

REVIEW ARTICLE

Industrial relations and the capitalist labour process.

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(reviewing) S. Wood (Ed.) *The degradation of work? Skill, deskilling and the labour process* London, Hutchinson, 1982, 238p. Price: \$24.50 and C.R. Littler *The development of the labour process in capitalist societies* London, Heinemann, 1982, 226p. Price: \$29.70.

Introduction

During the last 2 decades, there has developed a considerable literature which calls into question many of the taken for granted assumptions of leading scholars. Significantly, the field of industrial relations has not been immune to these investigations, and arguably the most damaging indictments have been served by Hyman (1978), Fox (1973), and Goldthorpe (1974), against the advocates of pluralism, and Wood *et al*, (1975) against systems theorists. These authors have exposed many of the functionalist assumptions implicit in the mainstream paradigm of industrial relations.

This kind of critical enquiry into dominant approaches is neither inappropriate nor undesirable. Indeed, it could be argued that a tolerance of critique and an openness to alternative definitions of reality and methodologies can have a positive and enriching effect. But, as 2 recent authors have noted, there is a need to move beyond the rather obvious limitations of what they call "academic demolition" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). They point to the importance of adopting a more constructive stance and suggest that areas of knowledge need to become more aware of their pedigree by developing along alternative paradigmatic lines.

One such paradigm which has become increasingly popular in recent years is the Marxist approach to the capitalist labour process (hereafter – the labour process). In Britain and in the United States, the labour process has become the guiding force for an increasing number of influential scholars. As yet, they remain a small minority of those working in the field. Nonetheless, they have produced a growing body of literature, which in the longer term, may move to occupy a central role in industrial relations. This paper is written in support of such a development, and in the hope that it may stimulate debate and research on the labour process in New Zealand, where hitherto it has been given scant attention.

The following discussion is in 3 parts. First, there is a brief outline of the paradigm itself. This is followed by a review of 2 of the most recent contributions to the debate. And finally, in the light of this review there is an assessment of the value of the labour process for the study and research of industrial relations.

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Braverman and the labour process

Today, most discussions of the labour process pay due regard to its original treatment in Marx's *Capital* Volume 1 (1976). Increasingly however, a more frequent point of departure is Braverman's highly celebrated *Labor and monopoly capital (LMC)* (1974). This book undoubtedly has a highly polemical content and an exaggerated central thesis, but is still regarded by many as the *locus classicus* of labour process theorizing. Given its widespread availability and the amount of discussion which it has generated, it is clearly unnecessary to submit yet another extensive resume. Nevertheless, it is appropriate briefly to examine Braverman's position before looking in greater detail at the contributions of Wood and Littler.

The central focus of *LMC* is the transformation of work organisation during the last century of capitalism, in its monopoly phase. Braverman starts with Marx's notion of the "formal subordination of labour", where, despite having achieved freedom from legal constraints, the vast majority of individuals remain propertyless, and are left with little option other than to sell their labour power for a wage. He then traces the development of the "real subordination of labour" in which competitive pressures and the search for profits drive management to dispossess control originally embodied in craft skills, by rigorously applying F.W. Taylor's techniques of scientific management. Braverman reduces these techniques to 3 main principles. The first, which he labels "the dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the worker" (Braverman, p. 113), involves rendering the labour process independent of craft, tradition, and the workers knowledge. Second, "the separation of conception from execution" (p. 114), involves workers losing control over their labour and the manner of its performance. And third, "the use of this (managerial) monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labour process and its execution" (p. 119), involves the systematic preplanning by management of all elements in the labour process.

Braverman contends that the rationale behind these moves is not simply to cheapen labour by deskilling and replacing complex jobs by simple ones, but also to ensure that labour is more easily transferable, and with the help of the "reserve army" of unemployed, easily replaced. Thus management becomes less compelled to rely upon the co-operation and goodwill of employees whose commitment to the employer is frequently unreliable due to conflicting economic and control interests.

Under capitalism the source of conflict is to be found in the commodity nature of labour power. As with other commodities, labour power (i.e. the potential of labour) is bought and sold on the market. This means that wages inevitably become a catalyst for this conflict, in so far as they act as a cost to the employer and as income to employees. The same is true of control. What is authority and control to the employer is frequently subordination and constraint to employees. The main implication of this built-in conflict, or competition of interests, is that workers cannot always be relied upon to work in the best interests of the employer. This necessitates the exercise of management control in order that the greatest amount of useful and productive labour is obtained from the labour power employed. Finally, by producing commodities which can be sold at a higher rate than the cost of the labour power which produced them, the employer creates "surplus value". Thus surplus value, resisting competition, and profits, all become contingent upon the exercise of control.

For Braverman then, the role of Taylorism is central to the analysis of the labour process. Conceptualised not as a true science of work, but simply as a device designed to control alienated labour and thus subjugate labour to capital, he sees Taylorism as creating a highly conducive atmosphere in which the maximum accumulation of capital may take place. But at the same time he believes that it has the effect of hastening the progressive alienation of individuals from their work. He rejects the conventional view that work is shaped by the neutral forces of technological efficiency or the logic of industrialism which operates in the interests of all, and replaces it with an emphasis upon how the labour process is dominated and shaped by the imperatives of capital accumulation. In effect he

suggests that the organisation of work becomes a political process.

The employer . . . is the possessor of a unit of capital which he is endeavouring to enlarge, and in order to do so he converts part of it into wages. Thus is set in motion the labour process which . . . has now also become specifically a process for the expansion of capital, the creation of a profit. From this point on, it becomes foolhardy to view the labor process purely from a technical standpoint, as a mere mode of labour (Braverman p. 53).

Another commentator puts the case more bluntly. "Thus the powerful message from Braverman is not just that jobs are boring and alienating — this has been known . . . for some time. Rather his message is that work is like this designedly" (Storey, 1983, p. 38).

Having established the dynamic underlying the transformation of work in the modern era, Braverman draws upon his own extensive work experiences, and a wide range of Marxist and orthodox literature, to provide vivid descriptions of the transformation of manual and non-manual work in manufacturing, in the service sector, and in the retail trade. In doing so he seriously challenges the belief that modern work requires a net increase in levels of education and training.

Finally, he extends his analysis of the labour process by examining the influence that changes in work have upon class structure. The essence of his argument is that the removal of existing skill differences has the effect of increasing the homogeneity of the working class as a "class in itself", in so far as an increasing number of workers come to share a common social and economic position. But, in his now famous self-imposed limitation, he does not explicate the relationships between the objective and subjective elements of class. Neither does he consider the extent to which the "class in itself" becomes a "class for itself", i.e. when deskilling creates an awareness of these similarities and the shared conflict of interest which employees have with their employer.

The contributions of Wood and Littler

Braverman's decision not to delve into the subjective side of the transformation of work has been noted even by the most congratulatory reviewers of *LMC*, and is a major theme developed both by Wood and his co-contributors in *The degradation of work?* and Littler in *The development of the labour process in capitalist societies*.

Lamentably, this omission is difficult to understand in that whilst management undoubtedly seek more control over the labour process, it is by no means certain that scientific management is the only means to this end, or that workers are as passive and malleable as Braverman implies. The possibility that workers may resist deskilling, and that management may adopt alternative forms of control as a result, is not considered, although it is unlikely that Braverman was unaware of exceptions to his posited general tendency. However, Wood implicitly rejects such a view and considers this omission to be a major weakness in *LMC*.

Above all else Braverman builds into his analysis an assumption that, having consciously designed the organisation of work to further capital accumulation, managements inevitably get their own way. This assumption is derived, in effect from his uncritical acceptance of Taylor's ideology, for the power of capital is taken to triumph by the virtue of the new managerial and scientific technology at its disposal (Wood, 1982, pp. 15-16).

Several of the contributors to Wood's volume, especially Penn and Jones, provide useful case examples of effective worker resistance in specific industries. These authors testify to the essential fact that the distribution of workplace skills at any particular time

is not simply the result of a one-sided and unilinear trend towards deskilling, but is the result of a continual struggle between management and labour, the dynamics of which are frequently the centre of much everyday industrial relations behaviour. The context in which this struggle is played out has a key role to play in explaining the eventual distribution of skills. For example, using the case of the introduction of numerical control machine tools in small batch engineering firms, Jones points to the impact of labour and product markets, organisational structures, and trade union positions, as having a decisive influence upon the final outcome. However, it is significant that whilst he grants a degree of independence to these middle range factors, and therefore lends support to the view that Braverman should not have isolated the solution to control problems from the wider struggle, he does not refute the underlying pressure of a constant drive to accumulate which force managements into a continual search for mechanisms of control.

This is not to deny that such motivations exist among manufacturing management. It merely reasserts that . . . management cannot construct *de novo* the conditions under which labour is to function" (Wood, 1982, pp. 198 - 199).

In contrast, Wood and Kelly, in one of the book's more interesting chapters, question the extent to which a desire to control the labour process is as central to management strategy as they believe Braverman has implied. They do not deny the importance of controlling the labour process, nor the role of Taylorism within it, but contend that Braverman operates with an inflated view of its centrality. They suggest that the realisation of surplus value, for example by the sale of products during periods of low demand, may be accorded a higher priority at particular times, especially during economic recession.

The heads of several large British Corporations such as British Steel or BL are currently less concerned with control over the labour process and surplus value production than with declining markets because of the world recession (Wood, 1982, p. 89).

Thus they question the notion that management has a universal order of priorities and go further by suggesting that even the notion of strategy itself, with its implicit conception of consciously formulated ends and means, cannot always be taken at face value.

In accepting the main thrust of their argument, it is still debatable whether this constitutes a valid criticism of Braverman. There is no doubt that Braverman lays great emphasis upon the labour process. But in doing so, it is not axiomatic that he fails to recognise the importance of the whole cycle of capitalist production, either analytically or in terms of the priorities of management strategy.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to counter the view that the realisation of surplus value is not a major problem facing management in these and other large corporations, or that the centrality of the labour process varies through different stages of capitalist production. But this should not be seen to suggest that labour process control has presently been relegated to a position of low priority. For instance, in recent years, the rate of changes in working practices and in technology at both British Steel and British Leyland has been second to none. Of course new technologies may have been introduced because they can produce goods in greater volume and at faster speeds than under traditional methods. However, it is patently obvious that one cannot ignore their implications for control of the labour process.

In the final analysis, surplus value can only be realised if it has been created in the first place. And as the demand for products decreases during times of recession, the need to solve the "labour problem" may become more urgent, because even in the monopoly phase of capitalism there is still a need for many companies to cut costs and eliminate wastage. Moreover, the countervailing power of opposition groups is often eroded as a result of higher levels of unemployment. Under such circumstances, it is doubtful whether management would be prepared to ignore any opportunities which arise in which it can either increase its control, or regain any control which may have been previously conceded.

The evidence from both corporations, which points to a general intensification of work, a tightening up of work practices, and at British Leyland an onslaught against the control previously held by shop stewards, suggests that this opportunity has not been lost. These changes, which have frequently been accompanied by threats of plant closure and appeals to the workforce over the heads of their trade unions, have been introduced despite the fact that both cases management may well have considered the "labour problem" to have been secondary to the problems of a significant reduction in the demand for steel, and a reduction in British Leyland's market share for motor vehicles.

So whilst management undoubtedly has to come to terms with the difficulties posed by contracting markets, and that, to a degree, the "labour problem" may be mitigated by pricing policies and state protection, there is the opportunity for management to take advantage of a recessionary environment which is highly favourable to the imposition of Taylorist control techniques. Also, it is unlikely to be mere coincidence that present day conditions of depressed product markets, sustained recession and unemployment provide the same backdrop against which Taylorism was first introduced to Britain during the interwar period. The increasing pace of technological changes today affecting the nature of work, coupled with tougher management attitudes and the widespread threatened introduction of restrictive labour law, suggests that for management and governments both, the effects of the recession have not caused them to lose sight of the need to control the labour process.

Nonetheless, this is but a minor disagreement with Wood and Kelly, and does not detract from the overall high quality of the volume. Its strengths are that, unlike many edited works, all the authors show remarkable restraint in remaining close to the central theme, but at the same time in the diversity of their contributions they aptly demonstrate the enormous potential which the labour process area holds for stimulating future research and debate. Elger's theoretical paper is justifiably reported to be the most thorough and comprehensive evaluation of *LMC* to date, and the other 8 papers rarely fall below a high standard. Most adopt an historical perspective and combine a discussion of empirical material within the theoretical framework provided by Braverman. They range from Beechey's evaluation of Braverman's analysis of the sexual division of labour, to Crompton and Reid's focus upon the effects of the computer on clerical work, and Lee's discussion of the different ways in which deskilling may take place. Finally, the volume contains very little unnecessary repetition, and each author demonstrates an acute awareness and understanding of the others' work.

In the second of the 2 books under review, Littler adopts the now familiar approach of developing his analysis from the perceived inadequacies of *LMC*. In the first part of his book, he attempts to move beyond Braverman by covering much the same theoretical and methodological ground as Wood. In the second part, he also adopts an historical approach, but by way of contrast to Wood's emphasis upon industrial and occupational data, he chooses instead to emphasise the cross-cultural development of the labour process in Britain, the USA, and Japan.

On the question of labour resistance, Littler reiterates many of the points made in Wood's volume, but he also casts serious doubts upon the conventional view that most acts of resistance are initiated and co-ordinated by trade unions. He cites evidence from all 3 countries to demonstrate that trade union activity has mainly been directed towards regulating the access to jobs, and suggests that an over-emphasis upon the role played by trade unions only serves to obscure and downgrade the significant oppositional role played by other groups including supervisors, middle managements, and, especially in Japan, internal subcontractors.

Having made this point, the main value of Littler's contribution to the labour process debate is not simply in drawing attention to the subjective element in the relationship between job content and class. A more substantive contribution is his attempt to extend analysis of the labour process by incorporating traditional Weberian ideas on bureaucracy, and also more recent work carried out by radical economists and sociologists (eg. Edwards, 1979; Gordon *et al.* 1982; Burawoy, 1979). Briefly, he suggests that the labour process

framework needs to include not only the division of labour and job content (Braverman), but also the wider organisational structure of the factory, and the amount of dependency in the capital/labour relationship arising from the relation of the job position to the labour market. According to Littler, these 3 levels of work structuration can be used to analyse all forms of work organisation, including Taylorism. However, he is careful to point out that these 3 mechanisms of control are not without contradictions, and do not always operate in concert. Thus Braverman's single dynamic of deskilling may not be sufficient to destroy craft control if it is maintained by labour in the form of continued shopfloor regulation, and the influence of craft unions over recruitment.

On the other side of the coin, the strong message for management which comes out of this extended conception of labour process control, is that by developing networks of bureaucratic rules and regulations, providing internal career structures, and segmenting labour markets along gender, racial, occupational, and status divisions, there are a variety of control strategies and tactics available within capitalism. Again Nichols puts it more bluntly, "... capital has more shots in its locker than Braverman implies" (Nichols, 1978, p. 194). So according to Littler, craft deskilling should not be taken to be *the* logic of capitalism. Rather it should be seen to be simply one of a range of mechanisms of which some of the most influential, for example the family and the school, operate beyond the boundaries of the workplace.

There are a number of reasons why Braverman over-emphasised deskilling, other than the fact that any broad historical treatment is bound to emphasise some variables at the expense of others. One explanation, which is covered in some detail by both authors and is worthy of mention here, concerns his conceptualisations of pre-Taylorite forms of control and of skill itself.

Implicitly the image which Braverman adopts as the benchmark against which the increasing degradation of work is measured, is that of the fully fledged artisan. However, Littler shows that, notwithstanding the reality of deskilling in some industries, this over-emphasis upon craft, control is an historically inadequate account which ignores the fact that many craftsmen in the nineteenth century did not have the autonomy which Braverman attributes to them, and that some actually performed a capital role within a system of sub-contract. Thus it was the craftsman and not the employer who was directly responsible for the supply and control of a labour force which in many cases was largely unskilled. Additionally, Wood highlights the fact that some industries and work processes were never craft based, and contends that, until only a century ago, the majority of workers did not possess some of the more basic skills such as literacy which today tend to be taken for granted.

Finally, Braverman's over-romantic benchmark of the skilled and unsubordinated worker who existed prior to Taylorism, is shown to incorporate at least 3 discernable elements of skill, but his use of the term is never precisely and unambiguously defined. First, there is the technical/objective "skill" content of jobs relating to the possession of complex capacities and frequently defined in terms of job learning times. Secondly, the "skill" which refers to the discretionary content of jobs, for example including decisions with regard to who does what, how they do it, and how much is produced. And thirdly, "skill" which is a social definition, and as such has no necessary relationship with either of the other 2 elements. The key issue is that whilst the picture painted by Braverman tends to incorporate these 3 elements into 1 crystallised image, there is no reason why, analytically or empirically, they should not operate independently. For example, high technical skill levels are not necessarily associated with worker control over the labour process if control and discretion has been expropriated by a strictly imposed network of bureaucratic rules and regulations. Neither does a socially created and socially defined "skilled job" necessarily contain high levels of technical skill. As a result of trade union control, custom and practice, or a consciously designed management strategy to segment the workforce, a social labelling of skill may conceal a subordination in the labour process, and for labour a lack of involvement in task conception activities.

Wood and Littler's discussion of the limitations and inadequacies of *LMC* has raised a wide range of issues concerning the development of the capitalist labour process. As such it is clear that major qualifications of Braverman's position are required, particularly in connection with the deskilling thesis and the casting of Taylor in the role of arch villain. However, the danger involved in over-emphasising Braverman's weaknesses, is that the baby could be thrown out with the bathwater. This would be unfortunate in that there would be a failure to capitalise upon the enormous contribution which Braverman has made to our understanding of work and the forces by which work is continually changing. It now remains to elaborate on the nature of this contribution so far as it relates to the study and research of industrial relations.

The capitalist labour process and industrial relations

For most industrial relations practitioners, the relevance of the labour process with its persistent struggle over control, will be all too obvious. Unfortunately, in attempting to articulate its relationship to the academic field of industrial relations, one immediately faces a number of difficulties. Not least is the problem of confronting the highly superficial, albeit jealously guarded boundaries within the academic division of labour. For example, traditionally the study of social relations in industry has floated uneasily between the various hybrid areas of management studies, organisational behaviour, and occupational and industrial sociology, as well as industrial relations. There is no reason to believe that the labour process would be different in this respect, and therefore any contribution which it is deemed to make does not imply that industrial relations is necessarily its most appropriate home. Obviously trespassers cannot be prosecuted.

Additionally one has to recognise the potentially misleading nature of the term "industrial relations" itself. This tends to create the impression that industrial relations can be studied in isolation of broader societal structures and processes. Such a view was implicit in many of the early investigations in the industrial relations field which took the form of historical and descriptive, (but rarely analytical) studies of the various institutions, particularly the trade unions, their battles, leadership, and growth. This is not the place to provide a detailed historical summary of the interests of industrial relations scholars, or to precisely delineate the boundaries of the field. Suffice to say that the framework of the capitalist labour process is firmly rooted in a Marxist perspective which, by its very nature, emphasises broader social forces, notably the capitalist relations of production and societal patterns of domination. In contrast, many traditional approaches have paid lip service to the wider logic of capitalism and have been content to emphasise the relatively autonomous relations between trade unions, employers, and the state.

So what contribution can a study of the capitalist labour process make to industrial relations? First and foremost, it goes some way towards rectifying the reluctance on the part of traditional scholars to examine labour itself. Despite its obvious weaknesses, the great strength of *LMC* is that Braverman brings labour to centre stage. To repeat, the main concerns of industrial relations have traditionally been focussed upon the institutions. A parallel interest has centred upon the impact of the economic and legal frameworks, and more recently there has been an upsurge of interest in building the field upon the "institutions of job regulation" (Flanders, 1965). This latter development has led to a shift of emphasis towards various processes, especially collective bargaining, and the operation of substantive and procedural rules. Whilst it would be churlish to deny the importance of rules and rule making processes, equally it is clear that this framework provides only a partial, if not misleading, view of the field.

This partiality is not simply the result of a failure to consider the impact of broader social forces. The more sophisticated approaches of recent years have at least managed to include environmental "constraints" within their frame of reference. But where they have continually failed, is that in emphasising the processes by which conflicting interests are

contained or managed, they have diverted attention away from the central concept of labour towards what, using Hyman's words, are essentially epiphenomena (Hyman, 1981).

On the other hand, the powerful message which will confront those who are prepared to have even a cursory glance through any of the post-Braverman papers which are at present populating the academic journals, is that the essence of the relationship between employer and employee cannot be properly understood unless some recognition is made of the struggle between the 2 parties *at the point of production*. In other words, the clearest statement of this antagonistic relationship is to be found in the jointly created patterns of job design and workplace structures. The outcomes of collective bargaining, the impact of awards, the decisions of the Arbitration Court, and other forms of job regulation are undeniably important. But the academic field of industrial relations cannot blind itself to the relationships which impinge upon day to day work experiences and are embodied in the act of production itself.

Second, the labour process debate shows that the investigation of management in industrial relations needs to progress beyond the traditionally narrow categorisation of ideologies, and consideration of management's role in collective bargaining. In particular, it shows that the strategies and behaviour of management, despite their lack of "problem" status, are no less important or worthy of interest, than those of employees and trade unions. Of course, many explanations for the relative neglect of management have been put forward (see for example Wood, 1981), not the least of which has been the real difficulties involved in obtaining research access to collect the required data. But it now seems clear that the development of the field can no longer be retarded in this way, and that more concerted efforts need to be made in order to overcome these obstacles.

However, this does not suggest that it is sufficient to incorporate management strategy and behaviour by merely acknowledging the impersonal forces of, for example, economic and technological sub-systems (see, for example, Craig, 1973). On the contrary, what is required is a recognition that those forces which the conventional literature frequently portrays as having an independent influence on industrial relations behaviour (for example, the influence of technology upon "alienation" (Blauner, 1964)), are the result of real managerial decisions to shape the labour process in a certain way, and therefore warrant investigation in their own right. This would mean that decisions such as the introduction of new technologies, the reorganisation of factories, and the distribution of revenue, can no longer be located outside the field.

In drawing attention to the importance of production, and management strategy and behaviour, the labour process makes 2 rather obvious substantive contributions on the subject matter of industrial relations. At the same time it makes a number of more general contributions. Two of these are worthy of mention.

First, it is known that the last decade and a half has seen the beginnings of a more sophisticated and explicitly theoretical approach. But, despite the efforts of a handful of radical scholars (Hyman, 1978; Fox, 1973; Nichols, 1980; Clark and Clements, 1977), industrial relations still lacks the variety of paradigmatic bases which Burrell and Morgan claim to be necessary if the field is to achieve its potential. To some extent, this may be the result of a desire to construct totally integrated theories which provide the framework in which the whole field is studied. Indeed this has been the declared intention of those who have developed various forms of industrial relations systems theory. (Craig, 1973; Dunlop, 1958). The danger with this type of supposedly eclectic and all encompassing approach is that the paradigmatic base, which largely dictates the nature of relevant issues and the lines of enquiry which are pursued, remains unduly narrow. Hence, during the early 1970s, the call to relate rules and rule making processes to the environmental constraints impinging on the system appeared to be dominating the field. This should not be seen as a call for the rejection of systems theory. Rather, it is a call for the acceptance of alternative approaches which belong to different paradigms. This would mean that alternative lines of enquiry can be followed, different questions asked, new concepts created, and different brands of insight developed. Doubtless, some might argue that there is nothing inherently different about the labour process, and that it may be accommodated without

too much difficulty within the dominant paradigm. As we have seen, such a view would be incorrect. This body of work has its roots in a rich philosophical tradition which is fundamentally different and in competition with the realities offered in the dominant paradigm. This is seen most clearly in the competing assumptions about the nature of society itself. Both paradigms acknowledge the endemic nature of conflicting interests, but whereas one identifies its material source in the social relations of capitalism itself, the other, in the absence of any convincing explanation for the existence of conflict, tends to see it as relatively superficial in comparison to the common goal of maintaining order.

Hyman, who has energetically campaigned for a reorientation of industrial relations away from the forces generating order and regulation, follows this line of argument to its logical conclusion:

. . . understanding would be better assisted by a radically different approach : a sensitivity to the contradictory dynamics of capitalist production, the antagonistic structure of material interests . . . within the labour process, and the consequent and persistent *generation of conflict and disorder* within the very institutions and procedures designed to bring order and stability to employer – employee relationships (Hyman, 1978, p. 35).

Such a change in the focus of enquiry which results from occupying a standpoint in an alternative paradigm, frequently coincides with changes in the nature of questions asked. It is no secret that much of the content of industrial relations courses and research projects, has tended to mirror the definitions of “problems” held by management and/or policy makers. Certainly there is nothing inherently wrong with adopting applied or managerialist approaches. Nonetheless, this partiality should not be allowed to dominate the field to the extent that little emphasis is placed upon either employee “problems”, or upon the development of concepts and theories which have an *understanding* of the field as an end in itself. Analysis of the labour process not only belongs to a different paradigm and therefore draws upon a long established Marxist tradition with its own particular brand of insight, but it also goes some way towards rectifying these additional imbalances in the field.

Finally, this emerging body of work provides a salutary reminder that industrial relations is a field which can be illuminated by the sociological perspective. One of the strengths of the labour process debate is that in contrast to the trends of the post-war period in which sociology became increasingly fragmented along lines industrial, organisational, and occupational, it has remained firmly located within the central concerns of the discipline. Recently these have been delineated as follows: “. . . the pathologies of industrial/organisational work, the determinants and principles of modern organisational structures . . . and . . . what one may describe as a theory of class within organisations” (Salaman, 1981, p. 15).

Unfortunately one problem with such undiluted sociology in what is still a highly pragmatic field, is that many seem unwilling to accept the Marxist tradition from which the labour process has emerged. This stems partly from a failure to distinguish between Marxism as an analytical and theoretical framework, and Marxism as a normative guide for action. Rose’s comments point to a solution to this problem:

. . . since such a course involves accepting and developing Marxian concepts, surely it commits the analyst to Marxian values; I do not believe this is necessarily so at all, except in so far as those values refer to the desirability of an exact knowledge of society (Rose, 1975, p. 276).

One suspects that even the most pragmatic of industrial relations practitioners would find it hard to reject this kind of knowledge.

In conclusion it is worth repeating the point made earlier, that an over-emphasis upon the weaknesses of *LMC* can be sufficient to blind one to the contributions which it has

made. Indeed in the work of both Wood and Littler one senses some unresolved tension between the extension or rejection of Braverman's framework. Fortunately on balance the weight of opinion in the 2 books appears to favour the former.

Finally, it remains clear that the growing body of post-Braverman literature to which both these books belong, still provides exceptionally fertile ground for research on the labour process in New Zealand. What is now required is an application of this knowledge to generate theoretically informed empirical data in specific historical contexts and physical settings.

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