



The Field of Industrial Relations

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Handbook is to profile the academic field of industrial relations (IR) at the start of the twenty-first century. To this end we have assembled an international roster of subject experts to reflect on the multiple facets of IR scholarship, summarize bodies of knowledge and theory and identify current developments and likely future trends. IR was a product of the great class compromise of the twentieth century between ruling elites and the rising working class. Many of its founding scholars were exercised by the 'labor problem' and the need for a practically oriented field of study to support the creation of new institutions that would regulate industrial conflict and integrate the working population into liberal democratic societies (Kaufman, 1993: 4–9; Lyddon, 2003). Much of this impulse (though not all) has faded as the decades have passed but the field of IR continues to evolve and address a broad and continually shifting set of issues within the employment relationship. This collection we believe, attests to the continuing vigor of,

what is now, a mature academic field and its continuing relevance at the start of a new century, very different from the old.

The purpose of this introduction is to provide a platform for the 32 chapters that follow. It does so by providing an overview of three core aspects of contemporary IR scholarship. We consider in turn the definition and scope of academic industrial relations, the multi-disciplinary nature of IR and the theoretical perspectives that shape its research programme, and the normative orientations of IR scholars that provide a standard for evaluating IR practice and underpin the advice to governments, employers, unions and others that issues from an applied, policy-oriented field. In each of these areas our aim is to identify classic positions and defining characteristics of IR but also point to contemporary themes and developments. Our purpose is to show how the enduring features of the field continue to evolve. To conclude the introduction, we also describe the structure of the Handbook and introduce the separate chapters that comprise the volume.

DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Twenty-five years ago Marsden (1982: 232) declared that, 'Everyone, instinctively it seems, knows what industrial relations is about, even those who have never studied the subject. It is "about" trade unions, managers and collective bargaining.' Undoubtedly many outside the field, if pressed, would provide a similar definition and it is certainly the case that the core of IR scholarship has focused, for a long time, on collective industrial relations. Studies of trade unions, collective employment law, collective bargaining and state–trade union relations continue to feature prominently in the field (Frege, 2005).

Definitions offered from within the field, however, typically cast their net much wider and effectively claim the non-union as well as the unionized segment of the economy as IR's province. This was true of some of the first attempts to specify the bounds of IR as an academic subject. Thus, in Dunlop's 1958 formulation of a 'general theory of industrial relations', the subject matter is defined as the 'industrial relations system', a distinct institutional domain within developed economies, comprising actors, processes, context and outcomes (Dunlop, 1993). Crucially, this definition includes but is not confined to the examination of trade unions and collective bargaining; the roster of actors embraces workers and their informal work groups as well as formal representative institutions, the list of processes covers management decision and legal regulation as well as bilateral regulation by unions and employers.

More recent attempts to designate the object of the study of IR have followed a similar tack and tend to define the field as the study of the employment relationship. This is true of authoritative statements by Kaufman (2004a: 45), who states that IR is 'the study of the employment relationship and all the behaviors, outcomes, practices, and institutions that emanate from or impinge on the relationship', and Edwards (2003: 1–2), who declares that the 'focus is employment:

all forms of economic activity in which an employee works under the authority of an employer and receives a wage for his or her labor.' Both authors state that 'employment relations' is a more satisfactory label for the field, if only because it has less connotations with smoke-stack industry, and in some parts of the world IR has begun to yield to this newer label.¹ We are sympathetic to this change of usage but have retained the established term to minimize possible confusion, as do Edwards and Kaufman.

Defining IR as the study of the employment relationship is only an initial step and the next is to identify the component elements of the employment relationship in order to further specify IR's domain. In our view, four elements can usefully be identified.

Actors

Much IR research is focused on the parties to the employment relationship, typically labeled since Dunlop the industrial relations 'actors'. These include workers and their representative institutions, including trade unions and left political parties; employers, their managerial representatives within the firm and their collective organizations, employers' associations; and the state and its multiple agencies involved in the formation and regulation of employment relationships. The latter includes legislatures, judicial and police authorities and specialist agencies engaged in training and development and dispute resolution. As traditional, collective actors have declined in significance in many countries so the field has begun to research 'new actors in industrial relations' (Heery and Frege, 2006). With regard to employees there has been a growth of interest in non-union representatives, including works councilors elected or appointed under statutory provisions and representatives operating under voluntary arrangements established by employers (Frege, 2002; Kaufman and Taras, 2000). There has also been a growth of interest in identity-groups and social movement organizations that campaign on behalf of particular categories of employee for

example, women, lesbian, gay and bisexuals, migrants, the disabled or older workers (Fine, 2006; Piore and Safford, 2006). A similar trend is apparent on the employers' side. Here there has been a growth of interest in organizations that can be regarded as forming and expressing the collective interests of employers, including management consultants developing new practice, employment agencies and other labor market intermediaries, and organizations providing standards and inspection in the field of corporate social responsibility (Kuruville and Verma, 2006: 48–51; Logan, 2006; Osterman et al., 2001: 144–6).

IR research focused on actors deals with a broad range of substantive issues. If one considers the classic subject matter of trade unions then the following main areas of research can be identified:

- 1) the formation and reproduction of unions including trends in membership and the basis of union joining;
- 2) the internal structure and functioning of unions including union democracy, governance and management;
- 3) the external structure of unions including the nature of union 'job territories' (enterprise, occupation, industry or general) and the degree of integration of the national trade union movement;
- 4) union functions and areas of activity including direct service provision to members, collective bargaining and dispute handling, legal advocacy and political action;
- 5) union strategies particularly in the context of union decline and attempts at renewal; and
- 6) union effects on business, economy and society and their effectiveness in representing their members.

Equivalent lists can be compiled readily for other IR actors though perhaps in all cases the key distinction that can be drawn is between the organizational characteristics of any given actor and the nature of its intervention within the IR system; that is between structure and strategy. Thus, for employers IR researchers are interested in the degree of centralization or decentralization of the management hierarchy and its composition, with a particular interest

in the presence and power of specialist HR managers. But they are interested also in management strategies of labor use and the multiple initiatives pursued to secure the compliance of workers or their active commitment to employer goals (Purcell and Ahlstrand, 1994).

Processes

The second main focus of IR research is the processes through which the employment relationship is governed. Again since Dunlop, it is common to define these processes in terms of rule-making or 'job regulation', with two primary types of rule being generated: substantive rules that specify the content of the employment relationship (wages, hours of work, methods of working, staffing levels etc.) and procedural rules that govern the interaction and behavior of the parties (bargaining, consultation, information disclosure and dispute resolution). Both types of rule may be formal, inscribed in company policies, collective agreements or statutes, or informal, enshrined in customary expectations and relationships. The main way of classifying these regulatory processes is in terms of their authorship – which actor or combination of actors is the creator of rules. It is usual to distinguish unilateral regulation by employers (and less frequently) trade unions, joint regulation through collective bargaining, legal regulation by the state and tripartite regulation, in which government, employers and unions formulate 'social pacts' that govern the economy, including wage growth, welfare expenditure and employment (Hassel, 2006).

From this starting point theoretical and research work on IR processes has followed a number of avenues. One course has been to identify the component elements of each rule-making process; to break it down into its constituent elements. A classic venture of this kind was Clegg's (1976) identification of the structural components of national systems of collective bargaining, which varied in terms of bargaining coverage, level, depth, scope and degree of employer support for trade unions.

More recent contributions have identified the elements of other IR processes. Sisson and Marginson (2002), for example, have developed a framework that is similar to Clegg's for analyzing 'co-ordinated bargaining', the process through which discrete episodes of bargaining are linked in broader sectoral, national or, indeed, international systems of regulation.

A second development has been to identify separate forms of each process. Thus, with regard to legal regulation, it is common to distinguish 'hard' and 'soft' forms of regulation (Kuruville and Verma, 2006). The former consists of rights and employment standards established by statute and enforced both through application to courts and inspection by government agencies. The latter, in contrast, consists of opinions, advice, guidance, charters and codes of practice, which are issued by legislative bodies and intended to encourage the adoption of good practice but which are not reinforced by direct sanctions. Scholars have further refined this typology, identifying other forms of legal regulation. In the European Union (EU), for instance, there has been a growth of what has been labeled 'reflexive governance' (Barnard and Deakin, 2002), in which employers can derogate from legal standards and tailor regulations to their particular circumstances provided this occurs through consultation with employee representatives.

A third line of development has been to explore the relationship between different forms and the degree to which they supplant or complement one another. National economies contain multiple processes of job regulation with management decision, collective bargaining, legal regulation and the inclusion of social partners, business and worker representatives, in government policy-making existing alongside one another, applied variously to different issues, different segments of the workforce or different industrial sectors. The separate processes may reinforce one another, with particular regulations establishing boundaries and ensuring integration. Thus, collective agreements frequently contain 'management rights' clauses

that specify those elements of the employment relationship that are subject to collective bargaining and those that are regulated through management decision (Sisson, 1987). A similar interface can be identified between collective bargaining and employment law. In Anglophone countries the prime function of the latter through much of the twentieth century was to serve as 'auxiliary legislation' (Davies and Freedland, 1993: 29), providing legal support for trade unions and collective bargaining rather than directly regulating the terms of the employment relationship. In Britain, auxiliary legislation famously took the form of 'statutory immunities', legal protection for trade unions from civil action under the common law if they organized industrial action that disrupted employers' business (Howell, 2005: 61–4, 149–50).

The decline of collective bargaining over the past two decades in many countries, however, has generated a fresh interest in the relationship between different forms of job regulation. It is asked with increasing frequency whether the rise of other forms is implicated in the decline of bargaining and researchers have focused on the interaction between joint regulation and both new forms of management regulation and the expanding volume of employment law. The central questions have been whether alternative regulatory processes supplant bargaining or whether collective bargaining and other forms can hybridize and support one another? Answers differ. For some writers the spread of human resource management and high-performance work systems poses a threat to joint regulation and is implicated in the de-unionization of industrial relations, essentially because it realigns worker and management interests and provides the basis for 'mutual gains' (Dickson et al., 1988; Fiorito, 2001). For others collective bargaining can support new work systems, union pressure serving to ensure that benefits are shared equitably between company and workforce and thereby helping to sustain innovation (Bacon and Blyton, 2006; Frost, 2001). A similar debate has emerged over the 'juridification' of

the employment relationship, the growth of individual employment law. On the one hand, it is argued that individual rights diminish worker need for collective bargaining (Metcalf, 2005: 114), while on the other hand it is suggested that new law can support collective bargaining, the platform of rights providing minima above which collective agreements can build and the threat of union-sponsored legal action serving as a lever to open up negotiations (Heery and Conley, 2007). Whichever of these positions is correct, the relationship between new and old forms of job regulation has emerged as one of the central themes in current IR research.²

Outcomes

IR is also, indeed increasingly, concerned with assessing the outcomes of processes. The classic expression of this concern can be seen in the very substantial body of research exploring the relationship between trade union presence and collective bargaining and a broad range of economic, psychological and social phenomena. The latter include rates of productivity and profit, job satisfaction and organizational commitment and levels of income inequality (Turnbull, 2003). Although a well-established research theme, development continues with new datasets, new theories, and new research techniques adding to an established body of work (for example Belman and Voos, 2006; Fairris, 2006). Another area where outcomes research has blossomed in recent years is that concerned with the impact of HR practices on business performance. This work lies at the centre of what Godard (2004a) has termed the 'high performance paradigm' within current IR research. Its distinguishing feature is the use of large datasets and econometric methods to establish a statistical relationship between measures of sophisticated human resource management, often expressed as the use of 'high performance work systems', and a variety of indicators of business performance (Wall and Wood, 2005; Whitfield and Poole, 1997). The broad aim is to validate employer

investment in the human resource and confirm that good management practice can have a bottom-line pay-off.

Research on outcomes within IR research has a number of dimensions. One marked feature is the emphasis on evaluating outcomes from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. Unlike other subjects taught in business schools, in IR there is no unreflexive adoption of the perspective of the employer and research on business outcomes sits alongside research on outcomes for workers and others. This is even apparent in the high-performance paradigm, where a notable development has been the growth of research on the effect of new work systems on employees, sometimes from a highly critical perspective that seeks to debunk the claim that all parties benefit from innovation (Thompson and Harley, 2007). In a related development researchers have also begun to apply ethical frameworks to employment issues, using normative criteria drawn from moral philosophy to judge IR outcomes (for example Budd, 2004; Guest, 2007; Legge, 2007). Another distinction that can be drawn in outcomes research relates to the issue of scale. A great deal of work is focused on the proximate effects of IR processes, such as the impact of work organization or union presence on job satisfaction. The distal effects of IR processes are also considered, however, and in a tradition that reaches back to the origins of the subject, there is a continuing interest in the contribution of IR to social integration and inclusion, the civilizing of the market order and the reproduction of liberal democracy (for example Adams, 1995; Estlund, 2003; Green, 2006). IR scholars are not just concerned with the minutiae of the workplace order, important though these are, but with the contribution of IR institutions to the making of a good society.

A final point to note about research on IR outcomes is that it is often comparative, in the sense that it seeks to evaluate the effects of *different* IR processes. Perhaps the clearest example today can be seen in the literature on gender equality. The outcomes of interest in this research include measures of pay inequality, vertical and horizontal

job segregation and the degree to which employment systems remain predicated on a male 'norm' of continuous, full-time employment (Blau et al., 2006). Researchers are interested in the contribution to narrowing these indicators of inequality of management decision, persuaded by a 'business case' for equality, unions prioritizing the needs of women workers through 'equality bargaining' and equal opportunity and other bodies of employment law (Dickens, 1999). For each process, moreover, researchers have tried to identify the conditions under which it is more or less effective. Management policy may be more developed and significant where there is a professional HR function that includes equality specialists (Colling and Dickens, 1998; Hoque and Noon, 2004), bargaining may be more effective when it is centralized or where women occupy negotiating positions (Colling and Dickens, 1989; Hunter and Rimmer, 1995) and law may be more effective when it imposes obligations on employers not to discriminate, backed up by inspection (Dickens, 2007). Whatever the precise question, however, the key thing is that in research of this stamp the central concern is comparative, to evaluate competing routes to the achievement of desired IR outcomes.

Levels

Another feature of IR research is that it is conducted at different scales or levels, stretching from the workplace to the global and encompassing many points in-between (see Kochan et al., 1986: 15–20). Table 1.1 illustrates this range and identifies typical actors, processes and outcomes that are researched at each of four analytical levels. Thus, at the workplace or enterprise level, IR researchers have focused on workplace representation, bargaining and dispute-resolution and examined outputs such as productivity growth and innovation in working practices and work quality and employee well-being. At the meso-level, encompassing studies of particular industries, occupations or localities, researchers have examined industry and occupational unions, employers' associations and

industry or pattern bargaining. A particularly important branch of IR scholarship at this level has examined public sector industrial relations and the distinctive patterns of worker behavior and attitudes, union representation and employer policy within public service organizations (for example Bach et al., 1999). At the national level key actors have been national labor movements and union confederations, peak-level business organizations and state policies and institutions, with a pronounced emphasis in European IR research on the relationship between government and social partners (Teague, 2006; Traxler et al., 2002). Finally, and increasingly, IR research has focused on the supra-national level. There is an increasing volume of regional research examining the industrial relations of particular trading and political blocs, such as the EU and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and a growing body of work that examines IR at a global scale. The latter encompasses research on multi-national enterprises and their supply-chains, global trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that campaign for workers' rights and the activities of international regulatory bodies, such as the International Labour Organization.

Throughout IR's history as a field of study each of these levels has attracted research and scholarship. At different points in the subject's development, however, certain levels have attracted particular attention. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, often regarded as a golden age of IR scholarship in some countries, there was a pronounced focus on workplace studies (Ackers and Wilkinson, 2003a: 11). This was partly driven by the changing nature of the 'problem of order'. The growth of workplace militancy, often beyond the control of official union representatives, prompted a search for the origins of 'disorder' and for policy solutions that would more effectively regulate workplace relations (for example Maitland, 1983). In addition, however, there was a growing volume of left scholarship in IR that was attracted to the rank-and-file challenge and sought both to record and identify the potential for social change of the

Table 1.1 Levels of industrial relations analysis

Levels	Actors					Processes			Outcomes	
	Worker	Employer	State	Management decision	Joint decision	State regulation	Business and performance	Social and justice		
Workplace and enterprise	Work groups, shop stewards and works councilors	Supervisory and general management; HR function	Inspectorates, mediators and labor courts adjudicating workplace disputes	HR policies and practices; employee involvement	Workplace and enterprise level bargaining; consultation and co-determination	Third party mediation and arbitration	Labor productivity, innovation and quality enhancement; financial performance	Work quality and employee well-being		
Industry, occupation and locality	Industry and occupational unions; professional associations; living wage and other local coalitions	Employers' associations; consultancy firms and labor market intermediaries	Industry and occupational regulatory bodies; occupational licensing authorities	Public sector management; state as 'model' employer	Industry-level and pattern bargaining	Training, educational and economic development programs	Diffusion of high performance practices within industry sectors	Impact of privatization and deregulation on labor standards		
National economy	Union confederations; social movements addressing issues at work	Peak-level business organizations	National legislature, judiciary and regulatory bodies	National systems of corporate governance and their impact on labor management	Economy-wide bargaining and the coordination of bargaining outcomes across sectors	National systems of labor law and vocational education and training; social partnership and social pacts	IR institutions and national economic performance	Wage and income inequality; gender, race and other forms of identity-based inequality		
Regional and global	Global unions and international union federations; European and global works councils; NGOs monitoring labor standards	International employers' associations; multinational enterprises	European Union and other supra-state institutions; International Labour Organization	Diffusion of management policies within MNEs; corporate social responsibility within supply chains	International framework agreements; international bargaining and consultation within MNEs	Creation and enforcement of international labor standards	Labor standards and economic development; varieties of capitalism and relative economic performance	Diffusion and effectiveness of global labor standards		

wave of workplace militancy that erupted at the end of the 1960s (for example Beynon, 1984; Herding, 1972). A feature of much of this work was a claim that workplace research possessed greater authenticity and generated a deeper insight into the nature of capitalist social relations. As such, it could be contrasted with an earlier tradition that focused on formal institutions erected above the workplace level – trade unions, employers' associations and industry-wide collective agreements and disputes procedures. As these institutions were challenged in the 1960s and 1970s so IR research switched focus and explored the source of that challenge at the point of production.

In the intervening period the focus of research has switched again and there has been a revival of work examining formal institutions, particularly at national level. As the long postwar boom faltered in the 1970s and as mass unemployment re-emerged, so academic attention switched to the forces shaping national economic performance. There was a growth of research on 'corporatism' and the systems of industrial relations in Northern Europe that co-ordinated wage bargaining and generated relatively low inflation and low unemployment (Goldthorpe, 1985). Although interest in corporatism has waned as the performance of once successful economies has faltered, the focus on national institutions of industrial relations has survived (Baccaro, 2003). This is most apparent in the 'varieties of capitalism' literature (Hall and Soskice, 1998) and its attempt to identify different types of national comparative advantage in a globalized economy. In this work a distinction is drawn between 'liberal market economies', such as the US, that excel at innovation and the development of new industries, and 'co-ordinated market economies', such as Germany and Japan, that dominate mature industries through incremental product and process development. In both types of economy, it is suggested, a complex of institutions embracing the financing and governance of industry, skill formation and wage bargaining reinforce one another and, in combination, underpin the trajectory of national economic

development. In this approach IR forms part of a broader comparative political economy that seeks to map and explain national sources of comparative advantage.

Another recent trend has been the growth of international IR research that examines the employment relationship on a regional or global scale. Much of this work is motivated by the threat to national systems of job regulation posed by globalization and the increasingly transnational scope of both product and labor markets. In the developed world there has been an export of jobs in manufacturing and an erosion of the position of trade unions as previously sheltered markets have been opened to competition. The result has been a policy interest in re-building or extending job regulation at an international level, which has generated academic research in its wake. There has been a growth of research on international unionism (Anner et al., 2006; Gordon and Turner, 2000), international collective bargaining (Lillie, 2006), the policies of multinational enterprises, including corporate codes of conduct on labor standards (Ferner et al., 2006; Tsogas, 2001: 61–85), and international regulatory bodies at regional and global levels (Marginson and Sisson, 2004; van Roozendaal, 2002). Like the research on gender equality described above, much of this work seeks to assess different ways of dealing with the same basic problem – establishing effective international labor standards that limit downward pressure on employment conditions from global competition.

The shifting focus of IR research, moving from different levels of analysis, as different types of 'labor problem' come into view, underlines the nature of IR as an applied, policy-oriented field (Ackers and Wilkinson, 2003a: 11; Hyman, 2004: 272). The research agenda for IR scholars has often been set by policy-makers or by the labor movement, seeking insight into pressing issues and help with institution building or reform. This is only one aspect of the field, however, IR research is also driven by an evolving theoretical impulse and the field contributes to the application, testing, refinement and

development of social theory. It is to this aspect of IR that we now turn.

THEORY AND EXPLANATION

IR is commonly described as an academic field, rather than an academic discipline (for example Muller-Jentsch, 2004: 1). It has provided a territory that has been occupied by different core disciplines, which have entered, exerted influence and occasionally withdrawn to be replaced by rivals. One way of telling the theoretical story of IR therefore is to track the oscillating contribution of different core disciplines to the field. Indeed, in several recent collections the contribution to the study of the employment relationship of economics, psychology, sociology, law, geography and other subjects has been examined and assessed (Ackers and Wilkinson, 2003b; Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004; Korczynski et al., 2006). Many scholars in the field, however, identify themselves as ‘industrial-relationists’ or as employment specialists who have long abandoned their home-discipline address (Adams, 1993: 128–31). A second way of telling IR’s theoretical history, therefore, is to identify the theoretical positions that IR specialists have developed or made their own, regardless of their disciplinary provenance. This option necessarily takes us to the ground of middle-range theory and an attempt to categorize the models that IR specialists have used to analyze trade unions, management strategy, state policy and other areas of substantive inquiry (for example Heery, 2003). Neither narrative strategy can be fully attempted here but at the risk of over-heroic generalization we examine some of the current disciplinary influences on IR and the main types of explanatory argument developed by its practitioners.

Disciplinary influences

The academic discipline that has exerted most influence over IR, at least in the US, is economics. The relationship of IR to economics is a complex one, however, with

different traditions within economics having influence at different times. According to Kaufman (1993: 30–5; see also Adams, 1993: 122), a key role was played in the foundation of IR by heterodox economists who rejected the assumptions of neo-classical orthodoxy and favored instead realistic accounts and inductive theorizing of the institutions that regulated the labor market. This branch of institutional economics focused on the solution of practical ‘labor problems’ and was broadly sympathetic to trade unions and other regulatory institutions that tamed both employer power and market forces. In John R. Commons, Selig Perlman, John T. Dunlop, Clerk Kerr and others it provided key figures in the founding and development of the field (Kaufman, 1993: 84–91).

From the 1960s, however, the institutional tradition lost ground within labor economics and neo-classical orthodoxy reasserted itself. The focus of labor economics switched from the analysis of labor problems to the analysis of the labor market with an associated methodological turn towards deductive theorizing and the statistical testing of models using secondary datasets. The earlier sympathy with the regulation of management and market diminished (Kaufman, 1993: 121–5). It is economics on this conventional model that now exerts influence over IR. Particularly in the US, IR journals are replete with articles based on conventional neo-classical assumptions that examine core issues within the field (Kaufman, 2004b: 365; see also Machin, 2006; Turnbull, 2003). *Inter alia* these include the economic effects of trade unions, the impact of minimum wage regulation on earnings and employment, the gender pay gap, the causes of rising income inequality and the basis of investment decisions in training and the returns to employers and employees. In a recent development economists have also begun to enter territory once occupied by psychologists, undertaking research on job satisfaction and the determinants of work quality (for example Clark, 2005; Green and Tsitisanis, 2005).

While economics is probably the strongest disciplinary influence in IR it is not the

only one and aspects of the field continue to be shaped by sociology, psychology, law, political studies and history. These non-economics influences are particularly apparent outside the US (Frege, 2005: 186–8). Other disciplines continue to be added to the list. Corporate strategy and other applied fields based alongside IR in business schools now exert influence (for example Bacon et al., 2004; Purcell and Ahlstrand, 1994) while there has been a recent surge of interest in social geography and the analysis of the spatial dimension of employment relations (Ellem, 2002; Rainnie et al., 2007; Turnbull, 2006).

It is not possible for us to trace these diverse influences and show how they have added to IR theory. What we can do, however, is demonstrate the continuing shaping of the field by outside disciplines in two particular areas. The first is the body of theory developed by political scientists and sociologists, which is variously labeled ‘contentious politics’ or ‘social movement theory’ (McAdam et al., 1996; McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 1998). The purpose of this field is to understand and account for the origins of social movements, their development and degree of success in challenging political elites. Among the core propositions developed by scholars in this tradition are the following:

- 1) that social movements arise in response to a ‘political opportunity structure’, often characterized by a division within the elite that reduces state capacity for repression and allows movements to form alliances with alienated elite politicians;
- 2) while movements have a spontaneous element and emerge in deeply held grievances they rely also on a ‘mobilizing structure’, an organizational framework comprised of ‘movement entrepreneurs’, activists and networks that builds collective action amongst supporters;
- 3) the work of mobilization has a discursive component and movement leaders develop ideological ‘frames’ that legitimate grievances, attribute them to an oppressor and articulate means of redress;
- 4) movements often develop distinctive ‘repertoires of contention’; that is forms of mobilization and

protest that embrace both the exertion of power against opponents (for example strikes, boycotts, riots, harassment, media scrutiny) and the use of symbols that generate emotional attachment to the movement among its adherents (for example street theatre, costumes, songs, graffiti).

This set of ideas has begun to influence IR scholars, with a key bridge being supplied by Kelly’s (1998) landmark book on IR theory, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*. Kelly used what he termed ‘mobilization theory’ to analyze a broad set of developments in British industrial relations and others have followed in his wake. The social movement framework has been applied to studies of union organizing, union participation, employer counter-mobilization, and the changing internal politics of trade unions (for example Badigannavar and Kelly, 2004; Brown Johnson and Jarley, 2004; Foley, 2003; Heery and Conley, 2007). It has been used to revitalize the study of workers’ collective action and to move beyond the stale opposition between rank-and-file and bureaucracy that for so long has underpinned analysis of unions on the radical wing of IR scholarship.

The second influence lies in the field of ‘political economy’ or ‘socio-economics’. This is a field developed by a new wave of institutional economists, political scientists and economic sociologists that is concerned with the institutional ‘embeddedness’ of capitalist economies. Central themes include the formation and shaping of markets by state and other institutions and the plasticity of the capitalist economy, which assumes a wide variety of forms across and within nation states and which generates highly variable outcomes (Coates, 2005). The Varieties of Capitalism school, described above, is one expression of this literature, which has attracted particular attention within IR (for example Godard, 2004b). A line of research that has emerged under this influence has focused on the relationship between IR actors, processes and outcomes and other (varying) institutions of the capitalist economy, including modes of

finance, corporate governance and different types of business enterprise. The link between forms of governance and IR has been a particular focus of research (for example Armour et al., 2003; Gospel and Pendleton, 2005; Konzelmann et al., 2006). Work of this kind updates the classic interest of IR scholars in the institutions of the labor market but links it to a broader resurgence of comparative political economy across several social science disciplines.

Explanatory models

The other way of looking at IR theory is to identify themes in the substantive, middle-range theories scholars use to account for IR phenomena. Of course, a colossal amount of theory of this kind has been accumulated over the decades. Nevertheless, we feel that this can be sorted into different types of explanatory model without doing excessive violence to the diversity of the subject and below identify four of these. These are: 1) societal models that account for IR developments in terms of adaptation to long-run social and economic change; 2) institutional models that offer explanations grounded in the structural characteristics of the IR system itself or the broader configuration of the national political economy; 3) organizational models that explain the behavior (strategy) of IR actors in terms of their organizational characteristics (structure); and 4) agency models that develop typologies of IR strategy and explore the identities of agents who promote them (see Heery et al., 2004).

Societal

There is a long tradition in IR of explaining the behavior of actors and shifting processes and outcomes as an adaptation to long-run change in economy and society. Causal variables identified in this tradition range from technical change, the globalization of product markets and the feminization of the workforce to less tangible developments such as the emergence of a more reflexive, individualistic population. It is also common to identify discrete

stages of development in the evolution of capitalist societies with each calling forth a set of matching IR institutions and practices. The current stage of capitalist development has been variously labeled, 'post-industrial', 'post-Fordist', 'neo-Fordist', 'the network society', 'disorganized capitalism', and an age of 'flexible specialization'. Assessments of its implications for IR diverge sharply. From one perspective, the diffusion of new high-performance practices presents an opportunity to recast IR on a more co-operative basis within the 'mutual gains enterprise' (Kochan and Osterman, 1994). From another, the latest stage of capitalist development threatens many of the achievements secured by working people in the twentieth century and the function of IR is to retard its evolution or mitigate its worst effects. A group of American writers has argued that the defining feature of 'post-industrialism' is the emergence of a more market-based system of employment relations, characterized by the hollowing out of large corporations, sub-contracting, the erosion of internal labor markets, the growth of contingent labor, de-unionization, rising income inequality and the collapse of employment standards (for example Cobble, 1991; Fine, 2006; Milkman, 2006).³ Faced with this challenge, it is believed there is a need to develop new institutions to re-regulate the labor market and take wages out of competition. Accordingly, researchers have examined emerging practices, such as living wage ordinances, community-based movements of low-wage workers and labor-market organizing by trade unions, seeking to identify their potential to diffuse and contribute to a broader regulation of the new economy.

Institutional

A second form of explanation stresses the role of institutional structures in shaping the behavior of IR actors and the outcomes of IR processes. A classic statement of this argument was Clegg's (1976) comparative analysis of trade unions, which claimed that forms of union organization and patterns

of activity, including internal democracy and involvement in industrial conflict, were determined primarily by the structure of collective bargaining. Contemporary analysts of trade unions continue to make this type of argument, the best known example of which is Fairbrother's (1996) union renewal thesis with its claim that the decentralization of bargaining can prompt the revitalization of workplace unionism. Another example can be seen in comparative research on the gender pay gap, which indicates that progress in narrowing the gap between female and male earnings is a function of industry-wide pay bargaining and relatively strong minimum wage regulations (Almond and Rubery, 1998). These examples focus on the relationship between the structure of IR processes and patterns of actor behavior and outcomes. Other theoretical explanations focus on institutional structures beyond IR narrowly conceived. This is a feature of both of the new disciplinary influences outlined above. Those influenced by social movement theory, for instance, emphasize the role of broader political structures – the political opportunity structure – in channeling union behavior (Turnbull, 2006); those influenced by the Varieties of Capitalism school identify a causal link between union strategies and the institutional constraints imposed respectively by liberal- and co-ordinated-market economies (Frege and Kelly, 2004: 37–9). As these examples indicate, institutional models are frequently comparative, identifying differences in actor behavior and outcomes across national boundaries and explaining these in terms of distinctive national, institutional contexts. Unlike societal models, which stress broad, underlying causes that are universal in their effects (at least across developed societies), institutional models stress contingency and (particularly cross-national) variation.

Organizational

In the third type of model the central interest lies in the causal relationship between the organizational structure of IR actors

and their patterns of behavior and effects. A classic illustration can be seen in the long-standing interest in the relationship between trade union democracy (and trade union oligarchy) and forms of union activity and effectiveness. Concern with this relationship continues to feature strongly in research on trade unions. An example can be seen in the examination of the link between union attempts to promote the interests of women and minorities – believed by many to be a precondition for union revitalization – and the reform of union governance structures to allow for gender democracy and the clearer expression of minority interests. There is a growing body of research on this linkage with different positions being adopted. In some contributions new democratic institutions within unions, such as women's committees and self-organized groups, remain marginalized and exert little influence over union bargaining and political activity (McBride, 2001). In others their effectiveness in pushing significant changes in union policy, which in turn have fed through into legal change and new collective agreements, is accepted (Heery and Conley, 2007). The same type of analysis, linking organizational characteristics to patterns of action, can be seen in research on IR actors besides unions. Thus, in research on management there is an interest in the influence of business structure and internal planning and control procedures on the content of IR policies. The trend towards the decentralization of collective bargaining in large, multi-divisional enterprises has been explained by the spread of new financial controls over operating divisions, in which corporate office monitors performance through financial ratios while conceding autonomy over operational matters, including pay determination, to business unit managers (Purcell and Ahlstrand, 1994: 75–7). Another example can be seen in the theory of corporatism, where it has long been argued that the capacity of states to develop effective tripartite regulation of the economy depends on the presence of strong, centralized and encompassing peak organizations of business and labor (Baccaro, 2003). Whichever actor is

considered, however, the common feature of this type of model remains the same; patterns of activity and their effects within the IR system are dependent on a particular form of organization being adopted – strategy flows from structure.

Agency

The final type of model departs from the structural argument common to the other three and is voluntarist in its assumptions, holding that IR actors have scope for strategic choice (Kochan et al., 1986: 3–20). Choice is exercised within constraints but is not reducible to an external and structured context. For adherents of this position, indeed, strategic choices themselves shape organizational and wider institutional structures. Theory development within this strategic choice tradition has followed two broad avenues. The first has led to the elaboration of typologies of strategy; a listing of the options available to strategic actors. There are many, many examples developed for all of the main IR actors. Thus, Boxall and Haynes (1997) commenting on the renewal strategies of New Zealand trade unions identify two underpinning, dimensions of choice. Unions can adopt an adversarial or co-operative stance towards employers and an organizing or servicing approach to members. From this starting point a menu of four strategic options can be identified: ‘classic unionism’ (adversarialism plus organizing); ‘partnership unionism’ (cooperation plus organizing); ‘paper-tiger unionism’ (adversarialism plus servicing); and ‘consultancy unionism’ (cooperation plus servicing). A well-known equivalent for employers is Guest and Conway’s (1999) typology of management strategy that rests on the extent to which unions are accepted and recognized and the degree to which managers follow a sophisticated, high commitment approach to HRM. Once again four options are identified: ‘the new realism’ (sophisticated HRM plus union recognition); ‘traditional collectivism’ (union recognition with traditional HR practices); ‘individualized HRM’ (non-union with sophisticated HRM);

and ‘the black hole’ (non-union with poor HR practice).

The second avenue leads to an examination of choice-makers and choice-making. Explanation here is directed both at the identities of those leading organizations and deciding strategy and at the internal political and discursive practices that lead to the selection and legitimization of a particular strategic choice. The focus on choice-makers is most readily apparent in research on trade unions, where there is a wealth of material that explains patterns of union activity in terms of the gender, generation or ideological stamp of union leaders and activists (see Heery, 2003: 290–5). There has been a particular emphasis on gender, with the feminization of union policy and the recreation of union democratic and management structures to better represent diversity, being seen as dependent on the prior mobilization of feminist activists within unions (Ledwith and Colgan, 2002). Equivalent work on the employer side is perhaps less developed though analogous explanations can be found. They exist, for instance, in attempts to explain company cultures in terms of the imprint of charismatic founding fathers or mothers, whether Victorian Quakers or New Age entrepreneurs, like Anita Roddick of Body Shop, contriving a deliberate informality and seeking employee commitment to ethical standards (Purcell and Sisson, 1983: 116–7). They can also be seen in attempts to explain variation in HRM within multi-nationals through a parent-country effect; that HR is shaped by the transfer of a distinctive corporate identity from one national culture to another (Gunnigle et al., 2006).

Theories that focus on choice-making allocate a central part to the (frequently conflictual) social processes through which strategic choices are made. In a study of the emergence of social pacts in Ireland, Italy and South Korea, for example, Baccaro and Lim (2007) note that the outcome of a fierce dispute between moderates and more radical elements in the labor movement was a crucial stage in each process. Decisive victories for the moderate, partnership wing

ensured the development of pacts in Ireland and Italy, while a radical victory in South Korea led to the pact's instability. There are numerous other examples. To take one, Ledwith and Colgan (2002: 16–18) identify a key stage of 'usurpation' in the feminization of unions, through which new activists challenge and overcome the resistance of the incumbent, male-dominated elite. There is also an element in this body of work that emphasizes discursive practice and the deployment of legitimizing frames for new strategic choices. Thus, Heery and Conley's (2007) study of union policy on part-time work in the UK, stresses the significance of distinct 'instrumental' and 'solidarity' frames in garnering support for new policy and rendering opposition non-legitimate.

The four types of explanation we have identified are in certain respects competing. They offer different accounts of IR phenomena and many empirical studies in IR seek to weigh the explanatory power of different structural explanations – societal, institutional and organizational – or the relative strength of structural and strategic choice perspectives. An example of this type of contest can be seen in the different explanations put forward of a widespread IR trend, the decentralization of collective bargaining to enterprise and workplace levels. On the one hand, this has been explained, as we have seen, as an artifact of the diffusion of new financial control systems within the management hierarchies of multi-divisional firms – an organizational account. On the other hand, it has been explained as an adjustment within IR to the diffusion of more flexible forms of production that require tailor-made, plant-specific systems of job regulation – a societal account (Katz, 1993). If pushed to their extreme, neither of these explanations can accommodate the other and much routine academic work within IR involves assembling evidence to choose between seemingly equally plausible explanatory models.

If extremes are avoided, however, then the different types of explanation can be combined; assembled in a complex, multi-factor model. This is also a common

development within IR theory. Again, we can provide a single illustrative case. Baccaro and Lim's (2007) full explanatory model for the emergence of social pacts combines different types of explanation. The search for a pact typically originates in a broad economic and social crisis, reflects a particular institutional context defined by a weak government that needs allies to develop a response to crisis, and depends on a strategic choice to co-operate within the labor movement which, in turn, is the outcome of a choice-making conflict between moderates and radicals. The latter also has an organizational dimension and Baccaro and Lim (2007) emphasize the importance of balloting procedures in both Ireland and Italy in registering union-member support for social pacts and isolating the opposition. Finally, social pacts become institutionalized if there is a subsequent buy-in by employers, which depends on the authority of employers' confederations (organizational), political opportunities to shape pacts (institutional) and calculations of strategic advantage amongst different employer groups (strategic choice). The supporting conditions, Baccaro and Lim (2007) note, were only fully in place in Ireland and it is in this single case that the social pact has been institutionalized and become an enduring feature of the IR system – in the other two cases the experiment faltered albeit after a period of success in Italy.⁴ The essential point, however, is that a complex, abstract model, combining different types of explanation, has been devised to account for a significant IR development.

NORMATIVE ORIENTATION

The dominant normative orientation amongst IR scholars is one of pluralism. This 'frame of reference' comprises core beliefs about the nature of the employment relationship, which provide a standard for evaluating IR practice and serve as a guide to developing policy advice, an essential component of an applied field. At the heart of the pluralist position is a conviction that the employment relationship embraces two equally legitimate

sets of interests, those of employers and those of employees. It is further believed that, while these interests are congruent in very large degree, there is an irreducible core of conflict. A preparedness to acknowledge conflicting interests at work and accept that the expression of conflict is not a pathological symptom has been held to be a defining feature of IR (Kochan, 1998: 37–9). A third core belief of pluralists is that there is an imbalance of power within the employment relationship and that the dependence of workers on employers for the means of subsistence places them in a vulnerable position. A fourth belief follows; that workers have the right to combine in trade unions and other types of collectivity in order to accumulate power, provide a counterweight to the otherwise dominant position of the employer and pursue their separate, legitimate interests (Budd, 2004: 26). The final component of the pluralist position is a conviction that collective organization by employees and the creation of a pluralist IR system based on trade unionism, collective bargaining and the regulation of conflict serves not only the interests of employees but can also serve a wider, general or public interest. The classic expression of this belief in the twentieth century was the claim that the IR system was functional for the wider society, addressing the ‘labor problem’ and successfully integrating the working population into liberal democratic societies (Budd, 2004: 4).

Several features of IR flow from this pluralist conception of the employment relationship. One is that the research agenda has often focused on the experiences, concerns and needs of workers and their institutions and has not slavishly reflected the interests of employers. This aspect of IR, moreover, has persisted despite the fact that most of the field’s members now work in business schools. Research on the quality of work experienced by individual employees (for example Barley and Kunda, 2004; Green, 2006) or exploring the revitalization strategies of unions (for example Wheeler, 2002) is testament to the continuing vitality of the pluralist tradition. Another feature is that a

considerable body of IR research is critical of employers and their practices, identifying unethical, exploitative, oppressive and inefficient aspects of management practice, particularly in a context of light regulation or non-unionism. Sisson’s (1993: 207) judgment on the non-union workplace in Britain as something of a ‘bleak house’ is indicative of a much wider orientation amongst IR scholars.⁵ There is little faith in employers’ capacity to manage the employment system for the benefit of multiple stakeholders and IR commentators frequently identify market failures that arise from employers pursuing sectional or short-term interests. Partly for this reason there is broad acceptance of the need for intervention in both the market order and the order of management control within firms. IR pluralists have a bias towards regulation of employer behavior through law but also through collective representation of workers and the joint regulation of the employment relationship.

The classic policy position adopted by IR pluralists, therefore, has been support for collective bargaining and the associated auxiliary legislation that can underpin it (Ackers, 2007). The main qualification to this position has occurred when pluralists have identified a tension between collective organization and a putative general interest; a tension that was particularly apparent in the long period of full-employment and relatively strong trade unionism after the Second World War. Pluralists have accepted constraints on collective action by employees to minimize general economic costs (for example restricting collective bargaining to reduce inflationary wage pressure) or preserve state functions and sovereignty (for example restricting strikes in essential services). Indeed, much policy ink has been spilt designing IR systems that retain collective organization by employees while reducing dysfunctional effects for the wider society. For much of the second half of the twentieth century IR pluralists were quintessential reformists, seeking to update and eliminate the flaws from established IR institutions founded on collective bargaining.

Challenge and critique

While pluralism has been the dominant orientation, it has not gone unchallenged. This challenge has been threefold and has come from Marxism, feminism and neo-liberalism. In each case, it should be noted, the critique has been fundamental in that it has targeted the core beliefs of IR pluralists and offered a different interpretation of interests within the employment relationship. The main elements of this three-headed critique are as follows.

Marxism

Marxism shares pluralism's focus on the dyadic relationship between employers and employees and a belief that interests are separate and conflicting, but it differs in one fundamental aspect. For Marxists there is only one set of *legitimate* interests, those of workers. Thus, in Kelly's (1998: 4–15) attempt to recast the field of IR around mobilization theory the starting point are the interests of workers, with main themes being the accumulation of power resources by workers and the strategies of counter-mobilization adopted by state and employers in response. The other distinctive feature of the Marxist normative position is a belief that workers' fundamental interest lies in challenging and overturning the capitalist mode of production. Two orientations flow from this belief. On the one hand, there is criticism of institutions that stabilize the economic order and integrate the working population into society. Unlike pluralists, Marxists do not believe that a 'balance is best' (Budd et al., 2004) and are typically highly critical of the regulatory institutions of capitalist societies that channel industrial conflict into compromise solutions while leaving the broader configuration of the economy unchanged (Hyman, 1975). Thus, since Lenin, Marxists have sharply criticized trade unionism, recognizing it as an expression of worker rebellion against capital but decriing its limited goals. On the other hand, there is a celebration of industrial conflict (Darlington and Lyddon, 2001) and a continual searching for new

points of challenge to capital beyond the established institutions of IR. The policy prescription for Marxists is typically one of militancy and support for rank-and-file movements that promise the renewal of trade unionism from below (Darlington, 1994; Fairbrother, 2000). The challenge to pluralist IR from Marxists has diminished somewhat as Marxism has lost influence generally in the social sciences since the 1980s. The division between pluralists and Marxists is still an active front, however, and continues to structure debate in IR. It is a particularly notable feature of the field in Britain with pluralists and Marxists offering competing interpretations of contemporary phenomena, such as the vogue for labor-management partnership agreements (cf. Samuel, 2005; Tailby et al., 2004) or the record of the Labour Government elected in 1997 (cf. Brown, 2000; Smith and Morton, 2006).

Feminism

The distinctive feature of the feminist critique is that it has not accepted the dyadic relationship between employer and employee as a satisfactory basis for the subject. In particular, it is argued that a focus on the gender-neutral category of 'worker' obscures the fact that the employment relationship is profoundly gendered and that the experiences of men and women employees are divergent and their interests often conflicting.⁶ Accordingly, the separate and gendered interests of male and female workers must be acknowledged and incorporated within the core research and normative concerns of IR scholars. However, feminist commentators have also problematized the category of 'women' and noted that 'multiple "women" exist' (Pocock, 1997a: 3), as a consequence of the 'intersectionality' of gender and other forms of social identity (Holgate et al., 2006: 310). A critique that started with a call to acknowledge distinct gender interests, therefore, has progressed to encompass a diversity of interests based in multiple identities: race, ethnicity, faith, age, disability and sexuality.⁷ All of these must now receive their due recognition within IR scholarship.

An extensive research agenda has developed from this attempt to reorient the subject towards gender and minority interests. One course has been to map and seek explanations of patterns of inequality at work. In many cases this has focused on the strategies used by men to maintain the subordination of women; whether male workers seeking to monopolize skilled trades, male-dominated unions prioritizing a traditional bargaining agenda, or male employers designing low-skilled, part-time jobs for women workers (for example Beechey and Perkins, 1987; Cockburn, 1983; Colling and Dickens, 1989). A second course has been to broaden the subject matter of IR in two distinct ways. On the one hand, feminist researchers have noted that the gendered employment contracts of men and women reflect a prior 'sexual contract' and rest on an unequal domestic division of labor (Wacjman, 2000: 193–5). This has encouraged work on the interrelationship of the domestic sphere and forms and experiences of paid work, a theme that has been given added impetus by public policy interest in the issue of work-life integration. On the other hand, there has been a drive to examine questions of sexuality and emotion at work that has encompassed research on the design of jobs to incorporate emotional and sexual display and the issue of sexual harassment (Forrest, 1993: 424; Wacjman, 2000: 192–3).

A third theme in feminist IR research has been to uncover women's resistance to oppression at work; to rediscover events, actors and movements that have been 'hidden from history' and neglected systematically by a male-dominated field (Forrest, 1993: 416). This concern has generated a substantial volume of work on women's trade unionism, which has emerged as a major theme in IR research in recent years (for example Briskin and McDermott, 1993; Cobble, 1993; Colgan and Ledwith, 2002; Pocock, 1997b). A fourth main area of research identified by feminist IR scholars is the evaluation of equality and diversity policies developed by states, unions and employers. Much of this work is highly critical, pointing to the persistence of gender inequality at work and

the superficial character of policies to deal with it. Nevertheless, a body of work has been accumulated that can inform evidence-based policy-making. This work points to the conditions under which employment law, collective bargaining and management policy are more or less likely to contribute to the narrowing of workplace inequality (for example Grimshaw and Rubery, 2001).

A characteristic that feminist IR scholars share with the pluralist mainstream is a belief in the need for law and collective bargaining to shape the behavior of employers. There is often a deep skepticism about the potential for employer policy to secure significant advance towards equality, which is expressed in a critique of the 'business case' for equal opportunities and the 'diversity management' programmes to which it gives rise (Kirton and Green, 2000). Effective external regulation (and the mobilization of women and minority groups themselves against employers), are deemed necessary because business pressures to eliminate inequality will only be felt by a proportion of employers. The ugly fact motivating much feminist comment on IR policy is that many employers gain from unequal treatment and consequently cannot be relied upon to act as agents for social justice. Partly for this reason the main feminist orientation to policy stresses the continual strengthening of legal regulation in particular to make it more exacting from the employers' perspective. An international manifestation of this orientation is the pressure to rewrite equality law so that it not only confers rights not to suffer discrimination but imposes a positive duty on employers to provide for equality at work (McColgan, 1994).

Feminist commentators differ in their evaluation of trade unions but there is a strong current of belief that 'social regulation' through unions and collective bargaining can supplement law and indeed ensure that it is more effectively 'mediated' at workplace level (Dickens, 1999). The policy advocated for unions is twofold. On the one hand, it is suggested that there must be more effective 'external' representation of women and

minorities by unions through the development of 'equality bargaining' (Colling and Dickens, 1989); that is through the incorporation of issues of discrimination, equality and diversity into the routine representative work of unions. On the other, it is argued that there must be more effective 'internal' representation of women and minorities through the reform of union government systems to ensure that their interests gain expression. Each type of reform can reinforce the other and both are deemed essential (Bercusson and Dickens, 1996).

Calls for legal and union-based regulation have to do with the means to ends – how the cause of equality can be advanced. Feminist IR scholars have also written extensively on the objectives of policy. Several themes stand out from this work. Perhaps the most fundamental is the need for policy to extend beyond mere equality of opportunity and secure equality of outcome, if needs be through positive/reverse discrimination. A second theme derives from the identification of the separate and distinct interests of women and minorities, the corollary of which is the need to tailor work and employment systems and surrounding regulations to accommodate this diversity (for example Baird, 2006). While feminists have developed a critique of 'diversity management', there is nevertheless a common policy emphasis on difference and the need to develop flexible systems of employment that accommodate the distinct interests of women and minorities (Dickens, 2005: 201–3).⁸ A third theme extends beyond the world of work and targets the domestic sphere through policies that socialize childcare and either encourage or require men to assume a greater domestic workload (for example through state paternity and family leave policies). As the origins of workplace inequality have been located in a broader 'sexual contract', so IR policy has leaned towards social and family policy and sought to reconstruct domestic as well as workplace relations. This, in turn, reflects an abiding theme of feminist IR scholarship; in both its analysis and in its normative stance it has extended the scope of the

subject and tried to erase the lines that separate IR from adjacent fields of (gendered) social life.

Neo-liberalism

The third challenge to pluralist orthodoxy has come from the neo-liberal right and although its proponents constitute only a tiny minority of IR scholars the ideas they expound reflect major themes in recent public policy in the US, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and other countries. In certain respects this normative orientation is the mirror image of Marxism, choosing to privilege the interests of employers rather than labor. This is not fully the case, however. Neo-liberals accept that employees have legitimate interests that they inevitably will pursue but suggest that inefficiencies will result and the interests of consumers suffer, if they are not restrained by a combination of competitive markets and management hierarchy. Competition and control, from this perspective, are the necessary disciplines that must keep 'producer' interests in check. It follows that, regulatory institutions which inhibit competition or which restrict the operation of management hierarchies are inevitably viewed with suspicion, if not hostility. The actions of the state in regulating the labor market and of trade unions in raising wages and challenging management prerogative have been particular targets. The same institutions that are seen to offer solutions to labor market problems in pluralist analysis are viewed as the source of problems by neo-liberals.

Following Hirschman (1991), we can identify the main types of argument that neo-liberals have mounted against pluralist industrial relations. One response has been to question the severity of the social problems that are the target of regulatory intervention by pluralists. Thus, it has been suggested that there is less need for unions to redress the power imbalance in the employment relationship when second jobs, self-employment and the ownership of shares and other private property render workers less dependent on wages earned from a single employer (Hanson and Mather,

1988: 36). An equivalent argument made against minimum wage legislation is to point to the fact that many low-wage workers live in multi-income households and so are not solely dependent on their own income. A second response, labeled the 'futility thesis' by Hirschman (1991), questions the capacity of regulation to moderate market outcomes, at least in the longer term. Examples of the futility thesis include the claim that minimum wage laws simply displace employment into the informal sector or Troy's (1999: 24) argument that union pattern-bargaining can never truly 'take wages out of competition' and simply displaces employment into the non-union economy. A third response, the 'perversity thesis', states that regulation rebounds against the very group it is intended to help, in most versions of the argument by destroying the jobs of unionized workers or those protected by legal regulation. To quote from Troy (2004: 70), '...high Franco-German unemployment, lower productivity, downsizing, and the export of production to other countries...can be traced to an important extent, to the works councils (and unionism) that [pluralists] extol and urge [the USA] to impose on its own workplaces'. The final argument, the 'jeopardy thesis', submits that regulation destroys other desirable states, such as national competitiveness. To quote once more from Troy (2004: 72) the effect of strong trade unions in the American school system is to raise the costs of education and impose 'externalities', including 'uneducated children who are ill-equipped to compete in America's labor markets...' For Troy, as for many neo-liberals, the effect of unionism is to create low quality and inefficiency by imposing work rules on managers that elevate producer interests above those of the consumers of goods and services.

The prescription which flows from this analysis is for the deregulation of industrial relations. Neo-liberals routinely call for the withdrawal or weakening of legislation that interferes with market forces or inhibits the capacity of managers to respond to market signals. Where regulation is unavoidable, as

is the case in the UK required to implement European social policy directives, there is a preference for 'soft law' or other, relatively weak forms of regulation. Employment legislation is continually weighed in the balance to identify potential costs and dysfunctional consequences. An even closer scrutiny has been directed at regulation stemming from trade unions and collective bargaining (Minford, 1985) and the weakening of union capacity to regulate labor markets has been a notable feature of jurisdictions where neo-liberalism has shaped public policy. The long catalogue of anti-union reform in Britain under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s or the more recent Work Choices policy of John Howard's government in Australia, provide examples. For some neo-liberal commentators the only legitimate role for trade unions is in providing labor market services to their members; that is in helping the labor market to operate more efficiently through the provision of skills and information (Roberts, 1987; Shenfield 1986).

If deregulation is the negative side of neo-liberal prescription for industrial relations, what is the positive element? Perhaps the clearest neo-liberal agenda for reconstructing work relations focuses on the use of financial incentives to alleviate principal-agent problems and re-align the interests of shareholders, managers and employees. Thus, one of the reasons Troy inveighs against the actions of educational unions in the US is because of their opposition to incentive and merit pay. Many neo-liberals have a particular enthusiasm for profit-sharing and employee share-ownership (for example Bell and Hanson, 1987) and the diffusion of neo-liberal ideas has been accompanied by an international trend to promote worker shareholding through tax incentives and other policy instruments (see Vaughan-Whitehead, 1995). The objective of re-aligning worker and employer interests was cogently expressed by the late President Reagan, 'Could there be a better answer to the stupidity of Karl Marx than millions of workers individually sharing in the means of production?' (quoted in Bradley and Gelb, 1986: 22).

Pluralist responses

Notwithstanding the challenge from Marxism, feminism and neo-liberalism, pluralism remains the dominant normative orientation within academic IR. The mainstream has stretched to accommodate aspects of each critique, however, and many recent developments in the field have emerged from the tension between pluralism and its opponents.

The classic pluralist response to the Marxist challenge has been to point to the effectiveness of IR reform in civilizing the market order, both in a material sense of raising workers' living standards and in a procedural sense of protecting workers from arbitrary treatment and importing due process into the employment relationship. Thus, Flanders (1970) defending UK unions in the 1960s from the Marxist charge of economism, declared that, 'by doggedly sticking to their immediate ends and refusing to be captured and exploited by any political party, they have gradually transformed society'. This search for evidence of reform, and for the capacity of capitalist economies to undergo significant reform, continues within the pluralist tradition. Its clearest contemporary expression can be seen in the attraction of many IR scholars to the *Varieties of Capitalism* literature. Particularly for IR pluralists in Anglophone countries, evidence of sustainable alternative forms of capitalism, which are more receptive to the interests of workers or which foster less adversarial relations between managers and employees, is deeply appealing (for example Adams, 1995). In recent years the labor market institutions of 'coordinated market economies' have served as a menu for Anglophone IR reformists, a new set of recipes for civilizing capitalism. German works councils, in particular, have been identified as an institution that can provide a model for reform, helping to create 'the mutual gains enterprise' in the USA and other 'liberal market economies' (Kochan and Osterman, 1994: 204–207).⁹

The response to feminism has been more accommodating and, as some feminist critics of mainstream IR acknowledge, there has

been greater recognition of gender and the issue of equality in textbooks and research literature (Healy et al., 2006). IR may still lag behind other fields of social inquiry in drawing from feminist theory and the accommodation may be limited (and largely ignore the gendered experience of men) but a shift has occurred. There remains a line of division, however, that has recently been sketched by Edwards (2003: 28–30). He makes two key points. The first is that the field of IR will lose its coherence if it extends too far beyond the employment relationship to embrace the domestic sphere and the wider cultural expression of gender relations. Edwards likens the walls of the workplace to a 'semi-permeable membrane', which 'filters influences from outside and also shapes how processes within the workplace affect relations elsewhere'. Clearly relations at work are shaped by forces beyond, including the sexual division of labor within the home, but they are not reducible to them and for this reason the proper focus of IR scholarship should remain the employment relationship. The second point is that the extent to which institutions involved in regulating the workplace are gendered is a matter of degree and to be established by empirical research. Edwards is at pains to concede that the use of gender-neutral categories by IR academics has often shielded important features of working life from inquiry, but holds that their use may be legitimate in particular circumstances. A related theme has recently appeared in empirical work asking if gender is of 'declining significance'; that is, if sex differences are becoming less apparent in the distribution of earnings and other indicators of workers' experiences (Blau et al., 2006).

If many pluralists have wanted to accommodate a feminist perspective, the typical response to neo-liberalism has been defensive, striving to rebut elements of the neo-liberal attack. One important service discharged by pluralist IR researchers has been to disprove the wilder claims of free marketers that protective regulation of the labor market generates perverse and other effects. For example, a series of careful studies of the UK's cautious

experiment with minimum wage regulation in recent years have shown little evidence of significant job losses (Dickens and Manning, 2003). A more offensive position has been to develop 'business case' arguments in support of the regulatory institutions favored by pluralists. One of the earliest and best known examples of this type of argument was Freeman and Medoff's (1984: 162–80) defense of US trade unionism, particularly on the grounds that it stimulated higher productivity. Since then other researchers have trod the same path, using empirical data to make a positive case for trade unionism and employment law (for example Turnbull et al., 2004). At a theoretical level pluralists have also developed the concept of 'beneficial constraints', as a counterweight to the neo-liberal predilection for perversity (Streeck, 1997). Institutions that inhibit the market or management decision, it is suggested, promote long-term efficiency by shutting off the low-road to cost-minimization and encouraging managers to forge long-term, co-operative relations with employees. The final and most ambitious pluralist response has been not to accept but to transcend the standards of evaluation employed by neo-liberals. There has been a turn to ethical reasoning and the revival of social justice arguments as a basis for labor market regulation, independently of economic effects (Budd, 2004). While many pluralists have fought neo-liberals on their own ground, there is a growing trend to reach beyond their Gradgrind values to mount the case for decent conditions for working men and women.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The themes, developments and issues outlined above are reflected in the chapters that follow. In the first part, the contributors provide an overview of the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of the field, its interconnections with other disciplines, links with developments taking place both within and outside the work organization, and the questions these raise for optimum ways of

studying contemporary industrial relations. In Chapter 2, Carola Frege considers the historical development of industrial relations research, examining to what extent the approach and focus of that research reflects particular national conditions. She highlights significant variation in the influence of particular disciplines in different countries (most notably the relative strengths of economic vs. sociological approaches to industrial relations) and the continuing influence of different academic structures, epistemological traditions and political discourses on the ways in which industrial relations research is pursued. The theme of the relationship of industrial relations to social science disciplines is developed further by Peter Ackers and Adrian Wilkinson in Chapter 3. They argue the case for a renewed dialogue not only with economics, politics, sociology and history, but also with psychology, law and geography. A key contribution of industrial relations to this dialogue is seen to be an institutional analysis of the employment relationship that incorporates much more than trade unionism and collective bargaining.

In Chapter 4, Edmund Heery considers different theoretical approaches to industrial relations. He contrasts 'cross-sectional' models that specify the different elements comprising the industrial relations field, their interrelationships and outcomes, with other models that focus more on types and rates of change occurring over time. Given evident shortcomings in the former approach, which has dominated the field in the past (mainly in the form of systems theory), Heery identifies the need for an approach that incorporates a sophisticated model of change, combining elements of the different models of change he outlines. In Chapter 5, John Budd and Devasheesh Bhawe explore the different underlying values, ideologies and frames of reference held by those studying and practicing industrial relations. They view the different frames of reference existing within the field as both a weakness and strength of the subject: a weakness when it leads to different groups 'talking past each other' and a strength when it helps to interpret the complexity of the

world of work. For the latter to thrive however, Budd and Bhavé emphasize the need for a clearer exposure of the values and ideologies within industrial relations discourse.

In Chapter 6, William Brown draws on three decades of research into pay setting to examine the central influence of product market conditions on industrial relations. He explores the relationship between greater competition and increased unwillingness on the part of employers to reach the sort of agreements with unions that were widespread in the past. In the light of this, Brown notes the growing importance of other means for workers to seek influence, including working to secure more state support for employment standards and gaining consumer backing for fair labor conditions.

In Chapter 7, Kerstin Hamman and John Kelly broaden the theme of influences on industrial relations systems by considering the links between different models of capitalism (focusing particularly on the Varieties of Capitalism typology) and the characteristics and trajectories of different national systems of industrial relations. While their analysis points to a number of identifiable clusters of industrial relations systems, they demonstrate the inability of simple dichotomous classifications – such as between liberal market economies and co-ordinated market economies – adequately to categorize patterns and developments in industrial relations. Hamman and Kelly argue that systematic comparisons of industrial relations systems need a greater sensitivity to, for example, the particular roles of national states, political parties and different welfare systems than is represented by the broad Varieties of Capitalism categories.

In Chapter 8, Stephen Procter shortens the horizon of analysis to consider changes occurring within the workplace. This is one of a number of contributions in the volume that draw on current debates regarding human resource practices and firm performance. In exploring what is known (and less known) in this area, Procter argues that the employment relationship has yet to be fully considered in questions such as the factors influencing

the diffusion of human resource practices, or more generally how management actions have ‘effects’ on practice and performance.

In the final chapter in Part One, George Strauss and Keith Whitfield discuss recent trends in research approaches by industrial relations scholars. Analyses of journal contents are used to gauge the extent of change in industrial relations research: the trend towards more deductive and less inductive approaches, for example and the growing use of large data sets and multivariate statistical methods. To avoid the danger of becoming too detached from the people and contexts they are purporting to study, Strauss and Whitfield discuss the potential for designing studies that benefit from both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Part Two focuses on developments among the different actors engaged in industrial relations, considering not only the ‘usual suspects’ of employers and management, trade unions and national state institutions, but also other relevant actors such as transnational institutions, works councils, and a range of other actors whose activities have a bearing on industrial relations processes and outcomes. In the first of two chapters on trade unions, Jack Fiorito and Paul Jarley consider in Chapter 10 the main developments in union structure, including trends towards general unionism and how union governance and administrative structures relate to outcomes. Implications of ‘organizing model’ and ‘social network’ conceptions of unions are also considered. In noting the difficulties facing many individual unions and national trade union movements, Fiorito and Jarley advocate greater investigation both of the relationship between union structure and practice and the relationship between local and national union structures and outcomes, together with a more thorough evaluation of the consequences of different union choices. This latter aspect is considered in detail by Peter Boxall in Chapter 11, in which he examines the strategic choices facing trade unions in the difficult environments many now confront. Drawing on the notion of organizational life cycles, Boxall argues the inappropriateness

of universal union renewal strategies, such as 'organizing' or 'servicing' strategies. He contends that different types of worker, facing diverse conditions and working for employers who have varying responses to trade union representation, require union revitalization strategies that are capable of responding to these different conditions.

In Chapter 12, Franz Traxler examines the relevance of the changing structure of employer organizations for the conduct of industrial relations. He notes the inevitable tensions that exist within employer organizations, and the extent to which the incentives for employers to join such organizations have declined, reflecting not only widespread reductions in union power, but also the internationalization of markets and the reduced significance of multi-employer agreements. Traxler argues that broadening their range of activities and developing roles in ways encouraged by the state, could become increasingly significant for the maintenance of employer organizations in the future.

In Chapter 13 Nicolas Bacon explores management's central position within industrial relations and the scope for, and constraints upon management in developing particular industrial relations approaches, such as those designed to build a 'high commitment' workplace. He emphasizes the need for greater understanding of the degree to which management can exercise choice in their approach to industrial relations given the constraints imposed by, among other things, product markets (and nature of competition), labor markets, financial systems and institutional contexts.

In the first of three chapters examining different aspects of the state's role in industrial relations, Richard Hyman in Chapter 14 points to the peripheral way in which the state has been investigated in much industrial relations research. He argues that this has acted to underplay the close interrelationship between states and markets and the centrality of the state within industrial relations, as employer, legislator, economic manager and welfare provider. Hyman develops a three-fold typology of the way that states shape

industrial relations, each representing a different balance of priorities in the weight attached to pursuing economic efficiency, social stability and the rights and standards accorded to its citizens.

In Chapter 15 Simon Deakin and Wanjiru Njoya reassess the position of labor law within broader industrial relations enquiry. Drawing on the examples of several countries, they trace the development of labor law and the different interests and wide range of objectives that it attempts to regulate. Identifying a continuing diversity across different national systems, Deakin and Njoya also point to common challenges facing established legal concepts and categories stemming from, for example, changes occurring in organizational forms and the global spread of business operations.

In Chapter 16, Marick Masters, Ray Gibney, Iryna Shevchuk and Tom Zagenczyk focus on developments in the state's role as an employer. The picture drawn is again one of substantial change, not least in the spread of different business practices from the private into the public sector, and increased pressures on public sector workers to improve their performance. They anticipate these pressures intensifying further, potentially signaling important industrial relations implications regarding work pressure, and the nature of the work-effort bargain among public sector workers. In Chapter 17, Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick turns her attention to the international regulation of the employment relationship, through the influence of such bodies as the International Labour Organization, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, as well as international federations of trade unions and employers' organizations. She identifies significant areas of development of an international industrial relations system; such developments are judged to have been restricted, however, by the limited powers ceded to organizations such as international trade union federations by national constituent members concerned to maintain their autonomy.

In Chapter 18, Jean Jenkins and Paul Blyton examine the development and prospects for

works councils within industrial relations systems. While they identify a number of factors potentially challenging the future of works councils, other developments appear to signal fresh impetus for the expansion of works council arrangements. However, without active support from the different industrial relations parties, the prospects for the latest generation of works councils exerting significant influence are seen to be limited.

In Chapter 19, Charles Heckscher charts the emergence of new industrial relations actors, distinguishing between issue groups (such as consumers and environmentalists) and identity groups (based on race, sex or disability, for example). Though such groups show a growing preparedness to press their own demands, for the most part he notes the lack of adaptation of existing industrial relations processes to integrate these different stakeholders. Heckscher identifies a need for improved internal and external organization among the new actors, as well as for increased attention by trade unions to building effective relations and coalitions with these emerging stakeholders.

Part Three of the Handbook focuses mainly on processes of industrial relations. In Chapter 20, John Godard considers the factors influencing the formation of trade unions, particularly what determines individuals to seek collective representation. He reviews the different evidence on individual predispositions, the role of trade unions and employers, and the broader relevance of legal structures and economic and political contexts. Godard's analysis points to a long list of influencing factors, but also how different national institutional environments – and the norms that these give rise to – shape the particular influence of specific factors in different circumstances.

In Chapter 21, Robert Flanagan assesses the impact of changing bargaining structures on the exercise of bargaining power. He considers the widespread trend towards more decentralized industrial relations arrangements, that in turn have contributed to increased pay dispersion and a broadening of the agenda

discussed within more localized industrial relations. Pressures for decentralization are seen by Flanagan as continuing, giving rise to an expected greater industrial relations focus on productivity issues, and more generally signaling a degree of convergence among industrial relations systems towards more decentralized structures. In Chapter 22, Ann Frost picks up the theme of high performance work systems and considers the impact on the broader field of industrial relations. In questioning the longevity and diffusion of such human resource initiatives, she points to the general lack of evidence of accompanying mutual gains relationships, or significantly greater worker autonomy over decisions, particularly in many low-paid service environments. Frost highlights the need for more research involving a broader range of work sectors, better to reflect the diversity of working environments and the growing scale of non-union settings.

The issue of employee involvement in decision-making is also addressed in Chapter 23 by Russell Lansbury and Nick Wailes, who consider the extent to which certain institutional systems are more conducive to employee participation than others. They also cast doubt on the sustainability of work reorganization initiatives based on greater worker participation, particularly in those (liberal market) economies that otherwise do not provide an environment conducive to extending worker influence over decision-making. Looking to the future, Lansbury and Wailes note that even within coordinated market economies, participation traditions may be more difficult to sustain as pressures on firms increase for short-term financial returns.

In Chapter 24, David Lewin examines different theories of why employer-employee conflict occurs and charts the changes taking place in patterns of conflict resolution. He notes the significance of the shift away from collective towards more individual expressions of conflict, and the resulting expansion of conflict resolution methods outside collectively-agreed grievance procedures.

In reviewing the different individual methods of conflict resolution, Lewin points to a need for further evaluation of the effectiveness of different procedures, for individuals and organizations.

The contributors to Part Four primarily address the outcomes of industrial relations. The nature of these outcomes varies considerably and the ten chapters in this part reflect this diversity. In Chapter 25 Daniel Gallagher reviews trends in workforce structure and how that structure is shaped by the system of industrial relations. He particularly explores the development of different forms of temporary work contract and the implications of these for our understanding of the 'typical' employer-employee relationship or indeed the 'typical' organization. One of the future research issues identified is the need for further assessment of different union strategies being adopted for increasing recruitment among temporary workers. In Chapter 26 Alex Bryson and John Forth examine the different explanations of wage determination. They identify the many variables that impact on pay setting, giving rise among other things, to continuing wage inequality between the sexes, full- and part-time workers, and across occupations. Bryson and Forth emphasize the importance for those researching pay determination, of incorporating a sufficient degree of complexity into their analyses.

In Chapter 27, Paul Blyton considers another major focus of union-management relations: the determination of working time patterns. He examines the shifting influence of different forms of regulation over working time by the state, collective agreement, management, and by employees themselves. Blyton also assesses the centrality of working time within the current debate over work-life balance, and the way in which current trends in working time potentially act both to facilitate and to inhibit workers achieving a successful work-life balance. In Chapter 28, David Guest broadens the discussion of industrial relations outcomes by considering worker well-being, with a particular focus on job satisfaction, insecurity, workload and stress. He identifies little relationship between trade

union presence and aspects of well-being, and notes that traditional industrial relations have rarely directly addressed questions of worker well-being in the past. However, with growing concerns over issues such as workplace stress, Guest identifies worker well-being as a potential area for greater attention by trade unions and industrial relations in the future.

In Chapter 29 Ali Dastmalchian reviews the research conducted on industrial relations climates. Drawing insights on the climate concept from organizational theory, he highlights a number of methodological issues which remain unresolved. Dastmalchian nonetheless identifies the influence of industrial relations climate on the outcomes of union-management relations, and notes the significance of the research on climate for current debates, including the question of whether unions and management should pursue greater 'partnership' relations. In Chapter 30 Barbara Pocock considers inequalities in employment outcomes. She emphasizes the multiple sources and manifestations of inequality and the ways in which recent developments both in industrial relations (such as decollectivization and decentralization) and labor markets (for example increased casualization) have contributed to widening inequalities. Pocock highlights the importance of a perspective that incorporates international as well as national and local comparisons; the chapter also underlines the broader importance of maintaining a focus on inequality in a field where it is prone to being crowded out by other issues such as economic performance.

In Chapter 31, Gregor Gall and Robert Hebdon examine issues surrounding how conflict is manifested at work. In reviewing the range of forms that conflict can take, and the widespread decline in strike levels that has taken place over the past two decades, they highlight the increased significance of more individualized conflict expressions and the degree to which these are currently substituting for other, more collective forms. In considering the future, Gall and Hebdon anticipate the continuation of both collective and individual forms of conflict,

and the possible further development of cross-national conflict expression coordinated through international trade union campaigns.

In Chapter 32, Irena Grugulis notes the central role that 'skill' has played within industrial relations, acting as a basis for union formation, wage demands, and pay differentials, among other things. She examines national variations in skill formation systems, together with firm-level and trade union influences. Grugulis explores the factors that are putting established systems of vocational education and training under pressure, and identifies the dangers of weaker skill formation systems for continuing job quality. In Chapter 33, John Delaney considers the evidence on the relationship between industrial relations and business performance. While noting the overall lack of evidence that industrial relations enhance business performance, he questions the significance of this in terms of measuring the contribution that industrial relations actually makes. Rather than relying on a yardstick of economic efficiency, he identifies the need for developing other measures of performance, such as worker well-being or social justice, and poses the broader question of how industrial relations can be developed to make a more significant contribution in a rapidly-changing world.

In the final chapter, Richard Freeman questions to what extent differences in economic performance between countries can be attributed to differences in labor market institutions. While he finds clear evidence that centralized wage setting is associated with narrower pay gaps, more generally the results on any broader relationships between labor institutions and, for example, economic efficiency, growth and employment, are inconclusive, despite previous pronouncements and even policy advice based on seeming consensus. Freeman calls for more firm-level and other types of evidence, together with the development of more sophisticated theories concerning the contribution of labor institutions.

Together the chapters provide a wide-ranging review of the issues currently shaping and challenging the industrial relations field.

They identify too a series of questions about the future purpose and contribution of industrial relations within contemporary society. These questions underline the continuing importance of the subject in a world of work in which vital issues concerning the conditions under which that work is undertaken, remain to be resolved.

NOTES

1 Fiorito (2005) notes that although the term 'industry' or 'industrial' connotes heavy industry for many, its use by IR scholars serves to differentiate 'industrial' or developed societies, from agrarian societies based largely on peasant production. Service businesses, public services, small enterprises and, indeed, contemporary agricultural production all exhibit industrial relations, to the extent that economic activity rests on the hiring of formally free labor to perform work tasks on the employer's behalf. Fiorito also notes that, while independent production for the market by the self-employed falls beyond IR's purview, bogus self-employment, in which dependent self-employed work for larger enterprises, and various forms of contingent labor, such as those based on the supply of contractors to employers through agencies, do not. In fact the study of contingent labor has been a notable theme in recent IR literature (for example Carré et al., 2000; Forde and Slater, 2005). In developed economies the employment relationship is the dominant institution through which work is organized – Edwards (2003: 2) estimates that 88 per cent of the UK's economically active population is engaged in an employment relationship – a fact that, in principle, underlines the continuing relevance of the study of industrial relations.

2 Another case can be identified along the boundary between state regulation and management decision. It is often suggested that managers (at least in Anglophone liberal market economies) are now the dominant actor in employment relations with the freedom to design systems of human resource management in a largely non-union context. Much of the prescriptive writing on HRM echoes this analysis with its emphasis on managers designing HR policies and practices that complement particular business strategies (see Legge, 2005: 19–25). In an important series of empirical articles, however, Dobbin and colleagues have cast doubt on this interpretation (Dobbin et al., 1993; Dobbin and Sutton, 1998; Kelly and Dobbin, 1999; Sutton et al., 1994). They argue essentially that the development of HR systems in US business since the early 1960s has been driven by the passage of equality law, which prompted US corporations to strengthen

the HR function and formalize and professionalize HR practice. The elaboration of HR systems, on this analysis, therefore, flowed from the interaction of management decision with legal regulation (see also Piore and Safford, 2006).

3 Stage-models seem to be used particularly by US writers. The scale of the US, the size of its economy and its dominance in the world system encourages indigenous scholars to treat it as a paradigmatic case. In Europe, in contrast, a continent crammed full of nation states each with their own traditions (Crouch, 1993), there is more emphasis on comparative studies and institutional analysis.

4 In Italy, although there was union support secured by a moderate victory, employer buy-in was limited and evaporated once Berlusconi's strong right-wing government was elected. Italian employers at that point had no need of a social pact to secure their objectives: 'When the 2001 elections gave a right-wing government the strongest majority of the postwar period, employers chose the more confrontational strategy of lobbying government for labor market deregulation'. (Baccaro and Lim, 2007: 40).

5 We note in passing, however, that despite this orientation there is little interest in IR amongst those engaged in what has come to be labeled 'critical management studies'.

6 Thus, Holgate et al. (2006: 325) note that, '...a dominant theme throughout has been the way in which 'mainstream' IR has often reduced workers' experiences to the manifestation of class relations that are defined purely in economic terms, or which are theorized in terms of a single conflict between managers and employees'. Forrest (1993: 410) similarly observes of both pluralism and Marxism that, '...these diverse approaches share a worldview that discounts the importance of gender as an analytical concept. Both presume that workers and trade unionists are quintessentially male; neither analyzes the way in which social relations at work are rooted in gender relations'.

7 Healy et al. (2006: 293) describe the contribution of feminist research within IR in terms of, 'putting women, and gender, and more recently, race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability and age, back in...'

8 Dickens writes of the need to abandon the 'Procrustean bed' of full-time continuous employment, designed to match the needs of male workers supported by a dependent care-giver. It must be pointed out, however, that feminist commentators are often critical of the actual work life balance or family friendly policies employers develop to accommodate diversity. Systems of flexible working time that allow women better to integrate paid and domestic labor, for instance, may simply reinforce a 'sexual contract' in which male interests are dominant.

9 The response of Marxists, in turn, has been to argue that differences between the 'varieties of capitalism' are exaggerated or that the force of

globalization will in due course erode institutional differences with an accompanying leveling down of employment standards (see Coates, 2000).

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