

*Nils Elvander*

# Industrial Relations

A Short History of Ideas and Learning

ARBETSLIV I OMVANDLING

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## **ARBETSLIV I OMVANDLING WORK LIFE IN TRANSITION**

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## Foreword

As an academic sub-discipline Industrial Relations is certainly a child of the coming of the industrial age. However, since its inauguration industrial society – especially in its liberal and free market version most fully developed in the Anglo-Saxon world – has been characterised by two opposing forces, labour and capital. Hence, according to Karl Polanyi – one of the greatest institutional economists and anthropologists of the last century – an industrial market economy has never existed without creating its counter-force. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the labour market as well as conditions within the workplace have been characterised by a peculiar social institution, i.e. industrial relations. Most certainly, this institution appears in different shapes, includes different organisational set-ups and combines different relations of power from country to country. However, it is crucial in order to understand the development of the working of labour markets, of work-place relations as well as of the development of society and economy at large.

The topic of this essay written by Professor Emeritus Nils Elvander – one of the most prominent scholars in this particular field in the world – is to present an historic outline of the sub-discipline of Industrial Relations. One striking feature of this historical sequence is of course how connected the field of industrial relations has been to the development of industrial society at large and the shifting power relationships between labour and capital. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a tri-partite structure was developed on the basis of the First and Second Industrial Revolutions including the trade unions, the employer organisations and the state. This once so strong structure has gradually been dissolved as the Second industrial society has been transformed into the Third industrial revolution during recent decades. As a consequence, also the sub-discipline of Industrial Relations has changed face. What it will turn to in the future is not the main topic of this historical essay, but it nevertheless gives much food for such reflections which is necessary in order to re-establish and re-new interest in Industrial Relations as a theoretical and intellectual undertaking also in the future.

Stockholm February 2002

Lars Magnusson

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## Introduction

Industrial relations (or labour market relations) emerged as a multi-disciplinary field of research in Great Britain and the USA about one hundred years ago. However, it took nearly half a century for research and teaching within this broad field to really gain momentum. As a distinct academic discipline, industrial relations (IR) is primarily an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. It is only since World War II that a corresponding multi-disciplinary treatment of the complex of problems pertaining to the employment relationship, albeit under different labels and in other organizational forms, has emerged in continental Europe as well as Scandinavia and Japan.

It is useful to put the development of ideas in the IR field into a larger context than the purely academic one. The key figures in this development have themselves often regarded research and teaching in IR as part of a comprehensive project of reform dealing with the labour market of industrial society, and their theoretical thinking has been inspired by their own practical experiences of such projects of reform and work as mediators in labour disputes. We discover the main characteristics of the development of ideas and analyse the interaction between theory and practice by studying how some key figures – as, for example, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and their successors in Great Britain, as well as the pioneers John R. Commons and John T. Dunlop in the USA – perceived the relationship between labour and management, the structure and functions of unions, the labour market organizations' relationship to the government, etc. This ought to be supplemented by studying the institutional development of the IR field, primarily in Great Britain and the USA, but also, to some extent, in other countries and internationally. How did the field of study evolve? How did the relationship to the disciplines in which the IR scholars were initially trained and other adjacent disciplines evolve? How did the professional organization of associations and journals, nationally and internationally, come about? What about theory formation in IR research?

The first part of this book deals with the emergence and development of the IR field in Great Britain – from the pioneering Webbs in the 1890s right up to the present day, with an emphasis on the diversified activities at the leading British IR Department at the University of Warwick in Coventry. In the second part, the corresponding development in the USA will be described. Finally, I wish to round off the survey with an outline of the conditions in some other countries, including Sweden, focusing on the contemporary situation and an account of professional activities at the international level. A discussion of the problems of theory building within the large multi-disciplinary IR domain will also be included.

## I. From the Webbs to Warwick

### The Webbs

The 1880s in Great Britain was a period of economic depression and political unrest. In spite of mass unemployment, the labour market was disturbed by big strikes, which were protests against poverty, low wages, and miserable working conditions. In connection with a couple of spectacular and successful strikes in London in 1889, newly created, large unions for unskilled workers challenged the old trade-union movement, which ever since the beginning of the industrial revolution in the eighteenth-century had been based exclusively on the principle of craft unionism with some connection with the guild system. Socialist and anarchist groups provided more or less utopian solutions to the problems in society, at the same time as the introduction of equal voting rights for men in 1885 made a democratic and reformist strategy for the growing working class movement possible. Formed in London in 1884 by a group of intellectuals of middle-class background, the Fabian Society became the principal proponent of democratic reformism.<sup>1</sup> Belonging to the first generation of Fabians were brilliant personalities, such as the dramatist Georg Bernard Shaw – alongside the Webbs the most diligent writer of pamphlets furthering adult education and lectures on socialism and many other things – the historian Graham Wallas, the agitator Annie Besant, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb (McBriar 1962).

Beatrice Potter was born in 1858 as the ninth daughter of a well-to-do, liberally-minded businessman. In the 1880s, she started on her own to study economics and sociology, a brand-new field of study, at the same time as her charity work in the slum districts of London's East End developed into a form of sociological field work. Among other things, her work resulted in a book about the British co-operative movement (Potter 1891) – the first one of its kind – and a major study of the history of British the trade-union movement, which she initiated and subsequently carried out together with the man who became her colleague and husband in the early 1890s. Coming from plain conditions, Sidney Webb (1859-1947) worked his way up to the rank of a civil servant at the Ministry of Colonial Affairs by way of private studies and degrees in social science and law at the University of London. He resigned from this position so as to devote himself full time to research,

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<sup>1</sup> Usually the name Fabian is derived from the Roman commander Q. Fabius Maximus, who was called Cunctator (The Person who Waits and Sees), about whom it was said in the first of the Fabian Society's pamphlets: "For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently, when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain, and fruitless." This axiom can be seen as the principle for the patient reformist strategy ("gradualness"), which the Fabians eventually, as early as in the late 1880s, chose, but the wording "strike hard" also perhaps implies a readiness for a tough struggle among those who founded the association in 1884 (McBriar 1962, p 9).

political reform work at the municipal level, and socialist agitation. Even though the partnership of Sidney and Beatrice Webb lasted for half a century, it was only in the 1890s that it directly concerned industrial relations (B. Webb 1946). The result was two major pieces of pioneering work: *The History of Trade Unionism* (1894) and *Industrial Democracy* (1897). It is especially the latter book that is the basis for Sidney and Beatrice Webbs reputation as “the father and mother of Industrial Relations” (Kaufman 1993, p 213).

The book on the history of the British trade-union movement is based on enormously extensive research of primary source materials, collected mainly from the unions in the bigger industrial cities. It is not only a question of written sources, but also information obtained by means of such modern methods as participatory observations of union meetings at various levels and interviews with representatives of unions as well as employers. Questions of methodology are discussed in detail in the preface to *Industrial Democracy*.

With her experience of sociological field work, Beatrice appears to have been the one chiefly responsible for collecting the source materials, while Sidney usually did the writing. The prose style in this their first collectively written book is intelligible, dry and immensely rich in concrete facts, as is the text of *Industrial Democracy*. Many pages were written on the British trade-union movement up to the turn of the century, a total of nearly 1,400. At times, Beatrice herself felt that both books were “unreadable”. If it were not for Bernard Shaw stepping in, with his usual energy, at an early stage in the editing, she would probably have been even more concerned (Seymour-Jones 1990, p 229-232; B. Webb 1946, p 36).

In *The History of Trade Unionism*, the development of the trade-union movement is described, in a well-balanced way, as resulting from the interaction of economic forces, political and judicial decisions and changing union strategies – from the period of its establishment and the subsequent period of proclamation of its illegality, the political repression of 1799-1825, up to the full emergence of “the new trade unionism” around 1890. Having provided this descriptive account of the “natural history” of the British unions, Sidney and Beatrice Webb took on the task of systematically and theoretically analysing that same material, resulting in a book truly deserving the label of a classic: *Industrial Democracy* is both a document of that time and in its central parts a surprisingly modern text of contemporary relevance.

### **Industrial Democracy**

Sidney and Beatrice Webb repudiated the predominant economic doctrine’s abstract and deductive theorizing and, instead, advocated a historical approach to the study of actually existing institutions, an approach which they called “sociology”. In the preface to *Industrial Democracy*, a manifesto was put forward: “Sociology, like all other sciences, can advance only upon the basis of a precise

observation of actual facts.” A realistic theory of trade unions’ effect on the production and distribution of wealth had to be based on empirical studies of the historical development of the trade-union movement as well as its current structure and functions. In accordance with this institutionally-oriented approach – inspired by, inter alia, French and British positivist philosophy and the German historical school’s criticism of the theory of classical economics – the Webbs divided their book into three parts: “Trade Union Structure” (problems of organization), “Trade Union Function” (forms of activities) and “Trade Union Theory”.<sup>2</sup>

The first part starts off with a description and analysis of the constitutional development of British unions. There was an ingenuous kind of direct democracy in the early unions, only working at the local level: every issue was settled at meetings of the entire membership and members took turns presiding over these meetings. As a consequence of local associations amalgamating into unions, change became necessary, though a total abandonment of direct democracy was late in coming. In the beginning, the election of officials was decided by equal voting, executive boards often changed between the different sections, and referenda dominated as the procedure of decision making. It was not until the end of the nineteenth-century that primitive democracy began to be replaced by representative institutions; the board and officials in the leading unions were elected at regularly recurring congresses, which also supervised the activities of the former union leadership. According to Sidney and Beatrice Webb, primitive democracy either involved failings and disorder within the organizations or an unchecked exercise of power by strong leaders. Whereas direct democracy could be manipulated by, for example, the directly appointed general secretary, representative democracy along with the professionalization of the leadership functions became much needed ways of neutralising the tendency “to magnify and consolidate the power of the general secretary” (S. & B. Webb 1897, p 27).

The analysis of the trade unions’ internal democracy is remarkably modern in its political science approach. The footnotes abound in references to direct democracy in Switzerland and the tendencies of plebescitarian dictatorship in France. To some extent, the iron law of oligarchy is anticipated a little more than a decade prior to its explicit formulation by Robert Michels (Hellberg 1997; Michels 1911). This new and ageless modernity is, however, contrasted with a blindness to the defects of their country and a time-bound fixation on the totally predominant principle of craft unionism. In spite of their understanding of the frequent competition between craft unions resulting in a weakening of the trade-union movement, the Webbs offered no alternative to the existing disorganization other than federations of craft unions within different sectors of industry. They had little confidence in

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<sup>2</sup> Jörgen Westerståhl’s doctor’s thesis *Svensk fackföreningsrörelse. Organisationsproblem, verksamhetsformer, förhållande till staten* (1945) is largely organized in the same way as *Industrial Democracy*.



the vitality of the newly formed general unions for unskilled workers; in this respect, they erred in their judgment.

Approximately half of *Industrial Democracy's* nine hundred pages is devoted to a detailed sector-by-sector study of the methods trade unions used to counter-balance the power of the employers and prevent competition between wage-earners by means of underbidding during different periods of time: insurance against unemployment and illness administered by the unions themselves, collective agreements, mediation as an alternative to strike actions, and finally also legislation pushed by the unions. The regulations that have been aimed at by use of these methods are foremost "The Standard Rate", i.e., a standard of minimum wage, normal working days and minimum standards for working environments and industrial safety. However, union regulations of access to a craft similar to that of the guilds, which were in use for a long period following the abolition of the guild system in 1814, were becoming increasingly obsolescent. In the mid-nineteenth-century, the conservative "Doctrine of Vested Interests" was superseded by more liberal and market-oriented thinking and behaviour, which in its turn in the 1890s was replaced by the collectivist and competitively-neutral "Doctrine of a Living Wage", i.e., the principle of a minimum wage. Unions primarily tried to achieve this principle by means of collective bargaining agreements, which at this time in history almost entirely had replaced an earlier individual wage structure governed by the interests of management. The alternative of legislating minimum wages was generally rejected, because it might, for instance, mean a weakening of the trade unions.<sup>3</sup>

According to Sidney and Beatrice Webb, a fully developed system of collective agreements involves "compulsory trade unionism"; the Webbs approve of the existing tradition of the "closed shop" in the craft unions. Hence it follows naturally that collective agreements ought to be legally binding – a thought that had been put forward by the employers in 1894, but had been rejected by the unions for fear of legal liability, even though its realization probably would strengthen the working class' organizations. Early on, the Webbs argued that the legal framework of industrial relations in Great Britain should be developed in a similar way to what had become predominant in the rest of Europe around the turn of the century, i.e., binding collective agreements with no-strike clauses during the period of agreement and a clear distinction between legal disputes and conflicts of interest. In this matter, however, they could not exert any decisive influence on the conservatism of the unions in the world's oldest industrial country.

The third part of *Industrial Democracy*, "Trade Union Theory", starts off with a critical study of the view of wage formation and unions in classical economic

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<sup>3</sup> According to one footnote in *Industrial Democracy*, p 173, the concept of collective bargaining was for the first time used in Beatrice Potter's *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain* (1891), p 217.

theory: ever since Ricardo and J. S. Mill to their followers of the late nineteenth-century. The polemic in “The Verdict of the Economists” gives the impression of beating a dead horse. As noted by Sidney and Beatrice Webb themselves, contemporary economists had ever since the late 1870s demolished the old theories of wage funds, the iron law of wages and the detrimental influence of unions. Alfred Marshall, whose *Principles of Economics* (1890) is often referred to with very deep respect in long foot-notes, had thus claimed that wage increases, just as a lowering of interest rates, results in increases in production and capital growth (particularly with regard to human capital) and that unions can be of great value to the economic system. As, however, the Webbs move on to a presentation of their own version of economic theory, based on observations of reality, the survey at once becomes more productive. In the chapter “The Higgling of the Market” (an expression taken from Adam Smith), a realistic description of the commercial life’s many and long links of transactions is presented from the transactions in production between, inter alia, labour and management, via wholesale trade and retail trade, to the consumers – in which the power game oscillates between unfettered competition and monopolistic limits on competition. Unions are conceived as protecting the workers against both these extremes. The lack of empirical research on the mechanisms of transactions in the market is commented on. In this respect, Sidney and Beatrice Webb did pioneering work, anticipating much of the research in business economics of the last decades.

What is most important in this multi-disciplinary theoretical construct are the two concluding chapters. Emphasis is here, inter alia, given to the fact that minimum guarantees concerning wages, working hours and work environment is in the interest of the whole society: they are humane, improve quality and are neutral with regard to competition. They also promoted a raised overall level of wages, which in its turn results in rationalizations, increases in productivity and the exclusion of poorly performing businesses. The appeal for legislation on minimum wages, as a necessary remedy for the exploitation of unorganized labour that often worked in the home in the so-called “sweated trades” is, of course, conditioned by the period of time. The basic idea in itself, however, is of renewed interest currently in New Labour’s Great Britain: the new government has carried through legislation on a National Minimum Wage. According to the Webbs, the minimum wage would not necessarily involve an encroachment on the standard wage formation resulting from collective agreements.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the Webbs present their

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<sup>4</sup> Legislation on minimum wages in the “sweated trades” through agreements within the framework of Trade Boards, consisting of labour and management representatives in various low wage industries, was carried out in 1909 by Winston Churchill in his capacity as Minister of Trade in the liberal government (McBriar 1962, p 260-61). The Trade Boards, now called Wages Councils, were abolished in 1993 by the Conservative government. Shortly after the election in May 1997, the new government set up a Low Pay Commission (LPC), which had George Bain (the former professor of industrial relations at the University of Warwick, since 1990 the headmaster of London Business School) as the chairman and an active participation

theory of economic democracy: political democracy will inevitably develop further into economic democracy by means of collective agreements, different forms of minimum legislation, strengthened representative democracy within the unions, and increasing political power for the unions – all of this within the scope of a preserved market economy and more diversified forms of ownership.

*Industrial Democracy* is probably Sidney and Beatrice Webb's best book. That it immediately got excellent reviews in the most important newspapers came as a surprise to the Webbs themselves (B. Webb 1946, p 56). Oddly enough, considering the century-old history of the British trade-union movement, the results from their research were big news at that point of time. It has been said that "the Webbs did not merely analyze and dissect the trade unions...It is almost true that they not only discovered but invented them" (Woolf, 1949). In spite of their own cross-disciplinary approach to industrial relations, however, Sidney and Beatrice Webb did not do very much for the institutionalization of this field of research. They did not try to introduce IR into the education programme when they founded the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) together with other Fabians in 1895; nor did this occur some years later when the LSE, under the leadership of Sidney Webb, became part of the University of London. This has been explained by "the Webb's belief that the study of labour problems was not sufficiently 'scientific' for the LSE" as well as their research interest shifting into issues of municipal self-government and social policy. Many years were to pass before the LSE got a professorial chair in Industrial Relations (Roberts, 1972).

### **The Oxford School**

With regard to trade union research, G. D. H. Cole (1889-1959), professor in social and political theory at the University of Oxford for a couple of decades, was a successor to Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Seeing that Cole was extremely well-rounded in his research, IR was only one of the fields that interested him. The work that he did bearing relevance to the IR field can be summed up under three headings: the history of the trade-union movement in Great Britain and internationally (Cole 1913, 1927/47, 1953), guild socialism (1918, 1920) and to a certain degree social scientific theory. Cole openly admitted to relying on the Webbs in

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of both of the labour market's central organizations the CBI and the TUC. This is something that had not occurred in governmental commissions of inquiry since Margaret Thatcher came into power in 1979. As early as in October 1997, the chairman explained that reaching an agreement between the parties on an acceptable level of minimum wages would take a long time and that empirical data from field surveys was required: "he made it quite clear that he is not going to be swayed by the 'a priori mumbo jumbo' of academic labour economists in setting a rate. Instead the LPC seems to favour an approach of drawing on the practical experience of employers and the unions. The Commission is currently organizing a series of visits and interviews around the country to this end." (Edwards & Gilman 1998). Apparently Bain is thinking and acting exactly in the spirit of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and the Schools of Oxford-Warwick!

his research, however, he did not add much that was new into their theoretical perspective. This meant that his major books on trade unions were mainly descriptive and lacking in theory. Guild socialism was popular in socialist circles around 1920 in many countries. It implied a decentralized and corporative social order based on producer interests and involved a superstructure of interest representation. Convincingly, Sidney and Beatrice Webb put forward a criticism of Cole's thoughts on self-government in industry as not being easily compatible with either political democracy or consumer interests (McBriar 1962, p 103-107; S. & B. Webb 1921, p 448-462). Cole's social theory does not seem to have left any profound marks in the social sciences, though certain aspects are possibly of interest in a discussion of theory formation in the IR field.

In 1928, Montague Burton, wealthy textile factory owner, made a large donation enabling the establishment of five professorial chairs at British universities, which were termed *International Peace* and *Industrial Peace*. However, when a professorial chair in Industrial Peace was offered to the University of Cambridge, John Maynard Keynes objected to what it was termed, since he felt that it "prejudged the subject in ways that would constrain good social science". Instead, he proposed a more neutral term, one which had been introduced forty years earlier by Beatrice Webb, i.e., *Industrial Relations*. As a result of the Montague Burton professorial chairs in 1930, the terms international relations and industrial relations were thus established in the British academic community; professorial chairs in Industrial Relations were established at the universities of Cardiff and Leeds as well as Cambridge (Brown 1988). This did not, however, involve any notable expansion of research and teaching in the IR field. The period after World War II is also characterized by a slow start. The British Universities Industrial Relations Association, established in 1950, notes in its review of developments in the past that "Prior to the 1960s, the process of acceptance of industrial relations in the academic world was slow and problematic" (Berridge & Goodman 1988). What ought also be mentioned in this context is that the London School of Economics and Political Science in the 1950s attained a professorial chair in Industrial Relations. In 1962 Ben Roberts, its first holder, established Great Britain's leading journal in the field, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, whose editorial office still has its head-quarters at the LSE.

However, in the mid-1960s a period of expansion began that lasted until the early 1980s. During this period of greatness for British IR research, the University of Oxford at first held a leading position in the field. This period largely coincided with the Labour Party's tenure in office and an extra-ordinary position of power for the trade-union movement. In the late 1960s, "The Oxford School of Industrial Relations" played a particularly important part, not only in purely academic research, but also in applied research and in inquiries associated with the Labour government's not very successful attempts of reforming the system of wage negotiations and labour legislation. The Oxford School is very important to the history

of ideas and learning in the IR field, since it might be said to constitute a link between the Webbs and the dominant Warwick School of today.

G. D. H. Cole was a person who worked on his own. He did not care for establishing an Oxford School, neither in industrial relations nor in any other of his many fields of interest. However, he took part in the foundation of Ruskin College (a department at the University of Oxford) and which ever since the period between the wars has served as a higher educational establishment for the trade-union movement. After World War II, there were some newly appointed university teachers who started courses in IR, primarily addressing students at Ruskin. They also published textbooks and initiated research projects, mainly about trade unions and their activities. Most prominent in this development were Hugh Clegg and Allan Flanders. They supported Labour, as did most of the other scholars and teachers at Oxford. This helps explain their prominent IR role in the commission under the leadership of Lord Donovan that was set up by the new Labour government in 1964. The purpose of this commission was to analyse the causes of wage-inflation, low productivity and the increasing frequency of industrial conflict in the British economy. In its concluding report from 1968, the Donovan Commission showed a previously almost unknown picture of the British system of wage negotiations, largely based on Flanders' new studies about wage formation at the local level. In fact, there were two different systems: one formal system founded on sectoral agreements and one informal system at the local level affected by directly elected shop stewards and management. The large influence wielded by the shop stewards was totally unregulated and local bargaining sometimes resulted in equally large increases in wages as sectoral agreements. Those in charge of the inquiries concluded that the informal system undermined the formal one and thus weakened the unions. Wage formation at the local level, therefore, ought to be subjected to formal regulation. The Labour government followed this recommendation and went even further with regard to statutory limits on union activities. For instance, legally binding collective agreements were proposed as were certain limits on the right to strike. Since there was a strong resistance from the trade-union movement against the government proposal, it was revoked shortly prior to Labour's defeat in the election of 1970. Allan Flanders was strengthened in his conviction of the necessity for resting the main responsibility for a more effective wage formation with employers (Clegg 1990).

### **The Warwick School**

The Industrial Relations Research Unit (IRRU) at the University of Warwick in Coventry was established by the British Social Science Research Council in 1970. Hugh Clegg left Oxford with the intention of setting up a Master's programme and building the new research institute at the University of Warwick. He was soon to be accompanied by his disciple George Bain, who had come from Canada to

Oxford in the 1950s, and Allan Flanders. The three of them were at this point in time the most prominent of the older generation of IR scholars. Thus there was some truth to the joke of “The Oxford School of Industrial Relations moving to Warwick”. Although the IRRU were soon to become the leading research institute in the IR field in Great Britain, Oxford still maintained much of its unique status as an educational establishment of long standing and the trade-union movement-oriented research was supplemented by management studies at a newly established college. Furthermore, there was a certain difference between the old Oxford School’s research programme, oriented towards a radical reform of the British IR system, and the Warwick School’s emphasis on detailed problem-solving (Clegg 1990).

Prior to dealing with the development and current activities of the IRRU at Warwick, something should be said about Hugh Clegg’s major work of synthesis, *The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain* (1979). Founded on research, this book of fundamentals is based on a text-book about the British IR system, which was edited by Clegg and Flanders in several editions in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1970, it was replaced by a new book that was written by Clegg. After having been revised several times it was published in an entirely new version in 1979, emphasising the changes in the system during the 1970s. Unlike his predecessors, the Webbs and G. D. H. Cole, Clegg deals not only with the labour union side, but also with management and its associations, and his description also includes the public and private service sectors. Much scope is devoted to the more or less failed attempts of governments to pursue income policies and reform the system of wage formation by means of legislation. These measures were perceived as conditioned by the challenge that the local system of collective agreements posed for macro-economic performance. This was a circumstance that had been “discovered” by scholars in the 1960s. According to Clegg, collective bargaining agreements (particularly at the local level) are more important as a method of regulating the employment relationship than those of legislation and regulations as arranged by labour and management. Hence it follows that “the process of industrial relations is essentially a process of collective bargaining” (Clegg 1979, p 5). Some years earlier, Clegg had developed the same basic idea in a comparative international approach (Clegg 1976).

Hugh Clegg finishes his book off with a short chapter (13 pages) on “Theories and Definitions”. Having summarized his inquiries into the British system of collective bargaining, the author asks whether this can be called “a theory of industrial relations with the structure of collective bargaining as the main explanatory variable?” (Clegg 1979, p 446). The answer is no. According to Clegg, the foundation for a theory among sociologists and labour economists is equally small (including John Dunlop, the American founder of a systems theory of IR). What remains is the neo-marxists’ attempts to challenge the predominant pluralist trend within British IR research. Does a marxist theory result in better explanations than

those based on the pluralist approach, the one to which Clegg adheres? Having looked into his Warwick associate Richard Hyman's arguments for a marxist outlook, Clegg yet once more arrives at a negative answer. The marxists do not possess any better concepts than the pluralists do; their analyses of actual labour market relations is, in practice, hardly distinguishable from those of the pluralists. But they are mistaken in viewing the trade unions as fundamentally revolutionary organizations, which have become encapsulated and tamed by capitalist society. Thus Clegg's implicit conclusion is that there is no particular theory of industrial relations. What may be added is that it has been very difficult for marxism to secure a foothold within British IR research ever since the resolute rejection of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and other Fabians, in the late 1880s (McBriar 1962), despite Richard Hyman's efforts in the 1970s (Hyman 1975).<sup>5</sup>

Some years after the establishment in 1970 of the Industrial Relations Research Unit (IRRU) at the University of Warwick, Hugh Clegg was succeeded as the director by Professor William Brown. In 1984, the IRRU was reorganized and became part of the University's School of Industrial and Business Studies. Brown became Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Cambridge the following year. As director, he was succeeded by Professor Keith Sisson, who led the IRRU until 1998, when Paul Edwards took over. As early as in the mid-1970s, the IRRU had about twenty scholars working full time and was thereby the country's largest IR department. In 2000, twenty-four scholars and teachers worked at the IRRU: four of them were professors. The series of *Warwick Studies in Industrial Relations* has been published since 1972. Thus far, more than thirty large research reports have been published in book form. Moreover, there are separate sequences of text books and shorter reports.

### **Warwick: From Industrial Relations to Human Resource Management**

In a report about its research activities during the period of 1984-92, that was sent to the Social Science Research Council, the IRRU's leadership emphasize that "The Unit defines industrial relations as the study of all aspects of the employment relationship, including the ways in which employees are recruited, rewarded, trained, and disciplined." This definition includes individual as well as collective aspects of the employment relationship. What is specifically pointed out is that it objects to the way that the concept of industrial relations has been traditionally identified with collective relationships between management and organized labour within industry. Instead, the definition also encompasses the direct relationships between individual employees and management, and includes the whole labour

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<sup>5</sup> An interesting attempt to reintroduce a "radical" approach has been made by John Kelly at the LSE, who in 1996 succeeded David Metcalf as the editor-in-chief of the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. Partly his "Editorial Statement", and partly, and above all, his book *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves* (Kelly 1998) bears the impress of that ambition.

market. Human resource management, a concept that often recurs in the report without being defined, is thereby in practice synonymous to traditional IR and is fitted into a broader concept of IR (IRRU 1992, p 14-15). This reinterpretation of the concept of IR is reflected in a stronger emphasis on the interests and functions of management than in traditional IR research. This can be illustrated by some examples from the research projects of latter years.

In *The Management of Collective Bargaining: An International Comparison* (1987), Keith Sisson made inquiries into how the employers and their associations in industry in seven countries, including Great Britain, had managed the bargaining agreements with the unions since the early twentieth century. The project was inspired by Hugh Clegg who in his own comparative study from 1976 had commented on the lack of information about employers' role in the bargaining process. For instance, Sisson's analysis demonstrated that while employers in other European countries insisted on multi-employer bargaining as a means to neutralize union activism at the workplace, British employers increasingly changed to bargaining at only the firm or workplace level in the 1970s. The main cause for this was that sectoral agreements lacked the effectiveness of regulation and no-strike clauses in Great Britain, which they still had in other parts of Western Europe. The British management strategy was thereby brought closer to the American and Japanese models in which the role of employers' associations in bargaining contexts are insignificant. The same image of poor co-operation among British employers in most of the industry sector in the 1970s is found in an IRRU survey on approximately 1,000 large and medium-sized firms (Brown 1981).<sup>6</sup> However, Sisson was the one who by means of a comparative approach put forward explanations.

In *Managing the Factory: A Survey of General Managers* (1987), Paul Edwards gives an account of an inquiry about factory managers in industry – their career paths, their methods of managing work organization and employment relationships, their views on the role of the union, and also their relationship to their own superiors. What emerged was a slightly surprising image of how effective management was based on good co-operation with unions; “The Macho Manager” who many believed would become the hero of the Thatcher era turned out to be a myth.

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<sup>6</sup> This IRRU report was the first one in a long series of comprehensive “Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys”, which were carried out by scholars at Warwick and other IR units with the support of the Social Science Research Council and the Department of Labour. This meant that an unprecedented volume of knowledge was formed, rendering it possible to analyse institutional change and changes in workplace relations in the British labour market as a whole, for example the dissolution of the collective bargaining system since 1980 (Cully et al. 1999; Daniel & Millward 1983; Millward & Stevens 1986; Millward et al. 1992; cf. Marginson 1998). William Brown has argued in favour of combining the survey method and case studies – based on interviews and participatory observation of systems of informal rules at the local level – in accordance with the older tradition, in which he himself has taken part (Brown & Wright 1994).



On the other hand, Edwards observed a clear tendency of individualization and thus management-determined employment relationships. In *Beyond the Workplace: Managing Industrial Relations in the Multi-Establishment Enterprise* (1988), Edwards went further in the survey-based study of management functions together with Sisson and a couple of associates from Warwick. This time the focus was on managers at the central level in large-scale British firms. The main results of the survey were that there was a higher degree of central control of subsidiary firms than expected and that hardly any clearly formulated strategy regarding personnel policies existed at the central level (Marginson et al. 1988).

According to Leonard Woolf, Sidney and Beatrice Webb had not only investigated the trade unions but actually even discovered and created them (Woolf 1949). In a similar, slightly exaggerated way, we might say that Sisson and his associates “not only discovered but invented the employers.” Thus, this connected them with the trade unionist view of the Oxford School, holding the employers as principally responsible for the reform of the bargaining system and workplace relations – something of a historical irony! Clearly, the approach to the research carried out by the Warwick School and their presentation technique is strictly scientific and unbiased, but the focus on management and its influence over the definition of problems is nevertheless unmistakable. By comparison to this, the trade union-oriented research at the IRRU is of rather limited scope. George Bain and others have studied changes in the rate of workforce unionization and they found fundamental structural explanations of its reduction in the 1980s. In 1989, Jeremy Waddington started a new project about the attitudes of members towards the trade unions.

The predominant focus on management is somewhat offset by a couple of contributions of a different kind from two of the female scholars at the institute. In an often quoted publication, *Farewell to Flexibility?* (1991), Anna Pollert subjected the concepts of the flexible enterprise and flexible specialization and the ideas of new business strategies, which are associated to those concepts, to a critical examination. She, for instance, claimed that much of the talk about labour’s flexibility was about restoring the authority of management rather than improving productivity and utilising the resources of those employed. In the early 1980s, Linda Dickens carried out a large, legal-sociological survey of the attainment of objectives with regard to the legislation on security against unfair dismissals. In *Dismissed: A Study of Unfair Dismissal and the Industrial Tribunal System* (1985), she and her associates showed certain imperfections existing in the industrial tribunal system, which had been introduced in the mid-1960s with the purpose of improving the security of employment, and discussed an alternative system of tribunals of arbitration. In recent years, Dickens and Pollert have studied the application of the British legislation on equality of opportunity.

One of the leading features of Warwick’s IR research has been the comparative, international approaches that have complemented the strong focus on solely

British objects of research. Clegg's and Sisson's comparative books (1976, 1987) constituted the beginning of this international attitude, which subsequently has been greatly intensified. By initiating and editing a couple of major textbooks, Richard Hyman and Anthony Ferner have made a large and qualitatively advanced contribution to the promotion of comparative approaches for research and teaching as regards IR in the newly enlarged Europe. The first one of these books contains some twenty monographs on countries and a comparative survey (Ferner & Hyman 1992, 1998) and the second has a thematical structure also focused on the EU and the specific IR problems of Central and Eastern Europe (Hyman & Ferner 1994). The orientation towards the EU and the new Europe has to a great extent left its mark on current research at Warwick. One practical example of this is that the IRRU in 1996 became Great Britain's representative in the work with an electronic database for developments in IR in the member countries and also at the EU level (the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO)), which has been set up by the EU authorities (IRRU 2000). It is too early to evaluate the results of this research, but a little can nevertheless be said about its organization and orientation.

In the mid-1990s, the IRRU was supplemented with the Centre for International Employment Relations Research (CINTER), which was funded by the Research Council. During the period of 1997-2000, seven out of ten research employments at the IRRU were associated with the CINTER. The research programme, which was completed in the autumn of 2001, involves three project fields, largely connected with previous projects (IRRU 1992, 1997; IRRU 2000):

- Wage formation and the regulation of working hours at different levels within British businesses from an EU perspective with regard to, for instance, the application of the EU's directives on working hours.
- Human resource management (HRM) in multi-national firms (British as well as foreign), also including further survey studies of the application and importance of the EU directive on European Works Councils.
- Case studies of innovative work practices at the workplace level, e.g. total quality management, aimed at improving the competitiveness of British industry.
- In this research programme – as well as in the preliminary report on its results – the strong orientation towards HRM and issues related to practical management, and also the absence of any union perspective, is even more conspicuous than in the large research reports from the 1980s.

Finally, something ought to be said about the theoretical ambitions and methodological orientation of IRRU research. Hugh Clegg's theoretical agnosticism appears to have left its mark on most of the institute's activities. No big interest in theoretical discussions has been displayed, apart from that of Richard Hyman and Anna Pollert. In the previously quoted report that was sent to the Research Council in 1992, this extraordinary empirical attitude is manifested clearly. Thus the

following is said about the multi-disciplinarian characteristics in IRRU's activities (in which almost all social science disciplines are represented, judging by the associates' degrees):

“The main purpose of the Unit is to contribute to the understanding of the employment relationship, using whichever disciplinary approaches are most appropriate. It is not to contribute to debates within the disciplines for their own sake.”

The report also stresses that a scholar's intra-disciplinary competence should be used

“in a way which speaks to the concerns of other disciplines and to the real world of employment. For example, the economists who have worked in the Unit have not concentrated on the formal analyses which characterize much of labour economics.”

They have “on the whole been sceptical of grand concepts such as ‘post-Fordism’. This has not, however, led to a stress on empirical detail for its own sake. Research has set out to explain concrete processes of change.” A great deal of the results from the research might perhaps afterwards appear to be “unsurprising”. “But it was the detailed research which helped to shape ‘what everyone knows’.” (IRRU 1992, p 17, 21, 38-39).

I find these statements, stressing the use of common sense, sympathetic as well as honest: there are no feigned theoretical ambitions which in reality do not exist, nor are there any promises that cannot be kept. The downside of the lack of theory – such as the absence of intra-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary discourses aiming at the cumulative development of knowledge – is, to some extent, compensated for by methodological perfection. The survey technique plays a leading role and, judging by the way it is presented and the methodological appendices in the research reports, is used with technical skilfulness and sound judgement.

In conclusion, the orientation of research at the IRRU can be characterized as a form of sociology of inquiry, which is of high quality. It has a pronounced, institutional orientation following the tradition of the Webbs and the Oxford School. Not only does it address the research community, but, to a great degree, also

“policy-makers in government, companies, and unions. Our task is to improve information and analysis, not to evaluate specific policy initiatives, still less to recommend particular courses of action to any of the parties.” (IRRU 1992, p 42).

### **The Webbs and Warwick: A Comparison**

“Sociology, like all other sciences, can advance only upon the basis of a precise observation of actual facts.” To be sure, the IR/HRM scholars at the University of

Warwick would agree with this scientific manifesto in the preface to Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *Industrial Democracy*. There is a hundred year old, unbroken tradition of factually-sound empiricism from the Webbs to Warwick.

Furthermore, there is a similarity between the pioneers and their successors in their strong commitment to how research ought to be beneficial to society, intelligible and of practical use. Of course, one important difference is that the Webbs directly addressed the trade-union movement and their inductively derived theory was given an openly-normative significance, whereas Keith Sisson and his associates adopt an unbiased attitude towards labour and management, and refrain from theory as well as normative recommendations, though in practice generally address management. This difference is, however, smaller than what might be perceived from a superficial view. By comparison to the present situation, a quick glance at labour-management relations in the British labour market one hundred years ago will indicate that the main focus of IR research is largely determined by which party has the initiative concerning the regulation of the employment relationship.

The main reason for Sidney and Beatrice Webb focusing solely on trade unions was the increasingly important role of unions as promoters of different methods regulating the employment relationships. The objective was to reduce the power of the employers and prevent competition between workers by means of under-bidding. In *Industrial Democracy* this is substantiated in detail. As late as in the 1890s, employers were almost totally unorganized and were at times at a disadvantage vis-à-vis union action. One hundred years later, the situation has been reversed. Since the 1970s, unions have lost the initiative at the national political level as well as at the local level, where management nowadays almost entirely sets the business order of the day. This shift of power is reflected in the reorientation from the labour union side to the management side in IR research. In the USA we can very clearly observe a corresponding shift of focus in the relationship between labour and management and in research.

## II. Industrial Relations in the USA

The term industrial relations was used publicly in 1912 for the first time in the USA when the Republican President William Howard Taft set up a commission of inquiry into problems in the labour market (the Commission on Industrial Relations (1913-16)). During this period, the term was principally used as an abbreviation of “the relations between labor and capital in industry”, of what had previously been called “the labor problem”. The direct cause of the setting up of the commission was a violent labour dispute in Los Angeles in 1910, costing twenty lives. The background was the hard struggle between labour and capital caused by the heavy industry’s rapid growth since the 1870s, the lowering of wages during the recessions, high unemployment (worsened by massive immigration) and highly authoritarian labour management in the majority of industrial firms. Unlike the ideologically extreme outlooks in this class struggle, reformist employers, politicians and scholars argued the need for reforms in order to preserve the capitalist system. The reforms ought to be aimed at strengthening labour’s bargaining position and improving working conditions; this could be done by means of trade unions and collective agreements as well as legislation and voluntary humanization of labour management and the work environment. As a term for academic research and teaching about the critical problems in the labour market, the concept of industrial relations arose out of this reform movement around 1920 (Kaufman 1993).

### **John R. Commons**

John R. Commons (1862-1945) was one of the prominent men in the reform movement. He is usually referred to as “the father of American Industrial Relations” (Kaufman 1993, p 54). Prior to starting his university studies, Commons had worked as a typographer and acquired his first practical IR experiences as an active member of the trade union. As Professor of Economics, he was active as a teacher and a scholar at the University of Wisconsin between 1904 and his retirement in 1934. His first major work in the IR field concerned the history of the American trade-union movement (Commons et al. 1910, 1918). His enormously comprehensive works covered virtually every branch of his discipline and, furthermore, important fields within political science, such as public and municipal administration, and also labour law. Commons was also frequently engaged in public functions, especially concerning labour market reforms in his home state of Wisconsin and as a mediator in labour disputes. He was a member of a large number of public inquiries, e.g., the Commission on Industrial Relations noted above, for which he did his own field studies and acquired information and inspiration for his theoretically-oriented IR research of later date. It has been said that “Commons

was the intellectual origin of the New Deal, of labor legislation, of social security, of the whole movement toward a welfare state” (Boulding 1956). Largely under the influence of Commons, the state of Wisconsin became “a great state laboratory for social innovation” (Barbash 1991). Furthermore, Commons started the first university education in IR in the USA at the University of Wisconsin in Madison 1920.

Commons was one of Thorstein Veblen’s students. Veblen (1857-1929) was the founder of American economic institutionalism, which during the inter-war period became a dominant school within economics (Pålsson Syll 1998, p 224-233). Veblen and Commons rejected the neo-classical economic theory of the utility-maximising, self-interested individuals in a closed, static world. Instead, they gave emphasis to the importance of norms, customs, and the rules of the game for the development of trades and industries, and the market economy, as viewed from a perspective of dynamic processes. According to Commons, economics ought to have institutions and collective action as its proper object of study. His definition of an institution is “collective action in control, liberation, and expansion of individual action” (Commons 1950, p 21). Society and our lives are governed by institutions as they regulate our collective actions. Benign institutions, such as trade unions, can increase the individual’s liberty.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Commons’ work is the emphasis he assigns to the economy’s legal dimension, partly by using legal processes in the USA and England as source materials, and partly by formulating a theory of change in the concept of property in common law and legislation. The main results of this legal historical research is shown in his first major theoretical work *Legal Foundations of Capitalism* (1924). The subsequent development of theory occurred in a distinctive interaction of Commons’ own practical experiences and his “dialogue” with the great classics of economic theory from John Locke to the present day. Within the framework of a very comprehensive and complicated conceptual apparatus, the conclusions of these original connections between theory and practice were put forward in the major work *Institutional Economics* (1934). This book has a reputation for being incomprehensible, which has not, however, prevented Commons’ thesis to be further developed and made clearer by a group of devoted disciples and has, again, been taken seriously in the debate of recent years over institutional factors in the economy. A simplified and elucidated version entitled *The Economics of Collective Action* (1950) was published posthumously. In both of these books, a theory of trade unions and collective bargaining is developed, similar to the one presented by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in the 1890s. Strangely enough, however, the books do not contain any references to the Webbs.

In *Legal Foundations of Capitalism*, Commons maintained that more often than not the courts sided with the employers against the workers and their trade unions. Despite this recognition of bias in the predominantly court-governed American

system of labour market relations, he felt that it ought to be the task of the courts to settle disputes and create order in the labour market together with the public commissions on regulation. Commons looked forward to “a constitution for industrial government” based on collective agreements, security legislation, and employers and employees being fitted into the same “due process of law”. He saw this labour legislative vision take shape in President Roosevelt’s New Deal. He praised the corporatism in the expanding federal administration and considered the interest groups (particularly the traditional craft unions) as more representative of the will of the people than the Congress (Olson 1965, p 114-117). Commons actually considered the interest-based collectivism as the salvation for American democracy against the threat of authoritarian regimes : “American democracy can only be saved through collective economic organization of firms and trade unions” (Commons 1950, p 263).

### **Industrial Relations: the Two Schools of 1920-1960**

During the interwar period, there was a rather slow, but decisive, development of IR as a multi-disciplinary, practically problem-oriented field of study at American universities. As noted above, the first courses were started by Commons at the University of Wisconsin in 1920. The Industrial Relations Association of America, in which progressive personnel managers from industry was the largest group of members, was established that same year. However, after a couple of years the association experienced a decline. In the early 1920s, two main research currents within the IR field emerged, termed “the institutional labor economics school” (ILE) and “the personnel management school” (PM) (Kaufman 1993). The ILE School was primarily oriented towards the history of the trade-union movement (labor history), collective bargaining, labour legislation, and also the causes and consequences of unemployment. John R. Commons and his students at the University of Wisconsin played an important part in research and teaching, and also practical reform work, in which the adherents of the ILE School keenly supported Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. In practice, the crucial dividing line between the two schools was the attitude towards the trade unions and collective agreements. The Human Relations School, which emerged around 1930 and became the leading PM orientation with Elton Mayo as the most prominent figure, emphasized the community of interests between the employers and the employees and made the employers responsible for the humanization and effectivization of the relationship between the employers and the employees, just as it regarded trade unions as an unnecessary disturbance or, possibly, a necessary evil. Despite these theoretical and ideological differences, the two schools stuck together, in most cases under the label of industrial relations and linked to departments of economics.

By the end of the war in 1945, IR got a flying start everywhere in the American social science community. As after World War I, the background was unrest in the

labour market, but now there was also the two new problems of full employment and increases in the power of the trade-union movement. Thus, there was an increase in the rate of workforce unionization in the economy (excluding agriculture) from approximately ten per cent in the early 1930s to a record 35 per cent in the mid-1950s. A number of new IR units were established, of which those at Cornell University in the state of New York, Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), became the leading ones in addition to the pioneering department at the University of Wisconsin. The Industrial Relations Research Association (IRRA) was established in 1947 by a group of labour economists. They were dissatisfied with the lack of understanding among the neo-classical economists, who set the tone within the American Economic Association, of the need for more institutionally and multi-disciplinarily-oriented labour market research. Furthermore, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* was established that same year at Cornell, being the country's first proper IR journal in which the ILE School carried a distinct authority.

During "The Golden Age of Industrial Relations" (Kaufman 1993) in the 1950s when the American trade-union movement was at the height of its power and influence, the ILE and PM Schools were still kept together within most of the rapidly growing IR departments. However, a future breach in the unity between the two schools was heralded when leading labour economists oriented towards ILE, such as John Dunlop and Clark Kerr, strongly criticised the Human Relations School. They accused it of overlooking the importance of contexts – particularly the importance of the trade unions – as a result of its behavioural scientific approach to focus on individuals and work life relations at the micro level. Dunlop and Kerr, just as Commons, had had extensive concrete experiences of IR.<sup>7</sup> They were in charge of a large, cross-disciplinary and internationally comparative project resulting in the comprehensive work *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Kerr et al. 1960). Here, inter alia, the controversial hypothesis of convergence was expounded, i.e., the thought that the IR systems of different countries (even communist ones) come nearer one another in the course of industrial modernization.

### **John T. Dunlop**

John T. Dunlop (born 1914), professor of economics at Harvard University, published the book, *Industrial Relations Systems*, in 1958. This is the book that has got the most attention concerning IR theory during the post-war period. Dunlop pre-

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to his professorship at Harvard University, John Dunlop performed a number of public functions in commissions of inquiry and as a mediator: in President Gerald Ford's administration of 1975-76 he was Secretary of State for Employment, and he was in charge of a Government committee on the reformation of labour legislation in the early 1990s, whose proposals were not, however, carried out. Among other things, Clark Kerr was the headmaster at the University of California in Berkeley in the 1960s and performed government functions in different labour market issues.



sented a theoretical framework claiming general validity, based partly on his own empirical studies of wage formation (Dunlop 1944, 1957) and his own practical experiences of, among other things, mediation, and partly on a summary of comparative IR research. For the purpose of describing the present situation in IR research, he by way of introduction quoted the British philosopher Julian Huxley:

“Mountains of facts have been piled up on the plains of human ignorance. [...] The result is an abundance of raw material. Large heaps lay unused, or were used in an arbitrary and incomplete way” (Dunlop 1958/1993, p X).

In order to remedy this sad state of affairs, Dunlop developed a systems theory model, according to which an IR system consists of agents, contexts, rules of the game, and a common ideology. The concept of IR system includes national systems as well as sub-systems at the trade and local levels. The *agents* of the system are made up of partly employers and employees, as well as their organizations, and partly the most closely concerned governmental agencies. *Contexts* include commodity and production technology, market and budgetary-based restrictions as well as the relations of power in society. *The rules of the game* are considered as the dependent variable, the essence of the IR system; they deal with wages and other terms of employment, and also bargaining and conflict resolution. Finally, *ideology* is defined as “a set of ideas and convictions generally held by the agents, tying the system together into an integrated whole” (Dunlop 1958/1993, p 53). The concept of ideology is connected with the role of agents. Strangely enough, it is not used in the subsequent empirical analysis, however.

One main purpose of Dunlop’s model is to promote IR research that is more systematically comparative. Not only should we compare national IR systems as a whole, but also national sub-systems at the sectoral level. Dunlop himself presents two well-documented examples of the shaping of the rule systems within sectors in different countries. The examples show that sectoral-specific technical and market-based contexts within the coal industry and the building industry tend to produce relatively similar rule systems concerning wage formation, general terms of employment and industrial safety, whereas contexts of power, the status of the agents, and the rules of conflict resolution to a larger extent are determined at the national level. According to Dunlop, the latter national differences were explained by historical factors, such as the timing of the nation-building and the industrial revolution, and the early development of the trade-union movement. Three ideal types of élite strategies of industrialization and establishment of national IR systems were discerned, and used as analytical tools: the feudalistic and paternalistic type, the middle-class liberal and market-oriented type, and also the revolutionary and party élite-governed type. In a subsequent chapter, Dunlop tried to apply these ideal types even to the development of rule systems at the workplace level as regards recruitment, training and the dismissal of labour, wage formation and conflict resolution. In this connection, without Dunlop explicitly pointing it out, there

emerged a striking similarity between the feudalistic and revolutionary type: included in the latter one were communist regimes as well as liberation movements and one-party regimes in the developing countries. Only the liberal type was proven to be consistent with strong, independent organizations taking on responsibility for negotiations and conflict resolution. In the two types of more or less totalitarian regimes “there is no room for conflict” (Dunlop 1958/1993 p 280).

Like all systems theory, Dunlop’s general IR theory undeniably has a high degree of universality, achieved at the price of vagueness and relatively low efficacy of explanation, however. Furthermore, Dunlop’s contempt of the Human Relations School results in shortcomings as he overlooks factors internal to the firm and as his macro-economic model, in fact, is not general, since it only includes the unionized sector of the economy. In spite of these shortcomings (or perhaps because of them), Dunlop’s book some years later gave rise to the biggest debate over IR theory ever occurring in the USA. It is not possible to discuss this debate in this context. Strangely enough, Dunlop himself hardly took part in the debate at all. In the revised, new edition of *Industrial Relations Systems* from 1993, in connection with a newly written “Commentary” he listed some forty articles and books connected with his own book in a footnote, but more or less refrained from defending himself. Instead, the commentary was devoted to a restatement of the basic thoughts of IR theory and some attempts to apply them to developments over the last decades. On the one hand, the hypothesis of convergence noted above was applied to the Soviet Union – with a not very convincing result. On the other hand, the criticism against *Industrial Relations Systems* was met with extensive references to the alleged utility of the systems approach for practical analysis and problem solving: four case studies of conflicts, in which Dunlop himself had been involved, were brought forward to support this assertion.

### **Industrial Relations: the Desintegration and Decline of 1960-2000**

During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a gradual weakening of American IR activities at the same time as these continued to expand quantitatively (new journals were started up, membership in the IRRA trebled, the PhD programmes were enlarged). The weakening came from two directions. On the one hand, the PM School broke free – inter alia as a consequence of Dunlop’s and Kerr’s criticism of human relations research – and started up its own, increasingly successful activity. The new term of human resource management (HRM) was then often used. On the other hand, IR scholars focused more or less exclusively on the shrinking unionized sector (the rate of workforce unionization in the business sector of the economy dropped from approximately 30 to 15 per cent), collective bargaining agreements, and the problems of underprivileged groups in the labour market. This resulted in a growing gap between, on the one hand, traditional, practically problem-oriented IR research originating from the New Deal tradition and, on the other

hand, a new, neo-classically-oriented and theoretically and methodologically advanced school within labour economics originating in the Chicago School. The two-way weakening of IR was followed by a self-critical debate among IR scholars over the correct balance between practical problem-solving and theoretically and methodologically-conscious science building, over multi-disciplinary advantages and disadvantages, as well as over the possibilities of claiming that IR is an academic discipline with the theoretical essence belonging to it. On the latter issue, most contributors to the debate took a sceptical view.

The present situation of American IR research is characterized above all by a sharp decline quantitatively and in terms of resources. The decline gathered momentum in the 1980s, and this can clearly be put in relation to the prevailing conservative political climate and to the trade-union movement's noticeable setbacks. "Non Union" and "Human Resource Management" became the order of the day everywhere in businesses and at universities. It is true that IR programmes held its own ground at some of the larger universities where they for a long time had held a strong position, such as Cornell and Wisconsin, and research with a diversified IR orientation resulted in some important pieces of work in the course of the 1980s and 1990s by scholars at MIT and Harvard, to be considered below (Thomas Kochan, Robert McKersie, Richard Freeman). Otherwise, however, IR was superseded by HRM at all levels within the university system; no new IR units were established and several of the old ones were discontinued or changed their names to HRM. Membership in the IRRA dropped and its status was thereby reduced; the association became a kind of sanctuary for pro-trade union IR scholars and traditional types of practitioners. Underlying this decline of IR we can discern not only an ideological current, which is connected with the process of dissolution of the trade unions and systems of collective bargaining within the private sector during the 1980s and 1990s, but also an intra-disciplinary reaction associated with the academic labour market: the inability to agree about what should be the theoretical essence of the IR field results in scholars resorting to the disciplines in which they were trained (economics, sociology, political science, labour law), and where the prospects of promotion and the intellectual environment is better. The term industrial relations itself came to be associated with New Deal nostalgia and a shrinking, obsolete industrial sector. One survival strategy that has been suggested is changing the name to *Employment Relations* and a restoration of the old connection between the ILE and PM Schools (Kaufman 1993, chap. 6-8).

### **Thomas A. Kochan and Robert B. McKersie**

Together with his disciplinary colleagues Harry C. Katz (Cornell) and Robert B. McKersie (MIT), Thomas A. Kochan, professor of industrial relations at MIT, published the first major empirical study of the development after World War II of the American IR system in 1986: *The Transformation of American Industrial*

*Relations*.<sup>8</sup> Kochan and his associates explicitly referred to Dunlop's systems model, but they directed their interest towards its weakest point, i.e., the conception of the IR system's common, unifying ideology. For so long as contexts and the behaviour of the agents remained reasonably stable, such as during the New Deal era up to the 1970s, the model could possibly be justified. Since then, however, this system's perspective has "with its emphasis on stability and consensus among the agents in respect to their different roles" become increasingly irrelevant: it can not explain the dynamic factors in an IR system in radical transformation (Kochan et al. 1986, p 7).

Like Dunlop's model, Kochan's revised theoretical framework proceeds from contexts, such as labour and commodity markets, technology and political relations of power. But what is new is a strategic agent perspective according to which the outcome of the IR processes is determined by the interaction of the pressure from contexts and strategies that the agents choose as a response to that pressure. Another novelty is the focus on management strategy; management is considered as the initiator of all of the important changes in the system, whereas it in research prior to this solely was perceived as passively reacting to the trade unions' demands. In the new, upside-down perspective, management stands out as active innovator of employment relationships in concord with the big changes of increasing internationalization and the tougher competition in the labour and commodity markets since the 1960s. The unions and the policies of the federal government, on the other hand, play the parts of conservative keepers of the heritage from the New Deal. According to Kochan, the active management strategy was never in reality that new, since it is connected with a century-old tradition of individualistic hostility towards trade unions, which was moderated during the New Deal era mainly for tactical reasons, but never entirely abandoned and, therefore, easily revived, especially in the 1980s of Ronald Reagan. The latent, but pronounced, non-union attitude among the American employers prior to the 1970s has been overlooked by most IR scholars, incorrectly assuming that management had accepted unions as legitimate interlocutors and collective bargaining as the way to manage business.

According to Kochan's new formula, the analysis of the actions of the parties ought to focus on three levels within the firm (and corresponding ones within the political arena). At *the top level*, more long-term, strategic decisions about the aim and direction of the business, investment and human resource strategies are made by management. By comparison to Europe, the trade unions and the government bodies are relatively passive at this level in the USA. *The intermediary level* is the scene for the traditional type of labour-management relations, i.e., collective bargaining agreements and other forms of co-operation with unions. In this context,

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Kochan defended his doctor's thesis in IR in 1973 at the University of Wisconsin and published a number of works within the field's different branches (inter alia 1980/1988). In 1992-1995 he was the president of the International Industrial Relations Association.

the government's contribution is labour legislation and the administration connected to that. Finally, *the workplace level* is affected by the decisions at the two higher levels, but especially by the continuous direct relations of personnel management with the individual employees without much intervention by unions. To some extent, these relations are developed within the framework of government legislation on, for instance, the work environment and individual rights of the employees.

Kochan and his associates apply their three-level model in both a wide-ranging and circumstantial description of the changes in the American IR system since the 1940s, based on prior research as well as current facts from extensive inquiries. The study also includes the increasingly dominant, unorganized sector of private business – a new device enabling systematic comparisons with the steadily shrinking unionized sector. What is shown is that approximately 40 per cent of the decline in the rate of workforce unionisation is explained by structural factors, such as the transition from manufacturing industry to service industries, from blue-collar jobs to white-collar professions, and from the Northern states to Southern and Western states. However, another equally important explanation of the decline of unions is management's increasingly sophisticated and successful "non union strategy". New forms of remuneration have been introduced, such as profit-sharing and partnership; there has also been a concentration on new forms of direct influence over the workplace for those employed and new work organizations featuring autonomous work groups – all of which is aimed at creating employment relationships so good that trade unions are made redundant. The management strategy was secured as the high-ranking managers themselves took care of human resource management, including the setting of wages at the expense of the personnel departments' traditional personnel policies, which had been the product of co-operation with unions.

In the course of the 1980s, previously large wage increases in the unionized sector were checked. There were even some wages cuts under the threat of reductions in employment (concession bargaining). The number of strikes dropped to the lowest level since the 1930s. The unionized parts of the labour market still generally had a higher level of wages than the unorganized ones, however. Despite this, trade unions became increasingly powerless. According to Kochan, there is a need for strengthening the unions' position for the sake of balance. He points to some ways of achieving that: a change in the legislation with the object of putting an end to the increasingly common illegal actions vis-à-vis trade union members; preserve the advances in the HRM strategy and strengthen them, for instance, through employee representation on the board of directors in larger firms; modernize union strategies and work practices.

As we have seen, Kochan's major work on developments in the American IR system results in a number of normative recommendations to labour and management, and the federal government; this is entirely congruent with the practically-

oriented IR tradition from Commons and Dunlop. To a certain degree, this also applies to another work by Kochan's associate Robert B. McKersie, professor of management at MIT. Together with Richard E. Walton, business economist at the Harvard Business School, McKersie published the classical work on applied theory of bargaining, *A Behavioural Theory of Labour Negotiations*, in 1965. This time with a third associate, Walton and McKersie returned in 1994 to the field of theory of negotiations with a survey based on case studies of 13 firms within three sectors: *Strategic Negotiations. A Theory of Change in Labor-Management Relations*. The authors connect with a fundamental distinction in the former book between "distributive bargaining" and "integrative bargaining". The distributive bargaining solely deals with the redistribution of the output of production, and tends towards a win-lose engagement and distrust between labour and management. The integrative bargaining, on the other hand, is characterized by the aim of achieving consensus on common interests and co-operation aimed at increasing the output of production. In the new survey, there is a study of two types of bargaining strategies, "forcing" and "fostering", used by the employers alternatively or in combination with one another. The forcing strategy involves distributive bargaining, a widening of opposed interests and attempts to create disunity within the opposite party. The fostering strategy is based on integrative bargaining, measures that create trust and a furthering of internal unity among both of the parties.

McKersie and Walton discovered several examples of forced strategy, sometimes combined with threats of discontinuing the bargaining relationship by means of shifting the production elsewhere. They also observed some examples of a genuinely fostering strategy in which there was co-operation with unions. However, the general pattern (approximately half of the cases) was a combination of both, or a changeover between, the principal types of bargaining strategies. The authors discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the ideal types and the mixed forms and recommend the latter ones, since those proved to be most successful for the firms concerned. The recommendations bear reference to agreements on continuous factual matters as well as "social contracts", i.e., fundamental compromises concerning issues of the distribution of value and consensus on "the rules of the game".

### **Richard B. Freeman**

Together with his colleague James L. Medoff, Richard B. Freeman, professor of economics at Harvard University, in 1984 published a study of the functions of the American trade unions, which already has become a classic: *What Do Unions Do?* Freeman is an ingenious and very productive scholar within, inter alia, the labour economics field, well-known and respected even in Sweden as a skilful empiricist (Freeman 1989). *What Do Unions Do?* is a synthesis of a great many articles and reports from many years' research. The basis of the project is an ingeniously basic

distinction between the “two faces” of the trade unions: on the one hand, a monopoly face demonstrating the unions’ monopoly power of raising their members’ wages and fringe benefits at the expense of, for instance, the interests of the consumers and, on the other hand, a face expressing collective opinions (“a collective voice/institutional response face”). There are good reasons for the person only seeing the monopoly face to be critical, whereas the person just reflecting on the trade unions voicing of their members’ concerns presumably is appreciative. We must consider both faces if we are to put forward an impartial and factual representation of the importance of the trade unions for society. This is what Freeman and Medoff do by means of systematic comparisons of the organized and unorganized parts of the private sector in the USA. The comparisons proceed from problems and hypotheses connected with the monopoly aspect as well as the representative function. The study is based on advanced, quantitative analyses of vast quantities of facts from surveys, public ones as well as ones that have been compiled by the authors themselves. The analysis is presented in a highly legible style. *What Do Unions Do?* is quite simply a masterpiece – methodologically, pedagogically and stylistically.

The main result is that the advantages of union organization considerably outweigh the disadvantages; “the voice/response face of unions dominates the monopoly face”. More often than not, trade unions have a favourable impact on the firms’ effectivity and productivity, as well as the distribution of income, and they also voice the workers’ concerns in societal matters. If trade unions were to disappear that would be a misfortune to the USA, but, on the other hand, if they were to organize the whole labour market that would be damaging. A strengthening of the influence of unions would most likely result in a general increase of welfare. At the same time, however, it would reduce the profitability of the firms concerned, since firms bound by agreements invariably pay their employees more and agree to more fringe benefits than unorganized firms do. As unions in the 1970s pursued large increases in wage costs, they severely affected firms with collective agreements, particularly smaller and medium-sized ones, since the average differential between those firms bound by agreements and those that were not increased by approximately 9 percentage units. This is part of the explanation of the strong anti-union current of the 1980s.

One of the advantages of union organization is that it promotes employment stability. In this respect, the union effect is larger than what would be explained just by higher wages and fringe benefits. The system of negotiations on collective agreements and regulations on dispute resolution create confidence among those employed that their complaints will be impartially tried and rights connected with seniority will be respected. Unions represent impartial procedures and this has a larger effect on the readiness to stay on in an employment than 20 per cent higher wages as compared to those at comparable unorganized workplaces would. In part, the higher productivity in the majority of firms bound by agreements is explained

by exactly that stability in the terms of employment and, in connection to that, the climate of co-operation in labour-management relations at the workplace level. But when labour-management relations are poor, there will also be poor productivity figures – even in unionized firms.

According to Freeman and Medoff, the ability of the American trade unions to voice the employees' concerns in societal matters is greatest in general issues of social welfare, whereas every attempt to change the course of labour legislation so as to promote unionization has failed ever since the late 1940s. The existing law on labour's right to organize into unions (the Taft-Hartley Act 1947) gives management, assisted by HRM consultants and the like, almost unlimited possibilities to unilaterally carry on propaganda work against union organization at the workplace. Hence it follows that even illegal methods are used. This probably explains most of the unions' sharp decline in the private sector since the 1950s. On the other hand, in the public sector, where the system of regulations is less unfavourable to union organisation, there is an increase in the rate of workforce unionization.

Furthermore, Freeman and Medoff demonstrate how the popular media image of trade unions as being corrupt and undemocratic is incorrect. In most cases, members are content with their own trade union, there is a high turnout at meetings and union elections, election irregularities are rare. Thus, at the local level internal democracy is working well, but at the central level we find the well-known problems of concentration of power and lack of public control. Corruption, embezzlement and other kinds of criminality are, however, exceptions – it chiefly applies to the transport, building, and hotel and restaurant sectors –, and there is much evidence that points to such occurrences being more wide-spread in firms than in unions.

When *What Do Unions Do?* was published in 1984 the rate of workforce unionization in the private sector in the USA had dropped to barely 19 per cent. Ten years later it had been further reduced to 13 per cent. Today, probably only one out of ten of those privately employed are organized into unions, whereas the degree of unionization in the public sector approaches 40 per cent. Richard Freeman, like Thomas Kochan and other working life researchers, considers the continuing weakening of the trade-union movement within the private industry as a big problem for the USA. Is it possible that the decline can be checked by means of changed legislation and union self-reform? The recommendations of scholars directed towards that purpose have not so far made any impact. As an alternative to increases in union influence, Freeman has proposed a relaxation of the prohibition of business unions through legalization of management-initiated forms of employee participation and co-determination – a strategy, however, that was rejected by unions, and by President Clinton as well (Nycander 1998, p 124).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Freeman presented these opinions, for instance, in his capacity as a member in the labour legislation commission, which John Dunlop was in charge of, in the early 1990s. The not very



Another path has been proposed by Charles C. Heckscher, professor of industrial relations at the Rutgers University. In *The New Unionism* (1988/1996), Heckscher's recommendation is that the trade unions break free from the isolation from the public opinion, something largely created by themselves as a result of their conflict-oriented strategy. They ought to abandon their demands for monopoly and associate themselves with other interest groups, such as consumer interest groups, women's associations, and different kinds of action groups. Such an "associational unionism" could be supported by a labour law reform aiming in the spirit of pluralism at a consensually-based formation of norms, not as with the existing legislation based on administrative directives. However, support for such a reform has so far been weak, especially outside of trade-union movement (Nycander 1998, p 128).

### **New Developments in the Sun Belt**

Since the 1960s there are two vital IR departments at the University of California in Berkeley and Los Angeles which still maintain their positions despite the general decline of American IR research. Nowadays, the department at Berkeley is strongly oriented towards labour economics; this is, for instance, reflected in its journal *Industrial Relations. A Journal of Economy & Society* (established in 1961). But there is also a new type of ambition involving the crossing over of dividing lines and, to a certain degree, it is cross-disciplinary. Thus, in 1988 the department organized a symposium on "Behavioral Research in Industrial Relations" with the purpose of furthering a more theoretically and cross-disciplinarily-oriented research than the traditional one (*Industrial Relations*, vol 27, 1988). Two years later, the IR-oriented labour economist Daniel Mitchell, from the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), in his capacity as the organizer of a

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radical reform proposals from the "Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations" in 1994-1995 were never submitted to the Congress. A number of IR scholars, among others Thomas Kochan, discussed the significance of the labour legislation reform and the possibilities of carrying it out in a special issue of the journal *Industrial Relations. A Journal of Economy and Society*, vol 34, 1995, p 329-401. – As a member of the Commission, Freeman took the initiative of carrying through a major survey investigation – the first one in more than 20 years – of privately employed workers' views on their jobs, their employers, their influence over the workplace and their representation. The results of this "Workers Representation and Participation Survey" were preliminarily shown to the Dunlop Commission and published as a small, solidly-factual, and easily read book in 1999: Richard B. Freeman & Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want*. What was apparent was that the majority of those employed wanted more influence, better representation, more co-operation with management – i.e., more equal relations than those in the prevailing system. A directly elected, co-operative body for dispute resolutions as the method of reducing "the representation/participation gap" was preferred by the majority to union representation. The attitude towards trade unions is, however, surprisingly positive: the local union is strongly supported by its members, and one third of those unorganized want to be organized; all in all, the trade-union movement is supported by 44 per cent of those privately employed, almost five times more than the actual rate of workforce unionization in the private sector.

symposium on “The Economics of Human Resource Management”, raised the question whether the differences between labour economics and the behavioural scientists within HRM research could be reconciled. The answer was yes: the economists’ theoretical and methodological advances could, in regards to work organization, personnel policies, and labour-management relations, be integrated with HRM/IR research at the micro level. The UCLA associate Sanford Jacoby claimed that neo-classically-oriented labour economists had a good deal to learn from the old ILE School as regards the historical dimension and the realism of behavioural sciences (Jacoby 1990; Mitchell & Zaidi 1990).

These examples from the University of California demonstrate that today there is an ambition within American labour economics research to approach the institutional and behavioural sciences research concerning the terms of employment. This ambition has been strongly supported by Bruce Kaufman, professor of economics and manager of the IR unit at Georgia State University. Outside of the USA, Bruce Kaufman is mostly known for his standard work *The Origins and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United States* (1993). However, he has also made important contributions to the development of theory within IR, focusing on the need for closer relations of economists with behavioural scientists within labour market research. According to Bruce Kaufman, it is not a matter of abandoning the rational choice model of neo-classical economics, but it needs to be supplemented with theoretical and empirical input from research in the behavioural sciences, particularly psychology, so as to attain more realism. Motivation, cognition and emotion are the key concepts in a more psychologically realistic analysis of decision-making processes in working life and the labour market. For example, such a type of analysis can yield better explanations to strikes than that of the purely rational calculation, which is assumed to be made by “the economic man”. Bruce Kaufman sums up his conclusion in the following way:

“The production of knowledge is inherently an independent, multi-disciplinary exercise. [...] And, I should make clear, the interdisciplinary approach I advocate is a two-way street – economists need to be more open to research in the behavioral sciences, but behavioral scientists in fields such as organizational behaviour and sociology also have much to learn from economics.” (Kaufman 1989, 1994, 1999, quotation 1999 p 387).<sup>10</sup>

We can discern three theoretical perspectives in the research reports and contributions to the debate within American IR research in recent years which appear to

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<sup>10</sup> As regards behavioural scientific explanations to strikes, Kaufman refers to, among others, Hoyt Wheeler (professor of IR at the University of South Carolina), *Industrial Conflict. An Integrative Theory* (1985). – Further mentionable examples of the type of cross-disciplinary ambitions recommended by Kaufman are the two journals *Journal of Economic Psychology* (established in 1984) and *Journal of Behavioral Economics* (established in 1980). *Journal of Labor Economics* was started at that same period in time (1982).

involve a certain reorientation. At the same time, these perspectives are firmly established within the traditions of the older, unified IR domain. To use Sanford Jacoby's terminology, the first perspective would be called *New Institutionalism* (NEO-ILE). Here we are dealing with an enlargement of the field of observation, so that institutions other than the trade unions, collective agreements and legislative regulations are included, such as alternative methods of conflict resolution, new types of reward systems and new forms of employee representation. The aim of this "new efficiency-oriented institutional labor economics" is to combine micro and macro economic analyses, and reconcile economics and behavioural sciences (Jacoby 1990). The new institutional perspective is close to the well-established, more practically-oriented research, usually called human resource management. Increases in productivity and profitability is the superior objective in *the HRM perspective*. It deals principally with the evaluation of new, innovative work organization practices, employee participation and payments based on results. HRM could be called the application of the theory of human capital at the micro level, which has been advanced by using elements from behavioural sciences.<sup>11</sup>

The third perspective is *International Comparisons* of national models or labour market regimes. Following John Dunlop, comparative IR research in the USA – as in Europe, but to an even higher degree – has made a strong impact in recent years, especially in the 1990s. Richard Freeman and one of his associates have thus compared the relationship between unionization and the union wage premium in the USA and other OECD countries, and discovered that the American unions' exceptionally sharp decline is largely explained by their capacity to get out relatively high wages (Blanchflower & Freeman 1992). Using an approach which in parts is cross-disciplinary, the political scientist Harold Wilensky (UC Berkeley) has studied "the great American job creation machine" in a comparative perspective (Wilensky 1992). There are many more examples that could be mentioned. A new, interesting device was introduced in 1998, when the Department of IR at Berkeley with a symposium on "Regional Studies of Comparative Industrial Relations" promoted an enlargement of the comparative perspective so as to include also Eastern Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The reports, which lay stress on the multi-disciplinary approach, demonstrated that methods coping with the more or less similar challenges resulting from economic globalization and ideological liberalization were different in different countries; this is explained by differing histo-

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<sup>11</sup> According to a frequently quoted research survey from 1996, the distribution and the results of innovative HRM methods in the American industry has been studied by a large number of scholars using a variety of methods. All of the studies show that in the last two decades at least some form of HRM measure has been introduced in the great majority of the firms that have been investigated, and that frequently this has resulted in certain increases in productivity. However, only barely one quarter of the firms have carried through different, coherent HRM methods - and only such a strategy is what results in large, and more enduring, improvements in productivity and increases in profitability (Ichniowski et al. 1996; cf. Osterman 1995).

rical experiences, institutions, and cultural patterns. These conclusions meant that George Strauss, the principal person behind the presentation of the reports, recommended a development of theory within IR aiming at general principles, focusing on the dividing line between economic freedom and justice for those employed (Strauss 1998).

It would appear as if these three theoretical perspectives on IR research have general validity. There is cause for returning to them in the subsequent survey on IR activities in other countries and, particularly, in the concluding discussion on the problems of theory formation within the extensive IR domain. What ought also be discussed is whether there are any more perspectives that are completely or partly lacking in American research, which so far (quite naturally) has been almost entirely oriented towards the complex of problems in the labour market relations in the USA.

### **The USA and Great Britain: a Comparison**

As noted earlier, we can observe a certain reorientation from the union side to the management side in British industrial relations research since the 1970s. This shift in the main focus might be said to reflect a shift in power in the labour market: in the course of the 1980s, the unions lost the initiative at the national political level as well as at the local level, where employers today almost entirely determine the business order of the day. As should be clear from the account above, a corresponding change in the main focus as regards labour-management relations and research in the USA is even more easily discernible. A comparative study of the orientation of labour-management relations and IR research in both of the countries will demonstrate interesting similarities as well as pronounced differences.

IR emerged as a field of research with an independent profile in the USA as early as around 1920 and attained a relatively strong position at several universities during the New Deal era. IR became identified with practically-oriented reform and a positive attitude towards the trade-union movement. The pioneer John R. Commons personifies that attitude. The major break-through came after World War II, at the same time as there was a growth in the bargaining power of trade unions and their political influence. This period of greatness lasted until the 1960s when the Human Relations School broke free from the IR community and, in connection to that, the basis was laid for the very successful human resource management strategy in the labour market and its reflection in research. At the same time, the unbroken trend of membership losses and setbacks for trade unions in the private sector started, gaining momentum in the course of the 1980s and still in evidence.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *Industrial Democracy* (1897) is evidence of Great Britain being first with the pioneering work within IR research, but it was not until 1930 (and then on a limited scale) that IR was introduced as an academic disci-

pline. The real breakthrough came as late as in the 1960s. During this period of greatness for British IR research, the University of Oxford at first held a leading position in the field. This period largely coincided with the Labour Party's tenure in office and an extraordinary position of power for the trade-union movement. But since the early 1970s, the well-equipped IR unit at the University of Warwick has occupied a totally dominating position. In the 1980s, there was a shift in the main focus of the Warwick School's orientation from labour to management. As in the USA – but not in such an exaggerated way, however – human resource management set the tone, at the same time as the employers and their ideology dominated politics as well as working life.

The large similarity between the USA and Great Britain is thus the conspicuous parallellism between, on the one hand, the orientation of IR research (in the broad sense) and, on the other hand, the relations of power between the parties in the labour market and their supporting troupes on the political battlefield. However, some distinct differences can also be observed. First, the breakthrough of IR research came much earlier in the USA than it did in Great Britain; this is probably explained by leading universities in the USA not being as old and bound by tradition as the British ones. Secondly, once they had got properly started in the 1960s, IR activities in Great Britain were largely concentrated to only one university (first Oxford and thereafter Warwick), whereas the large community of American universities for a long time have consisted of three strong IR centres: Wisconsin, Cornell, Harvard and MIT; the University of California was added more recently. Thirdly, influenced by the country's membership in the EU, an international comparative perspective has made a larger impact on British IR research than it has on American research, which up to the 1990s was almost entirely nationally-oriented. Finally, the shift in the main focus from IR to HRM was considerably more far-reaching in the USA than in Great Britain, especially quantitatively and in terms of resources. In its turn, this is related to that the shift in power, which has been unfavourable to the unions, has been emerging for a longer period of time and has been much more far-reaching in the labour market regime of the USA than in that of Great Britain.

The fact that there is parallellism between the orientation of IR research and the relations of power in the labour market, and in politics, could benevolently be viewed as IR scholars practically and realistically adapting to a changing reality. Of course, both in Great Britain and the USA, the practically-oriented empiricism has been predominant, and it has not been possible to produce any theoretical superstructure that could have resulted in more stability and long-term perspectives for IR research. But a critical point of view must be added: is there not an opportunistic feature to this adaptation to changes in relations of power and the political climate? What happens to the true freedom of research when the main focus of the economic and political power tends to be what concerns many scholars?

### III. Industrial Relations: an Overview

#### **Industrial Relations in the Rest of the World: a Few Examples**

Compared to Great Britain and the USA, the two countries in which IR originated, information concerning the origins and development of this field of research in other countries is more scant and less easily accessible. My own search for analyses in the form of books and articles that provide overviews, similar to Bruce Kaufman's book on IR in the USA and corresponding articles about Great Britain, has been relatively unproductive (somewhat with the exception of Canada and Australia). Since it has not been possible to carry out the comprehensive basic research on the history of ideas and learning that is necessary, I will have to confine myself to some isolated observations and the results from twenty years of studying and dealing with the IR world and some of its main figures. The analysis will be restricted to those countries where IR activities have apparently been developed furthest and a brief outline of a few examples.

The vigorous and empirically-oriented British IR research has seen interesting equivalents in the old Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia and New Zealand during the last three decades. In Canada, where IR activities started to gain momentum as early as in 1940s, a relatively ambitious discourse about IR theory has developed in recent years, often with concrete applications to Canadian conditions. Up to the 1970s, research and teaching was dominated by a systems-theoretical perspective with an emphasis on stability, community of interests between equal parties and industrial peace. This systems theorizing has since then been challenged by a more conflict- and historically-oriented perspective usually called "political economy" (Adams & Metz 1993; Giles & Murray 1988; Hébert et al. 1988; Meltz 1989, 1991).

In Australia and New Zealand, research and teaching in IR has been inspired by a very special type of institutions for conflict resolution in the labour market peculiar to these countries, viz., obligatory government-determined mediation and arbitration. These institutions were introduced as early as the turn of the twentieth-century in connection with the emancipation from the British Empire, but have recently been largely dismantled. Since the late 1980s, IR activities at universities have inter alia been oriented towards the adaptation of the system of conflict resolution to an environment characterized partly by far-reaching economic de-regulation and the weakening of unions. In Australia, this is reflected in a shift in the focus from institutional analysis – in most cases executed within a systems-theoretical framework influenced by Dunlop and focusing on trade unions – to a management-oriented perspective, similar to human resource management in the USA. Many IR representatives have in the course of the 1990s tried to reconcile

HRM with IR in a new concept, *Employment Relations* (Dabscheck 1993; Davis & Lansbury 1993; Kelly 1999).

In the neighbouring Nordic countries, just as in Sweden, some equivalents to the departments of industrial relations in the English-speaking countries have emerged since the 1960s. But nowhere has IR been established as an independent academic discipline with its own departments. Instead, the development of IR has taken place within the scope of the discipline in which the scholars initially were trained, generally sociology, and often with multi-disciplinary, university-independent and very practically-oriented institutes for labour market research as its material base (Ryberg & Bruun 1996). Research has largely been concentrated on domestic labour-market relations from a historical and comparative perspective. Some examples of this will be brought forward. In Denmark two research teams – the first one at the Department of Sociology in Copenhagen, the second at Aalborg's University Centre – have carried out extensive surveys of the Danish system of wage negotiations and local wage formation during the 1980s and 1990s (Due et al. 1993, 1994; Ibsen & Stamhus 1993 a, 1993 b). In Norway, the system of wage negotiations and conflict resolution during the post-war period has recently been studied from a Nordic perspective within the framework of a doctor's thesis in sociology at the University of Oslo (Stokke 1998). We might also mention that the interaction of wage negotiations and incomes policy in Norway has been dealt with in a doctor's thesis in history at the University of Trondheim (Fröland 1992). The latter theme has attracted much attention in Finland – a natural consequence of the mixed experiences of more than three decades of government-determined incomes policy (Helander 1982; Kauppinen 1994; Pekkarinen 1991).

In Germany, France and most of continental Europe, research and teaching concerning labour-market relations during the post-war period has been carried out under different labels partly in social science departments at universities linked to the disciplines in which the scholars were initially trained, and partly in independent research institutes linked to the labour market. Apparently sociology and law (labour law) are the principal disciplines in which such scholars were initially trained. In this context, economics does not have as strong representation as in the English-speaking countries (Hyman 1995). Noteworthy examples are the German sociology professors Berndt Keller, Walther Müller-Jentsch and Wolfgang Streek (the latter worked for many years in the USA), who have studied German “*arbeitspolitik*” – at times also called “*industrielle beziehungen*” – from national as well as European viewpoint (Hoffman et al. 1995; Jacobi et al. 1998; Keller 1996, 1997; Streek 1992). The labour law field, which has a central position in Germany, has had Manfred Weiss as its foremost scholar (Weiss 1987), frequently in co-operation with Roger Blanpain, doyen of Belgian labour law research. The advanced Austrian corporatism has diligently been studied by its sociologists and political scientists from an international perspective (Crouch & Traxler 1995; Marin 1985;

Traxler 1998). We also find vigorous IR research in the Netherlands, where the sociologist Jelle Visser holds a leading position particularly through his studies of union membership trends (Leisink 1996; Visser & Waddington 1996; Visser 1998). In Italy, scholars have been strongly oriented towards the problems of corporatism since the 1970s: they have studied the development of the tripartite agreements on incomes policy from being nearly a threat to macro-economic stability to becoming a zone of power in a weakened political system in the course of the 1990s (Regini 1987; Regini & Regalia 1998; Treu 1994).<sup>12</sup> Compared to the smaller European countries, IR research in France has a weak position, primarily oriented towards the organizationally weak but ideologically militant trade-union movement (Dufour & Hege 1997; Goetschy & Jobert 1993; Goetschy 1998). In France and Italy, as in Germany and several other countries in continental Europe, the relatively strong position of labour law research is explained by the fact that labour-market relations are largely regulated by detailed legislation, particularly at the firm level.

As regards the rest of the world, two general observations can be made. On the one hand, IR research in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe is still as weak and tentative as their systems of labour market organizations, labour law and systems of negotiations. Also, the orientation towards labour law research is more pronounced than in the rest of Europe (Mason 1995; Pollert 1999; Standing 1997). On the other hand, Japan appears to assume a leading position among the non-European countries. The Japanese research is predominantly oriented towards law and sociology, like the continental European research. Quite naturally, the focus of research is on the Japanese “model” of labour market relations, which has been much admired by observers ever since the 1970s. Japanese and foreign scholars have competed or co-operated in describing and analysing, for instance, the role of business unions in the – party informal – co-ordinated system of wage negotiations, the surviving patriarchy in large firms with their regular troupes of permanently employed co-workers, which, however, is being challenged by a rapidly growing share of temporarily employed labour as well as by the government’s active regulation of the business sector of the economy (Kuwahara 1993; Morishima 2000; Morishima & Feuille 2000; Sugeno 1993).

In conclusion, IR research in the Nordic countries, continental Europe and Japan is carried on within the scope of the discipline in which the scholars initially were trained (the mother discipline), generally sociology and labour law. It is strongly linked to practical issues, often administered by independent research

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<sup>12</sup> Tiziano Treu, Italian professor of industrial relations and the president of IIRA in 1995-98, as Minister of Labour in the expert-dominated governments, which took office following the collapse of the old party system in 1992, played an important part in the coming into being of three major tripartite agreements in 1992-95 between the government and the labour market’s leading organizations, whereby inflation was checked, government finances were put on a sound basis and real increases in wages were made possible.



institutes. By and large, it has avoided the weakening that affected IR research in the USA in connection with the major setbacks for the trade-union movement since the 1980s. What ought to be added is that there are vigorous IR departments of the British type at many of the universities in Canada and Australia.

### **The International Industrial Relations Association**

In the 1960s, European social scientists began to form international research organizations oriented towards Europe – partly as a means of offsetting the American dominance in the social sciences in the 1950s. The European Consortium for Political Research is a noteworthy example. In the IR field, an European initiative was also taken, but in this case it concerned a world-wide international organization in which the USA would take part from the beginning. The initiative originated from the British Universities Industrial Relations Association. Ben Roberts, professor of industrial relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, was the driving force. Together with the Industrial Relations Research Association in the USA, International Institute for Labour Studies in Geneva and Japan Institute of Labour, the British organization established the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA) in 1966. Ever since the beginning, the IIRA's secretariat has been linked to the UN agency International Labour Office in Geneva, where Alan Gladstone for several decades was the enthusiastic General Secretary of the IIRA. The strong link to the ILO also resulted in the two first world congresses being held in Geneva in 1967 and 1970; the third took place in London in 1973, while the ILO in Geneva once again hosted the fourth congress in 1976. The link to the ILO has had a more enduring structural effect as the IIRA has largely taken over the so-called tripartite system, which ever since the beginning in 1920, when it was administered by the League of Nations, has been fundamental to the ILO. The tripartite system implies that all ILO activities are based on co-operation between representatives of the employers, the employees and the governments of the member countries. This structure still characterizes the membership body of the IIRA. However, the equivalent of the government side is now dominated by an influential element of academics.

The IIRA has three categories of membership: the national IIRA associations have full membership, institutional associate membership is intended for research institutes and university departments, while individual associate membership gives scholars, teachers and practitioners within the field some membership benefits that do not automatically result from membership in a national association. There has been a substantial increase in membership. In the early 1970s, the number of national IIRA associations had increased from the original four founders to 20 and in 1997 the number had grown to 37. During the period 1984-97, institutional membership increased from 26 to 43 and the individual membership body expanded

from 279 to 1,316.<sup>13</sup> The distribution of the membership across countries shows an interesting pattern. There is a pronounced Anglo-Saxon dominance. According to the latest accessible figures from 1997 (IIRA 1997), the USA is clearly in the lead with 455 individual members and eight institutional ones, followed by Australia, Canada and Great Britain with 190, 93 and 44 individual members, respectively, and 2-6 institutional ones. The other large countries generally have 15-some 30 members, nearly all of them individual. Sweden, however, holds an exceptional position with no less than 72 individual members, of which the great majority work in labour-market organizations and governmental agencies; only some ten are linked to the academic world (in the USA, the situation is reversed). I shall return to the Swedish exceptional position and how it should be explained (IIRA 1997).

As regards the distribution of individual members across professional categories, we note that IR activities linked to universities quite naturally holds a top position with 226 persons, followed by human resource management (98). Among the disciplines in which the scholars were initially trained, labour law, economics and business economics (business administration) dominate as each of them answer for about 80 persons, while the contribution from sociology and political science is 45 and 16, respectively. Outside of the academic world, lawyers practising labour law constitute a big group, with more than 100 members. Other large membership categories are personnel administration and public administration (approximately 100 and 70, respectively). Labour-market organizations are relatively poorly represented: 57 members are active in trade unions and 29 in the employer associations (IIRA 1997).

The IIRA's activities have been completely dominated by its congresses and activities linked to these. Having a continuously growing number of participants – but with an arrangement that has basically not been changed – world congresses are generally held every third year: following the opening meetings in Geneva and London mentioned above, the fifth congress was held in Paris in 1979 and the following ones in Kyoto, Japan, in 1983, Hamburg 1986, Brussels 1989, Sydney, Australia, 1992, Washington 1995 and Bologna 1998. The twelfth congress took place in Tokyo in 2000 and the next congress will again be hosted by Germany, this time in Berlin, new capital of the federation. It would appear as if the feature of great power nationalism has been intensified in recent years. Regional IIRA congresses are nowadays held every third year between the world congresses; thus, five European meetings have taken place. The reports from both types of congresses have usually been published by the IIRA itself, thus far some ten volumes. An equal number is published by a few of some twenty study groups, mainly

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<sup>13</sup> In 2001, the number of national associations amounted to 38 and the number of institutional members to 50, while the individual membership body had been reduced to approximately 1,200 (information from Professor Tayo Fashoin, the IIRA's General Secretary).

consisting of scholars, who usually have meetings directly after the congresses about contemporary issues of both overall practical and multi-disciplinary character; the most active groups are also active in the meantime.

What is the significance of these IIRA activities? It is difficult to give a straightforward answer to this question. But two main points of view can be emphasized. First, the IIRA is different from the majority of professional academic discipline-oriented organizations by virtue of its influential element of practitioners, represented by labour-market parties as well as governmental agencies. Therefore, the role of the IIRA congresses as meeting place for scholars and practitioners is relatively unique, and it is reasonable to expect that the significance of this role is large in some cases. Secondly, the IIRA's publication business is relatively extensive and of high quality, providing large quantities of valuable concrete information. Unlike the common pattern amongst discipline-oriented scholarly congresses, viz., publication of some of the reports and individual contributions in scientific journals, the IIRA assembles its material from the congresses and study groups in particular publications, which can be advantageous from the point of view of accessibility.

Early on, Sweden formed a national IIRA association. The Swedish IIRA association was established in 1967. This was done on the initiative of the newly formed Institute for Labour Market Issues (predecessor to the Institute for Social Research at the University of Stockholm (SOFI)), the Swedish National Labour Market Board (AMS), the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the Central Organization of Salaried Employees (TCO) and the Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF). It is evident that the initiators reflect the principle of tripartite collaboration, fundamental to the IIRA in Geneva, and which is also explicitly stressed in the association's charter. The tripartite system is also reflected in the membership body's composition, which is dominated by practitioners. As noted above, the latter are also a proportionally very big group of individual members in the IIRA globally. This is probably mainly explained by the large central labour market organizations, and particularly the governmental agencies concerned, having an influential hold over the Swedish association ever since the beginning. The three party collaboration has also left its mark on the structure of the association's discussion meetings, its most important form of activity. Approximately five meetings per year are usually held, generally with introductions by scholars and representatives of the labour market parties. The orientation of the topics has been dominated by employment policy, work organization, wage formation, labour law and issues pertaining to the EU, in this mentioned order.

### **Labour Market Relations in Swedish Research**

Research on the employment relationship, – and on the interest organizations, government institutions and systems of regulation associated with it –, has been

carried out for a long time at Swedish universities, though it was sporadic and uncoordinated right until the 1970s. As a consequence of rapid industrial modernization and associated social problems, “the worker question” became an immediate concern for both politics and research in the 1890s. During the period 1890-1918, relatively vigorous economic research concerning the social and economic problems in the labour market developed, influenced by the predominant orientation in the emerging social science research at large German universities, usually called either the Early Historical School or “Katedersozialismus”. What is characteristic for this research is that wage formation is considered as a collective process, the need for social reforms to help the working class is recognized and trade unions are viewed as necessary and valuable institutions. The most prominent representatives of this orientation – strikingly similar to the Webbs in England and John R. Commons in the USA – were the economists Gösta Bagge and Gustav Cassel and also the economist-oriented sociologist Gustaf Steffen. Most of them were politically conservative with a social-conservative orientation; Bagge’s and Cassel’s outlook changed, however, from “Katedersozialismus” to market liberalism during the interwar period. With his doctor’s thesis *Arbetslönens reglering genom sammanslutningar* (1917), the future leader of the Conservative party, Gösta Bagge (1882-1951), can be said to have founded Swedish labour economics research, though his pioneering role in this respect would soon be forgotten (Carlson 1990, p 149-163; Lönnroth 1990, p 123-148; Pålsson Syll 1988, p 180-182, p 218-222; Wadensjö 1990, p 187-203).

The pioneering “Katedersozialisten” had no successors; the early launch of a Swedish industrial relations tradition stopped short. The Stockholm School of Economics, which emerged in the early 1930s, under the leadership of Bertil Ohlin, Gunnar Myrdal and Erik Lindahl, was only marginally interested in labour market relations issues. After World War II, the organizations in the labour market and their relations to the government were studied by some political scientists: Jörgen Westerståhl (1945) and Gunnar Heckscher (1946), as well as Nils Elvander (1966, 1974 a, b, 1988) and Axel Hadenius (1976). More recently, this political science tradition has been pursued, above all, by Bo Rothstein in his studies of labour market policy (1986, 1992). Practically-oriented economics research on labour market issues, particularly wage formation, was introduced by Rudolf Meidner in the early 1950s and attained a certain institutionalization in the Institute for Labour Market Issues, formed by Meidner himself in the late 1960s; and reorganized in 1971 into the multi-disciplinary Institute for Social Research (SOFI) at the University of Stockholm, where Gösta Rehn became the driving force (Meidner 1984; Rehn 1988).

In the early 1950s, an institute for behaviourally-oriented work life research called the Swedish Council for Personnel Administration (the PA Council) was established at the initiative of SAF in collaboration with LO and TCO. For a quarter of a century, extensive practically-oriented workplace research of the type

that today is usually called human resource management in the USA and Great Britain was carried out. At the same time, an even more extensive consulting activity administered by the PA Council was developed. In the late 1970s, LO and TCO broke off their engagement with this tripartite forum. This upheaval resulted in a transformation of the PA Council into the Swedish Council for Management and Worklife Issues in the early 1980s. With a connection to the academic world, the new council pursued research in the form of programmes during a ten year period, partly on the significance of the Swedish system of social organization for the renewal of firms, and partly on management and organization in the business sector of the economy and public administration. Some projects within this multi-disciplinary programme had a pronounced IR orientation.

Financed by a newly created fund for working life research, the Swedish Centre for Work Life (ALC) was established in Stockholm in 1977. The explicit objective was to promote problem-oriented and practical research about working life in general and the implementation of the law on Co-determination (1977) in particular. In order to accentuate this new orientation, the ALC was assigned an independent position in relation to the universities and placed under a board that was composed of relevant social interests. The research at the ALC was above all oriented towards work organization and work-place relations, union strategies and the situation for women in the labour market. However, the intended multidisciplinary did not amount to much in practice. The sociologists became totally dominant along with a small group of business economists and ethnogeographers. Economics research about wage formation and employment never secured a foothold at the ALC, and was instead to be carried on at the universities – and also at the Trade Union Institute for Economic Research (FIEF, formed by LO in 1985) that has a distinct economics approach to its research. Owing to this, the Swedish Centre for Work Life missed its chance of becoming Sweden's true centre for industrial relations. More deliberation, in general, and a new orientation in such a direction has, however, come about in connection with piecemeal reorganizations leading to what nowadays is called the National Institute for Working Life. Here we can observe a strong orientation towards work organization and production technology. What in this context also ought to be mentioned is that ever since the 1970s sociological and, to a some extent, business economics and ethnogeographically-oriented working life research is carried on at the universities of technology, the Department of Technology and Social Change at the University of Linköping, and also at some other universities.

In the 1980s, economics research about the labour market gained momentum in several university departments. Labour economics research on a broad spectrum of issues directly or indirectly linked to the employment relationship is today primarily carried on at the universities in Stockholm – especially at the Institute for International Economics and SOFI – and Uppsala. Examples of this is research on the general wage trend and its relationship to inflation and unemployment, and

also labour market policy measures, wage differences between men and women, wage systems and forms of remuneration other than wages, the effects of legislation on security of employment and much more. The Office of Labour Market Policy Evaluation (IFAU, Uppsala) and its predecessors, funded by the Department of Employment, have made some impact on this dynamic development of labour economics research. It took a relatively long time before the Swedish economists took a grasp at the labour market, but once they had done so it was all the more firm.

In the 1970s, the history of working life became a major field of research in Sweden, clearly related to the IR domain. Work organization and technology, the labour-market parties' struggle over wages and working hours, the trade-union movement's strategies and its outcome at different levels, the government's intervention in the labour market and much more have been investigated in economic history – above all, in the department at the University of Uppsala. Some economic historians in Lund and historians in Stockholm have also made major contributions to research on the history of working life. What ought to be mentioned in this context is the large research programme, initiated by LO at the time of its hundredth anniversary in 1998, *Swedish Trade Union Movement after World War II*. Some of the books emanating from this research have a particularly pronounced IR profile (Hellberg 1997; Johansson & Magnusson 1998; Åmark 1998).

In the early 1980s, a similar research programme was started by SAF, where some historians and social scientists looked into SAF and its relations to the surrounding world and opposite parties during the period of 1930-1970 (De Geer 1986; follow-up in De Geer 1989, 1992; Kuuse 1986). What is conspicuous is that the trade-union movement has been investigated to a considerably larger extent than the employer side. However, recently a certain shift in focus has occurred, partly facilitated by SAF opening up its archives for research. In both Sweden and internationally, employers and their associations nowadays attract much more attention than earlier.

Finally, something ought to be said about research on labour law. Advanced research on labour law, though not extensive in the quantitative sense, has been carried out at the law faculties in Lund, Stockholm and Uppsala for a long time. In the 1990s, this research has obtained valuable contributions from the National Institute for Working Life. Unfortunately, the research on labour law has in an altogether too great extent existed on its own without very much collaboration with social science research on the employment relationship. The experiences from Great Britain, the USA and many continental European countries, especially Belgium, Italy and Germany, show that this need not be so. In these countries, the legal dimension in the IR domain frequently holds a central position and is often, to a certain degree, integrated into the other disciplines.

In conclusion, it may be said that the Swedish research and teaching within the broad domain of labour market relations got an early start in the spirit of multi-

disciplinarity, but then stopped short in the interwar period. It experienced a new start in the 1970s boom for pro-union research on workplace-issues, which was followed by a period of consolidation from the 1980s in the spirit of research on labour economics, the history of working life and industrial sociology. Moreover, there is also a political science and labour law tradition of varying influence. The attempts to supplement university research on working life and the labour market (disciplinarily disorganized and, in terms of resources, for a long time weak) with sectorally-divided research institutes have not been entirely successful. Thus, there is a need for a new and more co-ordinated attention to academic research and research studies on labour market relations. In the spirit of synergy effects, the multi-disciplinarity might thereby be shown to be advantageous.

### **Industrial Relations: Four Theoretical Perspectives**

All reasoning about a theory – or theories – of industrial relations has to be based on the fact that the concept has a double signification: on the one hand, it refers to the practice which is related to the employment relationship in working life, in the labour market and in politics; on the other hand, it refers to the research and education activities which have this practice as their object of study. Sometimes the two meanings of the concept are confused in the IR literature. I shall try to avoid to do this in the following presentation.

Thus, the object of study for IR as a field of research and education can be defined as *the employment relationship*; this definition seems to be accepted all over in the international literature on IR research and theory problems. The employment relationship can be studied with the help of the theoretical and methodological tools of many social science disciplines: economics (particularly labour economics), business studies, sociology, psychology, labour law, political science, and history and economic history. The fact that almost a whole social science faculty can be mobilized in order to study the employment relationship has a great deal to say about the complexity of this phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> This multi-disciplinarity may contain strong internal tensions, sometimes finding expression in shifts of centres of gravity, sometimes also demarcation battles, which can be explained by the lack of a hard core of coherent theory of industrial relations, similar to, e.g., neo-classical theory in economics. It has often been questioned, particularly in the USA, whether or not IR can be regarded as an academic discipline. Finally, it can be noted that a practical problem-orientation has been very important in the IR activities of many countries, including Sweden, which has often resulted in an atheoretical and purely descriptive kind of research. There are also sometimes to

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<sup>14</sup> Some Canadian scholars have made an apt comparison with the development of medical science from the old homogeneity to the modern multi-disciplinary division (Hébert, Jain & Meltz 1988, Conclusion p 288).

be found certain elements of ideology production – to the “left” as well as to the “right”.

Despite all these internal tensions, most IR scholars seem to regard the following items as being related to the employment relationship, and thus are included in the field of research of industrial relations:

- The interest organizations in the labour market, their mutual relations and their relations to the state.
- The collective bargaining system at different levels; the wage formation.
- Labour law legislation, its application and effects, particularly as regards conflict resolution, security of employment, employee rights to information and consultation or co-determination.
- The roles of the state as a third party concerning legislation on employee protection, incomes policy, the public employer function and conflict resolution in the labour market.
- Wage systems and other forms of remuneration.
- Work organization and production technology.

In recent years, a gender dimension within most of these areas has become increasingly important, particularly in the sense of a growing interest in women’s situation in the labour market. The leading IR journals in Great Britain and the USA are full of good examples of this dimension, particularly in the 1990s. Another weighty general dimension – of a mainly macro-economic character – is the wage development and its relation to other macro-economic variables, such as inflation and unemployment, and public employment policy. Here traditional institutionally-oriented IR research comes close to labour market research; the meeting place can be described as the forms of remuneration and other conditions of work which are linked to the employment relationship. But, as the history of IR research shows, this meeting place is also the field which is loaded with the strongest tension within the multi-disciplinary IR domain (Kaufman 1993; Kelly 1999).<sup>15</sup> Here a fundamental problem of IR research becomes very clear: Can there be any theoretical cement, holding together the variegated manifoldness of disciplinary perspectives, which can be applied to the common object of study – the employment relationship?

In 1949, the American sociologist Robert Merton formulated a thesis on “Middle Range Theory” which became important in social science research in

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<sup>15</sup> This conclusion from the literature is supported, as regards the USA, by my own observations when I visited the leading American IR institutions and their surroundings in 1973 and 1989. Labour economists and IR researchers rarely had any contact with each other; alienation and distance seemed to be the pre-dominant attitudes. Among the few “borderland travellers” are the economists Richard Freeman at Harvard, Daniel Mitchell at UCLA and Morley Gundersen at the University of Toronto; another one is David Metcalf at the London School of Economics and Political Science.



many countries. In Merton's opinion, researchers should try to develop logically coherent models of explanation on a middle level between, on the one hand, the limited working hypotheses of every-day research, and, on the other hand, the grandiose but unsuccessful attempts at creating an integrated and comprehensive social science theory, imitating Marx and Weber (Merton 1949). The theoretical development which has occurred within the IR domain in the last half-century corresponds to a great extent with Merton's definition of middle range theory. It has mainly been a matter of formulating and empirically testing theories that partly are connected with the discourse within some of the mother disciplines, partly have a practical relevance to society on the whole. There have been some attempts at cross-disciplinary theory formation around the problems of the employment relationship at different levels, but they have not resulted in anything like a comprehensive middle range theory. Some *theoretical perspectives* can be found in the literature, however, which can be said to combine adjacent theories on a middle level within two or more mother disciplines. As far as I can see, four partly cross-disciplinary perspectives can be discerned, which have inspired some theory formation of an intra-disciplinary relevance as well as practical, problem-oriented empirical research. Prior to presenting the four theoretical perspectives at the middle level, however, I am going to discuss the relationship of IR research to the two great all-embracing bodies of theory: Dunlopian Systems Theory (and the related pluralistic theory) and Neo-Marxism.

John Dunlop's *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958) demonstrated the deficiencies of general systems theory: a low efficacy of explanation and a tendency to static harmony thinking. The book had no successors, neither in the USA nor elsewhere, although it gradually gave rise to an extensive and mostly critical debate (Kaufman 1993). Some attempts have been made to combine Dunlop's systems model with a "strategic choice model" (Kochan et al. 1986; Meltz 1993) or to broaden the framework in other ways (Meltz 1991). To my knowledge there have been no empirical applications of the Dunlopian systems theory. It was widely used, however, in Anglo-Saxon textbooks and education; it was found to be more useful as a frame of reference for organizing the multifarious teaching stuff in the IR domain than as a foundation for hypothesis-testing empirical research (Adams 1991; Kelly 1999; Laouche & Audet 1993).

In Dunlop's world the state holds a strange position. It is formed by "governmental agencies" which are supposed to work exclusively for common political aims. This is a very unrealistic conception, which has been amply demonstrated by political science research with a pluralistic orientation. According to the kind of pluralist theory that became popular among American political scientists in the 1950s, the political system is regarded as a self-regulating mechanism, formed by interest groups which are competing for possibilities to influence and even infiltrate the state. In this highly realistic and almost cynical view, governmental agencies may be occupied by special interests and become their agents. However, when

this philosophy of balancing group interests is applied to labour market relations – which sometimes has been done, particularly in British IR research – the important role of the state as ultimately responsible for the rules of the game and conflict resolution almost disappears. In addition, the pluralistic way of thinking, just like systems theory, tends to underestimate the more fundamental conflicts of interest which are emerging with varying strength in the labour market. Pluralistic theory is similar to systems theory in many ways. Both are characterized by mechanistic harmony perspectives with low efficacy of explanation. Therefore, both bodies of theory are equally unfit to serve as a comprehensive “Grand Theory of Industrial Relations” (Crouch 1993, p 55-59; Dabscheck 1989).

Whereas systems theory starts from the leading actors in the system and pluralistic theory deals with the manifold group interests, the whole societal analysis of marxism is based on classes and class struggle. According to Richard Hyman at the University of Warwick, who was one of the few exponents of neo-marxism in the British IR world of the 1970s, “there exists a radical conflict of interests, which underlies everything that occurs in industrial relations” (Hyman 1973, p 23). A great problem with the all-embracing concept of class conflict is, however, that it neglects all the conflicts of interest which actually occur within the employer side as well as among the employees. Whereas the marxist can see nothing but coalitions within each camp in the class struggle, the empirical observer of reality sees a multitude of alliances crossing the class demarcations, e.g. between a company about to be closed down and its employees. Another problem for marxism is its conception of the state. A researcher who is of the opinion that state authority is nothing but a committee for handling the common affairs of the capitalist class, as Engels said, is likely to disregard the state or – without empirical investigation – to dismiss it as a mechanism for social control, aiming at incorporating the working class into capitalist society through short-sighted concessions to the trade unions. It is obvious that neo-marxism, like systems theory and related pluralist theory, is of no use as a comprehensive Grand Theory: it tries to explain everything, but it ends up by not being able to explain anything particular. No more than systems theory has the neo-marxist renaissance in the 1970s been able to inspire empirical research.

The four theoretical perspectives of a middle range character that I am now going to discuss have given birth to a great number of empirical applications – in contradistinction to systems theory and neo-marxism. I call them Institutionalism, Human Capital Development, Corporatism and Comparative Regime Theory. There is nothing fundamentally new about these perspectives; the aspects of the IR domain which can be focused with the help of them are well-known to IR scholars as well as to practitioners. For instance, all of them with the exception of Corporatism can be found in the recent debate in the USA (cf. above pp 30-32). But the perspectives are mostly used in an implicit way, without an open discussion about the choice between them, and they are rarely combined in a conscious and theoretic-

tically fruitful way. In my opinion, this situation is not conducive to a much needed improvement of IR research which might to some extent transform multi-disciplinarity from being an irritating problem to becoming an inspiring asset. Therefore, the four middle range perspectives – which as far as I can see are able to cover almost the whole IR domain – should be made clear and logically coherent, and they should be used in a conscious way. In other words: the perspectives may be used as organizing concepts. Two of them already have this function under their well-known names, viz. Institutionalism and Corporatism. Human Capital Development and Comparative Regime Theory are terminological innovations, aiming at the creation of two new concepts which are more ideologically neutral than human resource management and the concepts of system and model as denomination for national units in comparative research and teaching. I am going to argue strongly for the usefulness of these conceptual (not only superficially terminological) innovations and for a vision of bridging the gap between IR and HRM – perhaps with the help of a new overarching concept instead of industrial relations.

*Institutionalism* has been the hard core of British IR research ever since the pioneering work of the Webbs in the 1890s. In this perspective, trade unions and the rule systems and norms for collective bargaining, wage formation, employee participation and conflict resolution at the national and local levels were the main objectives of empirical IR research. Later on, and particularly in the Warwick School, the institutional perspective was widened to include the employers as a driving force in the employment relationship. Institutionalism in a broad sense is now everywhere a firm foundation for empirical – and to some extent also theoretical – research, carried out within most of the social science disciplines concerned, and sometimes even in multi-disciplinary co-operation.

What was called institutional economics was the core of American IR research and education for half a century. Since the 1960s, however, a widening cleavage has separated the traditional institutionalists – with their practical orientation and their spiritual roots in the New Deal tradition – from a current within labour economics, mainly stemming from the Chicago School and characterized by a neo-classical orientation and a technically advanced methodology (Kaufman 1993). Some attempts have been made by labour economists to bridge this cleavage (see above pp 29-30, 44) but the IR traditionalists were usually unable to meet this challenge (Adams 1993, p 132-133). Even in Europe conflicts of this kind can be observed, but they are not as clear-cut as in the USA. Research concerning the employment relationship and related rule systems at different levels has much to gain from a better co-operation – and a striving for a cross-disciplinary theory building – among labour economists and institutionalists. Such co-operation would, among other things, imply that the institutional factors, which are usually regarded by economists as exogenous “givens”, are analysed and explained as regards their origin as well as their effects. The three decision-making mechanisms

for the solution of labour problems – the market, the bargaining arena and the political process – could be studied in a multi-disciplinary co-operation between economists and other social scientists. As well as in the corporatism perspective, the relations between the state and the parties in the labour market would be focused, but the emphasis in the common research endeavour is likely to be more at the local level than at the central level. A tendency to a neo-institutional direction in labour economics research in recent years promises well for a future co-operation (Gunderson 1988; Hartog & Theeuwes 1993, Preface).

*Human Capital Development* is my proposal for a conceptual alternative to human resource management. As Bruce Kaufman has cogently demonstrated, HRM has its roots both as a practice in working life and as an academic sub-discipline in the behaviouralist Human Relations School, which emerged in the USA between the world wars. At present, HRM in its two closely interrelated forms has a very strong position in the USA, largely obtained at the expense of the more trade union-oriented IR activities. Since the late 1970s, IR has been pushed aside by HRM at all levels in the academic world; no new IR units were formed and many old ones were closed down or changed their names to HRM (Kaufman 1993, Ch. 6-8, 2000). An indirect expression of the relative strength of the HRM perspective is the rapid expansion since the 1980s of a new field of research within labour economics which is usually called “personnel administration”; here, among other things, remuneration systems of different kinds are studied with the help of economic theory, which implies a critical attitude towards the conventional HRM perspective (Lazear 1995).

In Great Britain, and particularly in Australia, a similar tendency towards HRM emerged in the 1990s, although by no means as strong as in the USA; whereas in the USA HRM and IR became separated to the disadvantage of IR, HRM usually developed within the IR departments at the British and Australian universities. Comparable developments can hardly be observed in the Nordic countries and continental Europe. Irrespective of the diffusion of HRM as a practice and as an academic field, the concept implies a theoretical perspective at the middle level which is unavoidable in research on the employment relationship. Work organization and production technology can be regarded as the hard core of this perspective and its empirical application in a context which should be seen as characterized by alternately conflict and co-operation between opposite interests. In addition to this comes the manifold strategies and measures of personnel management which, according to the conventional American HRM perspective, are shaped by benevolent employers without embarrassing intervention of trade union representatives. In a European context, the HRM perspective is likely to give the unions a role as employee representatives, and the research will have an orientation towards negotiations and problem solving at the workplace level, but to some extent at higher levels as well (Edwards 1995; Kelly 1999; Kochan & Barocci 1985; Sisson 1989, 1994).

Some American IR scholars have aptly formulated the need for a perspective which is more comprehensive and less conflict-avoiding than the downright HRM philosophy. In business practice, as well as in IR research, it is necessary to bring together the two sometimes conflicting goals of business effectiveness and equity for the employees. The tension between the conditions of the market – supply and demand concerning the labour force – on the one hand, and on the other hand the social and political aspects implying that human labour cannot be treated as only one product among others in the market, can in fact be regarded as the core element in theorizing about IR and HRM (Barbash 1984, 1989; Kochan 1993; Meltz 1989). In order to indicate my support for this view, and to help finding a better and more neutral term than the ideologically distorted HRM (or the somewhat older alternative personnel administration), I will suggest a new concept: Human Capital Development. After all, it is a question of a human capital which, like all capital, has to be managed and developed in a good way. I have avoided the word *Management* because of its double implication of dominant actor and process of personnel administration – with all its ensuing ideological bias. *Development* seems to be a more neutral term. A good practice of human capital development is likely to have a bright future in the new knowledge intensive economy – still a small sector of the labour market but rapidly expanding – and therefore a new concept is needed which is better suited to this reality, in practice as well as in research and teaching, than the traditional HRM concept.

The *Corporatism* discourse – developing particularly within political science and sociology – was launched in 1974 by the German-American political scientist Philippe Schmitter with the famous article “Still the Century of Corporatism?”. Despite its extensiveness, Schmitter’s definition of “Neo-Corporatism” (the proposed term for a recently reinstated co-operation between the state and the interest organizations in many countries, intended to mark out the distance from fascist state-led corporatism) has come out fairly well as a source of inspiration through two decades of mainly concept-defining and classifying discourse. The useful core of the definition is the emphasis on a limited number of central organizations which co-operate in regular forms with the state authorities and partly substitute them in policy implementation. This concept was well in line with the kind of incomes policy which was carried on in many European countries in the 1970s in the form of trade-off agreements between the government and the labour market organizations. When, however, the incomes policy form of state intervention in the labour market by and large disappeared in the neo-liberal political climate of the 1980s in Great Britain and in many other European countries, the corporatism theoreticians were rather taken aback – probably because most of them had neglected empirical research. In the early 1990s, many scholars concerned were of the opinion that neo-corporatism was down and out, both as a societal phenomenon and as a scientific concept. Sweden was readily mentioned as a typical example; indeed, this was not done without justification. Since then, how-

ever, something remarkable has happened: corporatism doomed arose anew – now in the form of new types of stabilization agreements in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Ireland, which seem to be less vulnerable than the incomes policy agreements of the 1970s between the government (in the ideal case dominated by a social democratic party) and the trade unions. Thus, the corporatism discourse is well and alive, and it seems to be quite useful as a cross-disciplinary theoretical perspective in future empirical IR research, focusing on the relationship between the state and the organizations in the labour market; therefore, the concept of Neo-Corporatism (or just Corporatism) can still be used (Calmfors & Driffill 1988; Crouch 1993; Crouch & Traxler 1995; Dabscheck 1989; Ferner & Hyman 1998, Introduction; Lehmbruch & Schmitter 1982; Lewin 1994; Regini 1997; Schmitter 1974; Traxler 1996, 1997).

The fourth theoretical perspective is called *Comparative Regime Theory*. I propose a new term, *Regime*, because I have realized that we who study the labour market and working life in research and teaching ought to finally do away with two old and worn out concepts, namely system and model. *System* may be practical as a very general denomination for a coherent entity, e.g., a political system, a social system, etc. When it is applied to the labour market, however, it will all too easily be associated with Dunlopian system theory with all its shortcomings. The *Model* concept, on the other hand, has been over-exploited in recent years – in the political debate, in popular parlance as well as in research and teaching. Sweden is a case in point. “The Swedish Model” – vague, manifold and promising as it is, not least in connection with industrial relations – has for many people, mostly to the left, almost reached the level of cult object. Some other countries, particularly in the north of Europe, are also described as IR models for our time. Obviously, there is a normative element, more political than scientific, in the idea of models at the national societal level: it is a matter of being exemplary. Therefore, I suggest a more neutral concept: *Labour Market Regime*. In political science research concerning international relations the term “regime” has for a long time been used as a denomination for a political entity which unlike the state is not based on a constitution and a legal system but rather on a set of implicit or explicit norms, rules and procedures within a certain policy domain in the international arena. The rules of the game in a regime are not legal rules, but the outcome of bargaining processes resulting in binding agreements; such rules are sometimes called “soft law” (Goldmann, Pedersen & Österud 1997, p 240; Kratochwil & Mansfield 1994, p 95-139).

I think that the regime concept is well suited for IR needs if we allow for an element of legal rules which is more or less necessary to industrial relations (but more or less impossible in international relations because of the lack of a transnational legal system). What is actually called IR “systems” or “models” are in fact IR regimes in the sense of being founded on both law and agreement in various proportions. In some regimes, e.g. Denmark, even the rules for conflict

resolution are founded on agreements between the social partners, whereas in other regimes such rules are exclusively based on the law. Thus, the regime concept should be understood in a “minimalistic” way, leaving the role of the state as an open question to be answered by empirical research. The concept should include the totality of a country’s labour market relations, from the workplace to the national political level where the political conditions for the development of labour market relations are decided, such as economic policy, labour market policy, labour law, family policy etc. The scope and main direction of policies related to the labour market will be an important element in comparisons between regimes or groups of regimes. The regime concept should associate to a dynamic, historically based “holistic” view of this national totality. It might be useful as an instrument for an international comparative study of labour market relations. Therefore, I propose that we start talking about *Labour Market Regimes* and *Comparative Regime Theory*. Maybe we should also leave the somewhat one-sided and worn out concept of industrial relations in favour of a new term which has a wider purport and a natural connection with the regime concept: *Labour Market Relations* (LMR).<sup>16</sup>

When Richard Hyman as newly appointed editor of the newly founded *European Journal of Industrial Relations* wrote his first editorial in the spring of 1995, he wanted to emphasize the comparative perspective in IR research. Hyman thought that this perspective could also give theory formation in IR a much needed injection: “All theory, it could be argued, is at least implicitly comparative; comparative analysis, almost inevitably, involves explicit theorizing” (Hyman 1995, p 14). Together with his colleague at the IR unit of the University of Warwick, Anthony Ferner, Hyman has himself lived up to this program as editor of some large research-based textbooks concerning IR in Europe. In their well-written comparative surveys and summaries of the many country monographs, the editors give some good examples of the theoretical fruitfulness of a comparative perspective on labour market regimes; this is particularly true of the discussion about possible tendencies, related to the European Union, towards convergence between the national regimes (Ferner & Hyman 1992, 1998; Hyman & Ferner 1994).

In the 1990s, comparative research dealing with European labour market regimes has expanded in many ways. The revived interest in the corporatism discourse is one source of inspiration. Another one is, of course, the driving force towards comparative studies and theorizing which emanates from the development of the European Union. A global grasp of comparative regime theory is, however, still unusual. The best example seems to be the book published by Bamber and

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<sup>16</sup> In this context, I want to point out that the term *Employment Relations* – which began to be used by some Anglo-American scholars in the 1980s as a more up-to-date alternative to IR – is misleading because it tends to omit the national political level, and thereby also the significance of labour market related policies for the shaping of the employment relationship at the local and individual levels (Bamber & Lansbury 1998; Kaufman 1993; Lubanski, Due & Madsen 2000).

Lansbury in several issues (1987, 1993, 1998). Obviously, further comparative studies of labour market regimes in the age of “neo-globalization” may produce much new knowledge of both theoretical and practical value.

This survey of theory discussion and perspectives within the IR domain – or the Labour Market Relations (LMR) domain, as I prefer to call it – has tried to demonstrate that no truly cross-disciplinary and comprehensive theory of IR/LMR can be found. The research domain is simply too large, too heterogenous and too multi-disciplinary for really coherent theory formation to be possible. Therefore, in my opinion, it is not appropriate to regard IR/LMR as a separate academic discipline. It is more realistic to think and act in terms of theoretical perspectives of a middle range character which are to some extent cross-disciplinary. I have discussed four perspectives of this kind: Institutionalism, Human Capital Development, Corporatism and Comparative Regime Theory. I feel that these perspectives are able to catch the main elements of IR/LMR, inspire attempts at more cross-disciplinary research within each of them and lend themselves to cross-fertilization with interesting synergy effects.



## Summary

### **Industrial relations: A Short History of Ideas and Learning**

Industrial Relations (or labour market relations) emerged as a multi-disciplinary field of research in Great Britain and the USA about hundred years ago. However, it took nearly half a century for research and teaching within this broad field to really gain momentum. As a distinct academic discipline, industrial relations (IR) is primarily an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. It is only since World War II that a corresponding multi-disciplinary treatment of the complex of problems pertaining to the employment relationship, albeit under different labels and in other organizational forms, has emerged in continental Europe as well as in Scandinavia and Japan.

The key figures in this development have themselves often regarded research and teaching in IR as part of a comprehensive project of reform dealing with the labour market of industrial society, and their theoretical thinking has been inspired by their own practical experiences of such projects of reform. We discover the main characteristics of the development of ideas and analyse the interaction between theory and practice by studying how some key figures – as, for example, Sydney and Beatrice Webb, and their successors in Great Britain – perceived the relationship between labour and management, the structure and function of unions, the labour market organizations' relationship to the government, etc. This can be supplemented by studying the institutional development of the IR field, primarily in Great Britain and the USA, but also, to some extent, in other countries and internationally. How did the field of study evolve? How did the relationship to the disciplines in which the IR scholars were initially trained and other adjacent disciplines evolve? How did the professional organization come about?

The first part of this book deals with the emergence and development of the IR field in Great Britain – from the pioneering work of “the Webbs” in the 1890s right up to the present day, with an emphasis on the diversified activities at the leading British IR Department at the University of Warwick in Coventry. In the second part, the corresponding development in the USA is described. Finally, an outline is given of the conditions in some other countries, including Sweden, focusing on the contemporary situation and an account of professional activities at the international level. A discussion of the problems of theory building within the large multi-disciplinary IR domain is also included.

## Sammanfattning

### **Industrial Relations: Idé- och lärdomshistoria under hundra år**

Det mångvetenskapliga forskningsområdet Industrial Relations – arbetsmarknadsrelationer – började växa fram i Storbritannien och USA för ungefär hundra år sedan. Med det dröjde nästan ett halvt sekel innan forskning och undervisning inom detta breda fält tog fart i de båda länderna. Detsamma gäller den engelskspråkliga världen i övrigt: Industrial Relations (IR) som ett särskilt universitetsämne har varit och är en övervägande anglosaxisk företeelse. I de kontinental-europeiska länderna, i Norden och i Japan har motsvarande mångvetenskapliga hantering av anställningsrelationens mångfacetterade problematik utvecklats helt och hållet efter andra världskriget, under andra benämningar och i andra organisationsformer.

Nyckelpersonerna i denna utveckling har ofta betraktat forskning och undervisning inom IR som en del av ett brett reformarbete rörande industrisamhällets arbetsmarknad och låtit sitt teoretiska tänkande inspireras av sina egna praktiska erfarenheter av sådant reformarbete. Genom att man studerar några nyckelpersoner – såsom makarna Sidney och Beatrice Webb och deras efterföljare i Storbritannien – uppfattade relationen mellan arbetsgivare och arbetstagare, fackförningarnas struktur och funktioner, arbetsmarknadsparternas förhållande till staten etc, kan huvudlinjerna i idéutvecklingen klarläggas och samspelet mellan teori och praktik analyseras. Detta kan kompletteras med en lärdomshistorisk aspekt, alltså IR-områdets institutionella utveckling, i första hand i Storbritannien och USA men i någon mån också i andra länder och internationellt. Hur växte ämnesområdet fram, hur utvecklades relationerna till moder- eller granndisciplinerna, hur skedde den professionella organiseringen nationellt och internationellt?

Den första delen av denna bok behandlar IR-områdets uppkomst och utveckling i Storbritannien – från pionjärerna ”the Webbs” på 1890-talet fram till dagsläget med tonvikt på den mångskiftande verksamheten inom den ledande brittiska IR-institutionen vid University of Warwick i Coventry. I den andra delen skildras motsvarande utveckling i USA. Slutligen ges en översikt över förhållandena i några andra länder, däribland Sverige, med tyngdpunkt på nuläget samt en redovisning av den professionella verksamheten på internationell nivå. Boken avslutas med en diskussion om teoribildningens problem inom det mångvetenskapliga IR-området.

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