

BOOK REVIEWS

The Oxford Book of Work edited by Keith Thomas. Oxford University Press, 1999, xxiii + 618 pp., ISBN 0-19-214217-8, £20.00; 0-19-282531-3, £9.99 paper.

This anthology ought to be at the centre of contemporary discussion of work, its future as well as its past. Thomas has assembled a wonderful collection of writings, some a mere sentence long, others extending to several pages, and has arranged them into nine chapters, which are themselves further subdivided. Under ‘Compensations and Rewards’ we find some 16 different topics, ranging from ‘Work as the Creator of Civilization: the Celebration of Human Productivity’ to ‘The Tedium of Idleness’ and ‘The Psychological Necessity of Work’. Though Thomas’s editorial method is self-effacing, and there is no attempt to provide a full context for the extracts in terms of the particular setting or literary genre from which they are drawn, the very juxtaposition of so many observations on this one subject has the effect of highlighting their individual characteristics. One of Thomas’s express aims is to illustrate the literary conventions guiding the ways writers have treated the subject. In consequence we can see how work is capable of engaging many different means of expression, and need not figure merely as pretext for the jargon and patent nostrums of contemporary popular discussion. There is also a dearth of professional literature, and of its more relaxed alternatives, in this collection. Even the ubiquitous Charles Handy figures only once in a passing reference, in a *Times* piece by Libby Purves. Thomas’s colleagues, he felt sure, were perplexed by his interest in so dreary a subject, yet what emerge vividly from the book are the riches of so many individual observations.

One of their implications is that important parts of the industrial psychology studied by modern specialists are less the product of our own society, and of modern technology, and more intrinsic to the western tradition, or perhaps to the human condition in general. When reading of ‘The Pleasures of Occupation’, we are swept rapidly backwards from W. H. Auden and Anne Frank to an anonymous eighth-century Irish poet, and forwards again to the poets of the Elizabethan Renaissance. We encounter a workaholic Pliny the Elder at one point, but are reminded at another that Peter Medawar attributed the tendency for professionals to overwork to habits that had become ingrained during the Second World War. Sometimes the changes in perspective over quite short periods are surprising. J. G. Patterson of the Industrial Welfare Society described unemployment thus in 1934: ‘Enforced leisure is an embarrassment which only those who have experienced it can possibly understand.’

Why do the terms ‘enforced leisure’ and ‘embarrassment’ seem so strange a way of describing joblessness today? Very often there are exhilarating combinations, as when we move from Diderot the encyclopaedist defining the term ‘métier’, by way of Homer’s shipwright (in Chapman’s translation) to the autobiographical poem of a bell-ringer, elegizing an ancient craft in, of all years, 1968. There are also interesting similarities. Thomas’s own sympathies seem to resemble those of the economist Alfred Marshall: ‘The truth seems to be that as human nature is constituted, man rapidly degenerates unless he has some hard work to do, some difficulties to overcome, and that some strenuous exertion is necessary for physical and moral health.’ Today’s historians rarely pronounce so explicitly on the subject of human nature, yet much of Thomas’s own work has been devoted to the exploration of just how that human nature came to be so ‘constituted’ over time as a network of perceptions, values and sympathies. (This aspect of Thomas’s own work is an organizing theme of his recent Festschrift: P. Burke, B. Harrison and P. Slack, eds., *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, Oxford, 2000.)

The editor’s direct style when introducing individual passages conceals the extent to which this book resembles one of the great works of eighteenth-century historiography in offering an interpretation of civilization in its entirety. Work ‘is a virtually inescapable part of the human condition’ and ‘makes possible all the pleasures and achievements of civilization’. Despite this, however, the influence of ‘classical notions of decorum’ for long prevented its serious treatment in ‘Western literature’. Work as a process, argues Thomas, is also intrinsically harder to handle in literary terms than ‘shorter and more intense forms of experience’. Nevertheless, Thomas has assembled a remarkable array of writers whose claims to inclusion depended on their having written something of ‘intrinsic literary value’. In this respect, those lingering classical notions of decorum seem to shape this project, too, though Thomas’s criterion of value is simply that the piece must be ‘interesting to read more than once’. Like his teacher Christopher Hill, Thomas seeks to avoid complacency in the reader, sometimes at the risk of seeming complacent himself, as when explaining the book’s Englishness: most of the selections are ‘written in English by British or North American authors, but with a certain number drawn from other literatures in translation’. This is, after all, the *Oxford Book of Work*.

Yet Thomas uses the coherence afforded by this unfashionably restricted (if still enormous) body of material to demonstrate a rather different point, about the sheer scale of the variety of work in all its forms, and about its inconsistency. Thomas would hate to be thought of as a post-modern writer, yet aspects of this collection do serve to return a sense of complexity and contradiction to the centre of our ordinary understanding. The positioning of an extract from Albert Einstein’s *Autobiographical Notes* at the end of the chapter on ‘Head Work’ may offer an indication of Thomas’s own views in this respect: ‘Out yonder there was this huge world, which exists independently of us human beings and which stands before us like a great, eternal riddle, at least partially accessible to our inspection and thinking.’ This was the world Einstein chose to dedicate his life to studying. Thomas in turn makes the riddle of work’s place in the human condition a subject for our own generation, and in doing so frees it, and us, from the entanglements of ‘theory’ by ensuring our access to its complexity.

What we have instead is a sense of theory as merely a subset of the long-standing literary representation of work. We are even supplied with some suggestive pre-statements of ideas that have been latterly alluring. In 1573 Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, gave an account of reading in agricultural terms which anticipates,

though in inverted form, Michel de Certeau's comparison between the reader and the poacher:

So he that takes the pain to pen the book
Reaps not the gifts of goodly golden Muse;
But those gain that who on the work shall look,
And from the sour the sweet by skill doth choose.
For he that beats the bush the bird not gets,
But who sits still and holdeth fast the nets.

Thomas himself has patiently held fast, and, in the face of work's 34 dictionary varieties, responds as he puts it 'pragmatically' when choosing which examples to include. His own definition of work embraces paid employment together with 'those kinds of sustained physical or mental effort that have about them some form of necessity or constraint'. Work must have 'an end beyond itself', and be 'designed to produce or achieve something'. There must be a sense of obligation or necessity involved (on our own part, or others'), and work must ultimately seem arduous and cannot be 'wholly pleasurable'. This way of looking at work, however, is in fact the outcome of historical development, and has emerged in the West only in the last few hundred years. Moreover, even within that one tradition there can be no objective understanding of a subject whose value and meaning have varied with economic conditions and political viewpoint. While inviting us to welcome the variety of his examples, however, Thomas also seems to be demonstrating the very limits of the 'historical' when he concedes that, 'through the centuries, the lot of most of the human race has been hard toil for small reward'. Working people themselves, he notes in the case of nineteenth- and twentieth-century autobiographers, seem not to be very interested in work as such, nor do they regard it as central to their lives. While technologists or social reformers seek to ameliorate the hard conditions of work, the 'history' they produce is a reflection of their own priorities, and the sequence of stages through which the productive forces of society have been developed should not be read as the history of the producers themselves. In any case, the underlying assumption of such a history, that technological development represents 'progress', is difficult to take entirely seriously once one has read Crates' account of imaginary machines in the fifth century BC ('Each article of furniture will come to him when he calls it'), or Aristotle's dream of 'a situation in which each instrument could do its own work . . . A shuttle would then weave of itself'.

Having said this, the book's contents provide ample food for thought on contemporary questions, from the emergence of the emotional necessity of work into full recognition by the later seventeenth century, to the way in which work's usefulness has so often been defined as assuaging 'the long-persisting fear of being alone with oneself'. Why, asks Thomas, 'has it been so universally agreed that any absorbing and distracting occupation is desirable because it keeps inner thoughts at bay?' Some of the juxtapositions prompt startling thoughts, as when we move from James Thomson's remarkable poetic account of the transformation of mankind under the stimulus of Industry to Friedrich Engels's study of the part played by labour in the transition from ape to man. Utterly adrift from each other in style, both accounts nevertheless share a capacity for awe in acknowledging the power of human achievements and their future promise, and remind us of what our civilization may have lost in the form of confidence during the course of the twentieth century. Other themes are scattered across the collection, so that we have several commentaries on the winning of one's bread by the sweat of one's brow. As our leading early modern historian, Thomas is superbly equipped to show the successive moments by which

models of the place of work in social life laid down in Antiquity resurfaced within the 'western' tradition.

This also lends to the collection an authentically humanist rhetorical dimension. Experiences or observations of work find their expression in our language, and it is through attention to that language, as well as to the observed 'reality' of work, that we stand to gain most understanding and thus most chance of turning work to our advantage. Thomas includes extracts dealing with the business of writing itself, and this may be as close as he comes for the moment to fulfilling his own expectation that 'Sooner or later, most writers are led to reflect on their motives for writing, the business of getting started, the merits of different working routines, and the spectre of writer's block.'

The spectre is present in one of its most insidious forms in Sir Charles Oman's description of the historian Lord Acton, a man with a 'resolve to embrace too much, and to master everything before he completed anything. He had a great book hovering before his mind; what exactly it was I have never quite made out.' At least one of Acton's great books has in fact been written by Keith Thomas (*Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800*, London, 1983), and Acton's vision might still inspire, to judge from what Oman says of Acton's study: 'There were pigeonholes, desks and cabinets with literally thousands of compartments, into each of which were sorted little white slips with references to some particular topic, so drawn up (so far as I could see) that no one but the compiler could easily make out the drift of the section. I turned over one or two from curiosity — one was on early instances of a sympathetic feeling for animals, from Ulysses' old dog in *Homer* downward. Another seemed to be devoted to a collection of hard words about stepmothers in all national literatures, a third seemed to be about tribal totems.' After an interval with Beatrice Webb labouring away at local government, we can only be relieved to find Fernand Braudel's affectionate description of his fellow-historian Lucien Febvre, co-founder of the journal *Annales*, 'rattling through the writing without correcting, so rapidly and sketchily that it was often hardly legible in spite of its clarity'.

Through this sequence of passages, Thomas gently undermines the seemingly categorical distinction between 'proper' work — the work of workers — and the unremitting, sometimes fruitless, labour of the pen. In doing so he also reminds us just how ancient is the postmodernists' concern with the artificially wrought nature of our access to the 'real' world. The material included here from sources beyond 'western' experience likewise suggestively conveys a sense of what might be common to many cultures, or at least common as the result of cultural influence. Satoshi Kamata's account of beginning work in a Japanese factory in 1980 suggests that those new to the rigours of an early start might spontaneously have similar reactions, wherever they live in the world: 'My first workday. Up at 5.00 a.m. It's still dark when I go out. The eastern mountains are glowing faintly, but I can still see the stars shining brightly in the sky.'

Even with this world-wide reach, of course, there are bound to be unresolved questions. These include the relationship between the universality of attitudes towards work, across cultures, and processes of so-called globalization; the significance of new technology (about which Thomas's long perspective encourages him to remain sceptical); and the meaning of current shifts in the gender composition of the workforce. Thomas is less interested in the substantive historical analysis of such questions on this occasion than in registering the nuanced variety of ways in which such subjects have been approached in writing, and how this has been married with a

variety of ethical points of view. The overall thrust of his editorial comments is to emphasize the historical importance of the separation of work and leisure, and the relative abstraction of the modern notion of work. His extracts do much to render our sense of work more concrete, and to remind us of what we may have lost through increasing abstraction even if we have gained something through scientific analysis. As a stimulus to think of work as something deeply embedded in culture, and at the same time providing one of culture's perennial reference points, its ways of being a culture in the first place, this book is unsurpassed.

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A Theory of Employment Systems: Micro-Foundations of Societal Diversity by David Marsden. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, xvi + 298 pp., ISBN 0-19-829423-9, £45.00; ISBN 0-19-829422-0, £18.99 paper.

David Marsden, who has contributed considerably in recent years to heterodox economic theory, here proposes a model of four different types of solution delimiting management authority within an employment relationship. These are argued to be extremely extensive in their implications for the conduct of the employment relationship, and to be virtually mutually inconsistent within any individual empirical system. These two strong claims explain the book's ambitious subtitle.

To begin with, I was highly sceptical that such claims could be sustained. First, the author is proposing the superiority of forms of stable employment systems precisely at a moment in economic history when employers seem increasingly to want to forget this and most other aspects of the theory of the firm and to return to spot contracts with nominally self-employed individual labour subcontractors and franchisees. Another case of Hegel's Owl of Minerva taking wing at twilight? However, Marsden relativizes his theory, pointing out the circumstances in which employers will prefer the employment relationship — that is, when they can regulate its bounds. But Marsden also reminds us that employee status remains the majority form of engagement of labour in advanced economies.

Second, the model itself — contractual constraints and common employment rules — seems mechanistically abstract. There is the inevitable two-by-two matrix of social science theories: here the two axes are (1) the focus of enforcement criteria of labour obligations (polarized into task-centred and function-/procedure-centred); and (2) job demands identified by: the production approach and the training approach. (The first of this last pair refers to work rules where complementarities are sought between tasks in the production system; the latter where they are sought in workers' skills.) This gives the following four approaches to employment rules which then form the bedrock of the book:

- task-centred by production approach gives the 'work post' rule;
- task-centred by training approach gives 'job territory' or 'tools of trade' rule;
- function-/procedure-centred by production approach gives 'competence rank' rule;
- function-/procedure-centred by training approach gives 'qualification' rule.

Marsden insists that there will be a tendency for the different types of rule to diverge increasingly from one another. Once set down the path of one of the above, it

becomes increasingly difficult for an organization or a national system to combine elements of the others. This is the stuff that good strong theories are made of, but one immediately asks: what about all those mixed systems? For example, the production and training approaches lead to diametrically opposed emphases on on- and off-the-job training; what then are we to make of the German system, probably the most effective training system in the world, which systematically combines elements of both?

Gradually, however, Marsden begins to conquer large areas of one's scepticism, as he explores the detailed explanatory reach of his model. He contributes to the growing stock of literature that uses the idea of path dependence. However, while this usually means identifying procedures whose time has passed, Marsden concentrates on the more positive aspects of a path dependence, and shows us how 'knowing one's way around' institutions can bring scope for identifying subtle new possibilities, even innovation, within the terms of a system. This is invariably missed by the path dependence literature. One interesting consequence of this is that systems which ostensibly embody rigidities — the ultimate *bête noire* of contemporary labour market thinking — are seen to embody countervailing flexibilities, for example in dealing with 'unusual tasks' or with opportunism, which explain their continuing attraction for employers who are accustomed to working them.

An interesting aspect of the model is that each of the four types, ideal though it is, in fact embodies major compromises. For example, pure or extreme forms of the employment relationship would include both detailed specification of work terms and heavy reliance on diffuse exchange. Both of these encounter problems as their extreme characteristics develop. Each of Marsden's four types of rule, on the other hand, embodies a different kind of compromise for such extreme choices. It is this that gives them their durability, and the mechanisms that will lead to the increasing returns to first-mover systems in particular contexts in the classic path-dependent way. Once one adds to this some arguments as to why nation-state boundaries have often also marked the boundaries of employment rule systems, one is well on the way to an analysis and eventual classification of national systems.

Marsden insists that the internal ingredients of each of the types of rule are self-reinforcing. As a result, 'pick and mix' solutions, intrinsically attractive and apparently possible in a postmodern culture, are seen as difficult and internally contradictory. For example, firms that mix two different status categories — like the familiar one between manual wage-earning and non-manual salaried staff — find that they have to keep the two categories very much apart within the organization, because such contradictory elements are combined in them. This then imparts rigidities if changing technology indicates a different job organization which would cut across this divide.

However, this remains a problematic question. It seems to rule out analogies of the irritating grains of sand which lead the oyster to make a pearl. More prosaically, if incompatibilities between systems simply insist on being present within a firm's employment system, might this not lead to radical innovations, which might provide quite new systems, which might or might not suit participants' interests better than the previous one? The answer that seems to emerge from Marsden's account is that such Schumpeterian excursions into creative destruction are all very well, but there simply are not many of them about. One has to concede the weight of the evidence he adduces, but a sneaking doubt remains, which is fuelled by the approach taken to the search for evidence. Marsden deploys a vast literature of cases which demonstrate his four systems in their mutual incompatibility, but he does not look systematically for counterfactual evidence; he is not testing hypotheses against a neutrally gathered body of data.

This then has an important implication. If we look for examples of coherence we shall certainly find many of them, but an alternative research strategy which insists on looking for odd-ball cases that tried creative mongrel systems, while it will find many instances of failure, might also come up with a few interesting innovations. And how much might these be worth? Like all model-builders, Marsden needs at certain points to 'resolve the tensions' in cases that seem to contradict the rules. One can certainly argue, as he does, that ostensible differences are not really present; social science concepts are usually flexible enough for this. But sometimes it might be worth pursuing the implications of a genuine lack of fit. Indeed, the more generally convincing the overall theory (as Marsden's is), the more interesting it is to find cases that successfully break the rules. What is more important: the ostensible contradiction or the eventual reconciliation? It is often yet another case of the half-empty or half-full glass. And how one perceives that depends on one's objectives: theory builder versus pearl hunter.

A consequent problem of Marsden's approach is that it can be taken by surprise by innovative social actors. For example, in much of his analysis the kind of employment system characteristically associated with the UK and the USA is seen as particularly rigid. Much of Marsden's data is drawn from periods before the 1990s. Studies of data from the mid-1990s onwards suggest a different picture — though admittedly not the last word as theories of the end of history might want to imply. Where did employers in these economies find a new and exceptionally high level of labour flexibility by the mid-1990s, if not by actions difficult to predict from their prior path dependences? One can find the answer if one looks into previously under-emphasized and slightly anomalous characteristics of these systems, which were always there (and therefore part of a more complex set of path dependences) but were concealed behind the dominant models. Only a methodology of consciously seeking such subordinate or latent practices stands a chance of identifying such cases.

Again, one wishes that Marsden had exposed his model to a greater vulnerability to the discovery of counterfactuals — not only for the normal reason that this strengthens one's belief in the scientific character of the tests to which hypotheses are subject, but also because in the scraps of contradictory evidence that would have been encountered — no social science theory is without such — the germs of innovation might have been discovered.

Is this too churlish a conclusion? By the end of the book Marsden had thoroughly convinced me that such models exist, and that the tendencies he describes for them to achieve a coherent *Gestalt* within individual national or other generalizable contexts are entirely valid. For that very reason, however, I became curious to taste the forbidden fruit of 'transgressive' innovations which established something new — especially during and since that crucible period of the 1990s which threw confusion on so many of the prior assumptions of labour market research.

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Social Change in Western Europe by Colin Crouch. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, xxii + 543 pp., ISBN 0-19-878068-0, £18.99 paper.

This is the first volume in a series edited by Colin Crouch on the theme of 'European Societies'. The main aim is to provide a series of accessible texts on aspects of

European social development, written from a sociological perspective, with a focus on the interaction between similarity and difference.

In this broad introductory overview, Crouch considers trends in 16 countries of western Europe (all those with a population of more than a million), with reference also to the USA and Japan as a basis for assessing European distinctiveness. The analysis rests on the 'snapshot' technique which he used previously in *Industrial Relations and European State Traditions* (1993), assessing change through comparative statics rather than following its dynamics over the historical process. In this case, the comparison is between two points of time — the early 1960s and the mid-1990s — though the analysis is preceded by a prologue that summarizes the development of European societies at quarter-millennium intervals from the year 1000. The key questions addressed are: what are the patterns of commonality and national distinctiveness in western Europe? and how radically, and why, have European societies been changing in recent decades?

Thematically, social change is conceived in terms of a quadrilateral of forces: productive activity, ownership and control of economic resources, community institutions and political society. These dimensions, Crouch argues, are in a tension that at times can prove explosive, resulting, in some European nations in the twentieth century, in virtual or actual civil war. But as part of the postwar compromises that took different forms across western Europe, accommodation was achieved through a process that he terms 'structured sociological liberalism'. Its essence was the relative institutional autonomy of each of the four spheres. 'Modern' industry became universally the dominant form of production; private capitalism became largely unchallenged as the main foundation of the economic order; traditional institutions of family and religion were protected; citizenship rights were extended, in particular through the consolidation of elaborate welfare states. Yet if competing principles of social organization were reconciled through institutional separation, they were not thereby harmonized. Two key contradictions were particularly important, and ultimately a source of instability: between the expansionism of capitalist markets and the defence of spheres of social existence in which crude economic calculation was inappropriate; and between workers' rights as citizens and their subordination and vulnerability as employees.

The following third of a century has seen substantial changes. How far are they common across Europe? How far have they undermined any distinctive European social model? And how do we make sense of them? As Crouch notes, it is familiar to employ a variety of 'post-' categorizations: post-Fordism, post-Keynesianism, post-modernism and — a rather earlier variant — post-industrialism. These are not, Crouch insists, simple equivalents. The mid-century compromise is commonly viewed as the apogee of Fordism, and more recent developments either optimistically, as a transition to a society allowing greater individual choice, or pessimistically, as an era of disorientation and subjection to unpredictable external forces. But large-scale industry, organized industrial relations, Keynesian macroeconomic management and an extensive welfare regime were outcomes of different social dynamics and converged contingently and in different forms cross-nationally. By the same token, more recent trends — even if often interpreted as common responses to the challenges of 'globalization' — cannot be regarded as merely parallel movements towards a new equilibrium. Or at least, it is necessary to map the diverse patterns of change before we can judge whether they reflect a common underlying logic. There is thus a dual need for conceptual clarification and empirical grounding in order to identify the significance of such changes.

The body of the book examines in separate sections the four elements of the quadrilateral of forces, with the analysis relying heavily on detailed statistical indicators relating to the two focal periods. The overall message is one of complexity and ambiguity (and, frequently, a resigned admission that the available data simply do not allow us to reach firm conclusions). So, for example, the most evident transformation in the world of work is the shift from employment patterns centred on manufacturing industry and the 'male breadwinner' to a more feminized labour force strongly rooted in services. But the end of the traditional demarcation between employment/family does not displace gender segregation, but gives it new forms (a 'bicephalous gendered occupational structure'); and if some of the elements of post-industrialism are evident, there is no homogeneous service sector. (Indeed, Crouch insists on the need to make a four-part distinction among service occupations.) Or, again: the shift from a traditional conception of the 'normal' employment relationship has been uneven and contradictory. Apart from the obvious expansion of part-time work, linked to feminization, there has been little systematic growth in 'atypical' work; and those forms of 'flexible' employment that have expanded do not fit any simple analysis, either optimistic or pessimistic. Similarly, in the field of collective industrial relations we can observe institutional instability and a shift towards company-based employment regimes; but there is no universal trend to disorganization. And so on, across the themes of models of capitalism, family, education, religion, nationality and ethnicity, political democracy and welfare.

In conclusion, Crouch asks first whether there is a distinctive European model of society. He finds it hard to identify one, above all because of the similarities with the USA, which emerged out of Europe and has more recently colonized much of Europe culturally. National societies developed in the nineteenth century largely through the national extension of communications; but today the internationalization of communications transcends Europe. (Hence aspirations for the construction of a pan-European society are probably futile.)

Second, how can we make sense of current changes? Post-industrial (and post-material) theories may fit some of the trends but cannot account for the reinforcement of capitalist market dynamics. Postmodernism is relevant to some of the changes in family structure, and to the weakening of religious authority — though such processes are best viewed through the concept of reflexive modernity developed by Beck and Giddens. But such a concept does not easily extend to employment, where managerial authority has been reinforced, not eroded, and Fordist principles have been extended to non-industrial organizations. Overall, Crouch points to the paradoxical significance of class. Social exclusion provided the basis for working-class power mobilization, resulting in the achievement of citizenship rights in the postwar compromise; but this froze the contours of class structure while abating its inequalities. The socioeconomic changes of the past third of a century have in many respects reinforced class relations, but have fragmented class identities. The challenge for the future of Europe is: can non-capitalist institutions and interests enforce a new compromise? Crouch is not optimistic.

In many ways this is a very impressive book, certainly a major source of wide-ranging information on the social contours of western Europe. The style is clear and the argumentation lucid. Nevertheless, I have two important reservations. First, there is a tendency to refer to 'societies' as coherent actors: 'how have societies of the mid-century compromise tried to cope with this tension?'; 'societies developed differing responses to these questions...'. This is in spite of the fact that at times Crouch argues explicitly against a functionalist interpretation of social dynamics and

insists on the explanatory importance of power mobilization. Part of the reason for this tension, I suspect, is the book's underlying methodology, within which the 18 countries appear as bundles of variables rather than as totalities. How then is it possible to grasp the dialectical character of the 'mid-century compromise'?

The second problem stems from the immensity of the challenge — for author and reader alike — of digesting data from almost every nation in western Europe. In *Industrial Relations and European State Traditions* we were presented with a similar range of countries; but, because the theme was more narrowly defined, it was possible for the reader to acquire some appreciation of industrial relations in (say) Belgium, Denmark or Switzerland as a field of interaction. In the present case, the combination of both thematic and national breadth obstructs, to my mind, the possibility of such a feel for the dynamics of change.

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Unions, Employers, and Central Banks: Macroeconomic Coordination and Institutional Change in Social Market Economies by Torben Iversen, Jonas Pontusson and David Soskice. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, xvi + 339 pp., ISBN 0-521-65039-9, £40.00/\$64.95; ISBN 0-521-78884-6, £14.95/\$22.95 paper.

This book aims to contribute to the theoretical and empirical analysis of comparative industrial relations and political economy. Special attention is directed to the Nordic countries. Aside from the introductory chapters, the book is divided into three thematic parts: wage bargaining, macroeconomic regimes, and macroeconomic and distributive outcomes. The single chapters, which almost all adopt a cross-nationally comparative perspective, differ in their analytical framework, research problems and methodology, including quantitative analyses and qualitative single-case studies. There are also some differences in their answers to shared questions. Such diversity, which often constitutes a weakness of edited volumes, is turned into strength by Soskice's and Iversen and Pontusson's introductions. In addition to providing a general framework for the reader, they have made the contributions speak to one another in that they mutually refer and respond to controversial issues.

As Iversen and Pontusson emphasize, the changes in institutions and policies cannot be captured adequately by either neoclassical or corporatist reasoning. When assuming perfect competition and money neutrality, neoclassical theory does not match reality. The same applies to the corporatist literature of the 1970s and 1980s, owing to its narrow focus on labour's mobilizational capacity, organizational encompassment and centralization. To overcome these weaknesses, analyses need to be reoriented. On the one hand, they have to concentrate on the institutional interaction across such different policy areas as wage bargaining, economic and social policy. On the other hand, there is a need to disaggregate labour and capital by complementing studies of interclass relations with an emphasis on cross-class alliances and intraclass conflict. The latter is evidenced by Garrett and Way's contribution, which shows a significantly negative association between public-sector union strength and the ability of coordinated systems to internalize externalities.

Soskice's chapter is more than an introduction to this volume. He compares the neoclassical and New Keynesian accounts of employment theory and explains how they relate to studies of the performance of the wage bargaining systems. One main

argument is that, in contrast to neoclassical assumptions, monetary policy and fiscal policy affect equilibrium unemployment by influencing the incentive structure in the bargaining system. Furthermore, the analysis of the comparative performance of alternative bargaining systems is complicated by the fact that the actual equilibrium unemployment rate hinges on aggregate demand. Hence one has to adjust for aggregate demand. As Soskice shows, an unadjusted analysis tends to underestimate the performance of coordinated systems in comparison with their uncoordinated counterparts because almost all countries operating under coordination have been caught in a deflationary trap caused by the predominance of German monetary policy in Europe and the fulfilment of the Maastricht criteria.

Soskice's chapter is outstanding, since it provides the theoretical framework for meeting the volume's claim to bridge two distinct approaches to wage bargaining and macroeconomic policy: that is, the corporatist school and economic theory. His distinction between co-ordination and centralization is of utmost importance in this respect. As he has shown also in earlier work, one must not equate co-ordination with centralization of bargaining. From the theoretical point of view, a system capable of co-ordinating wage-setting across its distinct, formally independent bargaining units suffices to internalize wage externalities. Empirically, the distinction is essential because co-ordination does indeed rest on decentralized procedures in several countries (e.g. Germany and Japan). Otherwise put, centralization is just one special road to co-ordination. This raises the question of what mechanisms can make decentralized co-ordination work. The answer brings us directly to the volume's title and thus substantiates its research agenda. Following Soskice's argument, one may doubt that the unions are strong enough to align wage settlements with macroeconomic requirements in a decentralized context. Hence, 'external' incentives are needed, which may be set by either employer co-ordination or a central bank that does not accommodate inflationary pay hikes.

This argument is the guiding thread of most parts of the volume. As regards macroeconomic regimes, Franzese and Hall demonstrate that monetary policy and the bargaining system significantly interact. This includes empirical evidence of the beneficial interplay of decentralized co-ordination and monetary non-accommodation. Iversen's contribution elucidates that there are two couplings of monetary policy and bargaining that in turn cluster with differing forms of social policy across countries: centralized bargaining, monetary accommodation and a decommodifying welfare state versus a decentralized, non-accommodating and commodifying regime. This interplay also matters in distributive terms. Pontusson's contribution confirms that wage equality increases significantly with bargaining centralization.

One finds two main controversies in the volume. The first concerns the magnitude of change. While Wallerstein and Golden's analysis of wage bargaining in the Nordic countries suggests high stability in all countries but Sweden, Iversen and Pontusson register a general move from centralization to German-style decentralized co-ordination, flanked by a corresponding change in macroeconomic management. Obviously, this debate is fuelled by differing measures of centralization. The related debate on the complexity of the concept is instructive because it marks a caveat concerning many of the other studies of this issue that rather ignore this complexity and rush into conclusions on alleged bargaining trends. The other controversy is on the causality underlying the interplay of bargaining and macroeconomic regimes. As already noted, Iversen points out that accommodation and centralization form a coherent pattern, whereas Martin's chapter on the Swedish case argues that expansionary policies triggered decentralization.

The two introductory chapters, when providing a concise framework for the reader, also reveal what remains incomplete in the volume. Three points are worth mentioning. First, one misses a systematic consideration of the role of the state in 'coordinated market economies'. It is not only unions, employers and central banks that may engage in co-ordination: in addition, the state has a role in this process. Wallerstein and Golden's analysis is informative in this respect. However, they limit analysis to procedural aspects, in accordance with their research question. For comparative political economy centring on interactions across policy fields, the question of (in)consistency of state policies becomes essential. This is underlined by Martin, who emphasizes that expansionary policies in Sweden *unintendedly* unleashed decentralization.

Second, one would like to see a comparative analysis of employer action in addition to the two case studies of Sweden (Swenson and Pontusson) and Germany (Thelen). This is because it is difficult to deduce generalizations from them. In the case of Sweden, this is manifested in disagreement on the impact of new production paradigms. According to Swenson and Pontusson, these paradigms have been a main reason for employers' attack on co-ordinated bargaining. This is questioned by Wallerstein and Golden, who argue that these changes have occurred across the OECD, in such a way that they cannot explain the exceptionally fierce attack by Sweden's employers. Similarly, parts of Thelen's explanation for why German employers are more acquiescent than their Swedish counterparts are not very compelling from a comparative perspective. It is argued that a move to single-employer bargaining would endanger the peace obligation imposed on the German works councils. Furthermore, industry bargaining is already the norm there, whereas Sweden's employers had to struggle for enforcing such a beneficial system. However, one can hardly find a difference between the two countries in these respects. Both German and Swedish employers, ignoring the blessings of industry-level co-ordination, have (unsuccessfully) called for single-employer bargaining, which would challenge peace in the workplace in either case. Characteristically, Sweden's unions have countered employer demands for decentralization with the warning that this would imply a corresponding devolution of the right to strike (*European Industrial Relations Review*, 1992, 227: 10). Why do employers neglect their collective interest? One may argue that the co-ordinating capacity of employers' associations is far more constrained than labour's capacity, because most power resources of employers remain with the individual firm and are thus beyond associational command. Thelen's findings on Gesamtmetall rather support this scepticism.

Third, empirical methodology does not always follow hypotheses. Modelling an interaction between bargaining, monetary policy, etc., implies the statistical independence of these variables. This creates a problem for the study of the institutional interaction across policy fields, in particular when assuming coherent policy regimes. Correlations between the interacting variables of 0.85 and more (as reported by Iversen for centralization, accommodation and commodification, p. 218) support the coherence assumption but conflict with the preconditions for multivariate analyses of the interactive effect of these variables on such performance indicators as unemployment. The methodological consequences of the distinction between co-ordination and centralization are especially important. Most empirical studies that accept this distinction (including Franzese and Hall, in this volume) adopt a parametric measure of co-ordination. While measurement problems permeate debates on centralization (see above), they magnify in the case of co-ordination, because we lack any unequivocal criterion for identifying different degrees of co-ordination, leaving aside economic

performance which, however, results in tautology when co-ordination is used as a predictor of performance. Why should bargaining in Sweden be seen as more/better co-ordinated than it is in Germany (Hall and Franzese, p. 190)? Centralization may encounter more co-ordination problems than industry bargaining, since weak groups become more powerful in relation to strong groups when bargaining jointly in a centralized setting (e.g. Pontusson, p. 310). As a consequence, empirical studies have to content themselves with categorical measures of co-ordination, when it comes to analysing performance effects.

Rather than criticisms of the volume itself, these points should be seen as core problems of the research agenda demarcated by the volume. The book is certainly outstanding by scholarly standards. As a whole, it informs about the key issues that will prevail in macro comparisons for the foreseeable future.

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Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-based Society by André Gorz. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, vi + 185 pp., ISBN 0-7456-2127-9, £50.00; ISBN 0-7456-2128-7, £14.99 paper.

Although the general topic of the book is by now familiar to readers of Gorz's work, his new analysis of the current situation of our society is enlightening, his conclusions novel and the presentation intellectually exciting. As in earlier works, Gorz presents a critique of contemporary capitalism and discusses possible ways to a 'new' society. He argues that the job-based capitalist society is no longer sustainable: capitalism destroys jobs on a massive scale through labour-replacing technologies, but on the other hand keeps wage-labour as the basis for income, identity and 'full citizenship'.

Gorz starts by discussing current changes within the wage-based society. He analyses capital's reactions to the crisis of Fordism and how, through transnationalization, capitalism frees itself from the political control of nation states. He then describes in more detail changes in work and wage-relations. The post-Fordist enterprise demands from workers to self-organize in teams, to understand, plan and improve the entire manufacturing processes indicate that workers need 'general social knowledge' as a basis for their productivity. Within capitalist social relations, however, the liberating potential of these new forms of work cannot be realized. Gorz thus refuses the thesis of 'mass intellectuality', according to which the social process of production generates the subject of an alternative political power. 'Autonomy in work is of little significance when it is not carried into the cultural, moral and political spheres . . .' (p. 40). In other words, it is not the liberation in work that is heralding a new society (although it has to be said that this also plays a certain role in the author's argument), but the abolishment of work by post-Fordist companies on the one hand and the alteration of the nature of employment on the other. For example, the outsourcing of labour replaces the wage relationship with a commercial relationship. As a consequence, the Fordist wage-based society is being replaced with a universal insecurity.

The central problem we are facing today, according to Gorz, is that, while capital valorization is increasingly disconnected from work or any production, 'each person's right to an adequate income, to full citizenship . . . is still made to depend on his/her accomplishment of some measurable, classifiable, saleable "work"' (p. 53). It

is Gorz's conviction that 'neither the right to an income, nor full citizenship, nor everyone's sense of identity and self-fulfilment can any longer be centred on and depend upon occupying a job. And society has to be changed to take account of this' (p. 54).

Even in the early 1980s, in *Paths to Paradise*, Gorz maintained that a return to full employment and related Fordist social relations was not possible. In this book he develops an alternative to the basis of the current state of the labour markets and to progressive policies in some European countries aiming to redistribute working time and to combine discontinuous work with job security. For example, he argues that there are options to convert the insecurity and discontinuity of jobs into a more self-determined and 'multi-dimensional' life, thereby creating exit routes from capitalism. For Gorz, the problem is not a lacking cultural change that overcomes the subjective centrality of employment within people's lives. He maintains that social attitudes have actually changed and that the disaffection of work is spreading in all countries. Employment is increasingly valued for the rights and entitlements attached to it. More importantly, 'the problem and its solution are first and foremost political; they lie in the definition of new rights, new freedoms, new collective guarantees, new public facilities and new social norms, in terms of which chosen working time and chosen activities will no longer be marginal to society, but part of a new blueprint for society: a "society of chosen time" and "multi-activity"' (p. 65).

According to Gorz, social integration through work is disappearing in spite of the obsession with this theme of current political debates. 'There is no longer enough society for individuals to be able to define themselves by their way of serving it' (p. 65). The solution is not to 'create work', but to distribute the socially produced wealth in such a way that a sufficient, regular income does not depend on a steady job. On that basis, a wide range of activities rather than one life-long job will produce social relations and a meaningful life.

Although he is not suggesting a reformist project ('Let us make no mistake about this: wage-labour has to disappear and, with it, capitalism': p. 77), Gorz outlines a set of policies that should help to create the spaces in which alternative social practices can develop. These are, first, guaranteeing an unconditional and sufficient basic income (together with developing and making accessible the resources for self-activity); second, combining a redistribution of work with an individual and collective control over time; and, third, encouraging new socialities, new modes of co-operation and exchange. Partly in contrast to his previous position on the issue, Gorz convincingly argues in favour of not only an unconditional but also a sufficient social income, and thereby contributes important arguments to the ongoing debate.

Destandardization and discontinuity of work does not in itself open up space for self-determined activities: on the contrary, post-Fordist destandardization practices have so far pursued the opposite. Gorz also points to the dangers of the individuals' fragmented social ties. The need for identity and dignity may then make people seek recourse to national-communitarian ideologies or other fundamentalisms.

In sum, the author successfully combines a thorough analysis of the recent development of work with a vision of a transformation of society. It is of minor importance, in my view, that empirical findings on voluntary work, for example in Germany, do not all support his optimism about emerging new forms of social integration. Nor can it be taken for granted that these activities lead to 'critical and proactive attitudes'. Another question that could be raised is whether Gorz's claim is of universalist nature or is limited to a particular society. Comparative research has shown for example considerable variation among EU member states in terms of

gender relations at work, household models and labour market discrimination. From this evidence, one might infer that a basic income may not always support emancipation as Gorz suggests, but rather might have different effects in different countries.

Criticisms based on empirical findings are important and justified, but they should not lead us to ignore the basic message of Gorz. Rather than relying on a positivist sociology, Gorz follows Touraine in defining the role of the sociologist as a participating analyst within a political movement. A hypothesis is confirmed if the political group makes the hypothesis its own. In this respect my reading of the book has left me rather optimistic (assuming, for the sake of argument, that I am representing the average reader): I now ask myself seriously why I should not devote more time to build up the independent school I want my daughter to go to, and whether I could not initiate a co-operative circle or a 'local exchange trade system' to raise funding for the school . . .

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Beyond Unions and Collective Bargaining by Leo Troy. M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1999, xvi + 224 pp., ISBN 0-7656-0469-8, \$60.95.

In this book, Leo Troy examines the conditions that have created such a high incidence of non-union employment relations in the United States. Troy regards individual representation (which currently applies to some 90 per cent of employees in the private sector) as a 'system' of industrial relations, akin to the organized, New Deal system described in Dunlop's classic treatment. He sets out to explain the reasons for the growth and ongoing dominance of 'individual voice' in private-sector employment relations in the USA.

The first four chapters of the book contain Troy's theories about the rise of non-unionism. These are followed by two chapters designed to explore the nature of employee communication and the determination of conditions of employment in non-union employment relations. The book then contains a chapter discounting the idea that there could be forms of collective non-union representation in the USA. It concludes with two chapters summarizing the book's argument and revisiting Troy's view that unionism and collective bargaining have entered an irreversible 'twilight zone'.

Troy's key argument, consistent with much of his other work, is that the individual system is sustained by employer *and* employee choice. The 'sufficient condition' (p. 30) for a viable system of individual representation is this joint selection. In his view, worker preference for individual representation is much more of a factor explaining its prevalence than employer opposition to collective bargaining. Troy frequently cites a survey conducted by Harris and Associates for the AFL-CIO in 1984, which reported that most non-union workers regarded unions as irrelevant to their employment needs. In Troy's view, most workers in the USA aim to protect their employment interests through mobility in the labour market. He quotes Milton Friedman with approval: 'the most reliable and effective protection for most workers is provided by the existence of many employers' (p. 20). While market forces provide the major source of protection, Troy argues that workers have also gained from individually oriented employment law which has increasingly substituted for collective bargaining.

Troy's assessment of the decline of private-sector unionism stresses major shifts in the structure of the American economy. His account places emphasis on the growth from the mid-1950s of more 'personalized' service-sector jobs, many of which are undertaken by professional, technical and administrative workers who invest more heavily in their own education and who have much less interest in collectivism. He sees individual representation, preferred by these workers, as more consistent with the greater flexibility that employers need in a globalizing economy. At the same time, blue-collar workers have become more sceptical about what unions can do for them, given the propensity for downsizing in the traditionally organized parts of manufacturing where technological change continues to eliminate jobs and lift productivity. While admitting the existence of employer opposition to unionization in the USA, Troy argues that 'it is not ... the principal reason for the ebb of organized representation' (p. 35). This book, then, like much of Troy's other writing, takes issue with the work of those academics who assign a large role to anti-union employer strategy in the story of union decline in the USA.

Troy's main contribution lies in his insistence that workers do play a substantial, willing role in the prevalence of individual representation in the United States. By any assessment, this is a fair point and one that deserves much greater attention than it has received — as Troy emphasizes. The book, however, fails to calibrate the argument in a more defensible manner. In terms of data on worker preferences, it is much too reliant on the Harris survey conducted in 1984. Troy does not explore differences in the views of workers in highly skilled jobs, who might find his analysis very reasonable, and workers in less skilled jobs, who have greater need for union representation but much less access to it. Although accepting that there are 'irrational employers' who exploit labour 'when labor markets are not competitive' (pp. 22–3), Troy chooses not to go deeper than this brief observation and analyse studies of worker experiences in different segments of the US labour market. Campaigns to organize workers in the secondary labour market, such as 'Justice for Janitors', are mentioned only in passing towards the end of the book (p. 173), making no impact on Troy's analysis of worker interests.

The gaps in the book's analysis become obvious in the discussion of the role of employee handbooks in non-union employment relations (pp. 95–9). Troy argues that 'in the non-union system, the employee handbook serves as a structure for the governance of the workplace' (p. 95). He lacks evidence, however, on the prevalence of such handbooks and on employee attitudes to them as alternatives to collectively bargained contracts. To what extent do non-union employees find unilateral variation by management of the policies in these handbooks legitimate? Putting the question as broadly as possible: under what conditions, and to what extent, do non-union workers find the exercise of management authority problematic? This critical question — which should be central to any evaluation of the system of individual representation — is not formulated and explored in the book.

In terms of the quality of data, the book reaches a very low point in the chapters on employee communication and conditions of employment. Troy generalises too much from the anonymous illustrations he has drawn from companies belonging to the National Association of Manufacturers. As a result, the book lacks the kind of systematic evidence it needs to support its claims about the employment practices of non-union employers. As this criticism implies, the book not only fails to appraise the range of worker experiences in the American labour market, but also oversimplifies employer behaviour. It is widely accepted in the literature on management strategy that some form of typology is needed to approximate the array of employer

styles that actually exist in non-union employment relations. In Troy's treatment, however, non-union employers appear remarkably uniform.

Alongside these major difficulties with the work, the book is characterized by an antipathy towards trade unions which surfaces in various unflattering references. It does not look carefully at studies in the international literature which suggest positive roles for unions and collective bargaining in economic renewal and social improvement. While the author briefly refers to European industrial relations institutions, the treatment is much too generalized.

It would be helpful if Troy did look much more closely at sources outside his conception of the US system — for the kind of light they shed on problems *in* the US system. While occasionally referring to suggestions for reform of the US system along Canadian lines, Troy's treatment is unduly dismissive. Arguably, someone examining the international literature on union recognition will eventually realize that US law creates problems for union organization by requiring elections and majoritarianism for certification, as Roy Adams has argued. More effective systems provide for simpler, speedier recognition. Where workers want it, they facilitate collective bargaining much more quickly, with far fewer of the political and legal complications for which the US system is notorious.

In sum, this book raises worthwhile questions about the basis of non-union employment relations in the USA. It makes a valid point that much of the incidence of non-unionism must stem from a conjunction of employer and worker preference. However, Troy's supporting arguments lack sufficient evidence and calibration. The overall effect of the book is to minimize the bargaining disadvantages of workers (particularly in the secondary labour market) and leave readers thinking that attempts to reform labour law in the USA are not only extraordinarily difficult but pointless. Given the difficulties in its data base, *Beyond Unions and Collective Bargaining* does not engage well with better argued works on the other side of the debate. A more searching examination of the data — on both the worker and employer sides of the story — would qualify Troy's argument in important ways. Along with a review of the international literature on worker organization and a more balanced attitude to unions, such a study would inevitably lead to a different conclusion about US labour market policy.

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Handbook of Labor Economics edited by Orley C. Ashenfelter and David Card.

Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1999, vol.3A, 1100 pp., ISBN 0-444-50187-8, NLG 295 (€133.87), \$125; vol. 3B, 900 pp., ISBN 0-444-50188-6, NLG 295 (€133.87), \$125; vol. 3C, 900 pp., ISBN 0-444-50189-4, NLG 295 (€133.87), \$125.

When the first two volumes of this *Handbook* were published in 1986 they totalled some 22 chapters and 2000 pages. Such was the explosion in labour economics in the intervening period that these three volumes have a further 31 chapters and some 2500 new pages.

Ashenfelter and Card and their authors have produced a magnificent distillation of the state of play in present-day theoretical and empirical labour economics. Their all too brief preface captures the flavour nicely: 'The subject matter of labor economics continues to have at its core an attempt to systematically find empirical

analyses that are consistent with a systematic and parsimonious theoretical understanding of the diverse phenomenon that make up the labor market. As before, many of these analyses are provocative and controversial because they are so directly relevant to both public policy and private decision making.'

There are a number of important differences between the earlier volumes and this set. First, there are many more non-US authors, reflecting the growth in the study of labour markets worldwide. Second, the earlier volumes contained detailed descriptions of the *conceptual* apparatus for analysis of a topic, but these new volumes contain a wealth of detailed empirical analysis. Third, 'in some cases, the topics covered could not have been entertained for consideration a decade ago'. It is this latter set of chapters — inside the firm — that will be of most interest to industrial relations scholars and on which this review focuses.

The contents of the three volumes cover: overviews (e.g. empirical strategies in labour economics by Angrist and Krueger); the supply side (e.g. a review by Blundell and Macurdy); the demand side (e.g. labour market implications of international trade by Johnson and Stafford); inside firms; interactions between demand and supply (e.g. search models by Mortensen and Pissarides); emergent labour markets (e.g. in transition economies by Svejnar); links with the macroeconomy (e.g. long-term unemployment by Machin and Manning) and policy issues (e.g. race and gender by Altonji and Blank, crime by Freeman, and the public sector by Gregory and Borland).

The section on 'Looking within Firms' has four chapters, and the chapter on firm size and wages equally belongs in this section. Each chapter sets out the current state of knowledge, explanations for the empirical evidence and what we still do not know. Malcolmson discusses individual employment contracts. He focuses on three types of individual contract: contracts to allocate risks, contracts to protect investments, and contracts to motivate employees when performance is not verifiable. All three types can take account of practical issues like enforcement and renegotiation and can generate wage changes relative to employment changes that are more damped than the corresponding spot market; they can also generate wages that differ for equally productive employees. Employers' views on the roles of fairness and morale can also be investigated.

Gibbons and Waldman examine careers in organizations. They begin with building-block models: human capital, job assignment, incentive contracting, efficiency wages and tournaments. Next, they show how the blocks can be combined and enriched to address various aspects of careers including wage growth, promotions, job assignments, social relations and work practices. This opens up a whole area previously the preserve mostly of sociology and organizational behaviour.

Job tenure is analysed by Farber. He shows that: long-term employment relationships are common; most new jobs end early; the probability of a job ending declines with tenure. His data refer to the USA but the same holds for the UK. Thus, most work gets done in long-duration jobs, and worries about job insecurity are exaggerated (probably because those who comment on such matters in the media have become less secure).

Executive compensation remains very controversial, and Murphy's thorough grasp of the issues is a terrific antidote to much of the froth. (Incidentally, the publishers let Murphy down by having the wrong running heading on each of the 80 pages of this chapter.) Murphy shows that (1) levels of executive pay are higher, and pay-performance sensitivities lower, in larger firms; (2) levels of pay and pay-performance sensitivities are lower in regulated utilities than in industrial firms; (3) levels of pay

and pay-performance sensitivities are higher in the USA than in other countries. His analysis also documents that pay-performance sensitivities are driven primarily by stock options and stock ownership and not through other forms of compensation. This is an area where much still needs to be done — for example, what is the effect of CEO incentives on subsequent company performance?

One of the most enduring, and puzzling, stylized labour market facts is that larger firms pay more than smaller ones. Oi and Idson examine three behavioural explanations. First, productive employees are matched with able entrepreneurs to minimize the sum of wages and monitoring costs. Second, big firms pay efficiency wages to avoid shirking. Third, big firms adopt a discretionary wage policy to share surplus profit. Their own preferred explanation (partially incorporating the other three) is that a large organization sets a higher performance standard, which raises labour productivity but has to be supported by a compensating wage difference.

This innovative 'inside the firm' research opens up whole new areas to labour economists and gives greater scope than previously for collaboration across disciplines. This chunk of the *Handbook* displaces previous work on union membership, strikes and the effect of institutions on pay. It is plausible that, when the next edition is produced in a decade or so, the area will figure even more predominantly.

Given the cost of the three volumes, only real aficionados will wish to own the set. But it represents excellent value for libraries because world-renowned scholars have set out very clearly the extent of our knowledge on labour economics and identified the areas where there is still work to be done. A magisterial effort by all concerned.

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Negotiating Flexibility: The Role of the Social Parties and the State edited by Muneto Ozaki. International Labour Office, Geneva, 1999, x+157 pp., ISBN 92-2-110865, \$14.95.

Pathways through Unemployment: The Effects of a Flexible Labour Market (Work and Opportunity Series No. 5) by Michael White and John Forth. York Publishing Services for Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 1998, iv+62 pp., ISBN 1-89-9-987746, £11.95 paper.

Although the public policy debate on labour market flexibility shows no sign of fading away, it is now in a new phase. Policy-makers in the EU and its more influential member states seem to be close to a consensus on the case for promoting greater flexibility, strongly supported, not surprisingly, by most employers and, surprisingly, by some trade union leaders, as the ILO study points out. Those supporting the case are increasingly impressed by the employment culture and recent economic experience of the USA. The only issue, from that perspective, is how to achieve such flexibility: it brings, it is argued, a cornucopia of minimal unemployment, a higher rate of economic growth, increased competitiveness, low inflation and a strong currency. Samuel Brittan, in a contribution to the debate (*Financial Times*, 31 August 2000), finds no problem with the supposed outcomes. He suggests a micro-level approach to implementation through flexible employment contracts in which employees could choose between greater job security and lower take-home

pay. This is, in a sense, the approach of the ILO study, although, naturally from the ILO, it argues primarily for the introduction of flexible employment through the *collective* contract, which offers some protection for employees against employer power within the individual contract of employment.

Brittan does, however, and characteristically, call a spade a spade, citing Alan Greenspan of the US Federal Reserve (without argument a lifetime member of the great, the good and the influential) who sees labour flexibility as simply a euphemism for job insecurity. Greenspan can get away with this in the USA because it is true. US employment law is still essentially rooted in the nineteenth-century legal doctrine of 'employment at will'. This almost unfettered ability of US employers to dismiss their employees (although some states have legislated to limit it) is claimed now, by many, as the principal explanation for that country's low unemployment. Its attraction to policy-makers in the EU and its member states, not least Germany, is clear, although it is advocated in the more politically acceptable language of the four 'employment guidelines' or 'pillars' of employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities.

This emphasis on acceptable language is not unimportant, but it must be linked to substance. The economic, personal and family traumas of the loss of an occupation and employment must be adequately compensated for by readily available alternatives.

The two studies reviewed here do not, as we would expect, have a problem with language. The British-based research of White and Forth adopts a clear, though restricted, definition of flexibility. The study concentrates on types of job under different contracts: part-time, temporary and self-employment as well as those downwardly mobile jobs, i.e. 'personal flexibility' after a period, or periods, of unemployment. The authors, using this typology, follow the job search experience of a sample of the unemployed between 1990 and 1992 and their subsequent employment history in the years to 1995. The outcomes were that three-quarters of those who got jobs in that period did so within the adopted definition of flexibility. But it was clear that this was not what many who were so involved would have wished: 'One third of women and two thirds of men entered part-time jobs when they would have preferred full-time jobs ... the pathways through unemployment were often disadvantageous and this was particularly so for women' (p. 40).

Flexible jobs also tend to pay less well and to be less secure. This hazard particularly affected women (in the White-Forth sample) in households where an employed partner was not present. This inequity in the labour market treatment of women — less access to full-time work and less pay in almost all types of work — can lead to serious inequity in household incomes. The poverty implications for such families are obvious.

The policy options recommended by White and Forth are complex, and the available space, in a review, precludes detailed consideration. The authors point to some that are '... presently [i.e. in 1998] receiving attention from government...' They do, however, recommend three further initiatives: a review of National Insurance contributions to remove distortions favouring short-term contracts; education and training support for those entering part-time and temporary jobs; and, centrally, the provision of affordable child care. This last, in a comprehensive form, is of course now on the present government's policy agenda.

The ILO study is inevitably far more wide-ranging, drawing upon the collective experience, in 1997, of 22 of its member countries. Its definition of flexibility is equally broad. It includes the employment flexibility of the White-Forth study

(which it terms 'precarious employment'), but it also takes in pay (including performance-related pay), working-time flexibility and flexibility in the organization of work, especially teamwork. This is admirably comprehensive though somewhat confusing, and the study would have benefited from an index alongside the excellent bibliography. What is, however, a clear conclusion from this study is that flexibility has winners and losers. The winners are corporations operating in global contexts who have enhanced their competitiveness. The losers are the workers: 'In most cases, however, flexibility has meant less employment security, less income security, and a continuous adjustment to new, often more uncomfortable, working conditions, which workers have accepted in order to avoid the worst scenario (i.e. unemployment due to plant closures...)' (p. 148).

Yet, in accordance with its pragmatic tradition, the ILO does not condemn flexibility. It seeks to both ameliorate its excesses and get something in return. It sees this approach as appropriately implemented through collective bargaining, suitably buttressed by legislation protecting workers' rights and encouraging both trade union membership and recognition by employers. Effective collective bargaining, towards compromise and agreement, would give greater legitimacy to the introduction of flexibility and, more importantly, would allow workers some influence in the selection of forms more acceptable to their interests, especially their security.

This is both a persuasive and a practical argument. The difficulty is that, even in many advanced, industrialized countries, trade unions have grown weaker, collective bargaining has retreated, and capital is both increasingly mobile and largely outside the scope of nation states to regulate it. The ILO itself has influence but no powers of regulation. It can even be argued that its existence and role makes it easier for international economic agencies and corporations to shrug off any concern for the serious social implications of globalization, leaving that task to the well intentioned, but largely ineffective, ILO. The history of the rise of national trade union organizations, and attempts to extend their scope and influence to an international dimension, show the need for active and strong political support to resist the power of employers.

Overall, both of these studies, in their very different ways, are excellent additions to the now very large flexibility literature. They are of course concerned primarily with influencing important areas of public policy, at national and international levels, which could improve the economic and social welfare of many workers and their families. Such studies need to be more than read.

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Myths at Work by Harriet Bradley, Mark Erickson, Carol Stephenson and Steve Williams. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, x + 248 pp., ISBN 0-7456-2270-4, £50.00; ISBN 0-7456-2271-2, £14.99 paper.

Recently I have begun to notice that I spend an inordinate amount of time searching through publishers catalogues for teaching material that will help counter the latest wave of business bestsellers claiming that globalization, the 'new economy' or 'virtual organizations' are creating fundamental changes in the nature of work. In the past I tried to ignore much of this literature, for it tended to consist of little more than a series of anecdotes, experiences and winning recipes, held together by the

personal authority of an author whose only achievement appeared to be employment with a leading firm of management consultants. Now that some eminent sociologists, such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Richard Sennett, have entered the fray, it is no longer possible to teach a course on the sociology of work without going into these matters in some detail. It was for that reason that I eagerly took on the task of reviewing *Myths at Work* in the hope that this would be the meticulously researched and carefully argued review that I could recommend to students. Unfortunately, I was disappointed, for this is a rather unbalanced evaluation, mostly because the authors go overboard in their insistence on drawing on the traditional strengths of British industrial sociology.

Myths at Work opens with an introductory chapter that sets out the parameters of the myth-debunking exercise. Myths are defined as widely held ideas that opinion leaders promote for ideological reasons. Not only do they purport to describe and explain changes in the world of work, they may also influence developments in a manner that I take to be similar to the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The political charge of the book is evident from an early stage, as the origins of these myths are attributed to a right-wing managerial perspective on economic change, a perspective that, the authors believe, has been endorsed by recent Conservative and Labour governments. Furthermore, they point to 'the growing dominance in the sociology of work and organizations of practitioners of HRM and business studies and an accompanying neglect of radical workplace case studies, partly as a result of the crisis of Marxist theory, partly because of the practical difficulties of carrying out research involving interviews with employees' (p. 11).

This introduction is followed by chapters on the myths associated with globalization, lean production, non-standard employment, science and technology, the female takeover, the skills revolution, the death of class, the end of trade unionism and the 'economic worker'. The principal themes of these chapters are that little has changed or, if there have been changes, then the underlying divisions and inequalities remain the same. For instance, the introduction of lean production manufacturing practices has not led to a 'win-win' situation for employers and workers, since such practices 'are best understood as part of a capitalist initiative to intensify work and increase control over workers'. Similarly, the growth of non-standard forms of employment has not provided workers with life-enhancing combinations of work and leisure, while the advent of the 'information age' has led to a polarization of skills rather than a general increase in skills across the working population.

While one might quibble about the inclusion or exclusion of one or two of the myths, the overall selection covers the most prevalent and seductive myths in an accessible and stimulating style. Consequently, I would expect this book to appear on numerous undergraduate reading lists. That said, *Myths at Work* falls some way short of its initial promise. Specifically, the challenges to the various myths tend to be unduly influenced by radical politics, by qualitative research and by studies of local labour markets.

First, the repeated references to recent Conservative and New Labour governments (e.g. pp. 11, 32, 56, 152, 192–5) amount to little more than the kind of left-wing commentary one might expect to read in opinion pieces for the *Guardian*. In any case, the relevance to the material under discussion is quite tenuous and even contradictory. For instance, we are told that certain authors, such as Anthony Giddens, Charles Handy and Patricia Hewitt, are 'very close' to New Labour, which presumably implies that the New Labour government is about to adopt Handy and Hewitt's views on flexible working (p. 56) and Giddens's view that Japanese industrial rela-

tions represent the model of the future (p. 193). Presumably, the reason why the government has not yet legislated on these matters is because some ministers have spotted the contradiction between portfolio careers and life-long employment!

Second, the authors' dismissal of large data sets (p. 8) comes at a cost, for too many of their empirical challenges draw on ethnographic case studies of questionable representativeness. For example, in the chapter on non-standard employment much is made of the practices of further education colleges, such as North Tyneside, which dismissed all of its part-time staff and later hired them back on a self-employment basis, while other colleges (and it is not clear how many) claimed that the savings from such a strategy would be insignificant (p. 63). Similarly, the challenge to the notion of the 'economic worker' is based on interviews from only a handful of skilled workers employed by two firms in the defence industry. The possibility that attitudes to work might vary by age, gender or occupation is not considered. The general problem here is that qualitative research, especially of this kind, is inappropriate for launching challenges to myths about large-scale changes or widely shared properties. A trawl through the existing WIRS data sets and Labour Force Surveys would have provided a much more effective body of evidence on non-standard employment arrangements and on attitudes to work. Failing that, one might have expected reference to the research published on these matters by Duncan Gallie and his colleagues in their *Restructuring the Employment Relationship* (1998). Curiously, this nationally representative survey of 3500 employees fails to get a single citation.

Finally, the insistence on incorporating material from various pieces of published and unpublished qualitative research that the authors conducted in the North-east of England is both unexpected and unhelpful. British sociology has a long and distinguished tradition of qualitative research into local labour markets of the kind that Harriet Bradley has already published. On this occasion, the inclusion of this material detracts from the wider project and some of it is simply irrelevant to the myth in question. For instance, there appears to be no obvious reason for linking the recent decline of the North-east's major defence industry contractors to the effects of globalization. Indeed, the authors even acknowledge that it was interventions by the national government, rather than new sources of global competition that have had the most critical impact on the North-east's defence industry. Perhaps it's no coincidence that the strongest chapter, that on 'The Myth of the Female Takeover', draws extensively on survey research and makes no reference to the North-east.

Whatever its limitations, *Myths at Work* may signal the launch of a new genre in the sociology of work in which academics willingly engage with the claims advanced by contemporary management gurus and business philosophers. If this makes it easier to capture student attention and stimulate classroom discussion, then books like this will serve an important, if undervalued, function.

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Labored Relations: Law, Politics, and the NLRB — A Memoir by William B. Gould IV. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2000, xxiv + 449 pp., ISBN 0262-07205-X, £25.95.

In 1984, Betty Southard Murphy was confronted with a rumor that Ronald Reagan was considering her for chair of the (US) National Labor Relations Board, a position

she had previously held during the Ford administration. She responded: 'There is no way in God's world that I would go back to the NLRB,' adding that she would 'rather starve' than return to the Board (*Daily Labor Report*, 14 June 1984, p. A4). Her comment seems a bit dramatic, but would likely be shared by William B. Gould IV, the Clinton Board chair, who has recently published his memoirs. In *Labored Relations: Law, Politics, and the NLRB* Gould tells of an office with great responsibility, little power, and forever caught in the political struggle between labour and capital, Democrats and Republicans.

Gould's detailed, biting and sometimes angry memoir take us from his difficult Senate confirmation, through his relatively productive first year and into the particularly contentious periods of the 104th and 105th Congresses, when the Republican Party held leadership of both the House of Representatives and the Senate for the first time since the early 1950s. Their control gave the Republicans enormous power over Board appointments, appropriations, and operations — a power they used to great effect.

Early in *Labored Relations*, we find an idealistic Gould who places his story in the broad sweep of his family's history. He was the first African-American NLRB chair, and the great-grandson of a former slave who settled in Massachusetts after serving in the Civil War (or, as Gould prefers, the 'War of Rebellion'). 'The effects of racial discrimination and arbitrary treatment generally... encouraged in my family the conviction that the best objective for life was working for the public good... rather than [for] those already privileged by financial security and connections to the seats of power' (p. 4).

With this sense of public purpose and an impressive curriculum vitae, Gould accepted Bill Clinton's nomination in the summer of 1993. His problems began immediately. Although he had served as both a union and a management attorney, worked as a labour arbitrator and held the Charles A. Beardley chair in labour law at the prestigious Stanford Law School, Gould was viewed by most Senate Republicans and right-wing pressure groups as too 'pro-union' to be a neutral arbiter. Passages from his 1993 book *Agenda for Reform* were offered as proof of his leanings, with the anti-union National Right-to-Work Committee calling the book 'institutional unionism's *Mein Kampf*' for its policy suggestions. Although Gould tried to assure his Senate critics that he understood the difference between his role as an academician (to raise critical questions) and that of the chair (to interpret the law), few Republicans were convinced. After months of delay, he was confirmed by a vote of 58 to 38, the narrowest margin of any Clinton nominee, and with the support of only five Republicans. In his first speech as chair, Gould referred to the Republican 'no' votes as his 'badge of honor' (p. 57), further angering his detractors and setting the stage for his difficult relations with Congress. Indeed, six months later the Republicans were victorious and the rest of Gould's tenure was served under their intense and hostile scrutiny.

The Republicans monitored his every move — literally. Continual requests for his travel logs were made by congressional investigators, and he was questioned about everything from his presence at Nelson Mandela's inauguration to his attendance at baseball games. In response to a letter referring to the San Francisco baseball team's manager Dusty Baker, which had been included in material delivered to a House investigations' committee, two representatives asked Gould to 'Please identify "Dusty" by gender, position, and relationship to the San Francisco Giants, if any' (p. 230). Unless to stir up a scandal, Gould wonders — as might readers — why Congress would be interested in Dusty Baker's gender.

Congressional pressure never ceased, and included allegations of extravagant spending and pro-union bias at the Board. Members of Congress were particularly angry at the increased use of Section 10(j) court injunctions against employers during Gould's term. In one case, Gould received letters from several dozen senators and representatives on behalf of a firm whose president had served in a Republican cabinet. When the Board proceeded with the injunction, the House cut the Board's appropriation by nearly one-third. Later, Gould's opposition to the so-called TEAM Act, which would have allowed employer-sponsored labour organizations, and to California's Proposition 226, which would have further restricted the use of union dues' revenues, led to the characterization of him by one congressman as 'the House Republicans' number one enemy'.

Indeed, most of *Labored Relations* concerns the Board's dealings with Congress. But since much of that story is part of the public record, the greatest contribution of the book is its discussions of internal NLRB matters. We learn for example that, since all Board members are presidential appointees, there is little deference to the chair: he or she is simply one of five votes who must rely on persuasion and politicking to get things done. Sadly, Gould had few friends among his colleagues and was frequently blocked in his attempts to speed decision-making or change procedures. He alleges that a 'dilatatory virus' has infected the Board, arising largely from the careerist orientation of members who are so concerned with reappointment or with which potential employer they might offend that they hesitate in making controversial decisions. He suggests lengthening the five-year term of members, eliminating reappointment and relying less on Washington insiders.

Although the story is generally gloomy, Gould does cite a number of successes during his term. The creation of advisory panels of employer and union attorneys, and the use of bench decisions and settlement judges, are offered as examples of innovations that have led to better and quicker outcomes. Gould also devotes a chapter to the Board's successful effort to end the 1994–5 labour dispute in major league baseball.

Labored Relations is a very significant book for those interested in the NLRB, labour law, or labour relations public policy generally. Although a few former chairs have written books about the NLRB, none has offered such a personal look inside the organization. Gould's main source was the detailed diary he kept during his tenure. Long passages are reproduced seemingly verbatim, which makes the book an important original source. Gould also maintains a conversational writing style that makes for easy reading, though some of the long diary passages may have been better placed in the endnotes. As well, a treasure trove of data and information about the Board and its cases is included within both the main text and 15 appendixes.

This is not, however, a pleasant book to read. Gould spares few people. His colleagues are portrayed as generally shiftless and lazy, and Republican members of Congress, with very few exceptions, are bullies (and perhaps racists) who do not respect the rule of law. He ends as he begins, by recalling his great grandfather, and concludes: 'I sought to achieve some of the same aims for which he fought so bravely against the same forces of repression' (p. 305).

Although a completely dispassionate memoir would have been disappointing, perhaps Gould should have waited until some of his anger — justified as it may have been — had subsided before producing this work. At times the reader feels as if he or she is in the middle of a one-sided dinner table argument. And one also suspects that a few people who considered themselves friends and supporters may have been hurt directly or vicariously by the rough treatment some received. It would be too bad if a

man who is so intellectually gifted and has produced such an impressive body of work were to be ostracized as a result.

None the less, it is difficult to imagine any work concerning the NLRB henceforth that does not make liberal use of *Labored Relations*. It is an important work and essential reading for industrial relations scholars.

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