

John Thirkell / Richard Scase / Sarah Vickerstaff (eds): Labour Relations and Political change in Eastern Europe: A Comparative Perspective, UCL Press, London 1995.

Most discussions of economic and labour relations reform in Eastern Europe have focused on national and sector changes. This book is an effort to study the impact of economic reform on enterprise strategies and labour relations. At the level of the nation state it focuses on the economic transformation process, the political context, and the rise of tripartism. At the enterprise level the main subjects are the development of general enterprise strategies, organizational restructuring and its effects on the role of middle management, and the changing role of the trade unions at the corporate level due to privatization.

In order to analyze the impact of national developments on enterprise structure, strategies and labour relations, a number of countries have been selected, Bulgaria, Czechia/Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Russia, and in each of them

⁴¹ Nefiodow, L. A. (1996): Der sechste Kondratieff. Wege zur Produktivität und Vollbeschäftigung im Zeitalter der Information, Sankt Augustin.

three or four enterprises are singled out for detailed empirical research. The chapters are ordered by country, the editors provide a general framework in the first chapter and fit the case studies into the model in the concluding chapter.

Actually, the comparative framework is no more than a survey of trends in Eastern European economic transition and labour relations, like privatization, tripartism, and the decline of formal institutions of worker participation in the enterprise. It leaves the authors ample room to present their own frameworks, either in a very general and rather Dunlopian way (Bulgaria, Hungary) or in the form of schemes of organizational structure (Czechia/Slovakia).

After this rather disappointing beginning, the book gets better and better, however, culminating in the editor's discussion of the material presented, a fine example of drawing comparative conclusions on the basis of the material presented in the case studies, instead of the general talk that frequently completes such surveys.

The first contributions concentrate either on national developments or organizational structure, the following articles, like those on Hungary, Poland and Russia, show more interest in the theme of the book, the relations between national and corporate developments. The article on Hungary reveals an interesting contrast between conflictual and cooperative labour relations in two firms. Conflict is mitigated, however, by the maintenance of overemployment, a major base for cooperation between management and the unions. More than the other contributions, the Russian one discusses the position of middle management, referring to the context of overwhelming economic problems, like growing debts, declining production and great market instability. In some enterprise old fashioned and authoritarian management methods are used as a method to cope with the crisis (showing once again the relative value of the formal devices of worker participation under communism), in others middle managers try to split up the enterprise and transform their division into independent enterprises. In order to do so they seek support among their workforce, using it as a bulwark against senior managements' power.

The concluding chapter draws a number of significant conclusions, for instance about the effects of replacement of enterprise directors and of ownership change. The latter may be used by management as an opportunity to secure more autonomy but also to foster a coalition with the workforce to prevent a foreign takeover. Enterprise labour relations are heavily influenced by national tripartite initiatives and by enterprise level employment considerations. The top-down effect from national economic and political initiatives predominate.

Although the book does not fulfil the editors' promises (there is no general framework, the relations between national and corporate developments remain somewhat obscure) it offers an unusually profound and comparative analysis of

economic transformation processes in Eastern Europe and their impact on labour relations.

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