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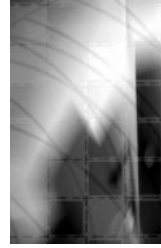
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Book Reviews

Raymond Markey, Paul Gollan, Ann Hodgkinson, Alain Chouraqui and Ulke Veersma (eds)

Models of Employee Participation in a Changing Global Environment: Diversity and Interaction

Aldershot/Burlington/Singapore/Sydney: Ashgate, 2001, 343 pp.

■ Reviewed by **Herman Knudsen**, *Aalborg University*

This is a truly international book. The editors are from four different countries, and among the authors all continents are represented, although Europe clearly has the strongest representation, which is hardly surprising given the theme of the publication. The book is a product of the cooperation between researchers in the Workers' Participation Study Group of the International Industrial Relations Association, coordinated by Raymond Markey.

Models of Employee Participation in a Changing Global Environment contains 17 research-based chapters plus introductory and concluding chapters. It is divided into five parts: 'Perspectives and Theory', 'Direct Participation', 'Trade Unions', 'Works Councils and Consultative Committees', and 'Interaction between Different Forms of Participation'.

It is not possible here to present all the new empirical research findings contained in the book. Instead I will concentrate on some of the theoretical issues it raises and the main trends emerging from the research findings.

In the introduction chapter Raymond Markey establishes a conceptual framework for the field of employee participation. He distinguishes between financial, direct and indirect participation and relates the various forms of participation to the discussion on 'hard' versus 'soft' human resource management. While hard HRM attempts to undermine or bypass forms of indirect/representative participation, and especially so if the participation is based on trade union representatives, soft-versions of HRM are usually implemented in cooperation with trade unions and/or works councils. Both of these HRM approaches tend to promote direct participation (group work and other forms of delegation of control or influence to employees). While there is little new in the concepts and themes presented in the chapter, it

nevertheless serves as a precise overview and setting of the stage for what is played out in the chapters that follow.

Although the large majority of the contributions present new empirical findings, most of them are not confined to that. They also include substantial theoretical discussions on the themes investigated. For instance, in Chapter 3 Jos Benders, Fred Huijgen and Ulrich Pekruhl review relevant literature and discuss employer motives for introducing group work. In Chapter 5 Juliet Webster explores direct participation in a gender perspective. In Chapter 12 Jan Looise, Michiel Drucker and Jan de Leede present a model for understanding how shifts in production 'regimes' affect works councils and possibilities of representation more generally. In Chapter 13 Ulke Veersma discusses the potentials of the European Works Councils. In Chapter 15 Ann Hodgkinson establishes a framework for analysing the relations between organizational change and direct and indirect participation before going on to examine these phenomena in the Illawarra region in Australia.

While most of the chapters give evidence of a growth in employee participation, and in particular direct participation, a few chapters focus on participation failures. In Chapter 10 Edward Zammit tells the story of the Malta Drydocks where workers' self-management was a reality for more than 20 years. As indicated by the title, 'Efficiency versus Democracy in the Workplace', this experiment was no success in efficiency terms, mainly because traditional adversarial relations between workers and managers persisted.

In Chapter 14, E. A. Musa presents a case study from a Ghanaian state-owned enterprise where he shows the fragility of participation structures originally introduced to boost support for a military government and now threatened by World Bank and IMF induced privatization. Jacques Monat, in Chapter 14, also addresses a problem area for participation, namely small- and medium-sized enterprises, in which participation through trade unions as well as works councils is only weakly developed.

While, as indicated, theory is integrated in many of the individual, empirically oriented chapters, two chapters are particularly dedicated to theoretical issues. In Chapter 2 Michael Poole, Russell Lansbury and Nick Wailes address the question of how to explain similarities and differences in patterns of participation over time and across societies. They argue that earlier explanations of the development of participation either as an evolutionary process or as occurring in cycles are not quite satisfactory. Instead, they propose a 'favourable conjuncture approach' that includes four sets of variables: (1) macro-conditions external to the organization, (2) strategic choices of the actors, (3) the power of the actors, and (4) organizational structures and processes at firm level. The authors find the last factor to have been particularly important in the recent period.

The 'favourable conjuncture approach' makes good sense to me, even if I have been a subscriber to the cyclical theory, formulated by Harvie Ramsay about 20 years ago. Roughly speaking, Ramsay detected the cycles of participation by relating the change in participation patterns to developments in the first three of Poole et al.'s variables. In my own studies of participation in different European countries I tended to find confirmation of the cycle thesis. However, if the fourth variable,

changes at firm level, has become the most important one in recent years, and if these changes do not add up to a uniform trend, such as more or less participation, but rather represent a trend towards increased diversity as indicated by much recent literature, then a new theory is certainly needed. In the version presented in this book the theory is still rather sketchy, but at any rate, Poole et al. have provided us with a promising model which may be used in future macro studies on changes in participation patterns.

The other theoretical chapter of the book is the last one, in which Paul Gollan and Raymond Markey establish some general trends and patterns from the findings presented in the book as well as from other recent research on participation. The evidence points at an increase in participatory practices generally and also in the variety of forms of participation. Both direct and indirect forms of participation appear to be growing, and in countries with a tradition for cooperation between management and trade unions, the unions still play an important role in participatory arrangements. Especially in Europe, where unions influence representative bodies strongly, a positive correlation can be found between indirect/representative participation and direct participation.

At the same time, recent research supports the notion that employee participation, if occurring in an industrial relations climate marked by trust and cooperation between the parties, promotes organizational efficiency. Participation increases employee commitment and reduces the risk of conflict during organizational change. How, more precisely, participation leads to increased performance, improved quality and more smooth processes of change, is well argued by Gollan and Markey.

Another interesting point taken up in this chapter concerns the relations between works councils and unions. Gollan and Markey present a model where works councils can either complement or be a substitute for trade unions, and discuss it in relation to research and different industrial relations cultures. From mainly European experiences the authors conclude that:

... there is no reason to assume ... that representative forms of participation such as works councils are necessarily an alternative to unions at all. Many authors ... argue forcefully that employee participation and involvement forms have the capacity to assist unionism in workplaces where they are given many responsibilities and especially when enforced through statutory rights. (p. 331)

So, unitarist, hard HRM approaches are not an inevitable global future. On the contrary, soft HRM based on cooperation with unions and works councils seems to have much to offer.

The book has its weak spots, but on the whole it can only be recommended. If you want to know where research on employee participation stands at the beginning of the new millennium, this is the book.

Arthur J. McIvor

A History of Work in Britain, 1880–1950

Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, paperback £14.99, xii + 276 pp.

■ **Reviewed by Michael Richardson, *University of the West of England***

In this book, McIvor, by segregating and studying the strands that compose the tapestry of the history of work in Britain between 1880 and 1950, discerns and discusses patterns of continuity and change. Drawing largely on secondary sources he interweaves these complementary strands into a comprehensive and illuminating picture of the development of British workplace and the labour process in a period covering the emergence of scientific management, mass production and the social, economic and political impact of two world wars. The aim of the book is to provide a synthesis of a wide range of authoritative studies on different aspects of the history of work on which to offer an interpretation that is free from the economic determinism that McIvor associates with Marxism. He extracts the relevant material and engages with the main arguments from both Marxist and revisionist studies of labour history in an effort to mark out his own pluralist perspective. This he makes clear in his first chapter on ‘the historiography and theorising of work’, going on to build, chapter by chapter, a composite analysis. The one chapter that takes a slightly different approach is Chapter 5 on occupational health and safety, where McIvor draws on primary source material to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge in a much-neglected area.

McIvor shows that paid work was almost as important in 1950 as it was in 1880, although the pervasiveness of occupational roles was not so apparent. He summarizes significant developments that occurred during this period: in response to competitive forces industry became more capital-intensive and work more subject to intensification and regularization. By the end of the 1940s, the emergence of personnel management as a specialism had largely superseded paternalism in the management of labour and labour relations. Moreover, the spread of scientific management resulted in tighter discipline and control of workers. Traditional independent craft workers experienced deskilling while a new layer of semi-skilled workers emerged to staff automated assembly lines. In return workers benefited from regular employment and rising living standards. These improvements were underpinned by the provision of state welfare benefits, the shoots of which were barely visible in the 19th century.

McIvor records that the workplace of 1950 was much safer than ever before, although industrial diseases and injuries were still extensive. He argues that patterns of class and gender divisions changed remarkably little. Despite the experiences of dilution in two world wars, gender-segregated jobs and gender discrimination in paid employment still persisted. Clerical work was routinized and feminized and men gravitated to professional and managerial positions; for men at least there was a greater opportunity for upward occupational mobility.

In a chapter on trade unions, work and politics McIvor reasons that ‘state encouragement of trade unionism and collective bargaining’ (238), especially during

World War I and II, stimulated union growth. Moreover, the state was influential in creating a regulatory framework in which tensions between capital and labour were largely directed and contested through collective bargaining. Thus the growth and influence of trade unionism extended dramatically over the period 1880–1950 but divisions within the movement arising from sectionalism were much apparent.

The strength of McIvor's book lies in its comprehensive coverage of these developments. However, what is a little disappointing is the coverage of important theoretical debates. In particular his discussion of gender relations does not give sufficient attention to sociological debates concerning gender divisions at work. Patriarchy is used too readily to explain gender divisions and gender inequality at work without sufficient clarification and without acknowledgement of competing theoretical perspectives.

McIvor places much weight on the view that patriarchal practices and structures have determined the pattern of women's employment experiences. In doing so debates about the influence of capitalism and patriarchy either as separate spheres of influence or a single capitalist patriarchal system are neglected. Notably, McIvor does not mention Cockburn's (1983) classic study of compositors, which rests on the dualistic theoretical approach of capitalism and patriarchy. This is a serious omission not only because of the importance of her work but because it avoids consideration of the way in which feminist theories influence and are influenced by empirical studies.

Another significant omission, given the importance that McIvor (179–80) places on the male breadwinner, is the debate around the notion of a family wage and whether there has ever been in practice a family wage system. Some reference to the different perspectives held on this issue (Humphries, 1977; Barrett and McIntosh, 1980) would at least inform the reader that feminists have engaged in vigorous debate on its impact. Also missing is any mention of the important discussion between Price (1983) and Joyce (1984) pertaining to the nature and extent of conflict and compromise within the social relations of production in Britain since the 1890s. Slipping in a brief summary of the differences between Price, who argues that British workers were vigorous in their opposition to deskilling, and Joyce, who places more weight on workers' acquiescence, would have revealed that arguments concerning the deskilling, intensification and alienation of labour are far from exhausted.

Overall, this book has much to commend it. McIvor documents patterns of continuity and change at work that, whilst familiar, are presented with theoretical observation in an accessible, clear format under one cover. He has produced an invaluable secondary source for students of labour history.

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Stuart Tannock

Youth at Work: The Unionized Fast-food and Grocery Workplace
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, paperback £22.95, 246 pp.

■ Reviewed by Tony Royle, *Nottingham Trent University*

In recent years the fast-food industry and similar low-paid service work has finally started to receive some serious attention from the academic community. This book follows a number of publications which have started to focus on the issues of work organization, work orientations and labour relations in this sector (see, for example Leidner, 1993; Reiter, 1986; Royle, 2000). Of course this sector has also been the focus of broader and other kinds of analysis such as Ritzer's (1993) thesis on McDonaldization, Watson's (1997) cross cultural analysis of McDonald's in Asia and Schlosser's (2001) 'Fast-Food Nation'.

This volume focuses on the fast-food and food service sectors in the USA and Canada and in particular examines the issue of youth employment and the problems of organizing young workers in this sector. It is based on an ethnographic study of workers in three large US supermarket chains in one city and fast-food workers employed in one large multinational in one Canadian city. Whereas workers in the supermarket chains had a relatively high level of union membership (about one third) the fast-food workers were almost entirely non-union. Because of the difficulties of gaining access for this kind of work the author used union contacts to gain access to employees but also spent a great deal of time informally interviewing workers whenever it was possible to do so. The author is quite rightly unapologetic for this approach in view of the likely employer opposition to such research and especially as the focus of the book is the experiences of young workers and the relations between them and the unions and not on the opinions and experiences of management.

The author focuses on youths in terms of their specific and temporary occupational identities and the 'stop-gap' jobs they take on. Tannock argues that there is a continuing age-based prejudice against young workers. Indeed he suggests that not only North American employers, but also North American governments and trade unions have abandoned young workers and in some cases actively discriminated against them. He cites the example of the arguments about the minimum wage and whether or not there should be a lower level wage for young workers. He states that

'conservatives' argue that young workers do not really 'need' wages because they can depend on their parents and are therefore not 'real workers'. As he points out however, more and more college students are becoming buried under mountains of debt especially since the real value of the minimum wage in the USA has fallen considerably since the late 1960s. At the same time the private sector loan industry is making handsome profits at their expense. Furthermore whilst North American youths occupy the lowest paid, lowest status dead-end jobs, their employers are some of the continent's largest and most powerful corporations and they are growing fat on the labour of young workers. Indeed for industries such as fast-food the 'indispensable ingredient' for success is the 'systematic exploitation' of large pools of minimum wage youth workers.

The same kinds of arguments can of course be applied to the issue of employee representation, that food service sector workers do not need representation because they have little commitment to their employment and that they will soon move on to something else. However, it may be a move into another low paid, stop-gap job, as Tannock points out. Youth work has an image problem which is compounded by such concepts as the 'storm and stress' adolescent, an employee who is 'naturally' alienated from his/her work by a lack of maturity normally associated with the state of adolescence itself. They do not care about their jobs so why should anyone else? As Tannock points out, however, this overlooks the nature of these stop-gap jobs. In many cases it is the only form of employment open to young workers. Besides, surely the temporary nature of such work should not mean that these workers should have no rights to either a decent level of remuneration or rights to independent representation?

Tannock therefore argues strongly for the intervention of unions to try to improve the lot of fast-food workers and suggests that where unions are stronger, such as in supermarkets, much can be achieved. However, he recognizes that there is a very low level of unionization amongst the young in Canada and the USA, making them particularly vulnerable to management prerogative. His conclusion is that young workers are interested in having their rights represented and cites the large number of small (yet usually unsuccessful) attempts to unionize fast-food sector jobs in North America. He argues that this is not down to a lack of interest amongst employees but rather to sophisticated union-bashing management techniques applied by employers, something which my own and other studies largely verify (Royle, 2000; Royle and Towers, 2002). The author suggests that American unions (particularly the AFL-CIO) are increasingly trying to reach out to youth workers through a number of different programs. However, he also admits that unions have been partly to blame by favouring older workers and seeing young workers as a threat to older workers' wages and conditions. Finally, he argues strongly for a change in policy to promote the rights of young workers and to do away with age discrimination, and that contemporary research must include the concepts of 'age' and the 'life stage' in order to develop a better understanding of temporary and contingent work.

The book provides some useful insights into the problems of youth work and the problems of trying to unionize young workers. Perhaps it does overlook the fact

that many of the people employed in fast-food and supermarket work are not always young employees in other countries (Royle, 2000). In this sense there may be a slight tendency to over-generalize on the basis of North American experience. Nevertheless, this is a welcome contribution to the literature on employment and labour relations in the service sector. It is well-researched, interesting and informative and it raises some important questions, not only about low paid employment and the treatment of young workers, but also about the future of the labour movement as a whole.

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Chris Grover and John Stewart

The Work Connection: The Role of Social Security in British Economic Regulation

Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002, xiv + 233 pp.

■ Reviewed by Matthew Cole, *University of Bristol*

The Work Connection traces a history of British in-work and out-of-work social security policy from the patchwork implementation of the 'Speenhamland system' in the early part of the 19th century, to New Labour's current policies. Theoretically informed by the French Regulation School, *The Work Connection* argues that such income maintenance policies constitute particular social modes of economic regulation that are congruent with changing capitalist accumulation regimes. The role of government is therefore taken to be that of the husbandry of income maintenance policies, such that the transitions between different modes of capital accumulation are managed without significant challenge to the fundamental capitalist order. Furthermore, a sophisticated sensitivity to the symbiotic interplay between capitalism and patriarchy is maintained throughout the book. The role of the family in transmitting the values and disciplines appropriate to entering the capitalist labour market within governmental and academic discourse is explored in some depth. So,

for instance, recent concern with the 'encouragement' of lone mothers into the formal economy is situated in the context of concerns with providing the appropriate role models and opportunities for emulation to their (male) children found in the 'underclass' theorizing of Charles Murray et al.

Grover and Stewart identify four key moments of transition in income maintenance policies: the implementation of the 'Speenhamland system' with its subsidization of low wages; the disparagement and dismantling of that system in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act; the introduction of Family Allowances following on from the Beveridge Report of 1942; and the return to wage subsidies in the government policies of the 1980s and 1990s (including Family Credit, Working Families Tax Credit and the National Minimum Wage). These policy changes are taken to mirror changes in the capitalist accumulation regime: the residue of the feudal moral economy in the early 19th century; the subsequent dominance of laissez-faire economics until the Second World War; the post-war Keynesian hegemony; and the 1980s shift to neo-liberalism. Grover and Stewart argue that the deployment of regulation theory offers a number of analytical benefits over other modes of interpretation. They point to the tendency within academic social policy to understand policy changes as *responses* to crises; the dogmatic assumption of the inevitability of capitalist catastrophe in Marxist thinking; and the neo-liberal blindness to the internal generation of crisis within capitalist accumulation regimes. Instead, Grover and Stewart point to the structuring effects of capitalism and patriarchy on policy changes. While they accept that changing regimes of capitalist accumulation do, or could, generate internal crises, policy changes understood as social modes of economic regulation are able to manage those transitions, and indeed have consistently functioned as managerial interventions informed by the twin a priori of capitalism and patriarchy.

The Work Connection does trace a plausible narrative of British social security policy as authored by the cold hand of economic rationality. Policies that have been presented as remedies to, or ameliorations of, the poverty trap, the unemployment trap, child poverty, etc. are all rediscovered as historically contingent means of co-opting a 'reserve army' and expanding the labour supply. By such policy strategies, key patriarchal-capitalist needs such as the suppression of wages, the retrenching and reconfiguring of patriarchal familial and labour market relations, and the retention of wage differentials so as to avoid disincentivizing paid work, are secured. A challenge is therefore issued to critical academic social policy, but a solution is unclear. Grover and Stewart's analysis reads as intensely pessimistic. Time and again they point to the defusing of radical attempts to challenge economic and gender inequality through a reconstitution of labour market and gender hierarchies. Real improvements of the lot of the low-paid, the unemployed, or lone-parent families are at best accidental spin-offs of the changing capitalist accumulation regime and its congruent social security policy shifts.

The rights or wrongs of this pessimism notwithstanding, the approach of Grover and Stewart is somewhat blinkered. The empirical research on which the book is based is limited to a handful of interviews with civil servants and a (thorough) analysis of policy documents. Based on these sources of public pronouncement, it is perhaps

unsurprising that Grover and Stewart take for granted the subscription to economic rationality among generations of policy makers, which raises the spectre in the reader's mind of Marx's famous line on the state as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. It may be equally plausible to suggest that (at least some) policy makers have paid public lip service to economic rationality while being motivated by genuine concerns with inequality and poverty, rather than vice versa as Grover and Stewart suggest. The more fundamental problem may lie in the deployment of regulation theory itself, which does not appear to allow room for the theorizing of the transmission and circulation of capitalist and patriarchal values among political elites themselves, or to the role of non-economic discourses in determining policy outputs. Instead, a rather simplistic top-down model of power is implicit in the argument; policy makers seem to magically appear on the stage of history as fully formed economic rationalists. Despite Grover and Stewart's justifiable disparagement of academic social policy as 'shallow' in its assumptions, they too are guilty of taking too much for granted. They point to the moral rhetoric with which new social security policies are heralded, for instance in the inculcation of the work ethic that surrounds what they term the market workfare policies of the Thatcher, Major and Blair governments, or the crucial historical role of stigma in the representation of the unemployed, but then go on to insist that policy makers only *really* believe in the power of financial incentives to work, or in the maintenance of wage differentials in regulating the labour market. Furthermore, given the well-documented shift into a neo-liberal mode of capitalist accumulation, regulation theory demands that this transition has to have been successfully managed by policy interventions that are guided by economic rationality alone. Grover and Stewart briefly deal with the Gendered Moral Rationalities that Duncan and Edwards identify as crucial to the decisions of lone mothers as to whether or not to enter the labour market. However, without a more thorough empirical sensitivity to the genesis and operation of *moral* work discourses among both the articulators and targets of social security policy (not just lone mothers), and the invisible mass of 'unproblematic' labour market participants, their analysis remains one sided.

The Work Connection is nevertheless a powerful and informative contribution to debates on the history and possible futures of British social security policy. The insistence on the intimate relationship between capitalism and patriarchy is especially welcome and important. In raising perhaps as many questions as it answers, *The Work Connection* is doing no disservice to the stimulation of further research and debate.

Anne McBride

Gender Democracy in Trade Unions

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001, hardback, ix + 192 pp.

■ Reviewed by Gill Kirton, *University of North London*

In July 1993 the public service unions NALGO, NUPE and COHSE merged to become UNISON, the largest union in Britain. Each of the partner unions brought with it its own structural and organizational traditions. The challenge facing the new union was to reconcile these differences, lay to rest historical rivalries between the partners and build a more representative and democratic union. Anne McBride's research was carried out during the first two to three years following the merger and *Gender Democracy in Trade Unions* provides a critical account of UNISON's attempts to translate the rhetoric of gender equality into reality. In so doing the book contributes usefully to contemporary debates about union democracy, in particular what gender democracy could or should look like. The UNISON goal of fair representation is an ambitious one and if it succeeded it would reshape conceptions of trade union democracy and have ramifications for the British trade union movement overall. Thus, this research is undoubtedly of considerable interest to trade union policy-makers and academics alike.

McBride sets four main aims for the book. First, to describe and analyse UNISON's strategies for reshaping trade union democracy and achieving gender democracy. Second, to illustrate the difference this reshaping makes to women's participation and representation. Third, to expose how these strategies can be blocked and limited, and fourth, to argue that union structures need to be organized around principles of individual and group representation.

To meet these aims the book presents findings of qualitative research situated in a number of sites within UNISON, namely representative and women-only structures at national and regional levels. It is clear that the fieldwork for this research was a considerable endeavour, seemingly both painstaking and meticulous: McBride interviewed 38 individuals, attended a total of 64 meetings and subjected documentary evidence to detailed examination. Qualitative researchers will appreciate the considerable time and effort this would undoubtedly have involved, demonstrating the energy and commitment necessary for rigorous qualitative research.

In the second chapter McBride locates the discussion of gender democracy within a robust theoretical framework, drawing on the important contributions of a number of key authors, including Cynthia Cockburn's (1991, 1996) and Iris Marion Young's (1990) work on the representation in political structures of oppressed social groups. The multiple research methods yield some rich data, from which McBride manages to pull some important theoretical insights including the 'push' and 'pull' (e.g., p. 88) mechanisms through which a greater diversity of members might gain representative positions; the way in which new cultural practices can emerge within existing structures once those structures become more representative; and the way in which informal social relations and practices can undermine the gender democracy project. From Chapter 7 (The Role of Women's

Self-Organisation), in particular, the reader gains a strong impression of the 'actors' and their activities and we see that the UNISON rule book prescription for self-organization can be interpreted in different ways and for different ends.

Throughout, McBride is mindful of the heterogeneity of women and is particularly concerned to discuss the intersection of gender and race equality. Although her interview data does not allow a detailed examination of race issues (only one black woman was included in the interview sample, p. 184), McBride is able to utilize observational data and informal encounters with black women to consider how UNISON's preoccupation with gender and class-based fair representation can squeeze out consideration of race-based representation (e.g., p. 87).

The book is ambitious in its level of detail, at times perhaps over ambitious. For example, the detailed examination of election ballots within a number of committee structures (Chapter 4) was problematic. Here, it was easy for the reader to get lost amidst the acronyms (used for the various committees) and the figures (numbers and proportions of women elected). When presenting detailed data of this nature, there is a challenge for the author to retain the reader's attention to the detailed processes described, whilst also keeping a focus on the broader debates concerning democracy in order that a conceptual link can be forged. The use of tables and figures to present some of the data, the summary and discussion to conclude the chapter and McBride's clear and accessible writing style do, however, salvage the chapter.

My main quibble with the book concerns its title – *Gender Democracy in Trade Unions*. We are actually told almost nothing about any other trade union than UNISON, whereas the title would suggest otherwise. Whilst there are clearly various theoretical insights to be gleaned from the study of UNISON, which might have wider applicability, as McBride states (p. 27) UNISON is distinctive in the manner in which it has engaged with conceptions of gender democracy. In order for any theoretical insights to be properly understood by the readership, it would have been useful to learn how UNISON's approach compares and contrasts with the steps taken by other unions towards gender democracy and therefore to gain a greater sense of what works and why. This is only a criticism in so far as the title of a book raises certain expectations, but there is no doubt that McBride's study of UNISON is instructive, and it reveals much about how traditional models of trade union democracy might be reshaped.

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Richard Whitley

Divergent Capitalisms: The Social Structuring and Change of Business Systems
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, paperback £16.99, 301 pp.

■ Reviewed by David Ashton, *University of Leicester*

This book is good news for those of us working at the boundaries of sociology and economics. It provides the type of comparative analysis of institutions and structures reminiscent of that pioneered by the founding fathers of sociology. It builds on the earlier work of Whitley, mapping out the institutional conditions that are creating varieties of capitalisms. In doing so it presents a framework for describing and explaining differences between systems of coordination and control and shows how the business systems approach differs from other approaches such as the 'new institutionalism' in economics.

The distinctive feature of the business systems approach is the focus on the ways in which the prevailing institutions deal with the constitution and control of key resources such as skills, capital and legitimacy and their interconnections in market economies. The approach claims to link these to variations in the political, financial, labour and cultural systems. It emphasizes how 'different kinds of market economies have developed and continue to vary, and why they are unlikely to converge on the same type in the future' (p. 27).

While one may not wish to preclude the possibility of some convergence within the long-term future, this book helps to put to bed the idea, still prevalent in conventional economics, that there is just one, market-based model of economic growth. Whitley tackles this issue expressly at two levels, first through an empirically-based analysis of some of the varieties of capitalism. By highlighting basic differences in the way in which societies control, structure and legitimate business activities, he demonstrates the inadequacy of the conventional notion that markets operate in accordance with universal principles. Second, he tackles it through a direct confrontation with the strong globalization thesis which states that forces of global capitalism are resulting in the dominance of one (Anglo-Saxon) form of capitalism. Here, Whitley provides an empirically grounded refutation through his detailed analysis of global pressures on individual societies.

This is a first rate analysis which will help shape future comparative analysis of business systems. However, there are one or two areas where it runs into problems. One such area concerns the willingness of the author to accept the terms of the debate proposed by the advocates of the convergence thesis. Essentially he identifies the existing arguments for globalization and then very effectively refutes them through empirically-based analysis. There are two consequences which stem from this. First he runs the risk of producing a somewhat static analysis. He succeeds in refuting the globalization thesis but there is then a tendency for the reader to be left with the impression that relatively little has changed. In fact the analysis of change is seen as central to the business systems approach.

The second is that he fails to analyse the international level as a system or configuration with its own dynamics which will then have implications for the national

level. Thus the emergence of the EU and NAFTA, and especially the actions of the IMF, are pushing the Asian nations to consolidate their own free trade area. This in turn will impact on their national systems, much as the EU is impacting on member countries. This is a level of analysis that needs to be analysed in its own right and which tends to be ignored if the focus is exclusively on national systems and whether or not they are succumbing to the impact of globalization.

While one can sympathize with the argument that no particular pattern of business system will become dominant across institutional contexts, there still remains the problem that the products of these systems are still competing against each other in international markets. They are not all equally efficient all the time. At different periods the products of some systems, for example the Japanese in the 1970s and 1980s, have a competitive advantage over others. If the business systems approach is to take our understanding further then this question, raised so effectively by Frank Wilkinson's work on productive systems, will have to be addressed.

Overall, a stimulating book which has much to offer the field. My only disappointment is that the style is dense and reading is hard work, which may put off the undergraduates who should be reading this book. It is good sociology.

Sharon Beder

Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR

London: Zed Books, 2001, paperback £15.95, 292 pp.

■ Reviewed by Michael Rowlinson, *University of North London*

It is difficult to know what to make of the rash of books such as Beder's. On the one hand it is written in a lively polemical style that is easy and often enjoyable to read. On the other hand it is largely derived from a restricted range of secondary sources, with little or no primary research beyond newspaper clippings, and no attempt to develop a coherent thesis that could be said to constitute social theory. The decision to write and publish such books must be based on an assumption that there is an audience for semi-academic, anti-corporate polemics that fall somewhere between Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* and Klein's *No Logo*. Beder is closer to Ritzer's radical Weberianism. She takes Weber's account of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as more or less given. She does acknowledge that 'There is some debate about which came first, the Protestant ethic or the beginnings of modern capitalism' (p. 26), but that is all she has to say on a controversy that has sustained many a Marxist and Weberian sociologist. For Beder, the importance of Weber is that he demonstrates how the 'work ethic' that she criticizes can be traced back to the Protestants who supported the idea of work as a calling. Marx gets only a brief mention (p. 96), so thankfully *Selling the Work Ethic* cannot be dismissed as a Marxist tract.

According to Beder both capitalist and socialist ideologies subordinate human beings to a work ethic that is becoming untenable in terms of its social and

environmental consequences. In capitalist societies the work ethic conditions individuals and ensures that every aspect of society functions in the interests of employers, whose power is largely hidden. In this seamless web there is little scope for resistance. There is also little room for debate in Beder's schema, which presents capitalism and the work ethic as a monolithic, demonic entity. She dismisses any arguments in favour of making people work for a living in a morally indignant tone.

Beder's argument can be summarized briefly. Belief in the possibility of social mobility, personified by the self-made man, is a myth that sustains the capitalist social order, even though social mobility is actually decreasing. Wealth is also justified by economics, which is a version of social Darwinism. Employees of large corporations in particular have little opportunity for advancement, even though they hold on to 'the dreams fed them by self-interested employers' (p. 65). Inequality is increasing as 'the rich have been getting richer whilst the poor have been getting poorer' (p. 74).

There is a broad historical sweep in Beder's argument, from the genesis of the work ethic to its impending failure. As the work ethic declined during the 20th century employers turned to other means to make sure that workers worked. Scientific management and various branches of social science stepped into the breach. This echoes the critique of Taylorism and human relations in Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, although Beder does not mention Braverman, nor does she emulate him in the sense of attempting to link her critique of work with political economy, Marxian or otherwise. Instead she offers an ironic motif:

The irony is that having made work the centre of life, both material and spiritual, capitalism then proceeded to destroy work as a satisfying, meaningful activity for millions of people by fragmenting it and reducing some jobs to activities that were better suited for animals or machines to do. (p. 109)

Beder gives a neat summary of the growth of corporate communications during the 20th century, consisting of company magazines and the like. But ironically again, as corporations secured a workforce that could 'conceive of no identity outside of work' (p. 127) they began to downsize, leaving workers without any purpose or identity. Beder then treats us to the familiar litany of woes that has befallen the increasing numbers of temporary workers, for whom increased 'electronic surveillance' makes up for their lack of motivation (p. 141). In case workers might be tempted to renounce paid employment, 'the media' can be relied upon 'to exploit the prejudices of the public to sell papers' by characterizing the 'unemployed as lazy scroungers' (p. 163).

Beder maintains that education for developing human potential is increasingly subordinated to utilitarian training for employment. Universities are increasingly threatened, both by corporate university rivals and from corporate take-over. In relation to education, Beder pays homage to Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America*, but it is odd that this and other well-worn classics in the radical canon are treated as if they are the last word instead of the generators of ongoing debates.

Finally, where all else has failed to shore up capitalism with the decline of the work ethic, the consumer ethic has come to the fore. Here Beder revives an interpretation of consumerism with the consumer as the dupe of corporate advertising. The sad irony of the world today is that 'people's only function' is 'to produce goods for consumption' (p. 267). People are compelled to work ever longer hours in increasingly insecure employment in order to remain members of the mass consumer culture. As a result the environment is under threat from overproduction. Beder sees little prospect of resistance from the working class since, 'The revolutionary potential of the "class-conscious radical" driven to protest by the conditions of his/her work has been subverted by the material rewards of consumerism' (p. 239). She concludes with a rhetorical question: 'can enough people see through the conditioning that we are subject to and recognise that it is detrimental to our future?'.