

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Craig W. RIDDELL : *Labour-Management Cooperation in Canada*. Toronto, Université of Toronto Press, 1986, 205 pp., ISBN 0-8020-7257-7

Alexander J. Matejko

Volume 43, Number 3, 1988

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050444ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/050444ar>

[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 review

Matejko, A. J. (1988). Review of [Craig W. RIDDELL : *Labour-Management Cooperation in Canada*. Toronto, Université of Toronto Press, 1986, 205 pp., ISBN 0-8020-7257-7]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 43(3), 714–715. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050444ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1988

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Labour-Management Cooperation in Canada, by W. Craig Riddell (ed.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986, pp. XVI + 205, ISBN 0-8020-7257-7

This is Volume 15 in the series of studies commissioned as a part of the research programme of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada. It includes an overview by W. Craig Riddell, review of the Ontario initiatives with respect to preventive mediation and quality of working life, a survey by Keith Newton of the quality of working life in Canada, two policy approaches by R.J. Adams to labour-management decision making at the level of the enterprise, lessons for Canada from the Japanese labour relations system (by Joseph M. Weiler), and the evolution of labour-management consultation on economic policy (by K.G. Waldie).

There is an obvious need of experimentation with various non-adversarial forms of labour-management interaction, and Canada has its growing share in this vital field. The issues relating to fundamental change and reform are still relatively neglected for the benefit of the operation of the *existing* collective bargaining systems; that remains the major preoccupation of social scientists.

An uneasy mixture of cooperation and conflict is definitely not satisfactory for the long period of time. There is much potential role for the participatory and consultative mechanisms; the competitive pressures and rational decision making should result in increased consultation and cooperation. According to Riddell, «there is no apparent need for government to subsidize or otherwise increase the relative attractiveness of the cooperative approach» (p. 47).

On the other hand, the uncertain costs and benefits of innovative approaches, as well as mutual distrust among management people and trade union people make substantial progress difficult to achieve. A highly legalistic approach to labour-management relationships leads to the excessive rule making within the framework of a collective agreement that much limits the freedom of movements and initiatives on the both sides. The basic question is how to allow for a much more open and flexible relationship based on responsibility, mutual respect and trust (p. 49).

The Ontario experience leads to several important conclusions. The change of the 'soft' social-psychological factors must happen together with an adequate transformation of the 'hard' organizational realities. People in organizations act not only on the basis of their good will and mutual understanding (empathy) but also they respond to the constraints imposed upon them; the chances and incentives are inherent in the organizational set-up and much of the human behaviour is just of a *reactive* nature. The content of task and the manner in which it is performed have much to say. The overall policy-level issues from both management and union sides are always involved and it is just impossible to promote a partial improvement without taking into consideration the wider repercussions. The reality of any workplace includes, among others, *authority and status* considerations. The change of socio-psychological equilibrium has to be treated with a particular sensitivity.

R.J. Adams proposes the extension of the works council approach to the whole variety of fields: health and safety, work sharing, redundancies, profit sharing, pension management, training and development, implementation of human rights, legislation and employment standards. He also advocates that the works council impasses should be arbitrable, a one-time referendum should be held in all covered workplaces to vote for union representation, enterprise-based unions should be free to assume the responsibilities of works councils, binding arbitration should be available.

It is just not true that strong unions are necessarily more aggressive to the employers. Actually «strong unions find fewer occasions when they consider it essential to demonstrate their

militancy than do weaker unions. Strong unions have less reasons to fear that the real intention of government and business is to undermine and destroy the labour movement» (p. 106).

J.M. Weiler reviews the Japanese experience and interprets it as a rational response to the violent and lengthy labour confrontations of the post-war era. Canada has much to learn, in this respect, but the basic condition is for the Canadian firms to recognize the role of the workers and of the trade unions. Enterprise unionism, lifetime employment and the seniority-based wage system do not necessarily fit the Canadian scene but they look like the reasonable answers to basic Japanese problems of that time, as well as being valid under the changing conditions. «Labour-management peace in Japan is not endemic to Japanese culture. Rather it was nurtured as the labour relations system matured in the 1950s and 1960s» (pp. 121-122). Collective bargaining and joint consultation are practiced in Japan with much effect and Canadians should learn carefully from this experience.

K.G. Waldie deals with the evolution of labour-government consultation on economic policy. The non-adversarial, two-way communication assumes the establishment of common information base, the identification of common and conflicting interests, as well as the achievement of consensus or an accommodation of positions on as many issues as possible. «In Canada consultation struggles under impediments inherent in the attitudes and institutions of government, labour and business (...) when the immediate purpose of consultation has been met, whether it ends in success or failure, these impediments are strong enough to discourage the participants from continuing the process» (p. 194).

The conduct of consultation is not placed high enough on the government's decision agenda. Coordination among portfolios is often insufficient. Consultative recommendations have a difficult passage through the government process. The planning and priority-setting time horizon of government decision making tends to be short in relation to the lead time needed for effective consultation. The Canada's national union central, the CLC, has an uncertain mandate from its membership to engage in economic consultation. Canada's labour movement has few resources to devote to consultation. There is a perceived lack of commitment to consultation. There is not a good communication between the involved parties. Organized labour is not enough receptive to consultation.

K.G. Waldie makes the following suggestions: labour must be satisfied that it is being listened to, consultation clearly should precede a decision, the degree of freedom is reduced in consultation in the interest of better-informed and more widely acceptable decisions, the political risk should be taken into consideration, consultation should be a continuing process, there is a need for the greatest possible shared understanding as to the intended purposes of consultation and its limits, there should be a strong protocol to protect the political and negotiating interests of the parties, the involved parties must dispose of sufficient control over the process and staff resources to do credit to their interest in participating.

Pity that the problem of *organizational culture* was not even mentioned by the authors. Cooperation between labour and management assumes a *dialogue* promoted with the framework of values, norms and attitudes allowing to achieve a meaningful encounter. Only the organizational culture enough diversified and rich in alternatives allows open a chance of such a dialogue and encounter. The form and content of the labour management communication quite often remain so far on a superficial level. Actually there is not much of a friendly and mutually satisfying message in it. Narrowmindedness prevents both parties to take a broader look, consider the general welfare, act with the full understanding of the far reaching consequences.

Alexander J. MATEJKO

University of Alberta