

## Compte rendu

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### Ouvrage recensé :

*Developing Employee Relations*, by Peter Warr, Stephen Fineman, Nigel Nicholson, and Roy Payne. Westmead, Farborough, Hants, England, Saxon House/Gower Press, 1978, 197 pp.

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tifs syndicaux est évidemment lié en partie à des facteurs propres aux caractéristiques du secteur de fabrication lui-même comme le fait que celui-ci occupe une part relative de plus en plus petite dans l'ensemble de l'économie ou encore que la proportion des travailleurs directement affectés à la production a, elle aussi, diminué par rapport à la main-d'oeuvre totale à l'intérieur des entreprises de fabrication. Rees souligne aussi que le déplacement graduel des entreprises du nord-est et du mid-ouest vers le sud-est responsable également du déclin des effectifs syndicaux, car on ne retrouve pas dans ces États des législations aussi favorables envers le syndicalisme que celles des États plus industrialisés. Malgré tout, l'explication la plus intéressante est soulevée par les deux éditeurs dans leur chapitre de conclusion et elle repose sur l'hypothèse suivante: les employeurs, malgré les apparences, n'auraient jamais véritablement accepté le syndicalisme; ils se contentaient de le tolérer lorsque c'était économiquement possible de le faire ou encore lorsque le contexte socio-politique l'imposait (que l'on pense à la période du New Deal jusqu'à la deuxième guerre mondiale). Cependant, avec les difficultés économiques que connaissent actuellement les États-Unis, notamment l'inflation et la concurrence étrangère, les sentiments fortement anti-syndicaux des employeurs ne manquent pas de refaire surface et c'est pourquoi on retrouve actuellement une grande résistance face aux syndicats, tel que le démontre le nombre croissant de bureaux spécialisés ayant exclusivement pour tâche d'aider les entreprises à prévenir la syndicalisation de leurs employés.

Malgré cette constatation plutôt pessimiste, Milton Derber souligne néanmoins que l'avenir réserverait des jours meilleurs aux syndicats si l'un ou l'autre des scénarios suivants se matérialisait: comme le syndicalisme a toujours progressé par bonds et ce dans des conjonctures économique-politiques non orthodoxes telles les guerres, les dépressions ou l'hyper-inflation, s'il fallait qu'une telle situation se produise (ce que l'auteur ne souhaite évidemment pas), les syndicats pourraient peut-être connaître un accroissement substantiel de leurs effectifs. Un deuxième

scénario de croissance fait reposer sur une nouvelle génération de dirigeants dynamiques l'élaboration de stratégies d'organisation plus vigoureuses qu'actuellement. Le troisième scénario suppose que les syndicats pourraient capitaliser sur l'insatisfaction grandissante de cols blancs, de jeunes professionnels et de femmes qui composent une fraction toujours plus importante de la main-d'oeuvre, pour refaire le plein des membres qu'ils ont perdus au cours des dernières années. Une autre hypothèse, qui me semble beaucoup plus problématique, impliquerait que la ferveur syndicale du secteur public pourrait se transmettre au secteur de fabrication. Enfin, le dernier scénario suppose que les travailleurs du sud des États-Unis traditionnellement hostiles envers le syndicalisme, changeront d'attitude au fur et à mesure que cette partie du pays deviendra de plus en plus industrialisée.

Malgré tout, la plus réaliste des prédictions demeure sans doute celle qui prévoit que les effectifs syndicaux du secteur de fabrication continueront de diminuer légèrement en pourcentage de l'emploi total entraînant ainsi une diminution du pouvoir des syndicats dans ce secteur.

Le livre **Shrinking Perimeter** est certes très intéressant et grandement d'actualité. Le seul reproche qu'on peut lui faire, c'est d'essayer d'avoir une prétention scientifique reliée à la théorie des relations industrielles. De ce point de vue, il déçoit grandement les attentes du lecteur.

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**Developing Employee Relations**, by Peter Warr, Stephen Fineman, Nigel Nicholson, and Roy Payne. Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England, Saxon House/Gower Press, 1978, 197 pp.

This book consists of two major parts. The first half provides a detailed description and assessment of a large scale organizational development intervention aimed at improving human relations at a British steel plant. The

second half draws on this, as well as theoretical and empirical literature, to make some generalizations relating to the broader issues of organization development. The authors state that their purpose in writing the book is "to say something useful to line managers and personnel specialists as well as to teachers and researchers (p. xii)." Unfortunately, without a distinct audience in mind, the work ends up making a relatively meager contribution to any of these groups.

The authors are members of the Social and Applied Psychology Unit at the University of Sheffield, which has a mandate from the British government to provide consultation services on request to both private and public organizations. The motivation for doing this particular intervention was that "some people within the corporation had increasingly felt that [the plant's] industrial relations and communications compared unfavorably with other works ... [and] ... had come to believe that some form of change program was needed to help workers achieve a more harmonious and effective climate of employee relations (p. 3)."

The intervention took place over a 1 1/2 year period and had several phases. The major aspect was the establishment of "project groups" at all levels of the works, intended to raise problems and seek solutions. At the lowest level, they consisted of a manager and about 20% of his subordinates, while at the upper three levels all employees (mostly managers) participated in the groups. The project groups met about once a month with the consultant in attendance. These groups had no specific powers beyond the making of suggestions. The chairmen of the groups were given training in group processes, and top plant management first began their meetings, followed sequentially by groups at the lower levels. Each group had met on up to nine occasions by the end of the project.

Other aspects of the intervention included the use of an action-research questionnaire administered shortly after the project groups were underway, and a study by the consultants of the formal consultative machinery of the works, which consisted of a works coun-

cil, section council, and joint consultative committees. Oddly enough, this study was carried out in isolation from the project groups, and these consultative bodies had very little involvement with the project itself.

The authors spend the first seven chapters describing the implementation and giving the background to the project. The usual problems encountered in using project groups, such as a lack of commitment by managers and union leaders, inadequate preparation for meetings, domination of meetings by managers, lack of employee interest, and lack of follow through on suggestions, all surface. Although very thorough, this section of the book is often plagued by excessive detail, and there is a disconcerting tendency for the authors to jump around in time.

Procedures for evaluating the results of the project, described in Chapter 8, reflected some lack of rigour, with much of the evaluation based on the impressions of the consultants and off-hand remarks of the participants. The evaluation questionnaire, which was administered prior to, during, and after completion of the project, included only 12 items, and these do not seem to be from a standardized set of measures. Only three response choices, "Yes", "No", and "Not sure", are used, reducing the sensitivity of the measures. The lack of theoretical underpinnings for the project is particularly evident here, as item selection seems to have been quite arbitrary. Several items seem entirely out of place, while no formal effort is made to measure important variables such as job satisfaction, motivation, or organizational commitment, nor to systematically measure patterns of worker influence. As a result, very little contribution to the empirical literature is made. This is unfortunate, since much could have been learned from an effort of this scale had a carefully developed research design been employed.

Even granting the validity of these items, the results are not terribly impressive. While slight increases in factors such as "friendliness of atmosphere", "trust of management", and "ability to speak openly" are noted, several items measuring upward and

downward communication show no change at all, and only relatively small minorities believed that the project had brought about improvements. While the authors argue that declining economic conditions would have caused widespread declines in attitudes in the absence of the project, there is no way of telling without a control group. The authors do present a table indicating that some 337 issues were raised by the project groups, and some 80% of these received action of some sort from management, and that there have been fewer industrial disputes since the project inception.

The authors' approach in undertaking the project revealed both a short term outlook and a rather narrow focus on identifying and making specific improvements, with little thought given to changing basic processes or structures within the organization. In fact, the authors' true feelings seem to be revealed on p. 177 when they state "a program like the ERP is necessarily a temporary and minor extension to the normal activity of a works." Thus, little effort is made to integrate the project into the broader organizational system. One wonders how much of a lasting effect these interventions will have on the works. The authors also skirt some important issues, such as that of power and influence, and do not talk at all about what types of rewards employees can expect from participating in these groups. It is unrealistic to expect much enthusiasm from employees in improving the organization and its effectiveness if they do not expect to share in the resulting financial rewards.

The eight chapters that comprise Part Two attempt to provide "a broader treatment of the general issues arising out of the events described in Part One (p. 95)." Issues discussed include the client-consultant interface, (Chapter 9), a typology of change interventions (Chapters 10 & 11), a typology of organization structures (Chapter 12), the relationship of human relations to industrial relations (Chapter 13), and how to evaluate organizational change (Chapter 14). However, while these are important issues, and while some are well treated, their treatment fre-

quently leaves much to be desired. The project is insufficient to illustrate many of the points the authors wish to make and the "illustrations" are somewhat forced in places. Moreover, in each chapter, the authors make wandering digressions relating to their own interests and pet theories, which have questionable relevance to the project in many cases. The focus tends to disappear with the introduction of many topics and concepts which the authors are not prepared to treat in other than a superficial manner. The impact of four authors is particularly noticeable here, as there is a lack of integration and the chapters tend to be disjointed.

Clearly, in writing this section the authors could have chosen to adopt one of two possible approaches. They could have built on their specific findings and experience, using theoretical and empirical literature to explain their results and to draw conclusions about the efficacy and generalizability of the techniques employed. Alternatively, they could have started out with a comprehensive outline of the process of OD and used the project to illustrate elements of this. Instead, they have attempted to do both and achieve only limited success in either.

While a considerable amount of the material in Part Two comes from other sources, much appears to be the original work of the authors and may be in need of refinement. For example, two chapters are devoted to explication of a typology of OD interventions, which does not succeed in establishing clear and distinct types which have some underlying rationale. The authors would have been better advised to simply make the usual distinction between behavioral and structural approaches to change and use categories which are well accepted in the literature. Similarly, Chapter 12 presents a typology of organization structures which may have some utility once refined, but makes a limited contribution to the book at this stage. In sum, by the end of Part Two very few fresh insights on the project and its outcomes have been obtained, and at the same time, no effective conceptual framework for carrying out OD has been developed.

One is left wondering about to whom this book will make a contribution. Because of the vague objectives, questionable evaluation procedures, and lack of theoretical underpinnings, the study adds little of interest to the empirical or theoretical literature. Because of its superficiality, little contribution to OD theory is made in Part Two. For the practicing consultant, the issues raised are likely to be very familiar, the project cannot be considered as a demonstration of any new or innovative techniques, and it does not deal with a number of thorny issues, such as power and the institutionalization of change. For the manager, the relatively modest success of the project is unlikely to stimulate a great deal of interest in these types of interventions, and he would be completely lost in Part Two.

However, this is not to imply that the conducting of this project was of no value. The works may well have been able to identify and correct numerous specific problems which it faced, and some positive attitude changes may have been produced. There are numerous insights and useful suggestions that can be sifted from the book, particularly for the inexperienced practitioner or student. The practical application of several methods of OD, and the problems and pitfalls in using them, are quite well-documented, and the authors treat some issues, such as the role of the consultant, quite well. As well, it illustrates the difficulties of achieving significant attitudinal and behavioral change in the absence of structural change.

If the book were shortened, given a concentrated focus on a case study of a major organization development intervention, with the application of only relevant conceptual material to explain the outcomes, it might be of interest to a considerable number of OD practitioners. Use of a tightly written concluding chapter giving a summary of the project and what the authors have learned from doing it would be a major improvement. But, as it stands now, the task of winnowing through all the material currently presented will probably not be worth the effort for many of us.

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**The Public Service Alliance of Canada: A Look at a Union in the Public Sector**, par Maurice Lemelin, Los Angeles, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Monograph Series: 21, 1978, 184 pp.

Ce volume publié dans la série des monographies de l'Institut des relations industrielles de l'Université de Californie à Los Angeles est essentiellement le résultat des travaux de recherches doctorales de l'auteur, maintenant professeur à l'École des hautes études commerciales de l'Université de Montréal.

L'ouvrage nous renseigne sur les origines, les structures et le fonctionnement du deuxième plus gros syndicat d'employés du secteur public au Canada, l'Alliance de la fonction publique du Canada, qui représente environ 70% de tous les fonctionnaires fédéraux canadiens.

L'approche retenue par l'auteur est celle qui consiste à considérer l'adoption de la **Loi sur les relations du travail dans la fonction publique fédérale** en 1967 comme l'élément central autour duquel s'effectue la monographie. Ainsi, les deux premiers chapitres sont consacrés à décrire les circonstances historiques qui ont conduit à l'adoption de cette législation ainsi que les principales caractéristiques de la législation elle-même.

Le lecteur est alors à même de constater tout le chemin parcouru depuis l'adoption de la première **Loi du service civil** en 1918, en passant par l'établissement d'un Conseil national conjoint en 1944, par la création du Bureau de recherches sur les traitements en 1957 et pour en arriver finalement aux travaux du comité préparatoire à la négociation collective dans la fonction publique du Canada de 1963, travaux qui devaient aboutir avec l'adoption de la loi de 1967.

La présentation de la loi inclut, outre les principaux paramètres régissant l'encadrement juridique des relations entre les parties, un exposé des critiques formulées par l'Alliance concernant des questions telles, la limitation du champ des matières pouvant être négociées ou portées à l'arbitrage, la