

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



C.H.J. GILSON : *Strikes in Nova Scotia, 1970-1985*. Hantsport, Lancelot Press, 1986, 191 pp., ISBN 0-88999-314-9

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du mouvement ouvrier faisant état aussi bien des tenants du syndicalisme d'affaires que du syndicalisme révolutionnaire et enfin, une attention portée à la fois sur des conceptions historiques et contemporaines (de Marx à Hyman ou Gorz, et des Webb à Kerr) du mouvement ouvrier.

Un tel volume gagnerait, par contre, à développer davantage et surtout en fonction de l'état actuel des connaissances scientifiques, un cadre d'analyse plus rationnel, plus opérationnel et plus contemporain que celui présenté par Dunlop dans la partie I. Un tel cadre d'analyse pourrait tenir compte, entre autres, du récent développement du concept «paradigme scientifique» et de son application aux sciences sociales.

La faiblesse la plus importante de ce volume est sans doute celle relative à son contenu, en ce sens que les deux éditeurs ont fait abstraction de toute la littérature européenne contemporaine sur le développement du mouvement ouvrier et du syndicalisme. Outre les auteurs français, dont certains ont été traduits en anglais (Touraine), les britanniques ont mené de nombreuses recherches à ce sujet, surtout sur le plan des idées. Citons par exemple un auteur comme Braverman (Labor Monopoly) qui a récemment laissé sa marque dans le domaine des relations industrielles.

Bref, bien que l'on puisse contester le contenu plutôt américain des théories du mouvement ouvrier que l'on retrouve dans ce volume, Larson et Nissen ont eu le mérite de recenser et de classifier, sous un même couvert, les diverses tendances en ce domaine et ce, dans leur contexte original et selon les ouvrages originaux de chaque époque.

Ce volume s'avère donc un outil pédagogique supplémentaire dans nos universités, afin de permettre aux professeurs et étudiants une meilleure compréhension des origines et du développement du mouvement ouvrier.

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**Strikes in Nova Scotia, 1970-1985**, by C.H.J. Gilson, ed., Hantsport, N.S., Lancelot Press, 1986, 191 pp., ISBN 0-88999-314-9

It has often been remarked that each province has its own unique industrial relations system. One of the purposes of this modest collection of essays is to offer insights into the pattern of industrial relations in contemporary Nova Scotia. This is done through a group of nine short papers, most of them prepared by student researchers at Saint Francis Xavier University. Each paper examines one recent labour dispute, providing an account of the causes, chronology and outcome. The research is generally based on daily newspapers, supplemented in several cases with interviews; there is little use of secondary literature on Nova Scotia history or on general issues in labour studies. The editor contributes an introduction and a conclusion which point out a number of common themes and suggest some of the weaknesses of the existing industrial relations system in the province.

The Canso fishermen's strike (1970-71) was perhaps the most significant of the nine disputes considered here. This was the strike which ended the legal fiction that fishermen were «coadventurers» — or even, the authors suggest, «management» (p. 19) who received a «salary» (p. 30) for their work! The strike has received considerable attention elsewhere, but this succinct treatment by Lorna Darrah and Rosalind Belland reminds us of the extraordinary

manoeuvres undertaken by employers, governments — and unions — in order to exclude the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union from the province. The focus is on the quest for legal reform and for union certification, but it does need to be remembered that the UFAWU had achieved much of its success on the west coast without these benefits. A second chapter examining a later fishermen's strike at Lunenburg in 1983-84 documents the arrival of the Newfoundland Fishermen, Food and Allied Workers' Union on the south shore of Nova Scotia. Isabel MacAdam and Colleen O'Connor show how 24-hour mass picketing and an extensive network of community support enabled the union to gain a first agreement, though only after the fishermen had waged a costly eight months' strike and their employer had been convicted of unfair labour practices.

The appearance of what might be called the new unionism of small producers in recent years is apparent in occasional references to the National Farmers' Union (who operated a food bank for the fishermen in 1984). By contrast, when paper mill workers went out on strike in a contract dispute in Pictou County it is notable that they did not receive the support of the small producers in this sector of the economy. The unorganized truckers and woodcutters protested that they were deprived of a market for their wood during the course of the strike. Sheri King shows that the government readily exploited these divisions by threatening back to work legislation and binding arbitration. This chapter on the 1982 Scott Paper strike also makes an effort to describe internal tensions within management and union ranks which had effects on the course of the dispute.

Some of the most significant strikes of this period involved women workers, especially those employed as health care workers. The province-wide nurses' strike in 1975 was ostensibly fought around the issue of substandard wages, but Judith MacLean makes it clear that this strike was also an effort to win public recognition for the importance and status of the nurses' work. The strike provided the nurses' associations with a rude introduction to the industrial relations process and helped prompt the formation of the Nova Scotia Nurses Union in 1976. A related episode is examined in a chapter by Professor Anthony Thomson of Acadia University, who contributes a perceptive analysis of the Common Front of hospital workers in 1981. This strike involved five health care unions with workers throughout the province. The effort at combined action met with mixed success, but also prompted calls for the removal of the right to strike in the public health field. In the private sector Susan MacNeil and Sheree Delaney examine the Keddy's Nursing Home strike (1982-83). In this case a small group of underpaid women workers faced an employer who was prepared to sell his business rather than recognize a union. The harassment and dismissal of union officers prior to the strike and the use of replacement workers during the strike exposed some of the holes in provincial labour law.

A majority of the strikes examined in this collection involved public sector workers. Like health care, police services also proved a sensitive area of public disputes. In passing it should be noted that labour historians will be surprised to read that the first police strike in Canadian history did not place until 1971 (p. 161). Larry MacMaster discusses the Halifax police strike of 1981 and finds that the provincial government was prepared to prolong the strike, even at the considerable expense of vandalism in the streets and the high cost of hiring RCMP replacements, in order to discredit the police union. After two and half months of striking, the police union was asking the provincial government to bring in back to work legislation in order to bring about a settlement. Although the Halifax police strike in 1981 provoked a round of vandalism in the downtown, the Sydney police strike in 1984 was a considerably more peaceful affair. Kyle Ferguson points out that the strike seemed to function as a catalyst for a long overdue general reorganization of the police department. In the story of the Digby bus drivers strike (1979-81) Lawrence Currie presents a less optimistic view of the industrial relations process. In this case a local school board was able to defy the Labour Relations Board and, with

the support of the Supreme Court of Canada, avoid negotiating an agreement with its workers. The case again demonstrated the inadequacies of provincial labour law. In the end it was the defeat of anti-union school board members in local elections which helped to bring about a settlement of the dispute.

The systematic study of strikes is fraught with difficulties, and in this case the editor makes no claims for an exhaustive analysis of strike activity during the 1970s and 1980s. Although the editor describes the choice of strikes as «almost self-selective», some consideration of other disputes might have given the collection a broader interpretive range. All but two or three of the papers focus on the early 1980s and the more optimistic phase of labour activism in the 1970s receives correspondingly less attention. For instance, the bar mill strike at Sydney steel in 1972 provided an instance in which workers were challenging the policy of systematic deindustrialization pursued by the management of this provincial crown corporation. Efforts to organize bankworkers and to resist contracting-out of services were significant themes during the 1970s. There was also a renewal of labour activism in the provincial coal industry, and in 1981 the province witnessed the first coal-miners' strike in more than 30 years. The militancy of the miners' wives was a particularly notable aspect of this conflict, as was the struggle between supporters of the United Mineworkers of America and the Canadian Miners' Union. Finally, a consideration of the Day of Protest in 1976 could have provided an opportunity to measure local participation in what may be recognized as Canada's first national general strike.

In assessing the significance of the findings the editor sounds some ambivalent notes. He comments, for instance, that most of the strikes under study involved «parochial» issues, such as wages and working conditions. This appears to be a way of defending unions against accusations of «deviant behaviour» or undue militancy. In this connection, some reference to Peter O'Brien's study of strike activity in Nova Scotia between 1966 and 1978 would have been helpful; this study established that Nova Scotia appears to have suffered from a «myth of labour instability» which is not sustained by the actual evidence. At the same time Professor Gilson also points out that many of the strikes involved «a hidden set of aspirations» which often became most conveniently focused around economic issues. This point would seem to be sustained by the quest for public recognition and industrial status which was so apparent in the fishermen's and nurses' strikes. Quoting Carter Goodrich, the editor does not disagree and notes that «the demand not to be controlled disagreeably» often lurks below the surface of apparently simple disputes. This is a theme which has been underlined in strike studies undertaken by social historians in the region and some reference to this work would also have helped place recent strikes in a larger perspective.

We must also pause at the generalization that the rule of law has been the prevailing force in settling labour disputes in Canada for the last century or more (p. 181). It is true that since the days of William Lyon Mackenzie King Canadian governments have often acted to contain industrial conflict, but the achievement of a legally enforceable collective bargaining system is a relatively recent development. Although unions received legal recognition in 1872, they enjoyed few rights under the law until the great compromises of the 1930s and 1940s. Administrators of the new laws in the 1950s often sounded a note of frustration in reporting the reluctance of employers to accept the fact that the legal framework of industrial relations had undergone a decisive change as a result of these reforms. And for most public employees, of course, the right to strike did not arrive until the 1960s. From this historical perspective the reluctance of modern employers to fully accept the rules of what is in fact a relatively new collective bargaining system is not entirely surprising. From a more theoretical point of view, it might also be argued that Professor Gilson's defence of «industrial legality» misses the point that unions have sometimes been as much the captives as the beneficiaries of the existing in-

dustrial relations system. This is one conclusion that could be drawn from some of the disputes discussed in this collection, and it would appear to be the lesson of the failed efforts to organize the Michelin tire plants in Nova Scotia.

The larger picture which emerges from the reports in this volume is one of costly, protracted confrontations around relatively minor issues. Professor Gilson reports that government intervention in labour disputes has usually reflected «a cavalier attitude of political expediency» rather than a firm commitment to the principles of industrial relations. In general, employers, both public and private, have been reluctant to accept the reality of trade unionism and collective bargaining. Much of this Professor Gilson attributes to shortcomings in existing provincial labour law. He would apparently not endorse the structuralist view that the industrial relations system, like the welfare state, regional development policy and the larger capitalist economy, has been in a state of continuing crisis since the 1970s and that this has forced employers and governments to adopt more coercive policies. Nevertheless Professor Gilson concludes that the pluralist vision of industrial relations has not been adequately fulfilled in Nova Scotia. Without the adoption of more constructive efforts for the reform of industrial relations, he predicts a precarious future for industrial peace in Nova Scotia.

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**Canadian Readings in Personnel and Human Resource Management**, par Shimon L. Dolan et Randall S. Schuler, St-Paul, MN, West Publishing Company, 1987, 467 pp., ISBN 0-314-32487-9

Ce volume édité par Randall Schuler et Shimon Dolan, se veut un complément au volume de base qu'ils ont publié l'année dernière sous le titre **Personnel and Human Resource Management in Canada** également chez West. Alors que le volume de base décrit de façon systématique les principales dimensions de la théorie et de la recherche relativement aux activités de gestion des ressources humaines traditionnellement connues, le présent volume regroupe trente-cinq textes d'auteurs différents, pour la plupart des canadiens, portant sur des aspects plutôt spécifiques et contemporains de la GRH. Ces textes sont regroupés sous huit sections. La première section sert d'introduction et regroupe deux textes intéressants de R. Schuler et de J.M. Cousineau traitant respectivement des choix stratégiques en GRH et des tendances du marché du travail relativement aux spécialistes et professionnels de la gestion des ressources humaines.

La deuxième section aborde le concept de planification en GRH et compte quatre textes dont les plus intéressants sont ceux de D. Ulrich sur la planification stratégique, de même que l'étude de cas des systèmes d'information de gestion en matière de ressources humaines chez Provigo, présenté par le directeur des ressources humaines C. Marier.

La troisième section concerne la dotation et compte huit textes que l'on peut regrouper en deux catégories. Une première fait le point, à l'aide de synthèses théoriques (H.C. Jain) et pratiques (L. Piché-Canadien national, L.J. White-Banque Royale) sur l'égalité des chances en emploi, et une deuxième catégorie critique les moyens traditionnels de sélection et fait la lumière sur des instruments dont la validité, la fidélité et l'utilité sont plus contingentes aux besoins des organisations contemporaines. Citons, à titre d'exemple, les essais de T. Janz sur l'entrevue, S.F. Cronshaw sur les tests et A. Tziner sur les centres d'appréciation par simulation.