

# Shop Stewards, Workers and Managers in Israëli Industry

## Les délégués d'atelier, les travailleurs et les employeurs dans les usines en Israël.

Shlomit Kaminka and Eliezer Rosenstein

Volume 38, Number 3, 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029380ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/029380ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Kaminka, S. & Rosenstein, E. (1983). Shop Stewards, Workers and Managers in Israëli Industry. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 38(3), 598–617.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/029380ar>

### Article abstract

This paper describes and analyses the place of the shop steward committee in the constellation of relationships at the workplace and pays special attention to the relations between the shop steward committee and the workers.

# *Shop Stewards, Workers, and Managers in Israëli Industry*

**Shlomit Kaminka  
and  
Eliezer Rosenstein**

*This paper describes and analyses the place of the shop steward committee in the constellation of relationships at the workplace and pays special attention to the relations between the shop steward committee and the workers.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Various researchers have emphasized the great impact of the shop steward committee on the labor relations system at the workplace. The usual claim has been that this impact stemmed from the committee's position at an important junction — between employees and management.<sup>1</sup> Sayles and Strauss<sup>2</sup>, for example, characterized the position of the steward as a «man in the middle». In various theoretical elaborations and reports of empirical studies, the examination focuses on the relationship between the shop steward committee and the management, the underlying assumption being that the shop steward committee constitutes an integral part of the entire body of employees. Accordingly, an examination of the committee-management relations would tell us what goes on in the area of labor relations at the workplace.

---

\* KAMINKA, Shlomit, Lecturer in the Department of Labor Studies, Tel Aviv University.

ROSENSTEIN, Eliezer, Associate Professor, Faculty of Industrial Engineering and Management, Technion-Israel Institute of Technology.

<sup>1</sup> N.G. PEDLER, «Shop Stewards as Leaders», *Industrial Relations Journal*, Nottingham, Vol. 4, 1973, pp. 43-60; N. NICHOLSON, «The Role of the Shop Steward: An Empirical Case Study», *Industrial Relations Journal*, Nottingham, Vol. 7, 1976, pp. 15-26; L. DONOVAN, *The Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations*, London, H.M.S.O., 1968.

<sup>2</sup> L.R. SAYLES and G. STRAUSS, *The Local Union*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1953, 1967.

Several writers, however, have emphasized the importance of the relations between the shop steward committee and the rank-and-file for the understanding of the very nature of labor relations at the workplace.<sup>3</sup> These writers who regard the shop steward's role as the essence of representation, point to the paucity of empirical research on their relations with the rank-and-file. There are several comprehensive studies that attempt to examine the relationship between shop stewards and workers, through a comparison of their attitudes<sup>4</sup>, but they refer to individuals rather than to the two groups, as the units of analysis. It is thus difficult to learn from them about the nature of the relations formed between these parties at the workplace. Furthermore, these studies do not usually examine the interaction between the rank-and-file and the shop steward committee within the general context of the labor relations system at the workplace. The aim of this article is to describe and analyze the place of the shop steward committee in the constellation of relationships at the workplace, while paying special attention to the relations between the shop steward committee and the workers.

#### THE FORMAL POSITION OF SHOP STEWARDS IN THE ISRAELI SYSTEM

In order to understand the significance of the findings that will be presented below, a short explanation of the formal position of shop stewards in the Israeli system is needed.<sup>5</sup>

3 W.E.J. MACARTHY, «Shop Stewards' Bargaining in Britain» in A. Flanders (ed) *Collective Bargaining*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969, pp. 286-314, N.G. PEDLER, «The Training Implications of the Shop Stewards Leadership Role», *Industrial Relations Journal*, Nottingham, Vol. 5, 1974, pp. 57-69; E. BATSTONE, I. BORASTON and S. FRANKEL, *Shop Stewards in Action*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1977. SAYLES and STRAUSS, who already in the early 1950s studied the relationship between the local union officers and shop stewards on the one hand, and the rank and file on the other hand, characterized these relationships as suspicious, resentful, and ambivalent. *The Local Union*, *op. cit.*, ch. 13.

4 W.E.J. MACARTHY, and S.R. PARKER, *Shop Stewards and Workshop Relations*, Royal Commission of Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, Research Paper 8, London, 1968; J.F.B. GOODMAN and T.G. WHITTINGHAM, *Shop Stewards in British Industry*, London, McGraw-Hill, 1969; M. POOLE, «Toward a Sociology of Shop Steward», *Sociological Review*, Vol. 22, 1974, pp. 57-82.

5 Further details on this subject may be found in the following works: E. ROSENSTEIN, «The Israeli Industrial Relations System», in *Industrial Democracy in Europe* team *European Industrial Relations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, pp. 233-251; «Workers' Committees and the Labor Relations System in Israel», in *The Position of the Workers' Committee in Israeli Labor Relations*, Tel-Aviv, Institute for the Advancement of Industrial Relations, 1975, pp. 1-17 (Hebrew); A. SHIROM, «Workers Committees in the Israeli Labor Relations System: An Appraisal», *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1971, pp. 64-74; M. DERBER, «Plant Labor Relations in Israel», *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1963, pp. 39-60. As to the formal status of the shop stewards committee in various countries, see B. YAFFE, «The Protected Rights of the Union Steward», *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 1970, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 483-499; International Labour Office, *Rights of Trade Union Representatives at the Level of the Undertaking*, Labour-Management Relations Series, No. 32, Geneva, 1969.

Similar to the situation in Great Britain and other countries, shop stewards in Israel constitute the direct representation of workers at the place of work as well as the shop-level echelon of the national trade union. The shop stewards in Israel are directly elected by the workers at their place of work, and they are involved to a great extent in the ongoing activities of the plant. In most cases, shop steward committee members do not receive payment for their work on the committee; they rather function as workers in all respects. Only in large organizations, and then in most cases only the chairmen of the committees work full time as committee members and receive full payment from the employer. In most Israeli organizations there exist more than one shop steward committee, depending on the subdivision of the workforce. In industry the most common division is into two committees; one which represents the white collar, monthly paid, salaried employees, the other represents the blue collar hourly paid employees.

As part of the trade union organization the shop steward committee is directly connected with the local labor council, which is the local branch of the General Federation of Labor (the Histadrut). By virtue of being the direct representative body of the workforce, the shop steward committee is a partner — together with the representatives of the local labor council — in conducting negotiations and signing collective agreements with management concerning specific plant-level issues. This is in addition to the national collective agreements which are negotiated between the various trade unions and their counterparts in the employers' associations.<sup>6</sup>

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data for this study were collected by means of the survey research method for a dual purpose: To characterize the parties as groups within each plant, and to present a general picture of what takes place in industrial plants in Israel. In order to characterize each plant as a unit, there was need for a great number of respondents within each plant, and in order to present a general picture of Israeli industry, it was necessary to examine a large number of plants.

With these considerations in mind, the process of choosing and sampling the study population was conducted in two stages: Stage 1 — A

---

<sup>6</sup> The specific activities of the shop steward committee have not been yet fully and formally legitimized in Labor Law, Collective agreements and various regulations. The National Labor Federation (Histadrut) published in 1978 its Shop Steward Committee Regulations which try to fill the existing gap in the definition of authority and mode of operation of the shop steward committees.

stratified sample of plants; Stage 2 — A stratified sample of respondents within the plants. In all, the research covered 70 industrial plants, in each of which three different populations were studied: Shop steward committee members, management personnel, and regular employees — a total of 1349 respondents. In stage 1, 70 industrial plants were sampled of a total of 231 plants existing in Israel in 1974-5, which answered the following requirements. Employs 100 or more people, has at least one shop steward committee, is an industrial manufacturing plant but not a kibbutz industry (in which the shop steward committee has a unique character). The sampling of the 70 plants was undertaken as a stratified sample, with the qualities of the enterprise characterizing the strata being the nature of the ownership of the plant (that is, whether it belongs to the private sector, the public sector, or the Histadrut); the type of industrial sector (food, textile, paper-wood-construction, chemicals, metals, electronics), the size of the plant, determined according to the overall number of employees; and its location, on the basis of a rough division into development area and other areas. These four organizational criteria were chosen in light of their possible impact on the quality of labor relations at the workplace. The sampling in each stratum was conducted according to optimal proportional sampling, in which

$$C = \frac{n}{N} = \frac{70}{231} = \frac{1}{3}$$

In stage 2 — sampling within the plants — the division of strata was also tripartite: Shop steward committee, management, and employees. As for the committee, all members, representing manufacturing and maintenance workers were included (taking into consideration that the study deals with industrial manufacturing plants); as for management, the general manager was interviewed, as were the manpower director and the production manager; and as for the workers, a random sample of about 10% of all manufacturing and maintenance employees was drawn at each plant. Total respondents interviewed individually and anonymously were 228 shop stewards, 958 workers, and 168 managers.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of our interest in comparing the three different bodies at the plant, there was need to compile the answers of the individual workers, shop stewards, and managers into data characterizing each one of these parties. An examination of the nature of the distribution of each variable in

<sup>7</sup> Further details on the research methodology, its execution and its different stages can be found in S. KAMINKA, «The Impact of the Worker's Committee on Labor Relations at the Plant Level», unpublished D.Sc thesis, Haifa, Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, 1977 (Hebrew).

each of the plants showed that, in general, the distribution was normal and the standard deviation low (less than one in most cases). On this basis, the average grade of all items for each party — workers, committee, management — was selected as reflecting its perception.

The nature of the data, defined by means, even determined the technique for their analysis. An examination of the relationship between two variables (means) was calculated, using the Pearson correlation coefficient. In order to describe the situation at the plants, use was made of the graphical descriptive method, which enables one to get an overall view of the situation (without an arbitrary division into boxes in contingency tables), and a sensitive discrimination of the differences, to the extent that they exist, among the various parties in each of the plants.<sup>8</sup>

An investigation of the mutual relations between the three bodies at the workplace with the shop steward committee as the focal point, necessitated a nominal and operative definition of «mutual relations». Generally, a distinction can be drawn between two types of criteria for an investigation of mutual relationships: (1) Objective criteria that describe relations through quantifiable behavioral expressions, like the number of strikes, the rate of worker absenteeism, turnover rates, etc.; (2) subjective criteria, like the perceptions and the feelings of the parties toward each other. In this study the subjective criteria were selected as defining the relations. This was based on the assumption that a principal determinant of the nature of the relations between the parties is the way they relate to the facts.<sup>9</sup>

Since no one specific definition exists for «relations», two measures were used: (1) feelings, and (2) contacts.<sup>10</sup> The «feelings» were measured by a combination of two questions. One concerned the satisfaction with the relationship (the exact version of the question was, «To what extent are you satisfied with the relationship between the various parties?»), and the other deals with the expressions of confidence between the parties (the exact version of the question was «How much confidence do you feel towards these

---

<sup>8</sup> Examples of the beneficial use of graphical techniques may be found in F.T. AMSCOMBLE, «Graphs in Statistical Analysis», *The American Statistician*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1973, pp. 17-21.

<sup>9</sup> A similar approach may be found in A. KORNHOUER, R. DUBIN and A.M. ROSS (eds), *Industrial Conflict*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1954, pp. 1-22; D.C. MILLER and W.H. FORM, *Industrial Sociology of Work Organizations*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1964, pp. 468; H. BEHREND, «The Field of Industrial Relations», *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, London, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1963, pp. 383-394.

<sup>10</sup> See also G.C. HOMANS, *Social Behavior, Its Elementary Forms*, New York, Harcourt, Bace and World, 1961, pp. 164-204; W.F. WHYTE, *Organizational Behavior, Theory and Applications*, R.D. Irwin Inc. and the Dorsey Press, 1969, pp. 87-170.

bodies?»).<sup>11</sup> The «contacts» were measured in two ways, depending on the parties. When it concerned contacts between management and the shop steward committee, the question related to the frequency of meetings between them (the exact version of the question was «What is the frequency of meetings between you and these managers?»).<sup>12</sup> The contacts between workers and the shop stewards were measured by the frequency of communication between them. The exact version of the question was «Consider the list of these communication devices and state by marking an x the frequency of use of each device in our plant».<sup>13</sup> The measure of communication was built up as a weighted means of various communication devices such as Newspaper, Notices, Department meetings, general meetings, office hours and material by mail.<sup>14</sup> «Feelings» and «contacts» should be viewed as complementary; that is, frequent contacts can constitute a means of communication, cooperation, and the removal of obstacles — which leads to improved feelings; while feelings of a positive nature create the tendency to increase the frequency of contacts (similar to Homans' theory). It is possible, of course, that the feelings of the parties toward each other will not be identical; therefore, the extent of agreement between the feelings of the parties constitute another means of examining their mutual relations. The mutual relations between each two parties are defined as more positive, the more positive the description of the feelings, the more frequent the contacts (according to the perceptions of the parties), and the greater the agreement between the feelings of the parties towards each other, and/or between their perceptions of the frequency of contacts.

In accordance with these definitions the bilateral relations between the shop steward committee and the workers, between the committee and the management and between workers and management will be examined first and in the end, the overall interrelationship will be presented.

## THE FINDINGS

### **Interrelationship Between the Shop Steward Committee and the Workers**

The relations between the shop steward committee and the workers are described in Figure 1 which relates to the feelings of the two groups toward

<sup>11</sup> The variables «feelings» was measured on the ordinal scale: 1- very negative, 2- quite negative, 3- quite positive, 4- very positive. Since each party is characterized by means, the scale can be considered interval.

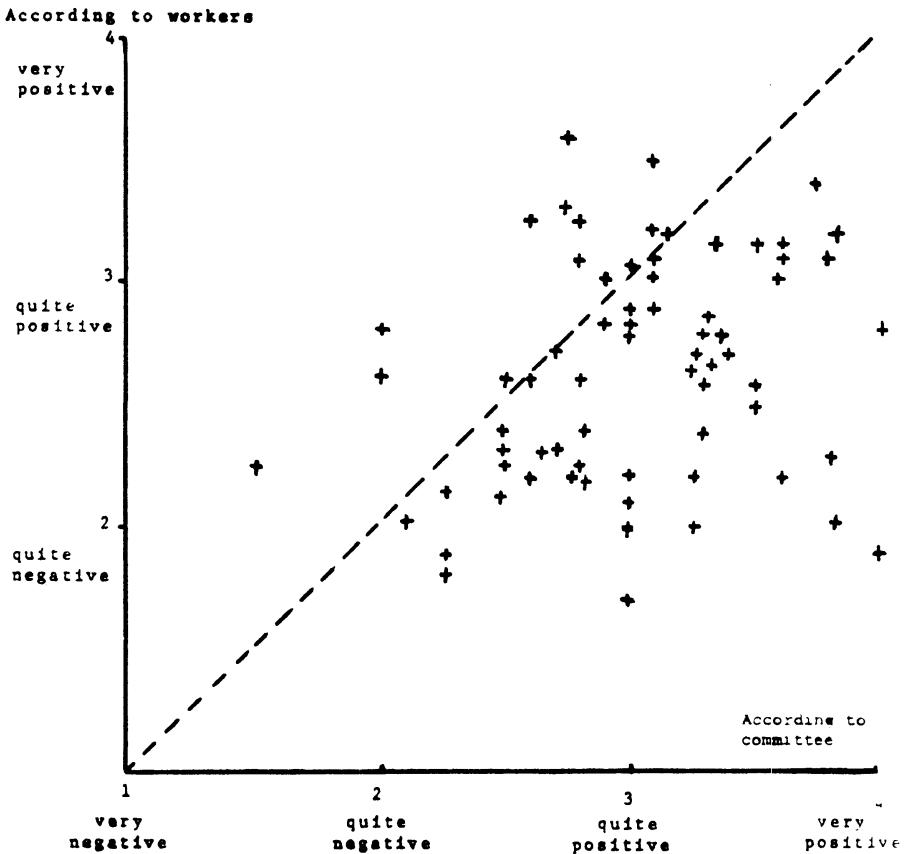
<sup>12</sup> The various alternatives were: 1- hardly every met, 2- twice a year, 3- once every 3-4 months, 4- once a month, 5- once a week, 6- daily meetings.

<sup>13</sup> The alternatives: 1- never used, 2- hardly ever used, 3- once a year, 4- once every few months, 5- once a month, 6- once a week. Since each party is characterized by means, the scale can be considered interval.

<sup>14</sup> The weights were given according to the attributes of the various devices and according to an analysis by means of the principal components method.

each other. The data represent the frequency of communication existing between them. Each axis in Fig. 1 represents the feeling of one of the groups towards the other at the plant. The values of the axes range from 1, which is an expression of negative feeling (meaning lack of confidence and great dissatisfaction) to 4, which marks a positive feeling (much confidence and great satisfaction). It is an interval scale since the data consist of means. Each point in the figure signifies a plant located between the axes according to the extent of agreement between the feelings of the parties; thus, a plant in which the feelings of one party are identical to those of the other is recorded as a point on a line 45 degrees between the axes, which constitutes the «agreement line» between the feelings of the parties.

**Figure 1**  
**Sentiments between workers and committee, towards each other, according to workers and committee**





A noticeable fact in Fig. 1 is that the spread of points (plants) is sufficiently random, which testifies to the small degree of linear connection between workers' feelings and the feelings of the shop steward committee (even though the extent of the connection was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.36$ ). Another point evinced in the figure is that most of the plants are below the 45 degree line, which testifies to the greater negative feelings by the workers than by the committee.<sup>15</sup>

The overall picture of the distribution of plants appears different when the distribution is compared from the point of view of the workers with that of the committee; a look at the workers axis shows that most plants are distributed between the value of 2 (not so good feeling) and 3 (sufficiently good feeling), while a look at the committee axis shows a distribution between a value of 2.5 and 4 (very good feeling). We also found (not presented in the graph) that 43% of the workers, in all the plants taken as one group, expressed negative attitudes (lack of confidence and dissatisfaction) towards the shop steward committees, as against 18% of the shop stewards who expressed similar attitudes towards the workers.

Our findings seem to point to the distancing of relations between the workers and their representatives; i.e., the shop steward committee. A common expression of the gap between the committee and the workers are the pressures exerted by individuals and groups of workers on committee members concerning issues such as promotion, grading, compensation and other issues that fall within the framework of collective bargaining at the workplace.<sup>16</sup> Another expression of that gap is more extreme, albeit not as frequent. This is the establishment of an «action committee» elected by the workers to replace an existing committee in negotiating with management on important issues. Such developments occur when the committee is perceived by the workers as incapable of managing such issues on their behalf.

The findings that relate to frequency of communication<sup>17</sup> between the committee and the workforce indicate the infrequent use of means of com-

<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, a comparison of the median values of the feelings of the parties shows a great difference: The median for the committee being 3.00 and for the workers 2.69.

<sup>16</sup> Collective bargaining in Israel takes place at three levels:

- a) National level, where overall agreements are concluded concerning pay increase, minimum wage, social security, and welfare.
- b) Industry level, where agreements are concluded on wage levels for various occupations and unique special benefits for the various industries.
- c) Local (company, plant) level, where agreements concerning promotion, incentive plans, standard of living and work conditions are signed.

<sup>17</sup> Communication — Expresses an index composed of the use of various means of communication, such as company newspaper, noticeboard, fliers in the mail, general assemblies, departmental meetings and office hours for workers.

munication (the linear connection between the parties' perceptions is:  $r = 0.72$   $p < 0.001$ ). Most of the workers, like most of the shop steward committee members (some 80% of them) in our study declared that they had almost never used communication channels or that they had not used them at all. Even when asked about a fact, like the frequency of communication, a great gap existed between the replies of the two groups. The viewpoint of the committee was marked for its positive character and for its description of communication as more frequent.<sup>18</sup> Lack of formal communication channels between the workers and the committee often result in apathy and lack of personal involvement in workers' affairs on part of the workers. This apathy, however, does not prevent them from criticizing the committee and from demanding the flow of up-to-date and extensive information about the committee's actions and its contacts with both management and union officials.

These findings, which point to the existence of a gap between the workers and the shop steward committee, indicate that there is no justification to relate to the workers of a specific workplace and to their shop steward committee as to one body. The fact that communication between these parties is often so slight leads to the conclusion that it is difficult for the shop steward committee to constitute the channel of communication and the mediator between management and workers, as it is customarily described in the literature.<sup>19</sup> An examination of the relation between the feeling index and the communication index in worker-committee relations shows a significant linear connection, although quite low ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.36$ ). In the light of that the argument is strengthened that a multiplicity of contacts improves the feelings between the parties, and vice versa. It is possible, then, that a break in contacts between the committee and its constituents will create among the workers an atmosphere of suspicion, lack of confidence, and lack of understanding of the activity of the committee as a proxy vis-a-vis management.<sup>20</sup>

### **Interrelationship Between the Shop Steward Committee and Management**

Committee-management relations are presented in Figure 2, which demonstrates the feelings of the two groups towards each other (similar to committee-worker relations in Fig. 1). In Fig. 2, the linear connection that

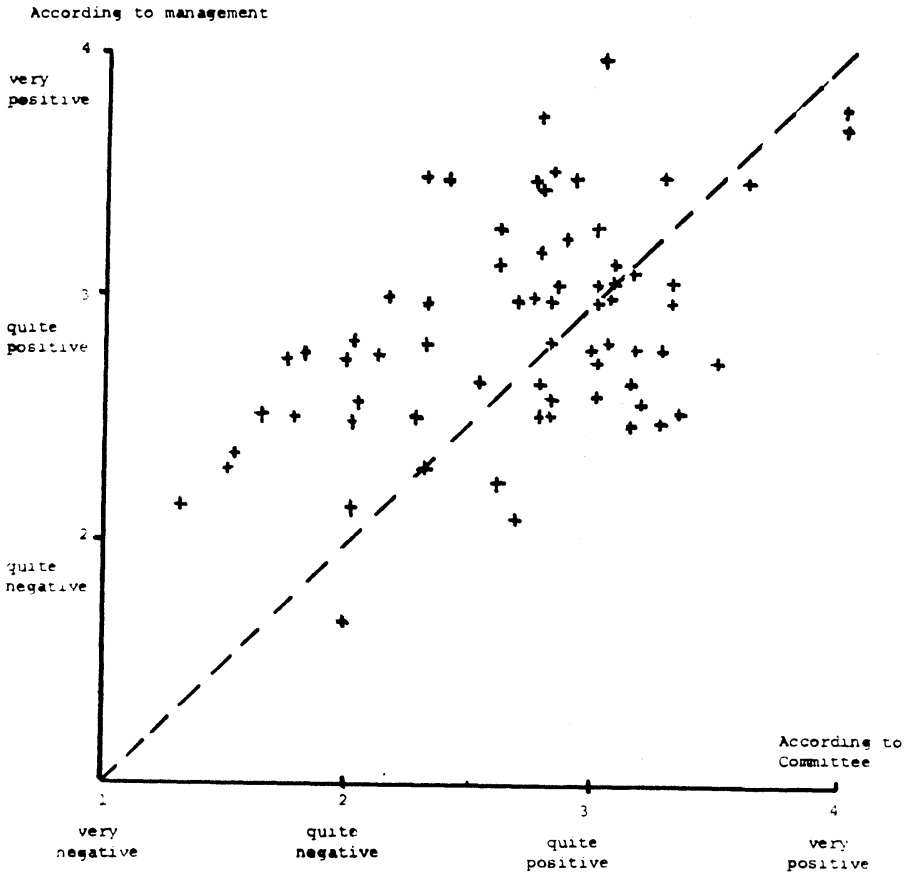
<sup>18</sup> A gap may also be seen in the median values of the parties, the median for the committee being 3.03 and for the workers 2.45.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, GOODMAN and WHITTINGHAM, *op. cit.*; PEDLER, 1973, *op. cit.*; NICHOLSON, *op. cit.*; B. PARTRIDGE, «The Activities of Shop Stewards», *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1977/78, pp. 28-42.

<sup>20</sup> It may be supposed that the connection between feelings and contacts in actuality is much stronger than what was found in the present study, since the term «communication» includes much more than merely institutional communication as it was investigated in our study.

exists between the feelings of committees and management can be seen ( $p < 0.0001$ ,  $r = 0.52$ ). This means that so long as a committee has a positive feeling towards management, management has a similar feeling towards the committee and vice versa. An examination of these two bodies show that the points of view of the committee and that of the management, in relation to feelings, are very similar; in each case most of the plants fall between the values of 2 and 3.5.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 2**  
Sentiments between committee and management, towards each other, according to committee and management



<sup>21</sup> Even the median values of the two parties are quite similar: 2.75 for the committee, and 2.83 for the management.

A comparison of Fig. 2 (relating to committee-management) with Fig. 1 (relating to committee-workers) indicates: (1) The existence of a strong linear connection between the feelings of management and committee towards each other, while the level of correlation between the feelings of workers and committee towards each other is lower, (2) the difference between the feelings of committee and management is not as striking as the difference between the feelings of committee and workers.

As to the frequency of meetings of the shop steward committee with the three administrators at each plant — the managing director, the head of personnel, and the director of manufacturing — it was found that the two parties were of almost unanimous opinion that they held frequent meetings (generally, even daily). Naturally these meetings were held more frequently with the personnel director and even with the managing director than with the director of manufacturing. A strong and significant linear connection was found between the manner in which the two parties related to each other especially with regard to the meetings between the committee and the personnel director ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.53$ ). The meaning of this connection is that whenever the shop steward committee in a plant thought that meetings with the personnel director were more frequent, the latter tended to describe the meetings in the same spirit — and vice versa.

Our findings seem to support the argument that the shop steward committee often does not constitute a rival to management.<sup>22</sup> The frequent meetings and the attitudinal match between committees and managements in many Israeli (especially Histadrut) plants rather seem to indicate day-to-day cooperation between them. This can be further exemplified by the committee's involvement in organizational activities such as safety, discipline, employee mobility, welfare, etc. However, cooperation as such does not refute the existence of conflict between the interests of the two parties. Cooperation may be understood in light of a pragmatic approach adopted by the parties according to which they have learned to adhere to certain behavioral rules and to reach agreements.

An examination of the relation between the nature of the feelings and the frequency of meetings shows that in contrast to committee-workers relations, no significant linear connection exists in this respect in the case of committee-management relations. This situation implies frequent meetings between the committee and the management which take place side by side with negative feelings of lack of confidence between them. This occurs often during a crisis situation, when the two parties meet frequently but,

<sup>22</sup> See also H.A. CLEGG, J. KILLICK and R. ADAMS, *Trade Union Officers*, Harvard University Press, 1964, as well as in GOODMAN and WHITTINGHAM, *op. cit.*

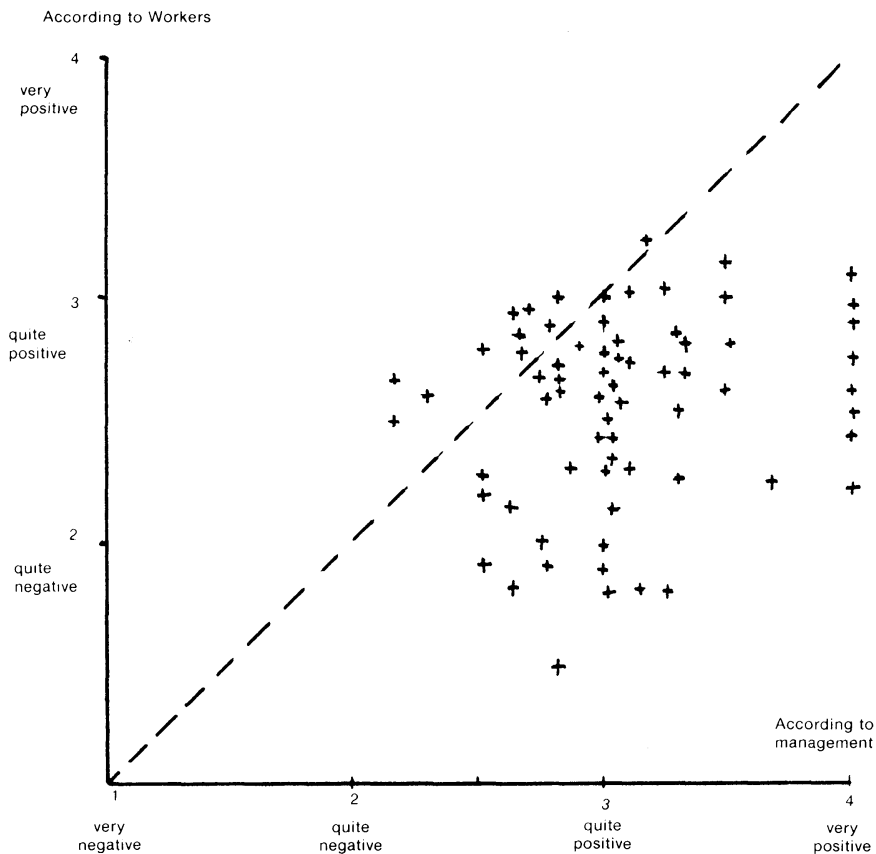
nevertheless, achieve very little, especially at the earlier stages. Indeed, often such meetings are characterized by tension.

**Interrelationship Between Workers and Management**

Fig. 3 describes the feelings that prevail between workers and management.<sup>23</sup> A comparison of this figure with Fig. 1 shows that the feelings of workers towards management are very similar to those shown towards the committee.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 3**

**Sentiments between workers and management, towards each other, according to workers and management**



23 In the case of workers-management relations, only feelings are described since the contacts between these parties as groups are usually established through the shop steward committee.

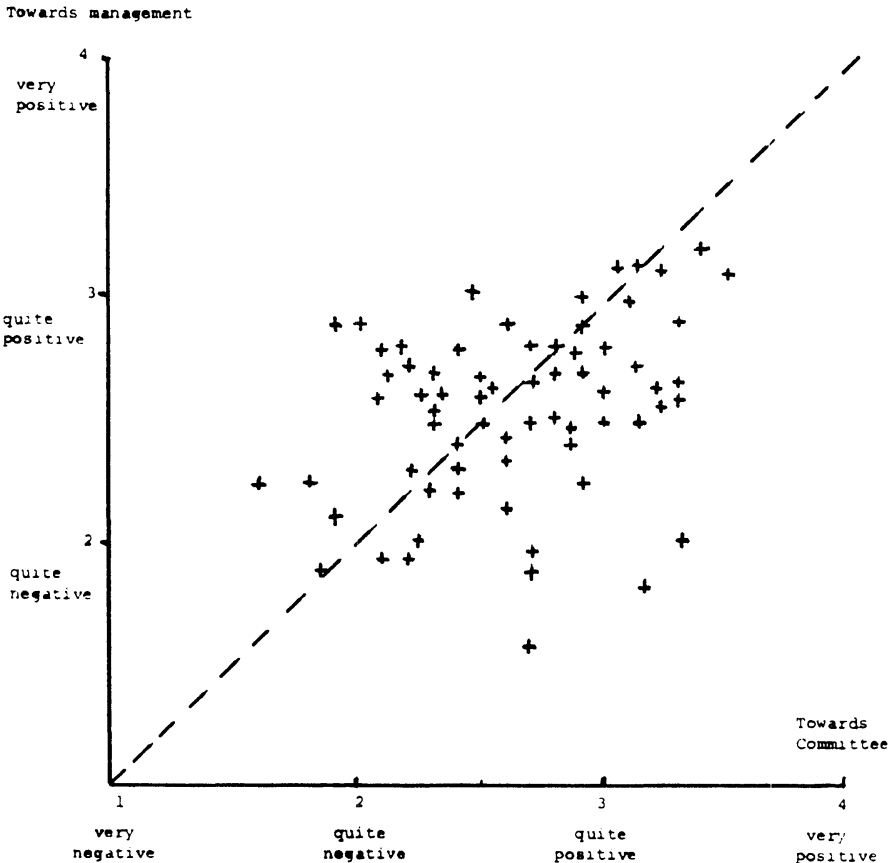
24 The median value in Fig. 3 is 2.6 for workers and 3 for management, while the median values in Fig. 1 are 2.69 for workers and 3 for the committee.

Similar to what was said about Fig. 1, two facts stand out: There is almost no linear connection between the feelings of the parties ( $p = 0.002$ ,  $r = 0.24$ ); also, most of the plants are located below the 45 degree line, which testifies to the more negative feelings of the workers than of management.

When Figs. 1 and 3 are compared, the great similarity between them can be seen, with the feelings of the workers shown towards the committee being similar to those directed to management and the feelings of the committee towards the workers being similar to those of management towards the workers. This comparison deals with the general character of the distribution of plants in the two figures. In order to present a picture that reflects each specific plant, another figure is introduced; Fig. 4, which

Figure 4

Workers' sentiments towards committee and management  
in each plant



specifically describes the feelings of the workers towards the committee and towards management in each one of the plants. In this figure, the great similarity may be marked in the feelings of the workers towards the committee, on the one hand, and towards the management, on the other (most of the plants are located contingent to the 45 degree line). Even in the few cases in which there is little agreement, there is no basis for the argument that the feelings of the workers towards the committee are more positive than those shown towards management ( $p < 0.001$   $r = 0.54$ ). From the various figures, the distance that exists between workers and management which is a natural phenomenon in labor relations may be seen. This gap, however, is essentially similar to the distance in relations found between the workers and the shop steward committee, which is not natural and arouses speculation.

### **The Integrative Interrelationship System**

From the findings presented, the gap has been emphasized between the feelings of the workers as a body and the two other parties — the committee, on the one hand, and management on the other. It seems that the workers constitute an alienated body, the distance between it and the other two bodies being quite great. The impression is that the proximity between committee and management is possibly created at the expense of relations with the workers; and indeed, a significant correlation is found, although low, between the difference in worker-committee feelings and the difference in management-committee feelings ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $r = -0.26$ ). The negative coefficient of the correlation testifies to a certain trend, that whenever the difference in feelings between committee and workers (manifested in a distance between them) is great, the difference in feelings between committee and management (which indicates an affinity between them) is small. In connection with this it is interesting to note the difference in feelings between committee and management in the private sector as opposed to the Histadrut sector. Whereas in the first the difference between committee and management was found to be the biggest, there was no difference in the latter. This may demonstrate the problematic status of workers representation in Histadrut-owned plants where there is a close tie between the union (shop steward committee) and ownership (Histadrut as owner and manager). No significant difference existed, however in the extent of the gaps between workers and their committees when plants were analyzed by sector. It appears, therefore, that the workers-committee gap is a more universal phenomenon and that its roots stem from the committee's role and status in the plant rather than from the organizational characteristics. Research in Britain shows the great influence of the size effect on shop stewards

organization, hierarchy, etc.<sup>25</sup> We examined therefore in our sample the influence of the size of the plant on the relationships between workers and shop stewards but did not find such influence on the feelings of the two groups towards each other. We did find, however, that the use of formal means of communication between the committee and workers was less frequent in the small plants (employing less than 200 people) than in the middle size (200-500) and larger (500+) plants. It thus seems that the size of the plant influences the rate of formalization of certain aspects of the shop steward's activity rather than the mutual feelings of the two parties.

Our findings highlight the focal point of the shop steward committee located between workers and management who have conflicting interests. The fact that the committee is being placed under the pressure of conflicting expectations affects its functioning as a representative body and causes it to feel at times closer to workers and at times closer to management.<sup>26</sup> A manifestation of this ambiguity can be found in the manner in which workers replied to a question as to the place of their shop steward committee between the workers, on the one hand, and the management on the other.<sup>27</sup>

Table 1 presents the proportion of workers, managers and shop stewards that ranked the place of the shop steward committee on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 expressing the worker's side and 5 the management's side) in a situation of conflict between workers and management.

**Table 1**  
**Perception of Place of Shop Steward Committee by the Parties**  
**in a Situation of Conflict Between Workers and Management (in %)**

|                   |           |           |           |           |          | <i>Total</i>   |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------------|
| Managers          | 39        | 35        | 21        | 5         | 0        | N = 166 (100%) |
| Committee Members | 62        | 16        | 19        | 1         | 2        | N = 226 (100%) |
| Workers           | <u>41</u> | <u>16</u> | <u>24</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>8</u> | N = 922 (100%) |
| Worker —          | 1         | 2         | 3         | 4         | 5        | — Manager      |

<sup>25</sup> See W. BROWN (ed.), *The Changing Contours of British Industrial Relations*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981.

<sup>26</sup> See also A. WARREN, «The Challenge From Below: An Analysis of The Role of the Shop Steward in Industrial Relations», *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 22, 1971, pp. 35-53.

<sup>27</sup> The exact version of the question in the study was «A member of the shop steward committee is likely to feel at times as a worker, as a manager, or as a trade union representative. State by marking an X in the scale shown before, your feeling as to the place of the shop steward committee when there is a conflict between the demands of the workers and those of management».



The gap may again be seen between workers and committee members, with 43% of the workers ranking the committee as located in the middle (3 on the scale) and up to the side of the manager, as against 22% of committee members and 26% of managers who similarly ranked the committee.<sup>28</sup>

To summarize, the integrative system of interrelationships at the workplace does not present the shop steward committee clearly and unequivocally as being in the middle between the workers and the management.

### Discussions and Conclusions

In this study, whose special contribution might be in the area of worker-shop steward committee relations, the noteworthy finding is the distance in relations and the contrast in perceptions between workers and shop steward committee members. There exist three bodies at the workplace — workers, shop steward committee, and management — with workers and committee not always being one and the same.

There can be several implications to our findings. Generally it seems that a better understanding of labor relations phenomena at the workplace necessitates more than the examination of the relations between workers and management or committee and management. The dimension of workers-committee relations is essential, and there is also need for an integrated systemic approach involving the interactions between management, shop steward committee and workers.

Our study also provides some explanation for actions by the shop steward committee that do not necessarily meet the approval of the workers. For example, the committees generally do not take a secret vote of all the workers before declaring a strike, as the regulations of their trade union obligate them to do. This, perhaps more than anything else, highlights the potential gap between these two «sides».<sup>29</sup> The distance between the committee and the workers creates a climate in which management may succeed in coming to terms with the committee but not necessarily with the workers, and therefore, does not succeed in laying the basis for good labor relations at the workplace.

---

<sup>28</sup> The gap between workers and committee is significant:

$P < 0.01$ ,  $X^2 + 11.18$

(2)

<sup>29</sup> From the report of the Commissioner of Labor Relations, it is evident that there is a high rate of unauthorized strikes, particularly in the past decade. During 1976-78, for example, the rate of unauthorized strikes was some 60% of all strikes, while the rate of authorized strikes was some 25% (the rest were incidents of lockouts or «unknown»).

The findings of the study reflect a reality that exists at certain plants with workers embittered and dissatisfied despite the fact that outwardly the shop steward committee seems active and functions closely with the management. The methodological implications are also significant, in that when labor relations in an organization are studied, the workers should not be avoided, and their representatives should not be viewed as necessarily reflecting their positions and feelings. Also, the findings in fact raise some doubts about the function of the shop steward committee as a channel of communication between the workers and the management. It is difficult for the committee to fulfill this role when there is a break in the chain of communication (the formal one, at least) between the committee and the workers. Just as Sayles and Strauss focused on the implications of the shop steward being a «Man in the Middle» between the rank and file and the Union, so this study emphasizes the problems which emanate from the position of the shop stewards as the men in the middle between the workers and the management.

The conflict between the shop steward committee and the management is an accepted theme in labor relations literature. It is thought to be natural, open, and known. But the gap between the shop steward committee and the workers, as found in this study, is hidden, not understood, and has not been extensively studied. Some of the literature that examines the subject of conflict<sup>30</sup> highlights the fact that when a conflict between positions is open and known, it has a constructive side to it, in that it can lead to the defreezing of hostile attitudes and thereby create an opportunity for settling the conflict. If this is indeed so, the conflicting interests of committee and management, when open, have an important constructive side and are known in helping to develop accepted rules of behavior and agreement between the two parties. The gap between the shop steward committee and the workers, on the other hand, is often latent and unrecognized, and therefore little is done to narrow it. Perhaps this study, which points out this existing distance will create an awareness of that situation and will, to some extent, contribute to future constructive steps in narrowing the gap and in the development of representation in closer proximity to the workers. Shop steward committee members and trade union officials can pinpoint the training needs of the committee members in order to prepare them for the fulfillment of their role. It seems that training programs need to concentrate especially on the principles and the implementation of representation and on the relationship

---

<sup>30</sup> Like L.R. PONDY, «Organizational Conflict Concepts and Model», *Admin. Science Quarterly*, Vol. 12, 1967/8, pp. 296-320; R. DUBIN, «Constructive Aspects of Conflict», *Collective Bargaining*; A. FLANDERS, (ed), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969, pp. 42-58.

between the shop steward committee and the workers. In this way, as Pedler also argues<sup>31</sup>, the training will achieve its goals and contribute to the improvement of relations at the workplace.

The distance between workers and shop stewards which was found in our study in Israeli industry is determined probably by a combination of factors, some of which are of a local (workplace) nature and others of a more general nature. One possible explanation of the distance is the very fact that shop steward committees in Israeli industry have often accumulated — with the support of the powerful Israeli Unions — much power, and to some extent have practically even taken upon themselves managerial functions. It is possible that the strong and influential position of the shop stewards in the affairs of the workplace has created in the eyes of the rank-and-file an image of the shop stewards as being people with influence and authority, who are at the same time too close to management. This indicates perhaps a potential paradox in the role of the shop stewards. In some enterprises, management decide to promote shop stewards to supervisory or managerial positions. This may also explain to some extent why workers feel that their shop stewards are close to management. Another factor which may contribute to the perceived distance between workers and the shop steward committee in the Israeli situation is the absence of a detailed and formal definition of the role of shop stewards and especially their obligations towards their constituents at the workplace. There is need, we believe, to study in depth the possible impact of such factors on the way shop stewards are perceived by the rank-and-file, as well as to examine carefully the actual performance of various shop steward committees and its differential impact on the workers-committee relationship.

---

<sup>31</sup> PEDLER, 1974, *op. cit.*

## *Les délégués d'atelier, les travailleurs et les employeurs dans les usines en Israël*

Le présent article décrit et analyse la fonction du Comité des délégués du personnel dans les relations professionnelles au niveau de l'établissement, tout en accordant une attention particulière aux relations entre les membres du comité et les travailleurs. L'importance de cette question est très grande en l'absence de recherches qui contribueraient à la compréhension de la nature des relations qui prévalent entre le Comité des délégués du personnel et les travailleurs qu'il représente. Semblables à ceux qu'on retrouve en Angleterre, les comités de délégués du personnel en Israël représentent directement les travailleurs sur les lieux du travail et constituent la base même du syndicat national.

Dans cette étude qui a porté sur la situation en Israël, on a choisi un échantillon de soixante-dix établissements et on a analysé dans chacun d'entre eux les relations entre les trois groupes suivants: les comités de délégués du personnel, les travailleurs et les employeurs ou la direction.

L'étude des relations mutuelles entre ces groupes s'est appuyée sur des critères objectifs fondés sur deux ordres de rapport: soit l'opinion qu'ils ont les uns des autres qui se manifeste par l'expression de la confiance et de la satisfaction dans leurs relations, soit les contacts, c'est-à-dire la fréquence des communications entre les groupes, tels qu'ils étaient perçus par chacun d'eux.

Les relations mutuelles entre chacun de ces groupes se définissent comme davantage positive lorsque l'expression de leurs opinions est également davantage positives, lorsque leurs contacts sont plus fréquents et lorsque la réciprocité des opinions et la perception qu'ils ont de la fréquence de leurs contacts est plus grande.

Les constatations de l'étude qui se rapportent aux relations existant entre les comités des délégués du personnel et les travailleurs tendent à démontrer la distance qu'il y a dans les relations entre les travailleurs et le Comité qui les représente. Ce fait se manifeste par l'opinion très négative des travailleurs à l'endroit du Comité, par le peu de communications formelles qui existe entre eux et par le large fossé qui les sépare.

Les constatations relatives aux relations entre le Comité des délégués du personnel et les employeurs donnent l'impression d'une réciprocité plus grande d'opinions et de l'existence de contacts plus suivis entre eux.

L'antagonisme qui se manifeste dans les relations entre les travailleurs et les employeurs montre que les points de vue des travailleurs à l'égard des employeurs se rapprochent de ceux qu'ils expriment à l'endroit du Comité des délégués d'atelier.

L'analyse des relations mutuelles entre les trois groupes traduit l'isolement des travailleurs dont les relations distantes avec les employeurs sont similaires en tous points à l'opposition qui existe entre eux et le Comité des délégués du personnel.

En guise de récapitulation, on peut tirer la conclusion que, apparemment, on se trouve en présence de trois organismes au sein de l'établissement: les travailleurs, les membres du Comité des délégués du personnel et la direction. Ainsi, le Comité et les travailleurs n'étant pas considérés comme faisant partie d'un seul et même groupe. Les constatations tirées de cette étude soulèvent des doutes relativement au rôle des comités en tant que canaux de communication entre les travailleurs et la direction. Il est difficile pour les comités des délégués du personnel de jouer ce rôle lorsqu'il y a rupture dans la chaîne de communication entre eux et les travailleurs. Il est possible que les constatations de l'étude, qui montrent des liens de parenté dans les relations entre le Comité et la direction, soient la résultante des modes de comportement qui se sont créés entre eux avec le temps au cours des réunions même si leurs intérêts sont en conflit. Cette analyse, dont les constatations mettent en lumière la distance qui existe entre les comités des délégués du personnel et les travailleurs peut éventuellement faire prendre conscience de l'état des relations entre ces trois groupes et contribuer à l'établissement d'une forme de représentation qui soit proche des travailleurs.

**VOCABULAIRE FRANÇAIS-ANGLAIS  
DES RELATIONS PROFESSIONNELLES**

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS  
USED IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
(ENGLISH-FRENCH)**

**Gérard DION**  
département des relations industrielles  
Université Laval

**Nouvelle édition revue, corrigée et augmentée. Plus de 1,000 termes ont été ajoutés aux 4,000 que comprenait la première édition.**

*New revised and augmented edition. More than 1,000 terms have been added to the 4,000 included in the first edition.*

**Un volume 6 x 9 relié 352 pages**  
*A hard-cover book 6 x 9 352 pages*

**LES PRESSES DE L'UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL**  
Cité Universitaire  
Québec, P.Q., Canada  
G1K 7R4