

REVIEWS

Hugh Armstrong Clegg **Trade Unionism Under Collective Bargaining: A Theory Based on Comparisons of Six Countries.** Warwick Studies in Industrial Relations, Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, pp. 121.

This is an ambitious book. It seeks to explain trade union behaviour under collective bargaining in six countries and all within 119 pages. As a descriptive work leading to some general observations and conclusions it reads quite well; but as a theory of union behaviour it has major weaknesses. And a theory it claims to be.

This book is interesting as a reflection on the state of industrial relations research, coming as it does from one of the most prominent British authors in the field. Although it is novel in tackling so much, its methodology is old. The book can be seen as the culmination (continuation?) of the descriptive or institutional approach to the study of industrial relations much beloved in the United Kingdom, and in the United States until the 1960s. By being purely descriptive though, it is a case of tackling a lot with little in the way of technique.

Extraordinary claims are being made for the theory being propounded. "Collective bargaining is put forward . . . not just as an important influence, but as the 'main,' 'major,' 'foremost,' or 'principal' influence" on union behaviour. "(Collective bargaining's) dimensions account for union behaviour more adequately than any other set of explanatory variables can do" (p. 11). The claim that union membership, structure and government, workplace organization, strikes and industrial democracy can all be best explained by the dimensions of collective bargaining is a tall one, difficult to demonstrate by any approach and well nigh impossible by the descriptive one.

Clegg's theorizing may appear familiar to students of industrial relations but not to those of more rigorous fields. The reader is continually confronted by statements like "the theory contends," or "the theory

asserts." And asserts it does! The theory here is not a logically consistent and rigorous body of assumptions, processes and results but a collection of assertions, contentions, and conclusions. Sometimes the theory comes before the description (which, presumably is meant to test it) and sometimes after. Industrial relations as a field of study desperately requires better theorizing. Now it may be that it is difficult to develop good theory about something as complex as trade union behaviour, but let us be honest enough to admit it and claim nothing more than an *ad hoc* approach.

The advancement of industrial relations as a field also depends on better testing. In this book the tendency is to state an hypothesis and then discuss it in the light of some empirical evidence. The evidence is non-statistical and, as a few pages of description, is necessarily selective. One is not convinced that brief reflections on institutional or legal detail or the provision of examples or counter-examples demonstrates much either way about the validity of the hypothesis.

Much of the discussion could be called "simple regression by words." A relationship between two variables is suggested — for example, that the density of union membership will be high where the extent of bargaining is wide — and then evaluated not in terms of statistics but of words. Now this is a difficult game to play. At times it is necessary because, for example, data is deficient. But many of Clegg's propositions appear amenable to statistical testing through multiple regression or other potentially powerful techniques. Something like multiple regression would have the added advantage of bringing the several strands of discussion together into one proposition (or equation) or set of propositions within which the influence of variables can be simultaneously assessed.

Many areas are unsuited to statistical method; but this does not apply to several explored here. An example will suffice.

Chapter 2 seeks to account for the density of union membership, i.e. the proportion of employees organized in trade unions. Something close to this is the subject of a companion volume by Bain and Elsheikh in the Warwick Series in Industrial Relations published in the same year as this one. (See review in this issue). Admittedly, Bain and Elsheikh are concerned with change in union membership and Clegg may disagree with their explanations. But they show that the subject can be tested statistically and one would have expected that their work might have influenced Clegg or at the very least have been referred to by him.

An upshot of the above problems is that some of the book's conclusions are less than profound and come close to being tautologies, (e.g. the conclusion that "the level of bargaining accounts for the extent of decentralization in union government"). All through the book one has reservations about the direction of influences or "causation." Does the level of bargaining determine the extent of union government decentralization, is it the other way or are they determined simultaneously?

Even if the dimensions of collective bargaining do account for trade union behaviour, the question arises as to what determines the dimensions of bargaining. Clegg addresses this question but unfortunately in a similar way to his earlier ones. A few institutional features — the organization of employers, the structure of management and the law — are seen to determine the nature of collective bargaining. This is far from satisfying. What determines these features, and would not things like the organization of employers and the structure of management be influenced by the same factors that influence union structure and government and other aspects of union behaviour? These underlying explanatory variables don't seem to interest Clegg but their investigation would have greatly improved the book.

This book does not make it as a theory of trade unionism. As a brief comparative description of unionism and bargaining in six countries though it does have value. It provides an overview. Detail can be gleaned elsewhere.

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George Sayers Bain and Farouk Elsheikh **Union Growth and the Business Cycle**. Warwick Studies in Industrial Relations, Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, pp. 155, \$26.50.

The monograph, **Union Growth and the Business Cycle**, is part of a series on the subject of union growth being produced by the Industrial Relations Research Unit at Warwick University. The objective of the series is "to develop and verify a theory of fairly general applicability in the sense that it helps to account for union growth in different countries; in different industries, occupations and regions within these countries; and in different historical periods" and this volume "is concerned entirely with national aggregate patterns of union growth." The authors make the modest claim that the monograph **makes a start** on the task of explaining the cyclical fluctuations in union membership in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Sweden.

The book is written clearly and thoroughly footnoted. Other than the brief introduction and concluding summary, there are four chapters. Chapter Two is a survey of theories of union growth starting with Commons and the Wisconsin School and moving up to the present day. Chapter Three is a detailed critical survey of three econometric models of union growth: Hines' model for the United Kingdom, Ashenfelter and Pencavel's model for the United States and Sharpe's model for Australia. In the light of their criticisms of these three models, the authors specify an alternate model of union growth in Chapter Four which they test for the United Kingdom. The model specifies the proportional annual rate of change of union membership as a function of the proportional change in the price index, the proportional change of wages, the level of unemployment and the level of union density (total union membership as a proportion of the eligible labour force). Satisfied with the model in terms of goodness of fit, signs and magnitudes of the coefficients, structural stability, data sensitivity and predictive ability, they then go on in Chapter Five to estimate the model (with minor changes) for the other three countries. The results for all four countries are broadly similar and the authors explain away some differences between the results by pointing to institu-

tional variations between the countries.

We can say that the authors have succeeded indeed in making a start in explaining cyclical fluctuations in union membership. Chapters Two and Three are handled well and the econometric work is far more competent than is usual in this type of study. My major criticism is the lack of theory. Despite the title, there is no discussion of the business cycle as such and we are not told how the independent variables are related to the business cycle. The authors do not discuss the possibility that changes in the level of unemployment (and prices or wages) can occur for reasons other than the movements of the cycle. This apparent lack of conceptualization carries over into the specification of the model. Although the authors accuse others of *ad hoc* model building, they themselves seem to be guilty of the same offence. As an example, a peculiar relationship is specified between the dependant variable and the annual change in the price level without any theoretical justification (p. 69-70).

The contents of Chapters Four and Five would be too technical for most readers. There are three appendices which attempt to explain the econometric techniques used. I suspect the intelligent lay reader would be unable to follow these unless she had studied statistics (in which case she wouldn't need them). There is also an appendix which presents the basic data; however this is rather skimpy and the reader who wants to know more about data sources is left in the dark. In my view space in the book would have been used best by scrapping the three appendices on econometric techniques and replacing the appendix on statistical sources with a solid chapter which critically assessed the basic data.

Despite its shortcomings, Bain and Elsheikh have completed a worthwhile study, but a full assessment of the value of this book must wait until the research project, of which it is merely a part, is completed. In the meantime, a similar study could be carried out for New Zealand. Suitable data are available and the project would make a nice dissertation topic for an Honours or Masters student.

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Michael P. Jackson **Industrial Relations: A Textbook.** Croom Helm, London, 1977, pp. 281.

"Industrial relations," concludes Michael Jackson, "is a complex subject." This observation could be agreed with by all those who are involved with the subject. For the person who approaches industrial relations from an outside discipline, as most still seem to, the complexity is increased by the need to gain some understanding of the approach and contribution made by the various disciplines that participate in the study of industrial relations. It is in helping to steer the way through this maze of material that Jackson's book is particularly valuable.

In the 250 pages of text, Jackson outlines the main contributions to industrial relations theory, traces the main points in the debate and development of those theories and looks at their impact on industrial relations study. By naming the main protagonists in some detail in the text the reader becomes familiar with the more significant contributors to the field and by referring to the numerous footnotes and the extensive annotated bibliography (25 pp.) is able to follow up the issues raised in the text.

The book begins with an outline of the main approaches to industrial relations and goes on to consider unions, management, bargaining, conflict, strikes and the role of the state. Some idea of the breadth of coverage can be obtained from the chapter on conflict where in 20 pages Jackson covers the definitions of conflict, the problems of measuring it and the main explanations for its occurrence (human relations explanations, explanations based on technology, Marxist approaches and studies of alienation) and concludes by looking at the institutionalisation of conflict. He also deals with the structuralist/ethnomethodological-phenomenological debate as it relates to conflict.

The drawback of this approach is of course, that the breadth is at the expense of depth and while the book is only to "provide a background for future discussion" it is possible that as an introductory text the student may receive too much too quickly. The book also reflects Jackson's background as a sociologist and is written largely from that point of view to the neglect

of the economic or legal viewpoint. This is not necessarily a major criticism but it does place limits on the book's usefulness as a basic text. This same criticism is however also true of many other texts which tend to push one point of view only.

The New Zealand reader will find little reference to New Zealand but the book, while rooted in Britain, does draw heavily on other countries, particularly North America but also Europe and Australia. Where else could one learn that the Newcastle watersiders once threatened to strike unless the local council repealed a bylaw forbidding the playing of rugby football on Sunday?

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- BENSON, Leslie **Proletarians and Parties: Five Essays in Social Class**. Methuen, Wellington, 1978.
- EMERY, Fred **Futures We Are In**. Martinus Nijhoff, Leiden, 1977.
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- REYNOLDS, Lloyd G. **Labor Economics and Labor Relations**. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 7th edn., 1978.
- SAYLES, Leonard R. and Strauss, George **Managing Human Resources**. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1977.