

# REVIEWS

Don J. Turkington (Ed.)

## Industrial Relations Teaching and Research in Australia and New Zealand

Industrial Relations Centre: Victoria University of Wellington, 1978, pp. 275.

In May 1978, a conference of Australian and New Zealand teachers of industrial relations was held in Wellington. This publication is a collection of the papers presented at that conference. The conference programme was directed at the specific themes of "Industrial Relations as a Field of Study", "Industrial Relations Course Content and Structure", "Research in Industrial Relations" and "The Future of Teaching and Research in Industrial Relations". The editor has kept strictly to these themes and in all twenty-two separate contributions have been included. Don Turkington must be congratulated for the speed with which editorial policy has led to publication. It is quite unusual for conference proceedings to be made available so quickly and yet there is very little evidence that the editorial process has been excessively rushed.

At any gathering of academics, it is an undisputable fact (as the editor notes) that much of the benefit arises "from the chat and socialising of the informal sessions". Nevertheless, a reviewer must accept as his narrow terms of reference the quality of the more tangible end-product of the conference, namely, the published papers. Review comment, therefore, will be concerned with two aspects of this publication: first, the balance of papers between the five selected themes and, secondly, the quality of individual contributions.

The ideal distribution of papers over a conference's major discussion areas is something outside the editor's control. Much depends on the particular interests of those who attend and who are prepared to participate; the final "package" is often different from the preconceived ideas of any organising committee. However, a number of comments can usefully be made. First, and perhaps a point of minor importance, there seems to be a little inconsistency in the division of papers between the two sections relating to industrial relations teaching. Although one deals with the organisation and conduct of teaching (Part 2) and the other with course content (Part 3), it is not at all obvious why some papers are placed where they are. A solution to the problem of overlapping might have been to bring all these papers together in one section related to teaching and the logical ordering could have been left to the editor. A second more serious criticism is the emphasis that has been given to industrial relations teaching in the United States at a conference set up to examine teaching and research problems in Australia and New Zealand. Meetings of teachers of industrial relations in Australia and New Zealand are, unfortunately, very infrequent and because of this three papers (and there is no criticism of their quality) devoted to the American scene seems inappropriate and unduly generous. Except for a background paper, there is some justification for all other papers to be deliberately and narrowly confined to teaching issues in Australasia. Recent developments at Madison or Ithaca, surely, have only marginal interest for those teaching trade unionists in, say, Invercargill or organising under-graduate courses in Waikato. If a reviewer is allowed to parade his biases, a final criticism is the amount of attention given to the topic of industrial relations as a legitimate discipline. Turkington is right to point out that this has been debated "endlessly" in the 1950s and 1960s. The debate itself has been very well documented. Petersen, one suspects, is correct and by now few care. Should this topic have been resurrected on the rare occasion of a meeting of Australia and New Zealand teachers and at the expense of discussion on more pressing local issues?

There is some unevenness in the quality of individual papers, but on the whole the standard is quite high. Indeed, the shorter papers and commentaries that obviously suffer in comparison with the major conference papers still perform a useful function in providing extra items of information and summarising arguments presented by other contributors. Some are very brief, four are less than five pages in length, and may unfairly be criticised for being superficial. One wonders, therefore, whether each of the major discussion areas should have been allocated a number of commentators and if informal discussion could have been taped and published to provide the reader with a clearer idea of the cut and thrust of argument that followed the papers.

Each of the main sections includes a number of excellent papers. There are, in the reviewer's opinion, five contributions that deserve special mention. The best is William Brown's survey of industrial relations research in Britain. This is a lively discussion of the impact of various institutional developments (for example, incomes policy, increased labour legislation and the move towards greater industrial democracy) on the direction and shape of academic research. Two very

competent papers by the Australians Howard and Lansbury on "Doctrine, Theory and Teaching" and "Industrial Relations in the Post Dunlop Era" provide the major supports to the section on the theoretical under-pinning of the subject matter of industrial relations. Similarly, Bill Ford's delightfully pertinent commentary on gaps in industrial relations research, the paper by John Niland on research funding and the need for collaboration and integration of research effort and, to a lesser extent, David Plowman's discussion on the four basic premises to structured course organisation stand out as the more important contributions in the area of teaching and research. In fact, it has to be admitted that much of the success of this publication stems from the quality of the in-put by Australian academics.

It is true that the burden of providing commentaries has, in the main, fallen on New Zealand researchers. Nevertheless, Margaret Wilson provides a very thorough survey of research problems in New Zealand and offers, though somewhat tentatively, some solutions and Alan Williams has a very competent paper on course design. The point about the quality of "local" contributions, however, does not detract from the usefulness of this publication. It is an important addition to the literature and should help teachers and researchers in the labour area. One can only hope that such conferences (and the publication of proceedings) become a more regular feature of the New Zealand scene. It is a sad comment on the state of industrial relations as a discipline that this is the first full gathering of teachers and researchers in the subject in New Zealand.

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John Deeks, Herbert Roth, James Farmer, Graham Scott

### **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN NEW ZEALAND,**

Methuen, Wellington, 1978, pp. 191.

Authors of industrial relations textbooks suffer more than most from the tendency for events to outstrip analysis and description. What might be called the problem of contemporary relevance, has been particularly acute since 1973, with changes in the industrial law a regular and frequent event in the analytical calendar. It is therefore a pleasure to report that the authors of this study have dealt adequately with the problem of immediacy, while leaving readers with much to inform and advise. Commencing from what may be described as a modified Dunlop-Flanders model of the New Zealand system, the freestanding, but limited essay form enables the reader to approach specific aspects of the book by theme.

The study opens with an essay by Deeks that will be invaluable for teachers seeking effective and useful summaries of the various disciplinary inputs into industrial relations. This is followed by the opening section on historical analysis by Roth of the evolution of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration System, since 1894, followed by a consideration of current institutional structures. One must confess to a sense of considerable disappointment with the opening arguments of this section. Roth is content to reiterate the standard explanations, notably, to 1914, without reference to the considerable current revision of radical historiography with regard to the New Zealand labour movement in the period. I refer here specifically to the work done by Honours and graduate students under the supervision of W. H. Oliver at Massey University. It has been established by current studies that the onset of bureaucratism, notably in the Labour Department, a growing employer confidence and some fundamental doubts about the administration of the I C and A. Act by conservative trade unionists were as potent a source of conflict as the 'Red Fed'. Unfortunately, we see nothing of this in Roth's approach which tends to follow the traditional radical assumptions. This caveat aside, Roth does a good job on contemporary institutions, putting to rest the hardy service club myth that industrial conflict began suddenly with the 'nil' award of 1968.

One is less happy however, with his argument for trade union growth as reflected in Table six. His figures tell us nothing about union growth in the 1970's that we did not know from Keating. Further, his approximations, with regard to the aggregate penetration rate in the labour force as a

whole, are rather optimistic. One would suspect the new union figure is nearer 60% than 40%, given the fact that trade unions have only fairly recently been able to develop the administrative structures that make sustained membership drives a long term practicality.

As a final comment, Roth's critical analysis of what might be called the postwar and modern period serves as a refreshingly challenging antidote to some of the arrant nonsense that passes for informed comment on the industrial relations scene at the current time.

The central theme then moves into the legal sphere with Farmer's excellent essay on the industrial law. The essay balances nicely between the enunciation of underlying principles, and consideration of the effects of law on industrial relations behaviour. This is neatly encapsulated on page 97, where Farmer points to a central discrepancy in our system: that while the regulation of collective disputes has been a key-stone of the law; it has not been accompanied by an equally important development. The evolution of a parallel 'jurisprudence of personal grievances', the root of any effective legal regulation of individual disputes of rights.

Finally, the author points to one of the basic questions facing industrial relations in New Zealand. The fundamental tension between a long tradition of legal regulation, and the demand for viable and modern institutions and operations methodologies in which the parties are free to interact in a constructive way.

If Farmer shows considerable skill in writing about a book length topic within the restraint of a section, Scott runs him a close second. From the abstractions of neo-classical rationality to the current uncertainties of income policies, as the Phillips trade-off worsens yet again around the world, he maintains precision and brevity. Not the least on p. 118, where the rationale of economic theory and its relationship to institutional reality is summarised with neatness and despatch. One would anticipate that this, as well as the preceding essay will prove to be the most thumbed sections of the study.

In the final section of the book, Deeks deals, not always successfully, with a range of issues. It is here that the limitations of length mitigate against the previous virtues of brevity and summary. One feels that the author might have done a lot more with another fifteen to twenty pages.

On reflection, one is left with the feeling that within the limitations imposed by the market, the economics of publishing and related matters, the authors have produced a useful addition to our sparse industrial relations literature. More important, teachers now have a source book around which they can construct an introductory course with confidence.

Alan Williams

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### **B. T. Brooks**

#### **The Practice of Industrial Relations in New Zealand.**

Commerce Clearing House (NZ), Auckland, 1978, pp. V and 299, with index.

To search for a theory of industrial relations and to present at the same time a practical outline of the industrial relations system operating in its legal framework at first glance appear to be contradictory aims. These goals are reconciled by the endeavour of identifying the theoretical basis not in the abstract but in the concrete setting of historical, political, economic and social factors affecting and moulding the system. The author has good qualifications for such an undertaking. He is not only a legal scholar but his considerable past involvement in the actual area of industrial relations places him in an excellent position to evaluate the law regulating them as well as to appreciate the paramount importance of what Sir Otto Kahn-Freund calls the extralegal elements.

After five brief introductory chapters giving definitions, referring to sources and touching on theories, Part II looks at the conciliation and arbitration machinery at more depth. It examines the legal provisions in connection with the role of Government, employers and unions, and also in the context of industrial unrest; further it deals with productivity bargaining and the emergence of white-collar militancy. Two chapters are devoted to different aspects of industrial democracy: Chapter 10 in Part II under this very title and Chapter 16 in Part III headed, "Management prerogatives and worker participation". The other six chapters in Part III, entitled "Employer and

Employee" discuss the contract of employment, statutory control of employment, job security, communication and motivation, production and productivity, and finally plant bargaining. The treatment of all these topics extends to the political, economic and social questions inherent in them. It may be questioned whether the last two issues come under the individual employment relationship or they should properly be classified into the wider field of collective labour issues. As the line between individual and collective matters cannot always be clearly drawn, the decision is one of methodology.

One may feel dissatisfied with the exposition of basic principles as it hardly goes beyond restating well known generalities, though sometimes refuting some commonly held "legends". A more penetrating analysis is lacking in the too brief introductory chapters. The nearly hackneyed characterisation of the legal framework as "one of legalism, statism and placidity" is reiterated with a terse and sweeping comment. Upon closer examination this old slogan will seem misleading or even meaningless. Reliance on legislation and some form of intervention by state authorities, judicial or administrative, aiming at dispute settlement, in other words peace, feature in most overseas systems, including those of Britain and the United States. Are the ideas and institutions of law, state and peace to be condemned advocating a complete anarchy? No! The author himself confirms later (ch. 8, subtitle "The Law") the important role of law in human and social interconnection as a guide and device for settling differences, as a protection against uncontrolled power. What the author disapproves is the heavy-handed use of penal sanctions, the relegation of the statutory system of conciliation and arbitration to "an extension of the criminal code". Because of overemphasis on the punitive element in industrial legislation, "law" has become identified as a repressive negative force, instead of being regarded as a beneficial positive force in society which assists and safeguards the creation and observance of reciprocal rights and obligations. As a result "the legal system as a whole is exposed to declining public acceptance". On this point the reviewer must sadly agree. Legalism, if it is understood in such a sense, should be abhorred; but if it means freedom under the law, legality, it must be upheld and venerated.

For the benefit of the less sophisticated reader it would have been desirable to present a more detailed explanation of the underlying principles in the introductory chapters. Among others the meaning of legalism, as distinct from legality, should have been clarified. In addition the matters briefly mentioned should be linked by appropriate cross references to later parts of the book elaborating them.

It must be remembered, however, that the very title of the work emphasises a practical approach. Both the purpose and the confines of the book make an in-depth conceptual treatment unwarranted and impossible. A list of books, articles and judicial decisions after Part I and the following chapters assist the more studious reader to do further research. Problem situations concisely presented and accompanied by answers intend to help those who look for practical solutions. A well compiled index completes this neatly printed volume.

All in all this is a creditable addition to the small number of works on New Zealand industrial relations as a valuable handbook for persons involved in its practice.

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Roy McLennan (ed).

### **Participation and Change in the New Zealand Workplace**

Fourth Estate Books, Wellington, 1978, pp. 94. \$4.95

'Discussion began slowly, as the managers groped with the concepts concerning Organisation Development, force field analysis, and new ways of looking at their organisation processes, which were clearly unfamiliar to the.' (p. 78).

Whether or not you are familiar with Organisation Development (OD) and its jargon, this book will leave you groping in despair, desperately searching for some substance to hang on to.

The intention of the book is 'to develop insight into methods which can transform the performance of our enterprises, and the satisfaction people get out of their work.' This is to be achieved primarily through the recounting in the body of the book of three modest OD interventions or pilot studies carried out by experienced graduate students in the Master of Public Policy Programme at Victoria University of Wellington, under the supervision of the book's editor. Unfortunately the modesty of the pilot studies is in sharp contrast with McLennan's introductory eulogy on the advantages of Organisation Development over other approaches to participation and change in organisations: 'It (OD) has twin foci: the development and effectiveness of the organisation as a whole, and the development and satisfaction of its members. It works through an enterprise's existing structures of management, supervision and unions, not against them. As such it adopts an essentially evolutionary, rather than revolutionary stance, which is less divisive than some other approaches to change, and more durable in the long term.' After the expectations created by this and the blurb on the cover the cases themselves are most disappointing.

I have tried to review the three studies presented from two separate perspectives, first from the point of view of the manager of an organisation, the potential buyer of OD projects, and second from the point of view of the OD consultant or practitioner, the seller of the OD approach. I find the book unsatisfactory from both points of view. The OD buyer wants hard data and evidence that performance in an OD project matches promise. The expectation is that, if OD can change the performance of an enterprise then it will be concerned with measuring key aspects of the organisation's performance and attempting to monitor any changes made against some baseline position. Alternatively, if OD can transform the satisfaction people get out of their work, then it will be concerned with measuring people's satisfaction with their jobs both before and after changes are made. You will look in vain to these pilot studies, however, for clear definitions of the performance and/or satisfaction problems that existed in the three organisations in which the studies took place, or for unambiguous measures of changes in work performance or work attitudes and behaviours resulting from the OD interventions described. The manager, then, wanting to know 'who did what where and with what effect' (p. 24) will, I believe, find his or her frustration with the book stems from a plethora of assertion unsupported by data, a frustration compounded by a tendency to draw conclusions from evidence that is not available to the reader within the pages of the book.

The OD consultant or practitioner in contrast might be more interested in the methods used in the pilot studies in so far as they illuminate key aspects of OD work — the client — consultant contract, the choice of intervention strategies, the use of feedback, the handling of inter-personal and organisation conflicts, follow-up and evaluation procedures. He or she will want to know not only 'who did what where', but why? This kind of analysis is also sadly lacking in the book. Thus there is no consideration given, in one of the studies, to the likely effect of using as the internal consultant and interviewer in the project a manager who had previously been responsible for the department under review. Similarly in another of the studies there is no discussion as to why, given that the focus of the exercise was behaviour in the divisional directors' monthly meetings, the two external consultants apparently never attended one of those meetings. Most of the pilot study material presented is descriptive rather than analytical. As McLennan rightly anticipates, the reader will find that the studies record 'a maze of interviews and group meetings, interspersed with planning similar activities, which do not always come off quite as planned' (p. 26). The discussion of 'findings' and the conclusions drawn rarely get beyond the pedestrian and in some instances are banal — 'the questionnaire had revealed that the staff were thoughtful people' . . . . 'Face to face contacts had also taken on a happier note'. In addition many of the claims of successful intervention are based on participants' reported feelings and perceptions of change rather than on evidence of changes in actual performance or behaviour. No attempt is made to draw together the various lessons that the would-be OD practitioner might draw from the three pilot studies described.

At the back of the book is a questionnaire on the values and assumptions of organisation development. On scoring my answers I find that my 'values and assumptions are substantially in line with those upon which OD is based' and that I am likely 'to find OD approaches to managing change comfortable and sensible'. All I can say to that is, 'Not on the evidence in this book, I'm not'.

John Deeks

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