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# New Frontiers of Democratic Participation at Work

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## New Frontiers of Democratic Participation at Work

especially Asia and South America, the nature of trade unionism and, more important, the potential future role of unions in an increasingly global world will remain only partially understood. The characterization of the volume as a handbook on trade unionism is well deserved, but the international descriptor must therefore be somewhat qualified. The editors themselves identify this limitation.

A solid comparative analysis by Jelle Visser, explicitly devoted to unionism worldwide, goes some way toward alleviating the volume's main shortcoming. As such, it is a welcome part of the mix.

This volume's limitations do not take away from its substantial contribution. The chapters are of uniformly very high quality and, taken together, represent an authoritative and comprehensive assessment of the behavior and effects of trade unions, at least in the West. This truly state-of-the-art collection earns the moniker "handbook," and deserves to be placed within close reach as a standard reference.

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*New Frontiers of Democratic Participation at Work.* Edited by Michael Gold. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003. 344 pp. ISBN 0-7546-0924-3, \$89.95 (cloth).

The significance and strength of this volume of essays lie in its political message. The 13 contributors are committed, one and all, to the political idea that workers are both able and entitled to participate in the democratic shaping of the economy at the sectoral and company level. That idea, although clothed here in modern guise, has a fairly long history. Notably, by the early 1900s, and with renewed vigor in the wakes of the two World Wars, it was propounded by the reformist labor movement in Europe—the wing that ultimately gained the upper hand over its revolutionary socialist adversary. In their introduction to this book the editor and two co-authors express their conviction thus: "Rather than a quantum leap in the form of one grand revolution, [we see] the participation process as a chain of little revolutions."

The reader is not, however, browbeaten to swear fealty to the idea of democratic participa-

tion, but rather is supplied with scientific analysis, argument, and information that lend credence to the authors' conclusion that there is indeed a historical trend toward a civil society. Precisely because the contributors to the volume are anything but naive, their optimistic stance comes to seem plausible. They are well aware that the reformist idea of participation was not without its own failings and setbacks: "The twentieth century experiences of Utopian work organizations without money, without managers or without markets have generally failed." The authors are referring here to the failures of the kibbutzim movement, the worker take-over of ailing companies, and self-management experiments in Yugoslavia, as well as to the disappointment that followed in the wake of formerly "hope-raising cases" in developing countries.

It is hardly surprising that this reworking of the reformist philosophy should take as its basis the experiences with institutionalized forms of employee representation in the countries of western Europe, for here participation seems to have proved a win-win game for everyone involved. "The role of capital is not eliminated but put under greater democratic control." The keywords for the modernized version of democratic participation are partnership and cooperation between capital and labor, and the expectation is of convergence between social democracy and economic efficiency.

Besides cogently arguing that democratic participation is on the rise, the authors invoke empirical material and strategic considerations designed to show that this is the *right* concept for a post-industrial society in which workers' claim for a right to participation is increasing while, at the same time, firms continue to need the loyal cooperation of their employees. They thus counter the free-market liberalism that predominates in academia and public opinion and according to which the revolution in participation is responsible for the current stagnation of western Europe. In other words, the coordinated market economy (CME), so strongly influenced by social democratic reformist ideas and Catholic social teaching, is certified by the authors as fit for the future and encouraged not to give way to the engine of the Anglo-Saxon "liberal market economy."

Since the collection's authors stress the manifest changes attributable to the transition from an industrial society to a services society, a frequently recurring question relates to the future of the trade unions: "Can the traditional institutions of labour relations cope with the micro-

meso- and macro-level issues confronting the world of labour tomorrow?" The answers are not uniform, but it is made clear that the trade unions can realize their potential for the future only if they are prepared to accept the new conditions of the post-industrial world. They may, according to the concluding chapter, gain new legitimacy insofar as they play a triple role, which "consists in defending both their members' material interests (business unionism) and their individual and qualitative interests (participative unionism) as well as the interests of workers in general (inclusive unionism)."

The essays in this volume cover a wide range of topics. A finding shared by all three contributions on the EU is that it offers many opportunities for involvement of the representative associations of trade unions, employers, or non-governmental organizations. Well-documented and stimulating presentations by Janine Goetschy (on social and employment policy), Michael Gold (on European works councils), and Jacques Monat and Thérèse Beaupain (on the Economic and Social Council) probe various aspects of the dialogue processes that have become trademarks of the EU and that the authors view as forms of democratic participation "beyond the usual tripartism."

Skepticism prevails in the contributions on new forms of work organization in the service society. Peter Leisink shows—taking the example of the communications industry—that organizing campaigns will be of little avail in recruiting new members unless the trade unions have updated their aims and *raison d'être*. Helmut Martens stresses that "a stable future for society requires stable institutional change in many of the key institutions of the old labour society." The trade unions' chances, according to this author, are good, but what remains doubtful is whether they can succeed in bringing about their own renewal. Christofer Edling and Ake Sandberg from Sweden ask whether management is really interested in democratic participation or whether it is more concerned to exercise economic and ideological control via new forms of work organization.

Democratic participation in sectoral restructuring is analyzed by Philippe Mossé, taking the example of the hotel industry, and by Thoralf Ulrik Qvale, who focuses on the petroleum industry. Worker participation in the reduction and reorganization of working time is the subject of contributions from Henri Pinaud and Anna Ponzellini. The collection is rounded off by contributions on central and eastern Europe

from Daniel Vaughan-Whitehead and on trade union education from Edward Zammit, Saviour Rizzo, and Joseph Vancell.

Democratic participation is the book's political message. Thirteen essays illuminate its extent, potential, and challenges. It is good that the authors argue rather than agitate. It is good also that these contributors, with their well-defended optimism, should give encouragement to all who are striving for a future characterized by social cohesion. I highly recommend this book.

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*The Future of Worker Representation.* Edited by Geraldine Healy, Edmund Heery, Philip Taylor, and William Brown. London: Palgrave, 2004. 325 pp. ISBN 1-4039-1759-0, \$69.95 (cloth).

This book largely arises from a wide range of employment relations research projects conducted under the *Future of Work* program funded by the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council. The editors, all of them experts in their respective fields, have put together a valuable collection of writings that cover many aspects of worker representation, from trade unions to local community coalitions.

The book's 13 chapters are divided into three sections. The critical first chapter, the editors' overview and introduction, asks how the "representation gap" caused by the decline in union membership might be met. The following eight chapters consider the prospects for trade union growth and renewal in diverse sections of the labor market. Finally, four chapters explore how non-union representation might assist those workers who currently find it difficult to access trade union support at work.

In outlining themes and issues for consideration of how unions might plug the "representation gap," the editors begin by contextualizing recent debates between those scholars who argue that union revitalization is key and those who advocate new or alternative institutions of worker representation. To provide a structural and theoretical framework for the book, they identify four models of union revitalization that