International and Comparative Industrial Relations

Action Research in Workplace Innovation and Regional Development. Edited by Werner Fricke and Peter Totterdill. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004. vii, 355 pp. ISBN 1-58811-467-8, $102.00 (paper).

In a world where policymakers regularly sacrifice the social goods to the laws of the market, what relevance does democracy have for workplace research? Some North American scholars tend to promote and analyze in-firm innovations, in hopes of advancing worker welfare and participation. Others focus on the renewed energy of some labor unions, hoping that revitalization will overcome the powerlessness plaguing workers in plant-level programs. Arguing against such compartmentalization, a group of European action researchers proposes that we build bridges between labor, management, performance, and social goods, and broaden our definition of research to include action. The contributors to Werner Fricke and Peter Totterdill's new edited volume argue for a form of action research integrating workplace change processes with regional economic development. The chapters, some conceptual and some empirical, discuss the dilemmas of actors and the techniques of research, and present a clear alternative to the dominant paradigms of social research (positivism) and public policymaking (neoliberalism).

Several chapters place regional action research in its historical and public policy context. In their introduction, Fricke and Totterdill explain the regional approach to action research in terms of the limitations of traditional workplace-focused projects of the past 50 years associated with the socio-technical and humanization schools of thought. They propose disseminating workplace lessons through "many low intensity changes generated by a great variety of regional actors" and "dynamic situations" of democratic change broader than the workplace. Björn Gustavsen traces the history of the Norwegian working life programs from the 1950s to the present, placing them within the current context of decentralization and regionalization of national policymaking. Peter Totterdill and Jeremy Hague provide a definition of "high road" workplaces that stresses dialogue, which, they argue, allows employees to "make full use of their competencies and creative potential, thereby promoting job satisfaction and personal development." Richard Ennals argues that these new projects promise to build a new social agenda into European Union policy-making. Taken together, these chapters show that European proponents of industrial democracy have moved beyond the firm, to build connections between the workplace, local community, and public policy.

This book has much to say about regional innovation policy. Christophe Heil and Guy LeCroix discuss a Silicon Valley–inspired project of the French national government to create a biotechnology cluster (a *génopole*) in the Evry region. Göran Brulin discusses the "Third Task" initiative of the Swedish government and the National Institute for Working Life to increase the value, broadly defined, that universities create for local regions. Tatu Piirainen and Pasi Koski discuss efforts to reform Finland's innovation policies to embrace local context and incremental process innovation. All three of these chapters discuss state-led initiatives to promote regional process; in Finland and Sweden, the projects also include employers' associations and trade unions.

Several pieces discuss workplace change. Marianne Ekman Philips, Beth Maina Ahlberg, and Tony Huzzard, for example, discuss a Swedish project to restructure a local health-care system and improve patient care. The initiative uses off-site meetings to involve employees, patients' groups, and the government. Still at its earliest stages, the project has had success in improving communications across functional and occupational boundaries. Palle Banke, Jeremy Hague, Trine Land Hansen, and Eva-Carina Nørskov discuss theater and filmmaking techniques to stimulate off-line participation in workplace change. Richard Ennals, Peter Totterdill, and Campbell Ford describe their efforts to build the UK Work Organization Network (UKWON) to rebuild national supports for workplace change torn down during the Thatcher era. Tor Claussen discusses Norway's national projects to promote local innovation and economic democracy (Enterprise Development 2000 and Value Creation 2010), through a pair of case studies. In the *Sunnhordland* and *Rogaland* networks, local governments, firms, unions, and business associations cooperatively pursue a wide range of collective goods. These papers provide fascinating details on regional and inner-organizational change processes, the role of university-based researchers in the projects, and the national institutional frameworks.

For those curious about the changing roles of unions in regions, two papers are especially

interesting. Birgit Beese, Klaus Dörre, and Bernd Röttger discuss local union participation in economic development policy in three of Germany's distressed industrial regions, Chemnitz, Dortmund, and Nuremburg. Although unions find new roles and contribute to local policymaking, anti-unionism in the new workplaces prevent organizational gains. Maarten van Kleveren describes a project driven by Dutch local unions to promote high-road economic development of transport-related sectors ("industribution"). Unlike Beese et al.'s German cases, the Dutch projects attract new members to local unions; national unions, however, have been unable to replicate these successes elsewhere. Both of these chapters show how difficult participation is for unions facing both organizational decline and the development challenges in their local communities.

Although this book contains rich cases, fascinating methods, and an unwavering advocacy of workplace democracy, North American readers will require much effort to absorb its lessons, for two reasons. First, the authors do not triangulate their findings with alternate methodologies, such as surveys or comparative analysis. Subjecting the book's major falsifiable conclusions to the "positivist gaze" might have made the findings more broadly accessible. Second, they could have examined the strategies and instrumental behavior of labor and management. If Silicon Valley, for example, provides lessons for successful innovation policies, how will Europe avoid the social costs of economic development seen in California, such as low wages and pollution? Explaining how these projects' participants pursued their own—at times conflicting—agendas might have given North American readers a more intuitive view of how European social partnership works. Compared to the book's important contribution, however, its flaws are minor.

Fricke and Totterdill's book is an exciting read for those interested in the changing roles of unions, the effect of social relations on economic performance, alternative normative approaches to social science, the challenges of building a Social Europe, and the prospects for improving the contribution of universities to their local communities. This well-edited book has interesting ideas and cases and reminds us that researchers should behave as if they live in the same world that they study.

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Historical Studies

The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America. By Dorothy Sue Cobble. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. 317 pp. ISBN 0-691-06993-X, $29.95 (cloth).

Readers whose shelves have been filling up in the past decade with volumes on the history of second-wave feminism will have to make room for yet one more book. Dorothy Sue Cobble's important new work on the history of labor feminism offers a panoramic view of the many ways union women helped define the shape and character of feminism in the second half of the twentieth century. Although she draws on recent work on the subject, Cobble undertook considerable original research of her own. The result is a study of organized and unorganized wage-earning women and their allies, in industrial, service, and white-collar unions, that will interest labor historians, industrial relations and labor studies scholars, sociologists, and feminist scholars.

Cobble frames her study loosely around the careers and working lives of female activists. These mini-biographies allow her to be attentive to the changing union policies and public policy developments in the decades following World War Two; they also reveal the importance activists attached to racial and class identities, as well as the ways their workplaces and unions structured their outlook. These newly situated women, Cobble argues, mostly joined together in the 1940s and 1950s in support of social feminism, which was an offshoot of the progressive movement's larger program of legislative measures to defend working women by curbing the worst excesses of the industrial age. Social feminists opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and focused instead on addressing practical ways to assist women—an emphasis that Cobble calls practical feminism.

The Other Women's Movement is less an internal history of organized labor than a treatment of union women's central role in the emerging support for feminist-inspired legislation and equal employment opportunity policies. Unlike female unionists in Canada and western Europe, labor feminists in the United States encountered a labor movement still in sympathy with aspects of a voluntarist ideology and a liberal state resistant to significant social planning and lacking a bona fide labor party. Consequently, to back wage and family support