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Sodi, J.S., Rama J. Joshi, H.V.V. Chellappa, S. Masilamani, Sarita A. Kalia, and Harinda Sanhu, *In Search of Participation: A Study of Some Successful Companies*

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bour unity or "defending the pattern" suppresses democratic participation. The "old solidarity" based on the community which was so amply demonstrated by the Mexican American strikers and their families is unable to overcome the power of a corporation supported by the forces of government. Strikers can only prevail if the public at large learns about the struggle and is moved to support it. Thus Rosenblum asserts that the unions "failed at one of their most basic tasks:

educating the workers and the public about labour's needs".

Jonathan Rosenblum has written an elegant account of an important strike that has seriously impacted the state of labour/management relations in the United States. Its compact and readable style help make it an important contribution to the labour history of the 1980s.

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### ***In Search of Participation: A Study of Some Successful Companies***

by J. S. SODI, Rama J. JOSHI, H. V.V. CHELLAPPA, S. MASILAMANI, Sarita A. KALIA, and Harinda SANHU, New Delhi, SHRI Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, 1995, 468 p.

The SHRI Ram Centre have produced an outstanding set of eight case studies on employee participation, a useful introductory chapter on employee participation and a helpful concluding summary of the case studies. As noted in the introductory chapter employee participation in industry has different forms in various countries of the world. The Indian version presented in this set of case studies is quite impressive in that it springs from strong communal values and also benevolent paternalism of founding families of outstanding Indian companies.

The companies selected and studied are quite exceptional in terms of fostering participation and most Indian organizations in the public and private sectors may not have very much employee participation. All these other Indian organizations can benefit from reading these case studies to see how employee participation can be achieved. Indeed North American industry can learn much also about effective employee relations. There has been so much emphasis recently on down sizing and re-engineering in North American industry that we can forget that we still depend on well motivated employees and managers to run the new companies.

Since the Indian case studies are developed in great depth it is not surprising that the authors emphasize the differences between the eight public and private companies presented. There are some differences between the companies in how they came to foster employee participation. National Fertilizers Limited (NFL) used joint committees and suggestion schemes to achieve productivity improvements. Hindustan Antibiotics Ltd. (HAL) used participation to increase "human potential" and thereby improve productivity. Fertilizers and Chemicals Travancore Ltd. (FACT) achieved efficiency and productivity through a "filial atmosphere". Bharat Electronics (BE) used quality circles to improve quality and upgrade technology. All the preceding are public sector companies but are still operated profitably in important industries.

Case studies were conducted in three private sector companies, Madura Coats, Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), and Textile Equipment Ltd (TEL). In TISCO and TEL participative initiatives started with management but had strong employee acceptance. In Madura Coats there was considerable sharing of information and power between management and employees and much joint decision making.

The eighth case study concerns Jaipur Metals and Electricals Ltd. (JMEL) which is largely employee owned due to refinancing arrangements. JMEL has less extensive participation practices, probably because employee participation was forced upon the company rather than coming from a long history of excellent employee management relations as in the other cases. The entire wage system at JMEL is linked with productivity and is well accepted by employees and the union. Both managers and employees recognize that inadequate training prevents them from improving participation, quality and productivity.

Unlike JMEL the other seven companies have achieved quite extensive employee participation at work and in related activities such as safety, health and education. Employee participation has grown and flourished in many respects. The authors distinguish between direct and indirect participation. "Companies were practicing indirect participation [...] union office bearers [...] the workers were members of the participatory committees. TISCO, FACT, TEL, and BE were also practicing some direct participation [...] TISCO workers were invited to take part in participatory deliberations in [...] meetings, at least once in a year. [...] FACT and TEL management involved workers in the day to day participatory proceedings. BE's quality circle programme had a majority of workers as its members."

Several factors have contributed to successful participation and possible negative factors have not been very strong. Surprisingly, caste factor has not been a

problem as communal loyalties have facilitated good relations between management and employees. Further more long history of good employee relations and welfare measures (paternalism) have made employee participation much easier.

All eight companies enjoyed "relative peace" in industrial relations. This was perhaps guaranteed by selecting companies which had extensive employee participation. Employee participation would have been quite unlikely if there were troubled labour relations. Nevertheless it is good to have reported eight instances of cooperative activities between unions and management.

Finally the government factor has not been very strong even though India has been a socialistic country and introduced laws requiring employee participation. The required forms of participation have been the less successful as these have been forced upon companies and not seriously followed. Some managers in public sector companies felt obliged to have participatory practices but these practices were successful only if supported by employees and management.

These eight companies have found much support within companies and communities for employee participation. Hopefully other Indian companies will also find indigenous sources of strength to develop good industrial relations and profitability.

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