

## REVIEWS

*Philip Garrahen and Paul Stewart. The Nissan Enigma: Flexibility at Work in a Local Economy. London: Mansell Publishing Ltd. 1992. 139pp.+References+Index.*

I remember as a young boy on Tyneside in the early 1950s being taken to watch the launching of huge ships into the river. So large were they that they had to be launched sideways from fear of damaging themselves on the opposite bank. At around the same time, on the other side of the world, Nissan Motor Corporation was engaged in a violent four-month lockout of the workforce that was to revolutionise labour relations in the company. It is a sad irony that forty years on, with the massive Tyne and Wear shipyards long laid waste by Japanese competition, a major industrial beacon of the North East should be Nissan's assembly plant at Sunderland. This plant was an important item on the Japanese overseas expansion agenda and, as such, merited careful examination. Not least, in New Zealand, where the introduction of the Nissan Way at Wiri in South Auckland was the precursor of a well-publicised dispute in 1988.

When *The Nissan Enigma* hit the bookshops in the UK in 1992, it provoked much comment in the media, some of it quite vitriolic. Hardly surprising, given the book's critical opinions of one of the Thatcherist flagships and the overt political leanings of much of the British press. However, whether this particular critical perspective will change anyone's views of the Nissan Way is debatable. The conformation of the book is fascinating. As each layer of the onion is peeled away the nucleus of the authors' message is gradually revealed. The first chapter is a brief but thoughtful description of some aspects of Thatcherist Britain, the rise of the Nissan *keiretsu* and changes in the world automobile industry. Chapter 2 examines the relationship between modern Japanese production systems such as JIT, the local environment (both physical and economic) and central government, again with quite admirable brevity and clarity. The first hints of the authors' forthcoming interpretation arise in Chapter 3. They scrutinise the philosophy and practice of the Nissan Way and make their first claims to understanding its "real intent". There are eleven subheadings in this chapter and the word "control" is used eight times. While we have now clearly arrived at the starting point for our management control odyssey, the prose remains reasoned and, dare I say it, controlled. The apotheosis of the control message arrives in Chapter 4 which is entitled "Teamworking and the social organisation of control". Having previously berated Nissan and its supporters for their rhetoric, the authors steadily develop their own from here on. As a sample - "workers' real subjectivities and identities could only truly be realised when they act in terms of radical class notions of dignity" (my emphasis). This is the core chapter of the book and it is highly dependent upon a concept "management-by-stress" apparently developed in a book *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept* by Parker and Slaughter. Management-by-stress is not defined or even carefully explained and my attempts to obtain the original book proved unsuccessful. (The only copy I could trace in New Zealand was at the National Library and I was requested by them to try again in six weeks.) So given that caveat, my deduced

summary of the chapter is that behind the cheerful appearance of equanimity and fulfilment of life at Nissan lies the New Regime of Subordination. The Nissan enigma of the title is that Quality, Flexibility, Teamwork really mean Control, Exploitation, Surveillance. Chapter 5 contains confirmatory extracts from the 19 in-depth interviews upon which the book was based and Chapter 6 is a brief conclusion.

I enjoyed and learned much from the early part of this book, but ultimately I ended up disappointed. There is a pressing need to examine and portray the less comforting side of Japanese management practices, but the critical literature has generally been erratic. From the viewpoint of the external observer, the most convincing cases have been made with detailed ethnographic studies, for example, Kamata's *Japan in the Passing Lane*, while the least convincing have failed because, in the final analysis, they have resorted to polemic or the self-fulfilling prophecy engendered by their theoretical stance. Of course the production line at Nissan is hard work and stress generating, but is it any worse than elsewhere? For example, the last I heard of the Volvo plant at Kalmar it was running at 122 MTM, 22 percent above the rate required to make a skilled motivated worker healthily fatigued. And of course management desires to obtain control of the workforce and will do so by whatever means available. Especially if, in the process, it can cut inspection costs, improve quality and increase flexibility and convince much of the workforce they are happier. Indeed, management and everyone else's employment hangs on it. And again, of course the Neighbour Check quality inspection system is a form of surveillance, but whether one wishes to interpret it as such specifically is a value judgement which tells more about the interpreter than the manufacturing process. These and other phenomena and arguments are evident to anyone who has studied manufacturing from a multidisciplinary viewpoint.

In the end, this book has given us nothing new about the manufacturing process or its human effects, and while it may have gained the authors some street credibility with those of like mind, it is unlikely to have gained a single convert to their stance from outside.

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*J R P Horn (Consulting Editor), Philip Bartlett, Phillipa Muir, Christopher Toogood, Ross Wilson (Authors) Kathy Drysdale (Publishing Editor), Employment Contracts, Wellington: Brooker & Friend Ltd. 2 volumes (also available electronically).*

Having practised extensively in employment law since 1975, I have had the opportunity to consider and utilise many texts on employment law.

In that time it has been easy to be critical of the standard of employment law reporting. To some extent employment law was one of the lesser lights in mainstream legal practices. The standard of reporting tended to reflect that.

With the advent of the Employment Contracts Act 1991 employment law takes on a much higher profile and now provides some practices with a substantial portion of their income. At the time the Employment Contracts Act 1991 came into being I utilised other publications. I noticed frequent reference by opposing counsel to Brooker's *Employment Contracts*. I perused the loose-leaved text and immediately acquired a copy. This has been a most valuable aid to assisting me in a busy practice.

This loose-leaved text has to be one of the most well put together texts that I have used in a long time. It has become a vital part of my daily reference material and is now indispensable. One of the features of this text which make it so impressive is that legislation and comment is combined, unlike many other loose-leaved texts where the legislation section is separate from the comment section. As a busy practitioner there is nothing more frustrating than having to swap from book to book in order to read the legislation where it remains distinct from comment. The learned authors of this book have got the mix right, in that legislation and comment follow each other throughout.

The depth of comment accords with the significance of the topic. In some areas the depth is immense. Substantial case comment is included. This text is easily readable and quickly converted for practical use. The feature of the comment sections is the use of bold sub-headings for identification of issues. In turn these bold sub-headings are linked back in an efficient way with the index.

The publication contains legislation and comment on literally all areas of employment law. The spread of topics is most comprehensive. The areas of employment law where lawyers and other users most frequently practice are referenced in great detail; for example, the personal grievance section of the text is some 64 pages, covering all aspects that users would want to know about personal grievance. Each sub-section of the grievance comment contains helpful cross-referencing sections. This applies throughout.

Other sections of the book that I should highlight are: enforcement; compliance; strikes; and the institution sections. That is not the limit of it by any means. The spread of the book from the Employment Contracts Act 1991 to the concluding section on Accident Compensation is impressive to say the least. Sandwiched in between those two sections is a substantial volume of other legislation and case comment. It is exceptional in its coverage.

Like most loose-leaved texts this publication is updated regularly. In my view where this outstrips other texts that I have had the opportunity to read is in the frequency of updating and the ease with which you continue to accumulate the most recent trends from cases and comment. The updates are also accompanied by an employment contracts bulletin which features editorials, significant recent cases, recent legislation and any other snippets of information which are relevant to employment law. The bulletin on its own is invaluable but read in conjunction with the text, it is a superb supplement to what is already an extraordinarily well presented text.

The text contains an extensive table of cases and includes a substantial section of recent case summaries. The case summaries are marked by helpful case headings and summaries of notable recent decisions. To give some indication of how current the text is, reported in the 1st of June 1993 update is *Hobday v Timaru Girls High School Board of Trustees 5/5/93 Palmer, J. CEC 24/93, Majestic Horse Floats Limited v Goninon 6/4/93 Castle, J. WEC 8/93* and *Unkovich v Air New Zealand Limited 1/6/93, Full Court AEC 23/93*. This is a mere smattering of recent cases refereed to and gives some immediate indication of how up to date this publication is.

Running in tandem with the text are the Employment Reports of New Zealand. Like the bulletin, they supplement the text and are presented and cross-referenced by a more than helpful index.

The cost of the publication is consistent with other services of a similar nature. It is also now available in electronic form. This provides the advantages of electronic searching and the provision for greater immediacy in updating.

The only criticism that I have of the text is in the area of precedents. That section of the book requires greater attention. It should contain a full list of useable precedents covering the wide spectrum of general cases. Given that the book is only two years old, I would hope that this area will be developed in order to make this text one of excellent quality. That criticism aside, the publication in its present form is of extremely high quality.

The success of the text clearly arises from the varying qualities that the authors bring to the publication. All of the authors are recognised authorities in their own right. This contributes a mix of talent that, in the writer's view, makes the formula eminently workable, practicable and easily readable. That mix of author skills is perhaps the secret to a most successful publication. This book should be a standard part of all practice libraries, and comes highly recommended.

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