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Recensions

Book Reviews

Trade Unions and Global Governance: The Debate on a Social Clause

by Gerda van ROOZENDAAL, London: Continuum, 2002, 260 pp., ISBN 0-8264-5660-X.

The issue of a social clause—a system that would allow the application of trade sanctions to countries that do not comply with core labour standards—is a controversial one. Roozendaal's book studies issues arising from the social clause debate among and between unions. The central argument of the book is that the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has strong views about the problems unions encounter as a result of economic internationalization, problems such as oppression of union members. In tackling these problems and with a view to the insurance of an acceptable level of protection for citizens against world market forces, the ICFTU takes great interest in international regulation. However, in designing such strategies, the ICFTU is hampered by insufficient access to international regulatory bodies such as the WTO and also by a lack of unity among its members. Against this background, the key questions upon which Roozendaal focuses are: how have unions attempted to influence the debate on the inclusion of minimum labour standards in the WTO agreement and what accounts for their (lack of) success? After this introduction of the central theme, chapters 2 and 3 present the theoretical approach of the book, chapters 4 and 5 cover national union studies, while chapters 6 and 7 consider the influence of international workers' organizations on the debate within the international settings of the OECD and

the ILO. Chapter 8 draws conclusions from these union studies.

Chapter 2 explains the rationale behind the union studies, defines the central notions and outlines a framework for measuring the influence of trade unions. Since the WTO does not allow trade union representation, the influence of unions on the WTO debate must be analysed in other international and regional bodies that influence decision-making in the WTO. Hence the study of union influence on the debate within the OECD and the ILO. However, policy decisions on a social clause are also made at the national level. Therefore, Roozendaal studies the position of the union movements in India and the United States in relation to their national governments. In the former, an alliance emerged between national union federations and successive governments against the international enforcement of labour standards, while in the U.S., the AFL-CIO and successive governments were in favour of a social clause. The dominant strategy of the unions studied is one aimed at influencing policy-makers at both national and international levels, and their success is assessed in two respects: the achievement of sensitizing successes in the political arena (changing the perceptions of other consequential actors), and substantive success in influencing policies. Discourse analysis is used to study the way in which unions try to influence the institutional debates. The concept of discourse is used to

describe changes that have taken place with respect to perceptions of reality and to explain why certain policy options are considered valuable. In addition, Roozendaal looks at the larger context in which unions operate to understand why unions have or have not succeeded in achieving their goals. This theoretical framework generates a number of assumptions about the factors for the success of the union policies.

Chapter 3 examines five substantive claims and their associated theoretical and normative arguments concerning labour standards, such as the universality claim that core labour standards should be regarded as universal principles while the relativity claim argues that these standards cannot be uniform owing to differences in culture and economic development. On the basis of these opposing claims and arguments, two ideal-type discourses are outlined: the interventionist discourse in favour of a social clause and the neo-classical discourse against a social clause. These ideal-types are used as a reference point in the analysis of the union studies.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 contain detailed descriptions of the efforts which unions undertook to influence the debate on labour standards in concrete instances of policy-making. Each chapter also presents an argued assessment of the influence which the unions were able to exert. Chapter 8 summarizes the results of the union studies and evaluates the assumptions which were formulated in chapter 2 concerning the factors which explain the success of union policies. Overall, the conclusion is that union initiatives have not led to a new regime on labour standards and trade that would make labour standards trade-enforceable. Major differences of opinion among the actors remain, and the core of the argumentation of the coalitions supporting the interventionist and the neo-classical discourse has not changed over time. However, union initiatives have contributed to an increased inter-

national consideration for labour standards. Some of the assumptions concerning the factors for success were confirmed, such as the importance of compatibility of unions' goals and the perception of the discursive context by other actors, and informal access to other actors. The disunity within the ICFTU because of the position taken by unions from India and other developing countries did not evoke strong reactions among other consequential actors in the cases studied. Nevertheless, the importance of unity among union organizations is emphasized with a view to the legitimacy and strength of the international trade union movement. The conclusion that the ICFTU has not been able to convince all its member unions and national and international public bodies that a social clause is desirable, raises the issue of future strategies to make labour standards an international public good. A sustainable strategy, according to Roozendaal, should focus on achieving economic development and on the improvement of human rights, offering, for instance, increased market access for countries that respect core labour standards. The distrust of the current ICFTU position from developing countries, involving that a minimum floor for labour standards is favoured by unions in the North because they want to protect their old industries, could be overcome by such a strategy, Roozendaal concludes.

This book is the result of a well-designed research project and presents detailed empirical studies of policy-making on economic globalization and labour standards. The discourse analysis approach is not so common in the industrial relations field but it is of great theoretical interest because it enables the study of opposing claims concerning the social clause in their own right. However, the requirements of such an approach are demanding and are not fully met. For instance, chapter 4 which analyses the case of the United States presents a fairly conventional observer's

description of policy-making without much attention to the emerging sense-making by the actors and the dynamic exchanges which result in the construction of a particular regime. More importantly, while chapter 3 emphasizes that its purpose is not to present the “right” perception of the issues involved in the opposing claims concerning a social clause, chapter 5 does not match that position in its analysis of the Indian unions, which are criticized for short-sighted opposition to a social clause and for not taking the social clause debate very seriously in any other way than as a threat. The point here is not the criticism as such but the lack of explicit critical reflection on the researcher’s own assumptions for such a critique.

The concluding chapter restricts its focus to the social clause debate. It would have been interesting if Roozendaal had used her findings for

a general theoretical reflection on the concept of “global governance,” which figures prominently in the title of her book. Indeed, “governance” is a hot topic, but political science and international relations literature understand the concept as public governance and have a government-bias, while business studies concentrate on corporate governance issues. In the debate on economic globalization, the elaboration of the concept of governance from the point of view of civil society and non-governmental organizations, including the trade unions, would be very welcome. Having said that, Roozendaal’s study will no doubt be appreciated for its contribution to our knowledge of the highly relevant issue of economic globalization and labour standards.

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Strategy, Organization and the Changing Nature of Work

edited by Jordi GUAL and Joan E. RICART, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2001, 250 pp., ISBN 1-8406-4713-2.

In contrast to the sustained economic growth that took place from the 1950s to the early 1970s, the subsequent period has been marked by endemic instability, characterized by technological and cultural change, increased mobility of investor capital, and heightened global competition. Whilst this may have, in certain cases, encouraged the development of more innovative functionally-flexible forms of work organization, it has also led to an increased emphasis on numerical flexibility, above all on the ability of organizations to readily upsize or downsize their staffing. This edited volume represents the outcome of a conference on employment, organized by the University of Navarre’s IESE Business School, focusing on the changes taking place in modern business as a result of new technology and heightened competition. The opening chapter provides a brief introduction to the

following eight contributions. However, it never really goes beyond summary; the reader is left uncertain as to the contribution of the volume as a whole, and the underlying coherence of the remaining set of eight chapters.

The second chapter, by Joan Ricart and Carlos Portales, looks at the role of new forms of strategic HRM in underwriting the competitiveness of firms. The authors highlight the mutuality of exchanges underlying the employment contract. They underscore the dangers posed by short-term contracting and high staff turnover rates; whilst the latter may make for an immediate competitive advantage, it is likely to reduce organizational commitment over the medium and long terms, and instill a culture of fear in the workplace. As a possible alternative, they suggest a movement towards an “organizational