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From Tellers to Sellers: Changing Employment Relations in Banks edited by Marino REGINI, Jim KITAY, and Martin BAETHGE, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999, 342 pp., ISBN 0-262-18193-2.

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It is thus unfair to blame parents for failure.

The final part develops the work and family theme later in the life course, and starts with the familiar theme of the effects of parental work on children's development. The other chapters focus on the transmission of work and family values, firstly amongst young adults, secondly amongst poor urban black women. The contribution on the links between parental work and children's attainment by Toby Parcel, Rebecca Nickoll and Mikaela Dufur concludes that it does not have a strong effect. More important predictors are maternal ability and children's personal characteristics. Significantly, the chapter treats paternal as well as maternal work roles in an even-handed way, and points towards policy-making that would allow parents of either sex to work flexibly during periods of family-rearing. Similar shifts in discourse are discernible in the U.K., where the concept of the working parent has replaced previous emphasis on the working mother in emanations from government. Policies such as those on parental leave also reflect this shift; though, in reality, women are likely to continue to shoulder much of the burden of reconciling family-building and paid work. The contribution by Joanne Sandberg and Daniel Cornfield reinforces this view, in that traditional gender roles strongly influence return-to-work decisions by leave-takers.

Overall, there appears to be something of an imbalance between the three parts of the book, with only two chapters in the first historical section. The chapters are almost all based on U.S. research, so that the first chapter by Heike Trappe, on the GDR, though very interesting, does not seem to fit. Perhaps a future volume could develop a cross-cultural theme in this area of research, perhaps encompassing contributions from Europe as well as North America. The influence of national context, infrastructure and institutions could be assessed and areas of similarity identified.

The book's objective of informing social policy is commendable, and social scientists are often justified in their complaint that policy-makers ignore academic contributions to knowledge in favour of less robust and sometimes methodologically unsound sources. However, it must equally never be forgotten that what constitutes "social betterment" may also be contested terrain.

The introductory elements and the individual chapters are generally well researched, painstaking in analysis and accessible to academics and non-specialists. Most make useful contributions to theory development on the interface between work and family, and should be compulsory reading for employers and policy-makers alike.

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From Tellers to Sellers: Changing Employment Relations in Banks

edited by Marino REGINI, Jim KITAY, and Martin BAETHGE, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999, 342 pp., ISBN 0-262-18193-2.

This book is part of the extensive MIT-initiated project examining the changing nature of employment relations in advanced economies in a range of industries. Its focus on banking is welcome in that this industry has tended to be relatively marginalized in the manufacturing-centred traditions of industrial relations scholarship. The book

faithfully follows the MIT research agenda in examining the main factors pushing change within employment relations, and in outlining the main contours of these changes, specifically around work organization, skill formation, staffing arrangements, job security, compensation, industrial relations policies and enterprise governance. The bulk

of the book is made up of national chapters on employment relations in banking in nine major economies. The countries featured are Australia, USA, New Zealand, UK, Italy, France, Spain, Holland, and Germany. Each of these country studies is written by a group of experts from the respective country. Each individual chapter comprises an overview of the main drivers of change—product market changes and deregulation, changing business strategies, and potentially revolutionary information technology developments—in that country's banking industry as a whole, and a review of employment relations changes, usually based on case study data on four banks. Sandwiching these nine chapters are an introduction written by the editors and a conclusion penned by Marino Regini.

The country studies clearly bear out the observation in the introductory chapter that, "it is evident... that banks throughout the OECD are experiencing a profound transformation unleashed by deregulation, privatisation and technological change, that affects not only the way bank business is conducted but also traditional employment practices and systems of industrial relations" (p. 3). The data indicate that there have been substantial moves away from the traditional bureaucratic and often paternalistic system of employment relations that was found in many banks in many countries at the end of the 1970s. While change is evident, the nature of this change is less clear. Such is the variation in business strategies and employment relations patterns emerging in the movement away from the bureaucratic past that it is not possible to identify one dominant model of new employment relations.

Some broad emerging themes can be highlighted, however. One key change has been the widespread adoption of sales aims within banking jobs. As the title of the book neatly puts it, the old tellers are increasingly becoming the

new sellers. Management is increasingly defining interactions between their staff and customers as "sales opportunities" and is reconfiguring employment relations accordingly. In bank after bank, in country after country, management has sought to introduce a "sales culture," often identifying individual sales targets for staff, and sometimes making commission or bonus payments contingent on these targets being met. Another important common change for the front-line, customer-facing jobs, has been the increasing segmentation of work organization systems to mirror the business strategy of marketing to specific segments of the customer base. For the more numerous staff in jobs in the "mass customization" segment, this change appears to often involve a narrowing of task variation. While "a degree of deskilling has undoubtedly taken place in some banks in some positions, the situation in branches is nevertheless complex" (p. 14), not least because the new sales emphasis brings with it increasing areas of discretion and a new range of skills. More straightforward Taylorization of jobs has occurred in "back office" processing jobs which tend to be undertaken in large centralized units. A consequence of these changes in work organization is that the traditional, bureaucratically structured, career path within banks no longer holds.

These are some of the important common themes that emerge from the data presented. But, overall, the story is not one of commonality; rather it is one of variation, variation at all levels, within banks, within countries and between countries. The already mentioned segmentation of work organization systems to mirror market segments speaks to variation within individual banks. The chapter by Keltner and Finegold on the USA highlights well the variation within individual countries. Of their four case study banks, they characterize two as following a "low skill commodation

strategy,” and two as following a strategy involving “adding value through human resource investment.” While these two levels of variation necessarily create a “messiness” in the data, the book also suggests important variation between countries. The well-established contrast between the employer dominated, weakly regulated USA system of industrial relations, and the German system of regulation through dialogue between social partners not surprisingly holds true also in the banking industry.

It is to the book’s credit that it does not shy away from the complexity and variations in the data on contemporary employment relations in the banking. The concluding sentence in the introductory chapter is unequivocal in its reasoned equivocation: “in the middle of such a fluid process [of change], the only generalization that seems valid is that the traditional world of banking is

dead” (p. 29). This is a clear, well-written and well-organized book that brings a wealth of empirical data to bear on an important issue. It is a key sourcebook for those interested in employment relations within banks. There is a sense that its strength is also its weakness, however. Its strong empirical focus means that it tends to eschew theoretical engagement. Frustratingly, this is the case at both the level of theorization of macro social systems of production, and at the level of theorization of micro forms of service work organization. This is to be regretted because in both areas there is much that is of interest in current academic debates. The book is a seller of empirical material, but unfortunately is not a teller of what this empirical material means.

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La révolution du travail : de l'artisan au manager

par Rolande PINARD, préface de Dominique Méda, Montréal, Éditions Liber, 2000, 342 p., ISBN 2-921569-88-4.

Voici un livre qui saura répondre tant aux attentes des lecteurs intéressés par les transformations récentes du travail qu’à ceux et celles passionnés par les grandes fresques historiques sur le travail et le syndicalisme.

Pour Rolande Pinard, la question qui a été à l’origine de cet ouvrage « a été suscitée par le rapprochement de plus en plus patent depuis les années 1980 entre syndicat et management, ce qu’on présente souvent comme une forme de démocratisation du travail et d’émancipation collective des travailleurs ». Pour aborder cette question, l’auteure analyse les différentes significations qu’a prises le travail à travers le temps. Le ton adopté par l’auteure qui a œuvré de nombreuses années au service de la recherche de la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec est un ton politique et engagé ; mais en même temps, c’est à travers une thèse de

doctorat fort documentée qu’elle s’attaque à son sujet.

En partant d’auteurs tels Touraine, Lefebvre et Gorz qui avaient déjà constaté la fin de la centralité du travail dans la société, le livre de Rolande Pinard est consacré, dans la foulée de travaux plus récents (tel celui de Dominique Méda qui signe d’ailleurs la préface de son livre), à retracer les diverses significations qu’a prises le travail depuis la révolution industrielle. D’emblée, le concept de travail est vu comme une catégorie sociale historiquement construite ; c’est, dit l’auteure, une invention de la modernité contre la féodalité. Tel est en effet le titre du premier chapitre qui donne le ton au reste du livre.

Il s’agit en fait d’un essai à caractère historique, retraçant les divers sens du travail à travers l’époque moderne, un essai basé d’abord sur une analyse de