



Cornell University
ILR School

ILR Review

Volume 58 | Number 4

Article 81

July 2005

International Handbook of Trade Unions

John T. Addison

Claus Schnabel

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International Handbook of Trade Unions

BOOK REVIEWS

Labor-Management Relations

International Handbook of Trade Unions. Edited by John T. Addison and Claus Schnabel. Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, 2003. viii, 555 pp. ISBN 1-84064-979-8, \$225.00 (cloth).

This edited volume consists of fourteen separately authored chapters dealing from an international perspective with various dimensions of trade unionism. Among the specific areas covered are the determinants of trade union membership; models of union behavior; bargaining; strikes; union effects on wages, wage structures, productivity, financial performance of firms, macroeconomic performance, and innovation in firms; and political dimensions of unions. Also included are some in-depth analyses of industrial relations and union developments in two key countries—the United States and the United Kingdom—and across several countries of continental Europe. The authors, who are noted scholars from a variety of countries with expertise on unions and industrial relations, have produced a much-needed synthesis of the empirical research on unions.

Most of the articles approach the analysis of union behavior and outcomes from the perspective of economics. This orientation is especially appropriate in the studies' treatment of empirical evidence. The chapters are very thorough syntheses and critical analyses of empirical findings on unions. I believe that the discussion of theories and models of union behavior would have benefited from more extensive presentation of theoretical perspectives from other disciplines. Still, notwithstanding the volume's mainly economic focus, several aspects of unionism are explicitly approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, and many articles account for institutional considerations. Notable among these chapters are ones devoted to political and industrial relations developments associated with trade unions.

The great strength of the volume is that it provides a thorough set of analyses of the extant empirical evidence regarding union effects. The evidence is carefully examined and synthesized and the reader is left with a clear sense of what we know and what we do not know about "what unions do." The chapters, taken together, cover

all the main areas of academic research on union effects, including bargaining, strikes, wages and wage structures, productivity, economic performance, and innovation. In some cases, the studies also provide fresh empirical evidence, and most of them offer new insights into trade unions. In a number of the chapters, the reviews of empirical evidence also span a fairly broad set of countries. To varying degrees across chapters, the studies explain the main theoretical models for considering union effects in an accessible manner and in ways that place the empirical evidence in context.

Another strength of the volume is two chapters that cover industrial relations and unionism in considerable depth—one on the United Kingdom, by John Addison and Stanley Siebert, and the other on the United States, by John Delaney. Both studies represent major contributions to our understanding of the main factors affecting trade unions and the current state and future prospects of unions in these two countries. These studies are also important because they include analyses of institutional considerations affecting trade unions. The United Kingdom and United States warrant examination in great depth because their union movements date back to the formative years of industrial development, have had significant effects domestically, and have also had a formative impact on trade unionism in other countries.

If the volume's strength lies largely in the thoroughness with which it surveys trade unionism and industrial relations developments in Western industrialized countries—the United States, the United Kingdom and, to some extent, Europe—its major shortcoming is its lack of similar attention to other major countries with important and established labor movements, or newly evolving labor movements. The addition of country studies on (for example) Japan, India, South Korea, and Mexico would have better validated the volume's claim to international scope.

One might defend the predominantly Western focus by arguing that most available empirical evidence on trade unionism is in fact specific to Western countries, and, after all, a main objective of the volume is to assess what we know based on *available* evidence. But without greater attention paid to the development and effects of trade unionism in other areas of the world,

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.

Richard P. Chaykowski

Associate Professor
School of Policy Studies
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

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,