal more than their parents ever earned in their blue-collar jobs but the decisions they make at work count for less, and they never feel they know where they stand. In the new economy people are at a permanent disadvantage because they can never do well enough to know they have earned their employer’s commitment. Under these conditions it is small wonder that there is little loyalty shown towards employers, in fact we now counsel, and celebrate, lack of commitment. The career of the average American is proof that we now believe that to stay put is to be left out, yet if we have no meaningful narrative to our lives how can character be formed? Outside a tiny minority of highly successful risk-takers most of us are being set up to fail, not just failing to reach our highest ambitions but failing to make sense of our lives.

In these new circumstances it also becomes impossible for parents to set their children the examples that they would wish to. They may want to persuade their children of the value of resolution and commitment but cannot do this when it is obvious that resolution and commitment are seen as value-less in the world that matters, the world of work. Their children see little evidence of commitment or self-discipline in the behaviour of anyone they know. The only message that parents can transmit which is congruent with their children’s real experience is to look after their own interests by avoiding commitment and eschewing pointless sacrifices. Instead of transmitting the building blocks needed for character formation the workers of the new economy cannot help but transmit all the components of rampant short-termism and individualism to their sons and daughters.

Because of the geographical mobility which is so common in America, Sennett is able to augment this argument at various points with allusions to the loss of community. The children of the workers of the new economy move from state to state as their parents change jobs, and learn that it is not worth over-investing in friendship. Yet the most interesting parts of Sennett’s account have less to do with simple nostalgia for gemeinschaft or even for workplace solidarity. Thus Sennett describes some of the ersatz substitutes that the new economy puts in place of the values it destroys. In particular he notes that the teamwork which modern corporations prize creates superficial ties between individuals that are a grotesque caricature of real solidarity and friendship. The reality of teamwork is that everyone is completely indifferent to who the other team members are. Their character is irrelevant and all that matters is how well they can act.

The aspects of the changing world of work that so worry Sennett are now very familiar and few people will read this book to learn about technological change, flexibility or hard HRM. Instead they will read it for its deep insights into the way people now live their lives in and out of work, although none of this amounts to anything more than circumstantial evidence that the new economy may bear some responsibility for the corrosion of character. Indeed Sennett probably over-emphasises the culpability of the new economy. He is, after all, fully aware that sociology has bemoaned the loss of gemeinschaft since the inception of the discipline and it is worth nothing how many of the people who appear in his book are the children or grandchildren of immigrants who have moved out of their communities and rejected all that they and their parents held dear. Moreover, David Riesman discussed character and its decline in some of the same terms as Sennett in the middle of the post-war Fordist boom which occurred half a century ago. A more systematic approach might have put in doubt the degree of culpability of the new economy for the changes Sennett finds so disturbing, but then the book might have lost some of the style that makes it so compelling. It is Sennett’s mission to think through the connections between capitalist development and people’s hopes and dreams and this book is a triumphant addition to, and vindication of, his lifework.

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RALPH FEVRE
This book comprises a series of essays on diverse aspects of gender and management in contemporary British public sector organisations, with a particular focus on education, and especially higher education, which is considered in five out of the thirteen chapters. The collection is unusual in that it considers both men and women, masculinity and femininity, and there is also a welcome mix of male and female authors, some of them fairly well-known. This having been said, this is a very uneven collection in terms of its style and quality. Some of the papers are thoughtful and the research extremely interesting, whilst others lack rigour and a coherent research methodology.

The strongest papers include that by Stella Maille which offers a persuasive and subtle account of masculinity and management in environmental health services. She shows how the fears and worries of male managers at work are related to their domestic lives and in particular to their concern to define a role for themselves given that they see home and family as female terrain. Maille skilfully brings out the kind of ambivalences of management masculinity, its mix of intimacy and distance to colleagues that other papers in this volume tend rather to lose. Lesley Thom provides an interesting account of why women tend not to apply for senior positions in schools. In ways no doubt familiar in many other areas in both public and private sectors, she shows how the apparent (sometimes genuine) enthusiasm for the appointment of women nonetheless does not tend to lead to large numbers of women being appointed to senior ranks. She shows how men continue to be informally groomed to develop their managerial skills by taking on a variety of roles and responsibilities. This allows them both to feel confident in applying for the job of head teachers, and to be more successful in being appointed to them. Another interesting paper is that by Rosemary Deem on feminist managers in higher education, which she uses to reflect on the ‘femocrat’ arguments put forward by Eisenstein. She strikingly shows how these women continue to feel marginal even in senior positions, and she discusses how this might allow these women the potential to be change makers. Brewis examines the embodiment of organisational cultures and shows how women effectively ‘manage’ their bodies at work, despite the negative stereotyping that persists in the public sector.

Alongside these interesting papers, I found a rather greater number of papers that proved less innovative and rewarding. It is striking that many of this latter group of papers were written by the male contributors, the purpose of which seemed to be as much about positioning their authors as sympathetic ‘pro-feminists’ than about developing substantive new research insights (I would like to think that it is possible to do both at the same time). Not for the first time I was struck by the fact that women seem better able to use reflexive accounts of their own experiences in informed and critical ways than do men. In some cases the research is simply not robust enough to justify publication. For instance, Whitehead’s interviews with six female Labour MPs hardly offers enough substantial material to be of significant interest. Similarly, Kerfoot and Knights provide a detailed case study of a macho power conflict between senior academics which can hardly be said to offer new insights into the gendering of management cultures.

In general, then, this book as a whole, and with honourable exceptions, is of limited interest. It can hardly be said that it provides a comprehensive account of the gendering of the public sector because it is so skewed towards education. The editors could perhaps have done more to integrate the essays cohesively, perhaps by grouping the essays on higher education together and reflecting on the inter-relationship between their respective contributions, for instance. They might have encouraged their contributors to relate their findings and arguments more centrally to core
debates about the gendering of organisation, or about the changing political economy of the public sector. I doubt that students would find the papers hang together well enough to be useful. Academic researchers will largely prefer more substantive research reports and findings. Practitioners in the non-academic public sector itself will find some material of interest but I suspect they will cherry pick and find the somewhat academic focus a little offputting. One of the anecdotes which seized my attention were the words of an ambitious female Labour MP’s interviewed by Whitehead. Rather to Whitehead’s annoyance she refused to see politics in strongly gendered terms and emphasised ‘I don’t spend time worrying about gender, I get on with it’ (p. 24). No doubt, she should worry about gender rather more, but I suspect she would feel confirmed in her outlook if she looked at the contents of this book.

University of Manchester

Mike Savage

Divergent Capitalisms. The Social Structuring and Change of Business Systems

Richard Whitley


During the 1980s and 1990s, there has occurred a shift of interest within sociology and political economy from a largely theoretical study of capitalism as a mode of production to an analysis and comparison of various forms of capitalism. Such study has combined theoretical conceptualisation with empirical substantiation. More recently, this literature has been enlivened by a debate between proponents of the ‘globalisation’ thesis, arguing for convergence between varieties of capitalism, and social scientists defending divergence. Richard Whitley’s book makes an important contribution to this debate.

Sociologists in organisation and business studies, interested in the systematic comparison of advanced capitalist economies from a broadly institutionalist perspective, will be familiar with Whitley’s earlier work on the comparative cross-national ‘business systems’ perspective. This new book is no mere collection of earlier publications. It not only brings together the ideas expounded in earlier publications in a new way but also significantly expands and deepens the theoretical framework.

In more substantive terms, the book analyses firms and markets as systems of economic coordination and control. It addresses issues such as ownership, control and management of firms, as well as their modes of growth; inter-firm relations and market organisation; and intra-firm processes of authoritative coordination of work processes and employment relations. These aspects of business systems are systematically analysed and explained in different national social institutional contexts, ranging from East Asian countries (Taiwan and Korea), the US and western European countries, to the post-communist business systems of Slovenia and Hungary. Additionally, Whitley provides systematic accounts of recent transformations in patterns of economic organisation in the two East Asian and post-communist eastern European countries. He also develops a very insightful and original analysis of the impact of various internationalisation processes on national business systems and, in the process, provides further solid support for the ‘globalisation as myth’ argument.

After an informative introductory chapter which distinguishes his own from related approaches in the economic sociology/political economy of comparative capitalism, Whitley sets
out his theoretical framework in five chapters. To summarise, the comparative-business-systems approach develops a framework for analysing and comparing forms of economic organisation 'that identifies their key characteristics and differences and explains these in terms of variations in particular kinds of social institutions' (p. 26). Social institutions which structure access to important economic resources are not only shown to vary individually between societies, but strong emphasis is also paid to the way such institutions are either tightly interlocked or, conversely, fail to become closely integrated. Different varieties of capitalism are thus each viewed to function according to a specific logic. The business systems identified are of the following five types: fragmented (Hong Kong); co-ordinated industrial districts (the Third Italy); compartmentalized (the Anglo-Saxon countries); state-organised (South Korea); and highly co-ordinated business systems (Japan).

Whitley's conclusions are that, despite pervasive changes both within national business systems and in their economic and geo-political environment, such systems have changed only incrementally in path-dependent ways. Even in post-communist economies, despite changes in political system and ownership patterns, no radical transformation of business systems is deemed to have occurred. Whitley identifies the processes which reproduce divergent ways of coordinating and controlling economic activities. Such striking processes of reproduction of forms of national economic co-ordination are explained by reference to the ways in which the various elements of business systems are interlocked and are maintained by constellations of important economic actors. This emphasis on enduring divergence in fundamental characteristics of national business systems simultaneously suggests that increased economic and financial internationalisation has not led to any significant convergence. These conclusions, although often counter-intuitive, are by and large very convincing as they are based on careful logical argument, backed up by a wealth of empirical detail.

Whitley's earlier work has been criticised as presenting a somewhat static view of capitalist economies, resulting from a one-sided focus on institutional structures. This book, in contrast, pays extensive attention to collective actors, contestation of institutional arrangements and processes and mechanisms of change. Change is seen to result from both external geo-political and economic transformation and from developments internal to individual societies. External stimuli for change are not necessarily effective if important institutional actors do not take them on board. But this sophisticated understanding of the possibilities and limits to institutional and organisational change remains largely at the descriptive level. Whitley's analysis of change is insufficiently integrated into his theoretical framework. The latter does not separate agents from structures, thus making it difficult to conceive of political action, independent of, and in opposition to, the various institutional arrangements.

Whitley develops his arguments in a highly systematic manner. Although written in lucid prose, the density of the argument does not make for easy reading. To follow the application of the theoretical scheme and its defence against counter-arguments requires a sustained effort from the reader. One has to grapple with the author's exposition of long lists of requirements to be fulfilled for certain counter-arguments to be valid. However, the reader is helped by frequent presentation of key features of arguments in useful tables, as well as by the constant illustration of theoretical points with empirical examples. Moreover, the effort invested in following the arguments is well rewarded. The book provides a very useful intellectual toolkit for comparative analysis of varieties of capitalism and their interaction with an as yet underdeveloped global capitalist system. It not only reliably documents the diversity of institutional and organisational forms found in contemporary capitalist societies but also enriches our understanding of both continuity and change in such arrangements in a wide range of advanced and newly industrialising countries across the globe. Undergraduates may find the book a bit daunting, but postgraduate students and
academics will not only read it with interest but frequently return to it for theoretical guidance and empirical reference.

University of Cambridge

CHRISTEL LANE

Why Unions Matter

Michael D. Yates

It comes as no surprise that this is a polemical book. It fiercely argues the case for union adhesion in a country where union density has been in free fall since the 1950s. This is, of course, an argument that the study and sometimes worthy Monthly Review Press has long been associated with. But what is a surprise is the quality of Yates’ writing and the book’s accessibility. It is actually a terrific read, calling on personal (and even family) experiences, and recognising defeats as well as retelling some of old favourite tales of successful struggle in a fresh way. The cocktail has fizz too, with some excellent examples of Jim West’s labour movement photography and a really funny cartoonist, Mike Konopacki.

The first task Yates sets himself is by no means an easy one: in the context of some of the world’s least democratic and, until at least quite recently, most sexist and racist unions, to present persuasive reasons why America’s middle class (few admit to being working class) should join up. It works very well at this level, and after using data on the ‘union mark-up’ effect (this always seemed unsatisfactory to me although it is present in abundance in the US), it moves rapidly towards the key political issue of ‘the unions and dignity’ (p. 18). An interesting parallel with Colin Whitston’s research on British trade unions is the research Yates quotes on union recognition ballots by Bronfenbrenner and Juravich: ‘Unions which focus on issues such as dignity, justice, discrimination, fairness, or service quality were associated with higher win rates than those which focused on more traditional bread and butter issues, such as wages, benefits and job security’ (p. 35). Finally, Yates plumps for an argument that has always seemed to me to be a clincher: as lousy as American unions perhaps are, they must be doing something, otherwise ‘why are most employers in an all-out war against them?’ (p. 23).

Having dealt with Why Unions Matter, Yates then turns to his second, and more important, task. This is to persuade his audience – young or new activists in the main – that the very broad American trade union left, by and large, both offered and offers something better (and probably more essential to union longevity) than did and does the traditional conservative and business union leadership. This is an argument that I like intuitively. The pivotal section is entitled ‘Politics and collective bargaining’ (pp. 79–80). In terms of its history it relies on Zeitlin and Stepan-Norris’ work contrasting ‘left-influenced’ union contract gains with ‘right-influenced’ union contracts. In contemporary America Yates contrasts bottom-up or at least bottom-involved campaigning around issues ranging from individual grievances to contracts positively with the results of top-down efforts.

The argument that left radical trade unionism can be shown to be at least as effective and normally is more effective in delivering improved working conditions than right-wing non-radical trade unionism is one I often use it myself, particularly in relation to France. But deep down I still have some doubts about the kind of counter-factual thinking the argument involves, particularly when by extension Yates applies it to the whole of the post-war period in trying to explain why the
‘glory days’ of the 1930s have not (yet) returned. There is an initial problem that many American radicals overlook, Yates among them: as I attempted to show in my historical study of Doge Main. The sit-downs of the 1936–7 were used out of tactical weakness and that weakness (of experienced independent trade unionists) still lay at the heart of the swollen CIO unions (left and right) of ten years later. But Yates’ explanation is a politically correct version of the old leadership betrayal thesis: ‘First, workers have not been able to overcome serious racial and sexual divisions … Second, all of the [earlier] labor rebellions were motivated by a search for alternatives to the wage labor system itself … Unfortunately, labor’s leaders instead accepted the class structure of American society … The result was a more conservative trade unionism …’ (p. 29). So first the workers get idealised (were they really all revolutionaries in 1936–7?), then they get blamed (were they not just as racist and sexist in the 1930s?), and then ‘labor’s leaders’ (who for unexplained reasons were good guys in the 1930s). Who does that leave out?

What Yates finds it difficult is to point honestly to the sheer strength of American capitalism as the most important factor. It has crushed workers’ struggle after workers’ struggle, it has bought and corrupted union leader after union leader, and now that workers’ union adhesion is being forced down to the levels it first reached at the start of the century, it is moving in for the kill. The reality may not be very palatable, but it is surely better to face the truth than to look for people to blame.

For a non-American audience the book’s strength is its straightforward presentation of what being a trade unionist in the US is all about: from the legal and campaigning steps necessary to win a recognition ballot (a chapter of great current interest in the UK), to a sensitive discussion of the key political issues in collective bargaining, like how to defend seniority without reinforcing racial and gender discrimination. I recommend it strongly to all students of American industrial relations.

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STEVE JEFFEYRS

Women and Social Class: International Feminist Perspectives
Christine Zmroczek and Pat Mahony (eds.)

Social class, claim the editors, remains one of the key ordering principles of contemporary societies, as it operates through social structures, lived experience and consciousness. Of particular interest in this volume are the experiential dimensions of class as they are situated within and connected to a variety of (in this case, national) social settings. Exploring these links, suggest the authors, opens the way for new initiatives in theorising social class.

To illustrate the continued significance of social class, and the relations through which class structures and experiences connect, the book assembles sixteen, largely autobiographical, accounts written by women (all professionals, mostly sociologists) from different countries. Through these pieces, we are invited to consider, for example, ‘the rules and codes’ of class membership, the varied nature of ‘entire class systems’, the manner in which ‘power relations are constructed and maintained, and the capacity of the contributors to ‘excavate the (class) ground on which they, themselves, stand’ (see the introduction).

This is an invitation that is difficult to resist, not least because we are also promised coverage of these issues through the lens of international feminist perspectives. The importance of such
perspectives derives from two sources: the structural and experiential effects of recent global transformations, and the steady decline in fresh initiatives by social scientists to theorise social class (and gender relations). The editors argue that current perspectives on social class are insufficiently sensitive to how people ‘do’ class on a day-to-day basis (p. 5). Here, then, is an opportunity to explore both the social and sociological dimensions of class processes as lived (and analysed) by professional women in different societies. In light of this large brief, what does the book deliver?

One interesting feature of the various accounts is the emergence of common themes in the contributors’ life stories. These include the importance of education (particularly for those who are class-migrants), a sense of living on the margins (often despite their professional standing), and their experience of class (gender and ethnicity) as power relations operating within their families, communities and their workplace. Amongst other things, the collection provides an opportunity to consider the use of autobiography as a route to comparative analysis, particularly in relation to the emergence and development of class ‘selves’ and communities.

Also useful are the historical and political descriptions of the societies in which the writers were raised, or now live. While these matters are not uniformly addressed, there is interesting information, for example, in the accounts of the connection between modernisation and the emergence of the professional classes in Botswana; the personal and public paradoxes of life in the ‘classless’ Czech Republic; the relation of nationality to class for a Korean-American living in Britain; and the emergent class structures in the social formation of Israel. The virtue of these pieces rests as much with the snapshots of the societies from which the authors write as it does with their efforts to chart how the conditions of public life translate into personal development.

This said, there are some respects in which the book is disappointing. One problem derives from the poor fit between the editors’ claims and what the contributors actually cover. One of the claims is this: ‘the authors analyse their own understandings of class and the implications for their feminism and for feminist theories in an historical period when capitalist market economics have claimed a globalizing influence…’ Well, some authors do this, and some don’t. This is partly a matter of the authors’ own narrative emphasis and inclination (they are writing about experience after all), and partly a matter of the tasks that the editors set for contributors (see p. 4). While the accounts are informative, they are too theoretically patchy to sustain the claims made on their behalf.

In two other respects, the editors misrepresent the contents of the text. For one thing, this book’s title leads us to expect engagement with ‘international feminist perspectives’. However, a collection of commentaries by women in different countries does not, in and of itself, constitute a book about ‘feminist perspectives’. Secondly, it is not clear in what ways the book offers new directions or models for theorising class. Perhaps their objective would have been served had either the contributors, or the editors, devoted some space to currents gaps in class theory and class analysis, or to existing ethnographic and autobiographical accounts of class experience. Since this did not occur, the contents do not really carry the burden of the book’s title or stated objectives.

For readers wishing to advance current debates around the sociological status of class analysis – say, by linking the many domains in which class formations operate – the book is a bit thin. The editors argue that ‘it has been increasingly difficult to define class adequately, or to provide an answer to the question (of) the interconnections with other categories of oppression and discrimination’ (p. 5). In some respects, a survey of attempts to address these issues over the past ten years would certainly bear them out. However, they choose to avoid the problems of definition (and application to different, national social systems) by ignoring them. This leaves the task of exploring how class is ‘done’ theoretically adrift, and the meanings and processes of social class are
made contingent on the reflections of the ‘doers’. Yet, all the contributors operate with some taken-for-granted conception of class structures through which they make sense of their experiences. Just what that is, and where it comes from, is often unclear.

If the editors wished to avoid tired arguments about the definition of social class because they do not capture the complexity of social relations, then at least some sustained attention to theory would have helped frame the contributions. For example, given the editors’ interest in experience as socially situated, they might have addressed, say, the theme of structure and agency. As a volume of personal recollection, it is an interesting source of evidence on the experience of class structures, gender and ethnicity, but its sociological content is limited.

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MARCI GREEN