

## Compte rendu

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Ouvrage recensé :

*Workplace Democracy: An Inquiry into Employee Participation in Canadian Work Organizations*, by Donald V. Nightingale, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983, 313 pp., ISBN 0-8020-6471-1.

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*Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, vol. 38, n° 4, 1983, p. 927-929.

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DOI: 10.7202/029421ar

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markets may not operate perfectly, they can operate in subtle fashions and have quite unintended side effects. In response to increased subsidies, employers may simply increase their turnover of young people in order to maximize their receipt of subsidies or even if they do not engage in such overt violation of the spirit of such grants, targetting money specifically towards youths means that employers will probably hire fewer women, older workers and others who have fewer sources of family income to rely upon. Will this then require another set of policies to help those adversely affected by the subsidies to youths? If not, have we made an implicit policy decision that one group is more deserving than another?

Clearly we are left with a number of unanswered questions in this important policy area. It is unlikely that the answers will come purely from an economics or sociological or any other single perspective — they certainly will not come from each discipline knocking down other perspectives rather than making their own contribution to the particular problem. Surely in an area as important as youth unemployment there is ample room — and need — for a number of perspectives.

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**Workplace Democracy: An Inquiry into Employee Participation in Canadian Work Organizations**, by Donald V. Nightingale, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983, 313 pp., ISBN 0-8020-6471-1

This is a book on perspectives of employee participation in Canada, based on the analysis of current trends, a historical review of the transformations within the management authority, the analysis of the foreign industrial democracy experience and its validity to the Canadian scene, the design of a theory of organization adequate to the

topic here under consideration (workplace democracy), as well as the application of the theory above mentioned to the sample of 20 Canadian industrial organizations, a half of them permitting some form of participation and another half following a conventional hierarchical design. Data from 1,000 respondents in twenty companies were collected though standardized instruments.

The author starts with the now dominating psychology of entitlement, the erosion of consent, the growing dissatisfaction of employees with how they are treated, and the general decline of confidence in institutions. These trends are partially related by the author to the fact that «The economic enterprise, the government agency, the trade union, the political party, the church, are essentially undemocratic in their decision-making practices. Few organizations in our society make any pretence of being democratic, and those which do—universities, trade unions, political parties—are in practice rarely democratic» (p. 9).

Much attention is paid by the author to the decline of the moral legitimacy of organizational power and the growing resistance in the society to the principle that some organization members have unilateral power over all others. According to Nightingale, «Authoritarian practices at the workplace remain one of the more conspicuous anomalies of our democratic society ... The role of the work organization must be redefined if it is to fulfil its obligations to promote and uphold our liberal democratic ideals» (pp. 174 and 175). «Democratic values must eventually penetrate the workplace and, as they do, organizational practices will evolve in the democratic direction» (p. 178).

It is a question whether the Canadian institutions are really so much undemocratic as the author seems to take for granted, as well as whether the cure suggested by him is really so benevolent. The adversarial mutual relationships between management, government and the organized labour are well settled in the local tradition, as well as in the nature of

a developed market society. It is not easy to move to a much more cooperative arrangement just simply applying some employee's participation. The quality of supervisory style appears from data collected by the author as having a more significant effect than structure (p. 109). The effects of work enrichment on job satisfaction, commitment and mental health appear to be not less important than the effects of democratic decision making (p. 135). The whole variety of means have to be taken into consideration in order to improve the work morale of employees and their productivity.

Data from the study here under review show that «The differences between democratic and hierarchical organizations are strongest for organization members at lower hierarchical levels, weakest for organization members at the upper hierarchical level, and intermediate for organization members at middle hierarchical levels... The democratic organizations are found to have more participative supervisory styles than their hierarchical counterparts ... The increased influence over decision-making of the rank and file in democratic organizations is not purchased at the price of reduced managerial influence. That is, the total amount of power is greater in the democratic than in the hierarchical organizations ... The differences between democratic and hierarchical organizations are strongest for organization members at lower hierarchical levels ... The differences between democratic and hierarchical organizations are greatest for organization members' values, followed by interpersonal and intergroup processes, and outcomes ..., and weakest for the job codification, hierarchy of authority, and formalization measures of structure ... The absence of significant differences in stress symptoms, mental health, physical health, and voting in political and union elections in democratic and hierarchical organizations is surprising...» (p. 118). As regards the comparison of tasks, «At the lower hierarchical level there is greater autonomy from supervision, more required

interaction with co-workers, and fewer conflicting demands in democratic than in hierarchical organizations» (p. 133).

Regarding the workplace democracy and trade unionism, the author takes for granted that trade unionism is not fundamentally incompatible with collaborative forms of workplace democracy and that the latter may well unburden the collective bargaining process by encouraging continuous negotiation — consultation-participation during the life of the agreement (p. 142). There should be a collaborative relationship between parties. «When common interests are emphasized rather than ignored, there is a far greater potential for a broadening of the collective bargaining agenda to matters of vital concern to management as well as to the rank and file» (p. 149). «Profit-sharing and employee ownership, because they are more compatible with prevailing ideology and practice in the workplace, may be an effective means of creating a unity of purpose and a positive labour-management climate which will facilitate the introduction of democratic decision-making» (p. 172).

It is also important to offer employees a tangible financial stake tied closely to the creation of wealth. «Profit-sharing can work only when the relationship between labour and management is based on a modicum of trust and co-operation» (p. 165).

The author provides a valuable review of various forms in which workplace democracy appears in Canada (pp. 197-249): board level representation, the Scanlon plan, works councils, producer co-operatives, self-directing work groups, job enrichment of a democratic nature. According to the author, «Of all forms of workplace democracy, self-directing work groups are the most promising» (p. 181). The Scanlon plan and works councils also are effective means of enhancing employee commitment. On the other hand, «Unless reinforced with shop-floor participation, board-level representation will not enhance employee reaction to the workplace» (p. 182). Workplace democracy

does not have much chance as a substitute of good organization. It «cannot compensate for incompetent management, and it cannot, by itself, save firms in declining industries» (p. 184).

There is an important question how to introduce workplace democracy. According to Nightingale, «Democracy is best extended into the workplace by incremental changes to existing structures, not by the imposition of complex structures ... Participation should begin on the shop floor, perhaps in the form of self-directing work groups. These changes raise the level of employee interest, involvement, and competence» (p. 191). Some form of participation at the shop-floor level is essential for desirable results (p. 192).

It seems advisable to start with issues on which there is likely to be substantial agreement, and then, as trust and competence develops, it becomes much easier to move to other issues which are potentially conflictual (p. 122).

The author does not expect much from government intervention in spreading workplace democracy. According to him, «Government intervention is both unlikely and undesirable. Workplace democracy will not emerge as a political issue in Canada or the United States in the foreseeable future ... Participation is not a process easily prompted by political edict» (pp. 192-193).

The book here under review is a very important in Canada for spreading the message of workplace democracy. The approach taken by the author is very reasonable, based on good knowledge of the subject, and free from wishful thinking. This is exactly how much should be expected from the initiator of an important reform.

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**Les cadres: la formation d'un groupe social**, par Luc Boltanski, Paris, les Éditions de Minuit, collection «Le sens commun» dirigée par Pierre Bourdieu, 1982, 523 pp., ISBN 2-7078-0617-7 (ouvrage publié avec le concours du CNRS).

**Politique d'éducation et organisation industrielle en France et en Allemagne: essai d'analyse sociétale** par M. Maurice, F. Sellier, J.-J. Silvestre, Paris, PUF, collection «Sociologies» dirigée par Raymond Boudon et François Bourricaud, 1982, 382 pp., ISBN 2-13-037472-7.

L'affirmation selon laquelle les cadres — et, plus généralement, le personnel d'encadrement — forment un élément essentiel de la structure du pays et de ses entreprises, recueillerait, probablement, un consensus général. Il est facile de démontrer, en effet, que dans l'évolution actuelle — dimensions plus importantes, technicité croissante, structures de plus en plus décentralisées — la place et le rôle du personnel d'encadrement dans l'entreprise apparaissent de plus en plus déterminants, ceux-ci constituant l'indispensable prolongement du management (on a entendu même dire qu'il était «la réserve stratégique des dirigeants»).

Pendant les années 1960 et 1970, nos entreprises se sont profondément transformées: nouveaux impératifs technologiques, ouverture aux services publics, etc..., et dans certains secteurs, dans certains pays, l'Administration elle-même n'en fut pas épargnée. Le personnel d'encadrement augmenta en nombre, mais son rôle, déterminant, son statut aussi ont singulièrement évolué: l'hyperspécialisation d'un côté, la polyvalence de l'autre, le problème de l'autonomie professionnelle, les nouvelles modalités de l'organisation du travail, parfois le resserrement des profils de carrière, le contrôle informatique des tâches, la mobilité professionnelle imposée par les reconversions et les restructurations, la mobilité sociale aussi forment uniquement quelques éléments typiques de cette phase de mutation.