

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Die Polnische Diskussion un die Arbeiterräte / Polish Discussion on the Works councils by Viktoria Grevemeyer-Korb, Philosophische und Soziologische Veröffentlichungen, vol. 15th, Berlin, Osteuropa-Institut and der Freien Unversität Berlin, 1978, 219 pp.

Alexander J. Matejko

Volume 34, numéro 4, 1979

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029027ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/029027ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Matejko, A. J. (1979). Compte rendu de [*Die Polnische Diskussion un die Arbeiterräte / Polish Discussion on the Works councils* by Viktoria Grevemeyer-Korb, Philosophische und Soziologische Veröffentlichungen, vol. 15th, Berlin, Osteuropa-Institut and der Freien Unversität Berlin, 1978, 219 pp.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 34(4), 833-835.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/029027ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1979

Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

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

Die polnische Diskussion um die Arbeiterräte
/Polish Discussion on the Works Councils by Viktoria Grevemeyer-Korb, Philosophische und soziologische Veröffentlichungen, vol. 15th, Berlin, Osteuropa-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin, 1978, 219 pp.

With the growing interest in industrial democracy this analysis of the works councils in Poland established in the second half of the 1950s makes a useful reading, even if the Polish debates in mass media of that period of time, look much more interesting than the councils as such. The author shows, among others, how much the Polish specialists were divided /and still are now/ regarding the model of socialism which they wanted to institute in their home country in order to replace the economy of command. That model was of a crucial importance because on it depended if and how much place would be secured for the works councils. Some of the Polish economists (Kurowski, Popkiewicz) propagated a free market economy between autonomous consumers and producers exchanging freely everything among themselves with no interference from outside. This approach represented a radical reaction against the rigid state socialism of a stalinist style directed from the top by the Party planners.

Other economists, for example Bobrowski, Lange and Brus, were much impressed by the Yugoslav experience. They were also for autonomous enterprises and the free exchange but still wanted to leave quite a substantial power with the state. Even these economists as Kalecki who wanted to leave the major part of central planning as it was before, declared themselves for a very considerable democratization of the whole system.

The ruling party (PUWP) after a relatively short period of some relaxation decided to return to centralism, much less oppressive than before but also quite rigid. This policy was decided against the public opinion and only few among the economists supported it.

It is clear from the present day perspective that the vested interest of state and Party apparatus prevailed over all other consideration and that the rival social powers were too weak, too much dispersed and divided in order to be able to provide any substantial challenge to the status quo. In the late 1970s the balance of power has become much more unfavorable for the Party because of the difficult food situation, a much stronger political opposition, and the internal split within the Party ranks.

In the first part of the book it is clearly shown how the very fast and expensive Soviet style industrialization of the early 1950s, promoted by the very authoritarian bureaucracy, had led to internal tensions, contradictions and even open conflicts. The political life was still almost exclusively limited to the Party ranks, but especially among the Party intellectuals there was a growing resistance against the ruling apparatchiks. It was still very far from any pluralism but the gap between the wide circles of various experts and the ruling Party élite had crystallized definitely.

The works councils were spontaneously established in various state enterprises by the local activists with the tacit consent of management. Local manager were far from being happy to play the role of obedient servants of the bureaucratic power but being appointed and controlled by the state and Party hierarchy they could not revolt themselves. Works councils as a new body depended neither on the state administration nor on the subservient trade union bureaucracy, and therefore these councils for several months could show some initiative. This ended afterwards with the growing subordination of councils directly to the Party bureaucracy.

In the book is clearly stated that the Polish works councils oriented themselves mainly to the economic and organizational improvement of their enterprises which suffered red tape imposed from the top. There was a tendency in the beginning to treat management as the executive body and the council as something like a board of directors

ected by the personnel. With the gradual return to power of the state and Party bureaucracy the works council started to play more and more the role of a consultative body.

There was a tendency among the factory electorate to delegate to the works councils primarily the skilled white collar workers as better prepared than the unskilled workers to take an active part in the policy matters. The Party treated it as a nuisance and started a whole action in favour of giving blue collar workers a clear priority. It was finally established as a rule that blue collar workers should constitute in the works councils at least two thirds.

Pity that the author has not used adequately the sociological and economic research data on works councils done in Poland in the late 1950s and also later. Most of the public debate dealt in that time with models more or less abstract and not necessarily related to the practical experience of councils. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s the ruling PUWP has seized power in Poland strongly enough not to allow any real democratization. The turmoil of 1956 was too weak and too short in order to challenge the ruling bureaucracy. The massive social upgrading of people from lower strata during the whole period of forced industrialization had changed the socio-economic, cultural and moral fabric of the society. The democratic ideals were popular mainly among the intelligentsia that constituted at most one tenth of the population, and the rest of the population looked mainly for some modest improvement of their very low living standard.

When the pressure of the omnipotent state and Party bureaucracy relaxed for a while due to the internal reshuffle inside the ruling elite, the establishment of works councils was a suitable temporary platform for some local initiatives. However, these councils oriented themselves almost exclusively to the administrative realm, and the whole problem of a grass-root industrial democracy was almost completely neglected. Due to this

fact, the mass of workers was never really mobilized behind the works councils and this mass remained apathetic even when the Party decided to tighten the control of enterprises by the bureaucracy.

The abstract reasoning in terms of models of the late 1950s was useful at least in that sense that it stimulated public interest in the alternatives to the existing state of affairs. Models constructed in that time still stimulate effectively the imagination of the Polish reformers and oppositionists. However, not enough attention has been paid in the book as well in the Polish reality to the practical applicability of these models to the socio-political and cultural conditions of Poland. Poles have been for a very long time under conditions of bureaucracy. Even during the period 1918-1939 the practice of democracy, free enterprise and entrepreneurship had its quite narrow limits. The state was the major employer, agriculture was underdeveloped and a very considerable part of the labour force suffered unemployment or at least underemployment.

The collective entrepreneurship of the socialized enterprises, i.e. state-owned or coops, may become a reality only on the basis of common interests, strong social cohesion, highly experienced democratic leadership and management, well functioning autonomous work groups, good channels of communication, high concentration of employees around common tasks, etc. The whole practice of totalitarianism has been oriented for several decades towards the atomisation of society, mutual distrust, dominance of the egoistic preoccupations, general feeling of helplessness, and the lack of personal responsibility. People have to become socialized effectively to the new socio-economic models not of an abstract nature but to those from the beginning well adapted to the Polish reality. The highly theoretical discussions around the whole issue of the works councils in the late 1950s look from the above mentioned perspective as being quite naive, even if useful and intellectually stimulating. It takes time and much effort to move the whole na-

tion from one socio-economic model to another and it would be dangerous to rush, risking even more social pathology. Of course, the reform is now in Poland even more needed than in the late 1950s. The opposition seems also to be now much more specific and outspoken. However, the difficulty of achieving a successful transformation is even bigger and therefore the caution is necessary.

Alexander J. MATEJKO

University of Alberta

La réforme des lois du travail, neuvième colloque des relations industrielles, École de relations industrielles, Université de Montréal, 1978, 124 pp.

Cet ouvrage rapporte les différents exposés qui ont été discutés lors de ce colloque. Compte tenu de la diversité des thèmes et des approches privilégiés par les conférenciers, il convient de les présenter séparément.

Les lois du travail, outil de libération ou carcan, Jacques Grand-Maison identifie un malaise social dans les relations du travail au Québec qui se traduit, selon lui, par un enchevêtrement de normes juridiques, administratives, syndicales, professionnelles ou autres. Il précise les limites des lois du travail qui ne peuvent suppléer à un manque de maturité des différents partenaires sociaux.

Négociateurs, big brother vous guette... Fernand Morin voit lui aussi l'employeur et la complexité que prend notre système de relations du travail et il soumet l'idée d'un code du travail intégrant l'ensemble des dispositions légales traitant des relations du travail et de l'emploi.

La négociation au sommet, l'application à la base. Réjean Larouche fait part des problèmes d'application à la base qui résultent de la négociation au sommet et il présente certaines recommandations visant à faciliter l'application de la convention collective négociée de façon centralisée.

Le dédale des instances quasi-judiciaires en matière de travail. Le juge René Beaudry dresse un portrait sommaire des différentes instances quasi-judiciaires du travail au Québec et il s'interroge sur l'opportunité de les unifier.

Les tribunaux de droit commun prennent-ils trop de place. Hélène Lebel note l'inhabilité du code du travail à régler les conflits du travail et elle cite l'expérience d'autres juridictions canadiennes en l'occurrence celle de la Colombie-Britannique et celle de l'Ontario.

Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi, encore faut-il la comprendre. Dans cet exposé particulièrement coloré de citations et de maximes, le juge Alan G. Gold pose la question suivante: pourquoi les lois du travail qui affectent tout, sinon tout le monde, sont-elles si mal comprises? (p. 70). Trois causes sont dégagées à cet effet.

Charte des droits et libertés de la personne, garde-fou contre la discrimination. Francine Fournier décrit le contenu de la Charte tout en appuyant sur la portée et les limites de cette loi dans le secteur du travail.

Secteur public, rapport de force et règle du jeu. Jean Boivin situe les amendements législatifs contenus dans les projets de loi 50, 55 et 59 dans le contexte de la philosophie de base du Rapport Martin Bouchard.

Santé et sécurité au travail, un des sujets piquants de l'actualité, a été abordé par Robert Sauvé qui explique en quoi consiste le livre blanc sur la santé et sécurité au travail. Il précise l'importance et les effets d'une telle réforme sur les relations du travail.

La loi: une loi du travail, Gilles Racine parle de cette loi bien souvent quant à son incidence sur les relations du travail dans l'entreprise.

Le mot de clôture du Ministre du travail, M. Pierre-Marc Johnson, tient lieu de conclusion à cet ouvrage. Il trace un bilan des amendements au **Code du travail** et souligne les projets de législation.

La réforme du travail est une réflexion intéressante qui incite à la discussion et sus-