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[Review of the Books *The Global Economy, National States, and the Regulation of Labour, Globalization and Patterns of Labour Resistance*, and *The State and Globalization*]

**Abstract**

[Excerpt] With their stress on complexity, contradiction, and flux, these books provide a solid analytical foundation and a wide-ranging comparative framework for researchers now seeking to understand the new, post-Seattle period. They also provide insights and ideas for activists confronting the neo-liberal offensive against workers' rights.

**Keywords**

technology, labor market, globalization, labor movement, activism, trade

**Disciplines**

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**Comments**

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## **International and Comparative Industrial Relations**

*The Global Economy, National States, and the Regulation of Labour.* Edited by Paul Edwards and Tony Elger. New York: Continuum, 2000. 261 pp. ISBN 0-7201-2370-4, \$85.00 (cloth).

*Globalization and Patterns of Labour Resistance.* Edited by Jeremy Waddington. New York: Continuum, 2000. 253 pp. ISBN 0-7201-2369-0, \$80.00 (cloth).

*The State and Globalization: Comparative Stud-*

*ies of Labour and Capital in National Economies*. Edited by Martin Upchurch. New York: Continuum, 2000. 320 pp. ISBN 0-7201-2367-4, \$85.00 (cloth).

Published in the "Employment and Work Relations in Context" series from the University of Warwick, these volumes pull together an eclectic and valuable set of 28 articles on the changing relationship of forces among national governments, international capital, and workers in a context of global economic integration. They might be seen as a last, comprehensive digest of "pre-Seattle" information and analysis of globalization's impact on employment and labor relations.

The contributors, who are professors of industrial relations, human resource management, sociology, economics, political science, anthropology, history, and geography, bring a variety of voices and frameworks to the books. Most of the writers are associated with British and Australian universities, but they are joined by colleagues from several other developed and developing countries.

The country studies cover events in at least one nation in each populated continent. In the north, the United States and Britain come under scrutiny for their movement toward "workfare" programs and the implications of those programs for low-income workers. Canadian contributors report on developments in automobile manufacturing and in relations between local and national unions. The "Nordic Model" of social partnership in five northern European and Scandinavian countries is studied for cross-cutting evidence of decline and of vitality.

Worker and community assistance policies are treated comparatively in the coal industries of Britain, Germany, and Spain in the Edwards/Elgar volume for lessons about laissez-faire versus managed economic and social adjustment. Each of the same three countries comes under the spotlight again in the Upchurch book, with a focused look at employer-employee relations in the British banking industry, a broader treatment of the German "codetermination" model, and an account of the evolving roles and relationship of socialist and communist trade union federations in Spain.

Australia is prominently featured, with two extensive analyses of the pro-business trajectory of nominally pro-union Labour Party governments between 1983 and 1996, which one author calls a "transition from democratic to authoritarian corporatism" with the disguised con-

sent of peak trade union leadership. A third Australian article provides a case study of the interplay of international norms and national bargaining institutions with respect to pay equity in the workplace, and another compares workers' experience in Australian and Chinese factories run by the same multinational company.

One strength of the books is the nearly equal attention given to developing countries. Authors recount efforts in India to address child labor problems through national legislation and ILO assistance, hoping to avert an export-limiting "social clause" in trade disciplines at the WTO. They analyze adult and child prostitution as a feature of poor countries' insertion into the global economy, with a case study of the Dominican Republic. Other chapters deal with the political dynamics of state, capital, and labor relations in Poland, Hungary, China, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, and Malaysia.

One subject running through the three volumes is the challenges faced by workers, unions, and social movements as they struggle to regain ground lost to the neo-liberal corporate offensive of the 1980s and 1990s—the drive for more privatization, labor law deregulation, weaker unions, elimination of social benefits, and the like. Taken whole, the three books rebut claims that international capital in general, and transnational corporations in particular, have overwhelmed the capacity of formerly strong nation-states to regulate the employment relationship—that workers are helpless, unions are finished as effective agents of worker advocacy, and the only role left for national governments is to make their countries' investment climate as friendly as possible for "regime-shopping" international investors looking for deregulated labor markets.

Rejecting the view that globalization is responsible for a linear, one-dimensional advance of a neo-liberal agenda that is irreversibly undermining national standards and institutions and driving convergence toward a deregulated bottom, these articles instead posit that globalization generates a diverse, contradictory, contested, ebbing and flowing process that remains highly dependent on national structures and open to new directions. Indeed, the state is still a powerful actor regulating labor markets and labor relations through direct legislative means, indirect social protection requirements, and macroeconomic management. Moreover, workers still find ways to resist pressure they see as unfair and job-threatening.

In the Edwards/Elger volume, Gillian

Whitehouse and Di Zetlin's study of pay equity policy in Australia captures this process. Obligations under UN and ILO Conventions on discrimination against women, alongside long-standing national collective bargaining institutions, pull policy toward stronger efforts to advance pay equity. At the same time, however, legislation promoting newly decentralized collective bargaining for market-reflective outcomes militates against pay equity corrections. Thus, Australia's international commitments on non-discrimination, supported in a centralized bargaining context, run up against a decentralized, firm-based bargaining structure. The central message of these books, and a healthy corrective to simplistic discussion of labor and globalization, is that the results are mixed.

On balance, but only narrowly, the authors express pessimism. This is not an upbeat account of trade union revitalization projects. Some authors discuss how management's drive for "lean production" methods has put workers and unions largely on the defensive. Some tell how Australian unions' acceptance of the Labour Party's neo-liberal policy shift, aimed at making the country more competitive in the global economy, ended in defeats for both the unions and the party. Spanish trade unions, which mobilized against the state in the late Franco years and tried to democratize it in the post-Franco transition, now yield the state to conservative market-oriented rule. South African unions are caught up in increasingly pro-corporate policies of their erstwhile African National Congress party allies, leaving them vulnerable to directives from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Malaysian workers are hampered by ethnic divisions among Chinese, Indian, and native Malay groups. Hungarian workers saw a union formed in a "greenfield" auto plant supplanted by a company-favored works council.

But the overall argument presents a complex picture of labor and government responses to the global integration process, one in which unions and their allies yield terrain grudgingly and summon enough grassroots strength to preserve key rights and standards in the national polity. Canadian unions have developed a strong counterweight to management's lean production demands. Spanish, South African, Malaysian, and Hungarian workers and unions have not surrendered; they are finding new ways to maneuver in a difficult climate. In Germany and the Nordic countries, key elements of the social bargain among labor, busi-

ness, and government have been maintained. In Britain, formerly management-sympathizing banking sector workers are becoming increasingly class-conscious as they see bosses taking advantage of them. Chinese workers seek alternatives to state-run unions. Mexican and Brazilian workers nurture independent union currents to counter long-standing corporatist labor relations arrangements.

Much of the analysis stresses class relations and capitalists' need for ever-expanding markets and profits. Whether the reader shares this approach or not, it anchors the books in a strong theoretical framework and provides a sharp analytical edge usually lacking in mainstream treatments of globalization-driven changes in industrial relations that see them as a product of neutral market forces, not as a result of a corporate class war against workers.

The skepticism expressed by several of the authors regarding the popular image of globalization as a powerful neo-liberal juggernaut has been borne out by events since the mid-1990s, the period that serves as the source of the information and analyses in these chapters. Indeed, a crisis of confidence now besets advocates of free market and labor deregulating policies. The demise of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), the rocky road to restarting global trade talks in the WTO, U.S. presidents' difficulty in getting "fast-track" trade negotiating authority from Congress, mounting criticisms of the IMF and the World Bank, mass protests against "corporate globalization" in Seattle, Washington, Davos, Goteberg, Genoa, and other sites of meetings among international economic elites, demands for debt relief and a response to the AIDS crisis in developing countries, all have called into question the premises of the neo-liberal agenda and of arguments that corporations are overwhelming states.

With their stress on complexity, contradiction, and flux, these books provide a solid analytical foundation and a wide-ranging comparative framework for researchers now seeking to understand the new, post-Seattle period. They also provide insights and ideas for activists confronting the neo-liberal offensive against workers' rights.

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