BJIR An International Journal of Employment Relations LSE

British Journal of Industrial Relations
51:1 March 2013 0007–1080 pp. 196–213
doi: 10.1111/bjir.12013

Article by an MPIfG researcher
Helen Callaghan: Book Review: Culpepper, Pepper D.: Quiet Politics and Business Power (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). In: British Journal of Industrial Relations 51(1), 203-205 (2013). Wiley-Blackwell
The original publication is available at the publisher's web site: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12013_4

BOOK REVIEWS

China's Changing Workplace: Dynamism, Diversity, and Disparity, edited by Peter Sheldon, Sunghoon Kim, Yiqiong Li and Malcolm Warner. Routledge, London and New York, 2011, 332 pp., ISBN 978 0 415 58454 8, £95.00; US$155.00, hardback.

Trade Unions in China: The Challenge of Labour Unrest, by Tim Pringle. Routledge, London and New York, 2011, 224 pp., ISBN 978 0 415 55958 4, £85.00, hardback.

China's structural changes occur in two parallel paces. Profound shifts initiated by political elites take place suddenly, while significant though less dramatic ones percolate upward through the capillaries that connect society, the economy and the state. These two volumes chart the latter in the arena of labour relations.

China's Changing Workplace — something of a mistitle, as it hardly mentions workplace and labour process issues — covers a wide range of labour market and human resource questions. The overall theme is, not surprisingly, the variegated practices in different parts of the country and the different stages of transition from state socialism to a somewhat distinctive if still highly segmented Chinese capitalism. Indeed, the editors have the temerity to ask just when 'transition' gives way to a sustainable new form of political economy, which they believe to be taking root in some parts of the country.

An opening section contains chapters that provide useful overviews and contexts on labour markets and human management practices, business systems, and legislation and institutions. That is followed by five chapters on labour markets that underscore a number of important new developments that are often overlooked. China still possesses what Marx called large 'latent' reserve armies of unskilled or semi-skilled industrial labour, both in the countryside and among urban school-leavers, 'stagnant' reserves of long-term unemployed and unemployable laid-off workers in rustbelt zones, and 'floating' pools of underemployed looking for work. The government speaks often and urgently of its need to maintain at least 7 per cent annual economic growth in order to avert a social and political crisis sparked by unemployment. Yet *China's Changing Workplace* looks closely at the other side of this labour market dialectic: the often severe shortage of skilled labour. China is often hailed, and rightfully so, for its highly educated and literate labour force; indeed, many observers credit educational gains going back even to the Maoist era for the success of the post-Maoist economy. Yet *China's Changing Workplace* takes the country to task for an irrational system that places too much emphasis on general education and too little on focused technical and vocational training fine-tuned to the needs of local labour markets. This leaves employers holding the bag for training their own workforces, a

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challenge to which they cannot readily rise due to ongoing problems of poaching and general horizontal mobility characteristic of tight and highly segmented labour markets. Yet the inevitable rising wages that result do not equilibrate or integrate those markets, for reasons that are not much examined here but that have a great deal to do with the country's extraordinary social, economic, and institutional diversity and segmentation (e.g. between the private and state sectors, or among regions) that the book does emphasize.

The third section looks in turn at labour market and human resource issues in various ownership and functional sectors: state industry, foreign-invested industrial firms, family-run factories and services generally. Several interesting findings emerge. State enterprise workers, normally thought of as the most coddled and secure, turn out to have high levels of dissatisfaction around human resource issues that result in low commitment and high turnover. The foreign-invested sector, often considered by self-referential Westerners as carrying with it modernization of employment practices, also includes an equally or even more weighty set of Asian firms with more patriarchal or corporatist labour relations. More novel is the suggestion that foreign-invested firms of both stripes are beginning to adapt to Chinese employment practices rather than the other way around. Not surprisingly, family firms have been the slowest in modernizing their labour relations. The service sector too has been slow on the uptake — for example, job qualifications often mention women's physical appearance — due to its relative novelty and great diversity.

Finally, the fourth section looks at the relationship between capital and labour in terms of labour standards, inequality and institutional change. Chapter 13 pins its hopes for 'decent work' on firms such as — wait for it — Nike, that old bogey-man-turned-exemplar of the international labour standards movement. Yet the very next chapter emphasizes ongoing inequalities — especially along the cleavages between genders and migrants/urbanites (also the focus of chapter 8). These persistent inequalities and ongoing employer ruthlessness help reproduce an economically irrational labour market that continues to limit the primacy of human capital in employment allocation. In a theme echoed by the other volume under review here, the penultimate chapter looks at the state-run labour unions federation, identifying the meso-level of regional offices and leaders as most capable of promoting admittedly minor innovation and modernization of labour relations, compared with the factory-level offices that are closely tied to employers and the central level which is kept on a close tether by the political elite. The book closes with an intriguing analysis of emerging employer associations. Not surprisingly, there is a great deal more development of robust institutions, including non-state ones, capable of representing capital than labour, including in infant state-sponsored tripartite arrangements.

This theme of institutional change lies at the heart of *Trade Unions in China*. Tim Pringle's overarching argument is that where one of the core labour market conditions highlighted in *China's Changing Workplace* — a shortage of skilled workers capable of exerting real pressure on employers — pertains, meso-level union offices (as also argued in *China's Changing Workplace*) are capable of political and institutional innovation (provided, of course, that they possess committed, talented, and politically courageous and savvy leadership). After three introductory chapters charting the broadly familiar historical development of labour protest and the unions' lack of involvement therein across the Maoist and post-Maoist periods, and the cleavage between migrant and urban-based industrial labour, the heart of the book lies in three chapters on different innovative developments in the activities of Zhejiang Province local labour federation offices.

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In 2003, skilled, savvy, gumptious workers in the Xinhe woolen sweater industry took advantage of tight labour market conditions to create a crisis for employers. They enforced tough demands by jumping from one factory to another and by striking with increasing frequency. The local government became alarmed at the damage wrought to the local economy, and the local union federation swung into action. It convened 'collective consultations' among the local labour and social security bureau and representatives of capital and labour (the latter of whom were, not surprisingly, nominated by their employers). Eventually, it produced a set of wage and working condition guidelines agreeable to all sides, which almost immediately stabilized local labour relations.

Yiwu City, also in Zhejiang, was also experiencing sharply rising labour conflict in the late 1990s, as small private employers took advantage of migrants. The latter's native place associations, many of which were also criminal gangs, branched out to organize protests and strikes, many of which, naturally, produced violence. Thus, the government had even more reasons than in Xinhe to be alarmed. Here, the local union federation, stimulated by research indicating that workers were open to taking advantage of mediation and arbitration processes, organized a 'labour rights centre'. While generally such local government outfits across a range of arenas are sleepy affairs, here the union leveraged the power of local media, which went beyond merely promulgating relevant laws, regulations and institutions by dispatching reporters to the scenes of particularly sharp labour disputes. The local television station began airing a weekly programme to encourage public debate around labour issues. The centre also provided mediation and arbitration representation for aggrieved workers using these processes.

In 2000, the Yuyao City union federation undertook pilot projects to promote the election by workers of factory-level branch leadership. As in Yiwu, its goal included government anxiety about the growing power of native place gangs among migrant workers. Interestingly, though, the union specifically excluded factories with such problems from participating in the trial out of fear that local gangsters might end up getting elected! In the end, workers in the pilot broadly averred that the experience of electing their branch leaders had increased their confidence and interest in the union. Pringle has no evidence about the effect of this on actual labour relations, though.

These are truly fascinating straws in the wind, and Pringle expresses his duly cautious hopes for them. Yet, in the decade or more since they occurred, they do not seem to have presaged much significant change in the institutions and processes, much less the outcomes, of labour relations in China. To be sure, workers have begun to become bolder, as the 2010 wave of automobile plant strikes is but one example. And wages have been rising even in China's sweatshops (although much more in nominal than in real terms). But these gains for workers seem to have had much more to do with tightening in the relevant labour markets combined with increasing personal and organizational sophistication among aggrieved workers than with any invigoration of China's state-run labour federation. *China's Changing Workplace* makes plain that over this period, employers have been increasing their organizational and political capacities much faster than workers. When China's workers take on their employers, they still resort to wildcat strikes and *ad hoc* organization much more than on their state-supplied 'union'. The caution in Tim Pringle's hopes seems to remain the dominant pole.

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From Iron Rice Bowl to Informalization: Markets, Workers, and the State in a Changing China, edited by Sarosh Kuruvilla, Ching Kwan Lee and Mary Gallagher. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2011, 248 pp., ISBN 978 0 8014 5024 2, US$39.95, hardback.

Walmart in China, edited by Anita Chan. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2011, 304 pp., ISBN 978 0 8014 7731 7, US$24.95, paperback.

Kuruvilla *et al.* chart the journey from employment security — known as the 'iron rice bowl' in colloquial Chinese — to informalization in 10 chapters. This sad tale is standard fare in the global labour studies literature, but the underlying arguments in this book are more nuanced and at times controversial.

During the 1980s, the iron bowl of formalized employment was fractured by the state's withdrawal from industrial management and the arrival of new forms of ownership. The cracks spread and the bowl was pretty much shattered during the second phase of the journey, signposted by the promulgation of China's first labour law in 1995. So far so good — or bad, depending on your view of the market. Phase 3 transports the reader along a new route: in 2008, as the global economy descended into the financial crisis and the noose of employment insecurity tightens everywhere, the Chinese state found itself trying to put some of the pieces of the shattered bowl back together! Attempts were made to slow the rate of informalization through the Labour Contract Law (LCL), accompanied by two separate laws that made it (a little) easier for workers to pursue claims against employers and (a little) more difficult for employers to practise discrimination in recruitment. This book illustrates informalization in China — and the state's attempts to control it.

Park and Cai set the scene by putting a figure on the extent of informalization: a startling 36–39 per cent for urban employment in 2005. Comparing official databases and household surveys, they identify the 'missing' workers recorded under the hitherto somewhat mysterious category of 'other' in the statistical yearbooks. The authors conclude that almost all of them are in informal work.

Yet, as the authors acknowledge, the story is complicated and the trend is even reversing. One of the book's principal arguments is that 'national circumstances and institutions dictate the extent and effects of increased flexibility and informalisation' (p. 4). Expanding this theme, Gallagher and Dong contrast the national circumstances of China's National Labour Law of 1995 with those of the LCL of 2008. They argue that the former consolidated increased managerial autonomy and efficiency in the state sector while introducing labour legislation in the private sector. On the other hand, the tsunami of redundancies that followed the 15th Party Congress' 1997 decision to deepen restructuring in the state sector produced social tensions on a scale that has persuaded the state to apply the brakes. Despite sabre-rattling from the forces of capital during its drafting and consequent compromises by the lawmakers, the LCL provides workers the prospect of permanent employment, at least on paper. Nevertheless, as Frazier points out in his discussion of pension reform and public opinion, a sea change in public attitudes has indeed taken place. The socialist entitlements of a secure urban workforce have given way to an acceptance of 'welfare rights and coverage based on citizenship rather than employment' (p. 79) by an urban workforce in which, according to Park and Cai, 4 out of every 10 workers do not have formal employment. How has the Party pulled this transformation off? Frazier's contribution explains how, crucially for Beijing, local governments tend to get the blame for everything, from the

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shortcomings and corruption that have accompanied the introduction of market forces, to pension provision.

Part 2 provides case studies from three of China's 'key' industries. Focusing on wage movements in the oil industry, Lin brings a network organization analysis to his extensive knowledge of the industry to shed light on 'state-led commodification of labour' that has redrawn the boundaries between internal and external labour markets. These changes have produced cross-class allegiances at the increasingly isolated core, as managers and workers fend off the encroaching insecurities emanating from the periphery. Conversely, Zhang's study of 'labour force dualism' in the auto industry identifies a transformation of the social composition of the workforce in which younger rural and urban 'dispatched' (agency) workers are deployed by auto firms on *the same production lines* (my emphasis) as a buffer of flexibility. This simultaneously provides permanent workers with a degree of security and denies formalized employment to agency workers. The state-labour-capital dynamic at work here has created a younger, more productive but militant workforce that we saw in action in the auto industry strike wave of 2010. Turning to the construction industry, Swinder's contribution finds similar overall patterns of informalization brought about by a more varied process and structure of 'mediated employment'. The result cuts the ties of rural construction workers from their home villages and excludes them from forging a new life in the cities. Swinder calls this parlous state of affairs 'permanent temporariness'.

The final section considers the question of agency. Building on previous papers examining state trade union activity in Zhejiang Province, Liu expands his model of three types of trade union bargaining: traditional patterns inherited from the command economy era, geographically based union associations covering multiple workplaces, and regional industry-based bargaining. Key aspects to this narrative of cautious reform are the issues of innovation, sustainability and independence as the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) grapples with the challenges of transition, labour militancy and Party leadership. Liu's valuable insights into trade union models would be strengthened by a stronger discussion of recent publications on trade union reform in China.

The substantial gaps left by the absence of trade union plurality and informalization have led to a significant growth of labour non-governmental organizations (LNGOs). Lee and Shen explore the organizational cultures and practices of these groups, and find a disturbing 'anti-solidarity' trend that substitutes service delivery to mainly migrant workers for a more imaginative organizing approach. The roots of this behaviour lie, according to the authors, with the LNGOs themselves rather than the political constraints of authoritarian rule. The authors' provocatively titled and well-intentioned critique of China's 'unique type of labor NGO' (p. 174) cannot help but overgeneralize. While the authors acknowledge the dangers therein, the picture that emerges bears little resemblance to the mostly Hong Kong-based labour groups I worked with for over a decade, and for whom promoting solidarity was — and is — a key component of their activities.

Walmart in China explores what happens when 'Walmartization' is imported into the evolving labour relations described by Kuruvilla *et al*. The authors demonstrate how the sheer scale of Walmart intimidates suppliers into accepting tight lead times, leading to illegally long working hours, an increase in outsourcing, and an atmosphere of insecurity and powerlessness at almost all levels in the supply chain. Walmartization is brought vividly to life by Lichtenstein's description of a US distribution centre where 200 boxes per minute are diverted by electronic arms from a main 'river' of

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boxes down 100 chutes to container-sized trucks *all the time*. Meanwhile, over in Shenzhen, Xue Hong employs a fieldworker's ruse to establish the true age of a worker making the toys that go in the boxes — she turn outs to be 15. There is no question of an iron rice bowl here. Yu and Pun illustrate not only that serious labour violations are the norm but also that corporate social responsibility — at least the Walmart version of it — can produce inferior pay and conditions. Homing in on garment and toy suppliers, Chan and Siu use a survey of 88 workers to demonstrate that the wage demands of unskilled workers in these footloose sectors are informed by the limitations of China's minimum wage levels — to the point that extreme exploitation is normalized. They call for the jettisoning of piece rates and hourly rather than monthly minimum wages.

Section 2 of the book turns its attention to Walmart stores in China. Davies sets the scene with a descriptive analysis of management and the 'Walmart culture'. He shows how it is not necessary for Walmart staff in China to believe in the corporate culture; the main point, as far as Walmart is concerned, is for staff to follow the myriad rules and regulations required to administer Sam Walton's creation. Ethnographic fieldwork explains how managers, supervisors and cashiers negotiate their own 'Walmartization'. One is struck by how these accounts challenge the national stereotypes of American individuality and Chinese lack of creativity. Store supervisor Li Shan summarizes a late night deconstruction of Walmart's management systems with his colleagues with a blog entry that observes that 'Walmart needs administrators, not innovators. Walmart needs people who can follow 100 percent of the orders, not be 120 percent excellent' (p. 166). So much for corporate creativity!

The ACFTU's global coup in being the first nominally trade union organization to organize workers in Walmart stores is also held under the spotlight. Echoing the observations of others in the field, Chan *et al.* find that, on the one hand, the state-controlled union did break from past practice and covertly organize workers to form trade unions. On the other hand, once Walmart caved in and signed a national memorandum with the ACFTU accepting trade unions, the organizing drive quickly degenerated into a bureaucratic exercise to meet quotas from the top.

These events are almost five years old, and are well known to scholars and activists who are currently focused on demands for accountable collective bargaining. Chan criticizes the Walmart-ACFTU national collective agreement concluded in the spring of 2008 for failing to keep up with inflation. However, the legally binding agreement did mean that while up to 26 million Chinese workers were laid off as the global financial crisis hit Chinese exports later in the year, Walmart's workers received a — much needed — 9 per cent pay rise. At a time of concession bargaining and union retreats, it is worth re-acknowledging how, as Polanyi explained, such interventions can push labour further away from the 'orbit of the market'.

These two very different books are valuable additions to the Chinese labour relations canon. Kuruvilla *et al.* point the way to further research opportunities, while Chan and her fellow contributors provide labour activists with considerable food for thought, and — who knows — maybe even a few sleepless nights for some of the most committed antitrade union executives on the planet.

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The Thought of Work, by John Budd. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2011, 264 pp., ISBN 978 0 8014 7761 4, US$24.95, paperback.

This is a really useful and important book for anyone working or especially teaching in the field of employment studies. Combining a variety of disciplinary approaches, John Budd draws out the full complexity of the ways in which scholars have chosen to attend to the issue of work. Each of the 10 substantive chapters approaches work in a slightly different way: as a curse, freedom, a commodity, citizenship, disutility, fulfilment, a social relation, caring, identity, and finally service. Each of these chapters is concerned both to define these conceptualizations as well as to explore their intellectual roots. Overall, the book cannot avoid being an excellent example of interdisciplinary writing, but what is especially pleasing is the way that Budd does not shy away from showing the tensions between academic and political viewpoints within each of his chapters.

In some ways, *The Thought of Work* travels within a well-worn groove of academic writing. I suspect that many of us who teach work in schools of sociology or management will start our introductory lecture with a brief account of how work and the meanings that attach to it have changed across the years. Often, teachers draw on the handful of published readers on work that have been compiled, or more directly will use P. D. Anthony's (1977) *The Ideology of Work*, which maps out a similar terrain to that of Budd's volume. Anthony was writing in a different era to our own where work was arguably taken for granted more than is the case now. Since the publication of *The Ideology of Work*, the Western economies have undergone profound change and upheaval. Simple assumptions about identity and meaning have given way to more complex readings of economic life.

The Thought of Work is an interesting hybrid of a book, and I think this is what it makes it an important addition to the study of work. First and foremost, Budd writes very well in a relaxed style where he carries theory lightly — yet, at the same time, he has not produced a simplistic account of his subject matter. The book can be used in a number of ways and at different levels to teach about work. It is, for example, an excellent way to introduce students to the general subject matter of economic life. Importantly, it invites the reader to think in theoretical, conceptual and at times philosophical ways about work. From the beginning, then, we are engaged in a thoughtful historical reflection on the meaning and nature of labour, and how this has changed and been contested. However, the power of the book is that one could imagine it as a volume around which you could design a number of seminars or indeed a whole course, with singular or multiple chapters forming the basis for a lively discussion. *The Thought of Work* lends itself to this, as each chapter is roughly 20 pages in length and forms a discrete essay that can in turn underpin a debate. Such is the nature of Budd's writing, that the book could be used at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels with neither audience feeling lost nor patronized.

The Thought of Work marks an interesting contrast to a recent trend in academic publishing where, as teachers, we are left with a choice of either a comprehensive textbook or a volume of 'key terms'. Budd's book is neither of these things, and because of that it invites discussion and comparison rather than structure student responses to the point where they simply parrot back a line. The volume is also introduced and concluded by useful and substantive chapters that are important interventions in their own right.

The Thought of Work is self-consciously pitched at a wide audience in both social sciences and humanities. This is a real strength and one that opens up the study of work in a welcome and creative way. Students are shown the value of using a combination of

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different approaches to explore economic life. The book does not duck from showing disagreement and difference between traditions, exposing the reader to the mess of social thought, and the legitimacy and value of intellectual conflict. Budd and his publishers are to be congratulated on producing a text that will be an invaluable resource for teachers and students of sociology, philosophy, management and business, as well as other disciplines. The book deserves to be a staple on any self-respecting critical reading list on work and employment. *The Thought of Work* is part of a real renaissance in the interdisciplinary study of work and is to be applauded.

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Reference

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Quiet Politics and Business Power, by Pepper D. Culpepper, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, 248 pp., ISBN 978 0521118590, £55.00, hardback.

With his book *Quiet Politics and Business Power*, Culpepper refreshingly extends the focus of research in comparative political economy beyond employer preferences, towards the means by which managers get their way in the political arena.

The book starts with a straightforward empirical puzzle and equally straightforward answer. Culpepper asks why some non-liberal market economies (France, Japan) experienced an increase in takeover bids since the 1990s, while others (Germany, Netherlands) did not. Drawing on secondary literature, Culpepper first offers a standard 'varieties of capitalism' explanation: managers' preferences varied across countries due to cross-national variation in the strength of labour. However, instead of stopping there, he goes on to ask, more provocatively, why managers in all four cases got what they preferred, regardless of whether they wanted the removal or the fortification of barriers to unsolicited takeovers.

The answer to this second puzzle, neatly captured by the term quiet politics, constitutes his main argument. Business power is high where political salience is low. According to Culpepper, elected politicians and the media care mainly about issues that mobilize voters, and many corporate governance issues are too boring or too complex for voters to care. As a result, politicians and journalists have weak incentives to acquire independent expertise, and this opens the door to business lobbyists, who can tell them what to think and what to do. It seems obvious why this should worry us, and Culpepper states it clearly. Political contestation fades where issues are of low salience, and this suggests a democratic deficit.

Salience is hard to measure, and some may object to Culpepper's exclusive reliance on newspaper coverage, but his empirical findings are plausible. Between 1996 and 2006, takeover regulation made the headlines less often than pension reform, and it seems likely that, during the period in consideration, voters in Germany, France, Japan and the United States did in fact care less about takeover regulation.

I am less convinced by his explanation as to *why* voters cared less about takeovers, and why, more generally, some issues are less salient than others. The answer matters because it affects the assessment of whether and why quiet politics is a problem for democracy. Culpepper suggests that takeover regulation 'is a complex issue, not easily

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translated into concise prose that will hold the attention of a reader' (p. 8). In my view, he underestimates the writing skills of tabloid journalists. Some aspects of the current financial crisis may indeed be too technical for non-specialists to handle, but the main distributional consequences of takeover regulation are easy to grasp, and the fact that press coverage tends to rise in the wake of major bids suggests that they lend themselves perfectly well for populist politics.

I suspect that the lack of problem pressure, rather than inherent complexity or deliberate media manipulation, accounts for the lack of public interest. Contested bids are still extremely rare in all four countries studied by Culpepper. Even in France, where the increase was largest, the average number of attempted takeovers since 1990 amounts to less than one per year. Moreover, most of the companies involved were in the financial sector, with no blue-collar jobs at stake. The vulnerability of French companies may have increased because of changes in the structure of corporate ownership, which Culpepper describes in detail, but until more takeovers actually happen, or until more individuals start owning shares, the average voter will not see a pressing need for takeover regulation.

If this is correct, then the democratic deficit stems not from quiet politics as such, although it is not necessarily less severe. Why exactly is it problematic that managers get their way as long as they are the only ones who care? Culpepper suggests that voters and their political representatives do mobilize where issues are salient, and that the 'promise of popular sovereignty' (p. 177) is thereby realized. This optimism seems misplaced for two reasons. First, the mobilizing capacity of societal countermovements has declined dramatically since the 1960s. Protest groups, such as Occupy or Attack, may be visible, but they have not prevented business interests from carrying the day, even on issues of high salience. Second, legislation can be hard to reverse once it is locked in due to constraints on parliamentary sovereignty, such as those that result from European integration. In the case of the takeover Directive, the European Commission forced non-liberal market economies to endorse EU-wide legislation before the issue became salient. If it ever does become salient, governments in these countries will not be able to unilaterally change a Directive that has been endorsed by all 27 member-states. In other words, business may still win where politics is loud.

And does 'business' really win where politics is quiet? Culpepper defines business broadly, without dwelling on intra-country divisions within and across sectors. His case study of France, which does include fascinating details about disagreements inside the main employer federation, provides ample unexploited material for a more systematic analysis. Most problematically, he repeatedly uses 'business' as a synonym for 'managers'. This may reflect reality in the four countries under study, where institutional investors are not politically influential at the domestic level. However, it does not apply to Britain or the United States, both of which are regrettably missing from the analysis. In the UK, where investors are strong, the managers of non-financial sector companies did *not* get their way. One segment of business, namely investors, did win, possibly due to quiet politics. But there is a lot more to learn about what parts of the business community prevail when, where and why.

To the extent that salience matters, it would also be worth investigating how and why it changes over time. Again, longitudinal case studies of Britain and the United States may prove especially instructive. Unlike the cases covered by Culpepper, both countries have had active markets for corporate control, and the associated takeover waves, since the 1950s. This would allow for a more systematic analysis of the connections among news coverage, parliamentary debate and regulatory response.

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In sum, Culpepper's book is a stimulating and provocative read that opens several agendas for further research. While packed with empirical detail, it is written in a clear, engaging style and does not presuppose specialist knowledge. *Quiet Politics* will resonate with anyone interested in the relationship among government, business and the media.

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Disintegrating Democracy at Work: Labor Unions and the Future of Good Jobs in the Service Economy, by Virginia Doellgast. ILR Press, Ithaca, NY, 2012, 272 pp., ISBN 978 0 8014 5047 1, $65.00, hardback.

Call centres owe their omnipresence to a combination of forces: technical development and new services in telecommunications, deregulation of markets and industrial relations, a more general wave in politics and economies working against labour as an organized factor of production, and outsourcing and a rationalization of customer contact that splits front and back office functions. A powerful impetus came from telecommunications companies: these and outsourcing firms are in the empirical limelight of the present book, which compares call centres in the United States and Germany.

The main results point to both convergence and divergence: common movements towards neoliberal recipes involving a weakening of unions and collective agreements, and relative deterioration of wages and working conditions, and also a persistence of institutions and culture established earlier in the two countries. This more general message is developed in great detail, and is based on case-study data and general information. The present study formed part of a wider comparison of call centres in North America and Europe, with participants in many countries. The work of this network has constituted the major and authoritative investigation of call centres worldwide. The attractiveness of the present book is founded on the societal contrast between the United States as a 'liberal market economy' model, and Germany as a 'coordinated market economy'.

The study confirms what scholars in comparative industrial relations and organization studies would have suspected: companies in the United States are larger, have a more confrontational posture against unions and impose more of a strait-jacket on labour, whereas companies in Germany feature establishments not as large, operating with works councils and appealing to team-based employee motivation. However, the study is exemplary in its impressive attention to details regarding working conditions and industrial relations machinery, and in its combination of enterprise and regulatory histories with present-day quantitative and qualitative results. Furthermore, the book excels by attractive writing and presentation: the reader is put in the picture right from the start by an excellent summary chapter that explains general results at length and in the comparative context of the two countries. This overview leads on to the more detailed chapters in such an appealing way that the reader at all times understands the specific results as part of the wider picture. Thus, although the book emerged from a PhD project at Cornell University, and is appropriately theoretically based and informed, it is easy to absorb. This is no mean feat, also bearing mind that the investigation presented is an authoritative study of an important and topical subject. In short, this is a highly recommendable read!

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The author, an American, is very well informed about Germany as a societal context in the comparison, and with some minor exceptions (pp. 49, 50), the German language in the technical or institutional terms is fault-free. This adds to the authoritative character of the book. The author has worked in the two countries empirically, in both languages, and there is never any doubt about the validity or interpretation of the findings. The conceptual background of the book is mainly in industrial relations and comparative political economy, and the discussion of literature is both focused and complete. So far, so good.

Nonetheless, I had some difficulties with 'the future of good jobs' rhetoric and the stylization of call centre work as exemplary of 'knowledge' or 'service economies'. It is very hard to extrapolate towards the future from any present-day investigation, and terms as the latter ones are too vague and all-embracing to be meaningful. Working in a call centre is no more knowledge-intensive than harvesting tobacco in North Carolina in the 1930s. I also had some difficulty with the picturing of the past, as having featured more satisfactory jobs in manufacturing. It may have been more stable in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was also full of drudgery. Studies of work and industrial relations at any time in history relativize the notion of 'good jobs' in the past quite effectively. I also felt less sure about the policy conclusions at the end. Yes, of course, there is always, at least in principle, a choice. But after all the comparative results that the book nicely demonstrates, societal institutions and the politico-economic spirit of the age do not leave actors much of a choice, least of all the unions. What we would need is a business and economic case for a socio-technical design of call centres and proximate or distant institutions, a design that would counteract the deleterious effects shown, where human resources are wasted rather than generated, and a rationale to help spread the design, particularly in an individualistic and liberalistic society such as the United States has increasingly become.

This takes us back to the question: in what way call centres can be taken to represent service work more widely? Indeed, in all manner of service and also industrial firms do we come across call centres. But depending on local organizational goals and other settings, call centres have to meet very different requirements. For instance, a leading multinational bank in which I supervised a student on an internship has a call centre to answer queries from its own personnel in Europe regarding individual and collective employment contracts. That is a very different kettle of fish, regarding knowledge required, communication skills, and commodification of labour and possibilities of outsourcing, compared with receiving orders from a mail-order catalogue. As a socio-technical redesign spreads into manifold settings, the variety of organizational and industrial relations solutions also increases by leaps and bounds. Only if we are aware of this increasing variety beyond telecommunications firms and their ancillaries can we claim to cover an exemplary work situation. This angle is neglected in the book.

Bearing this limitation in mind, it still is a splendid book on its subject. I only wish that publishers, especially the university press, would stop putting pressure on authors to choose dramatic and overgeneralizing titles that tell you little about the substance of the book, such as the present one. A responsible university press would have gone for a title such as Work Organization, Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations in Telecommunications Call Centres in the USA and Germany. As long as publishers do not do that, and readers do not object vociferously, we are still far from 'good jobs' in academia.

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Social Pacts in Europe: Emergence, Evolution, and Institutionalization, edited by Sabina Avdagic, Martin Rhodes and Jelle Visser. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, 336 pp., ISBN 978 0 19 959074 2, £58.00, hardback.

Social Pacts in Europe: Emergence, Evolution, and Institutionalization is the most comprehensive work on social pacts to have appeared so far. Written by three specialists of the comparative political economy of employment relations, it is a must-read for scholars interested in social pacting and corporatist policy making, and a should-read for those interested in economic institutions and institutional change.

The book asks two questions: in what conditions do social pacts (defined as 'formal agreements of social concertation between the state, unions, and employers that seek to facilitate adjustment in the areas of wage setting, the labour market, and welfare policies', p. 3) emerge? In what conditions does social pacting become an institutionalized and durable mode of policy making? The answers are that social pacts tend to emerge in situations of political economic duress, weak governments and intermediately centralized unions. Weak governments faced with a high 'problem load' have incentives to rely on extra-parliamentary channels of consensus mobilization for reform. Therefore, they are more likely to strike deals with trade unions if such unions are neither too centralized nor too decentralized. In the former case, they would internalize the systemic consequences of their actions spontaneously with no need for an explicit pact. In the latter case, they would be unable to affect aggregate outcomes. With regard to specific pact negotiations, agreement is more likely when asymmetric power shifts make one actor feel weaker and/or other actors stronger relative to the other. The outcomes of the agreement are likely to favour the more powerful actor. Concerning institutionalization, it seems to be best explained by a power distributional logic, by which social pacts get reproduced if there are powerful actors who support them, and are abandoned if those actors lose interest or if the power balance shifts in favour of actors who oppose them.

The book features theoretical frameworks for pact emergence and pact institutionalization, respectively. The theoretical chapter on pact emergence is by S. Avdagic. Drawing loosely on bargaining theory, it aims to explain not just whether a pact will emerge in a particular country and year, but, more precisely, whether a particular episode of bargaining interaction will issue in pact success or failure. Pacting is conceived as the result of utility-maximizing strategies by actors whose ability to assess present and future pay-offs is limited by radical uncertainty and incomplete information, as well as other cognitive imperfections. In these circumstances a pact will be possible if the expected outcome is perceived to be better than the actors' 'breakdown value' (p. 55). This element of perception is crucial as it may vary over time and across actors of the same type. The presence of a positive bargaining zone is not enough to ensure that a negotiated agreement will be reached. Exactly which point, if any, will be selected within the feasible set depends on the negotiation process between the actors, in which actors may erroneously try to push for an outcome that is outside of the feasible set for other actors, thus causing a collapse of social pact negotiations. Alternatively, they may hold out for too long and end up with heavily time-discounted pay-offs for themselves and their counterparts. The key intuition of the framework is that the situation most conducive to the emergence of a negotiated agreement is that of an asymmetric shift in perceived relative bargaining power of the actors. In particular, a perceived weakening of the bargaining power of an actor (relative to the other) increases the likelihood that the actor in question will settle for

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an outcome that is relatively more favourable to its opponent. The least conducive configuration for the emergence of a pact is that of actors that simultaneously see a positive shift in their perceived power.

The theoretical framework for pact institutionalization is discussed in chapter 4 by Visser and Rhodes. It is less focused on rational choice mechanisms than the chapter on pact negotiation. Several possible logics are potentially at play in institutionalization according to the authors. Two of them — the utilitarian and power distributional — follow closely from the rationalistic, actor-centric framework deployed to explain pact emergence: Pacts get institutionalized (i.e. repeated over time, and possibly broadened in scope and level) if actors continue to benefit from them, or alternatively if the actors' sunk costs in institutions and networks surrounding social pacts are high enough (utilitarian hypothesis). Alternatively, pacts get institutionalized if they benefit the most powerful actors (power distributional hypothesis). The other two possible logics of pact institutionalization — the functionalist and the normative — either operate at a higher, more macro-level of analysis, or depart from the assumption of utility maximization of bargaining actors. Thus, pacts get institutionalized to the extent that they fulfil 'system needs' and in so far as alternative institutional channels (referred to as 'microfoundations') are unavailable to fulfil the same needs (functionalist hypothesis). Finally, pacts get institutionalized if actors perceive them or their outcomes as fair in procedural or substantive terms (normative hypothesis). The authors leave it to the empirical analysis of country cases to determine the empirical plausibility of these various hypotheses.

For reasons of space, I can say much less than I would like to about the case studies of Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Slovenia that are featured in the book. It suffices to say that they have been written by specialists of the respective countries. They all follow a common analytic framework and focus on the analysis of specific episodes of pact negotiation. In fact, the authors are exemplary in their respect of the editors' marching orders. Most of their writing is devoted to tracing shifts in power perception, and more generally to testing the plausibility of the editors' theoretical framework, even when their own past research would presumably lead them to emphasize different explanatory factors.

The Irish case is authored by O'Donnell, Adshead and Thomas. It highlights the weak bargaining position of the unions at key stages of the bargaining negotiations, and the crucial coalition between the government and public sector unions that undergirds the Irish social partnership. In the chapter on Italy, Regini and Colombo argue that Italy is an almost paradigmatic case of high problem load, weak governments and intermediately centralized unions, which combine to explain the emergence (but only partial institutionalization, due to employer and government defection) of social pacts. The chapter on Portugal, written by da Paz Campos Lima and Naumann, underscores the enormous problem load facing the country at different points in time, which leads governments of different colour and electoral strength to continuously experiment with social pacts. The chapter on Spain, by Molina and Rhodes, stresses the role played by asymmetric power perceptions among the actors (which in turn were shaped by changes in the economic and political landscape) in explaining the success and failure of pact negotiations. The Dutch chapter by Visser and van der Meer emphasizes the government as a mediator and as an actor providing incentives and constraints for the social partners, and argues that the power-institutional logic of elite support best accounts for institutionalization in the Netherlands. Finally, Stanojevic and Krasovec, authors of the chapter on Slovenia, argue that the unions' capacity for collective mobilization at crucial stages, combined with

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high inflation and the weak electoral strength of centre-left governments, is key to explaining the Slovenian trajectory of social pacts.

The final chapter, penned by all three editors, assesses the plausibility of the theoretical framework. The authors argue that '[i]n all cases of successful negotiation, power disparities were clearly evident and the outcomes largely correspond to the preferences of the stronger actor' (p. 267). *A posteriori*, some adjustments to the bargaining model would seem in order. For example, the model does not do justice to the important role of the government as a mediator. Overall, however, it performs well in explaining pact emergence. As far as institutionalization is concerned, the authors did not have strong theoretical priors. In the various country studies, there is evidence of all kinds of institutionalization logics. Nonetheless, 'power-distributional mechanisms, often in combination with utilitarian concerns, are most frequently cited [by the authors of the country chapters] as explanation for both institutionalization and deinstitutionalization' (p. 285).

The broad message of the book is that social pacts are agonistic processes in which some parties prevail over others. Their reproduction over time requires the presence of powerful supporting coalitions, and is heavily dependent on the vagaries of the economic and political cycle, and above all shifts in power perceptions. This message provides a strong contrast to alternative and more irenic analyses in which social pacts are regarded either as the result of co-ordination games emerging spontaneously from the distribution of pay-offs, or as the manifestation of shared norms of co-operation, or as the outcome of learning processes through which actors come to partake the same analysis of the situation and of its distributional implications, possibly as a result of thoughtful deliberation and associated preference change. I sympathize with the broad message of the book and agree with most of its more specific arguments.

Nonetheless, no book is perfect. My critical remarks pertain to both the theoretical framework and the empirical analysis. First, although the bargaining model is certainly an interesting innovation relative to the existing literature, it introduces a crucial set of unobservable constructs — such as bargaining power, relative power shifts and the actors' perception thereof — that are difficult to operationalize independent of outcomes. For example, a measure of bargaining power would require the analyst to come up with an assessment of the best alternative to a negotiated agreement for a specific actor relative to alternative states of the world. This measure would be complicated by the fact that there are multiple and internally divided actors, that the assessment changes depending on actors' perceptions, and that the perceptions in turn shift over time. I do not want to argue that such an operationalization would be impossible. However, it would require something like multiple interviews at the time of action (as opposed to retrospective), possibly participant observation and detailed process tracing. The end result would probably be the analysis of a handful of negotiation processes. For country authors asked to cover 20 years of multiple pacting episodes in the standard 9,000-word format, such a detailed analysis does not seem possible. At the very least, the bargaining framework forces the authors to make multiple subjective calls about the power distribution, perceptions thereof, and the distributional implications of particular bargaining outcomes.

Second, the country case studies identify 27 episodes of social pact emergence (p. 267) and provide rich information on the contextual factors surrounding them, yet no rigorous analysis of the configurations of circumstances leading to pacts is conducted. This is surprising, since one of the highlights of the book is a novel and innovative application of fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA) to social pacts for 14 countries by S. Avdagic in chapter 2. The analysis brilliantly illustrates the utility

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of applying fs/QCA to the study of events whose appearance depends on complex configurations of circumstances and is characterized by equifinality, that is by the presence of multiple causal paths to the same outcome. Yet this analysis treats social pacts as national-level properties. It is a stand-alone piece of scholarship and has been published as such, but in my opinion fits uneasily with the rest of this book, which emphasizes the fallacies of trying to explain pacts from time-unchanging properties of countries, and focuses on bargaining episodes instead. I am surprised that a formal fs/QCA of the 27 pact episodes was not included in the book perhaps *in lieu* of the country-level fs/QCA analysis. It would have made an interesting and provocative book considerably stronger empirically.

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The Political Economy of Collective Skill Formation, edited by Marius R. Busemeyer and Christine Trampusch. Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, 392 pp., ISBN 978 0 19 959943 1, £60.00, hardback.

Collective skills systems have important economic, political and social consequences. This book will no doubt become a seminal contribution to our understanding of skill formation systems in co-ordinated market economies (CMEs). It is fair to say that the broad aim to 'explore the historical and political origins', as well as to 'explain institutional change in collective skill formation systems', has certainly been achieved if not exceeded (Busemeyer and Trampusch, pp. 4 and 34). In addition to creating a superior typology of skill regimes and investigating the origins of these systems, the findings of the book are certainly relevant for scholars of labour economics, education, varieties of capitalism and comparative political economy more generally.

The starting premise of this study is that skills formation processes should be located in their institutional context. Vocational education and training (VET) crucially interacts with other spheres, such as the welfare state, wage bargaining and industrial relations. Departing from rational choice institutionalism and the varieties of capitalism literature, the contributions to this volume do not conceptualize collective skill formation systems as equilibria. Instead, institutions require political support for their continuity, rather than being self-sustaining and rationally supported by diverse actors seeking efficiency enhancing solutions to collective action problems. Within a historical institutionalist perspective, political struggles among the state, employers and labour determine outcomes — who pays, provides and controls VET — at critical junctures along a path-dependent process.

Besides providing a state-of-the-art review of the existing literature on skills, this book has several important merits. First, it provides the reader with an in-depth, yet comparative, analysis of the historical evolution of skill systems in different CMEs. More specifically, the first part of the book enriches our empirical knowledge of the historical origins, current institutions and challenges confronting skill formation in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Austria and Denmark. While the chapters on country cases certainly vary in their merits and shortcomings (e.g. in the degree to which they present an explicit analytical framework), they all make novel contributions on their specific country, which have implications that transcend each case study.

With respect to the centrality of historical origins, Anderson and Nijhuis's case study of the Netherlands convincingly demonstrates that the decision to adopt

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school-based vocational training early on was determinant for the institutional evolution of the skill regime that ensued. Moreover, the chapter on Germany by Thelen and Busemeyer provides new insights on how skill systems evolve. Their analysis reveals that there has been a trend from a collectivist — characterized by broad and portable occupational skills — to a more segmentalist training system. The latter system caters to the interests of large firms, at the detriment of small and medium companies, and results in training being increasingly carried out in internal labour markets. By contrast, Denmark is shown to 'fulfil, if not exceed, the criteria of a collective training system', most notably in its provision of portable certified occupational skills achieved by the high commitment of both the state and firms to VET (Nelson, p. 179).

A second important merit of the book lies in its introductory chapter by Busemeyer and Trampusch, which successfully manages to pull these diverse, country-specific contributions together under a common analytical framework, by developing an impressive political economy-based model of collective skill formation. Depending on the degree of firm and state involvement in collective skill provision, this model identifies four different regimes (p. 21): liberal (low firm and state involvement), statist (low firm involvement but high public commitment), segmentalist (high firm involvement but low public commitment) and collective (high firm and state involvement). Firm involvement is high where co-ordination is sufficiently high to prevent poaching of trained workers (logic of membership). State involvement is driven by the relation and balance of power among the state, employers and unions (logic of influence).

Moreover, the characteristics of each actor are also important. For instance, conflicts within employer or union organizations also determine the extent to which skill regimes are collective. Similarly, as Martin's chapter on the origins of collective skill formation system shows, the state's features have a determining impact on both future state commitment to VET and the ability of employers to collectively co-ordinate. For instance, centralization makes it more likely that employer associations will want to operate at the national level, whereas federalism locates policy making at the regional level, which engenders 'regionally fragmented associations' (p. 47). Proportional representation similarly matters a great deal for employers' co-ordination. Indeed, employers faced with little prospects of having a parliamentary majority in government in multiparty systems will find it more rational to promote their agenda by discussing matters directly with workers' representatives.

Last but not the least, a third important strength of this book is its explicit focus on cross-cutting themes, with a second part wholly dedicated to investigating the link between skill systems and higher education (Nikolai and Ebner), gender equality (Estevez-Abe), wage bargaining (Busemeyer and Iversen), and Europeanization (Powell and Trampusch). While these chapters are all valuable in so far as they examine the relevance of training for other important topics in political economy, the rationale for choosing the themes covered could perhaps be made more explicit to the reader. Comparative institutional advantage and the role of partisanship are two themes that are not covered, but would be interesting to investigate given the importance of the former for varieties of capitalism and of the latter for comparative politics.

The chapters on wage bargaining and labour market stratification by Busemeyer and Iversen, and on gender by Estevez-Abe, were in my opinion the most rigorous in their treatment, explicitly analysing the impact of VET on other domains, and thereby looking exclusively at collective skill regimes as an independent variable. Importantly, both showed the relevance of training for stratification and inequality, which have become of particular salience in the last two decades.

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Notwithstanding the fascinating final chapter by Streeck, unpacking and challenging our understanding of skills, the book could have benefited from a more conventional concluding chapter that takes stock on the wealth of insights presented in the book and delineates in more detail further research avenues that stem from them.

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The 1926 Miners' Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield, by Hester Barron. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, 314 pp., ISBN 0 19 957504 6, £65.00, hardback.

In 1984, during the year-long miners' strike, the vicar at Easington Colliery, on the coast of Durham, referred to the weekly sermon as his 'party political', spoken in support of the miners. At that time, the Church of England employed a number of industrial chaplains whose voices were some of the most radical in the North East. Here is evidence, if such were needed, to indicate that industrial struggles and strikes rarely operate along the lines of strict class alignment. The fact that this is not a modern phenomenon is confirmed in this interesting addition to the Oxford series of Historical Monographs. Originating as a history PhD thesis, it uses the 1926 dispute as a focus for an examination of local communities, and the diverse ways in which help and support in Durham came from (sometimes) unlikely quarters, with local vicars figuring once again, along with school teachers, shopkeepers, paternalist employers and occasionally the local police.

In May of 1926, the coal miners were locked out across the UK as a result of a refusal by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) to accept the terms of the Samuel Commission, which demanded a return to district agreements with a cut in the wage rate and an extension of the working day to eight hours. At a time of intense industrial conflict, workers in the mines owned by the Consett Iron Company had already been on strike for nine months when they were joined in May by the entire Durham labour force. Almost all of these 150,000 workers remained on strike until the end, with fewer strike-breakers than any other coalfield. When a ballot was called in November, a majority (but less than the two-thirds required) voted to continue.

This strike, such as the one in 1984, easily finds a place in the tragic/heroic genre of labour history that is the *bête noire* of this book's author. Barron's concern is to challenge romantic ideas of 'blackened faces and masculine toil deep beneath the ground' (p. 15), and of those 'coalfield communities of lore, whose inhabitants were prepared to do anything to help a neighbour in need' (p. 133). In casting her light on the events of 1926, she looks to expose frailty, fear, unhappiness and division in order to offer a more 'rounded' account. Identifying with the new revisionist school of labour history, she challenges the salience of identity based on union, class and occupation, highlighting other identities developed in the community and civil society. In this concern to investigate how 'miners and their families experienced, conceptualised and identified with a mining community' (p. 1), she finds that 'the overlapping and conflict of identities and loyalties is one of the more striking traits thrown up by the evidence' (p. 134), and that 'the mining communities of Durham . . . consisted of inter-locking layers of identity placed one on top of another' (p. 272). This supports previous research conducted in Durham and elsewhere.

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This conclusion is based on her scholarly and assiduous use of official statistics, numerous archives, autobiographies and novels. All these are woven together skilfully, sometimes presented in useful tables, most often through direct quotation. In this she benefits from the considerable oral evidence collected in Durham in the 1970s by a wider public, also concerned to document multiple identities. These include the publications of the *Strong Words* group and the archive in Gateshead library where the staff produced two interesting booklets — *Changing Kibblesworth: A Study of a Mining Community* and *Chopwell's Story*. As ever, the oral transcription is revealing, often moving and most often used to good effect. However, there are times when the authorial voice intrudes, becoming over-didactic, extending the meaning of a quotation and warning of misinterpretation. Occasionally, in pursuit of her romantic demon, Barron bends the stick too far, as when she warns us that:

> . . . if the number of men who blacklegged remained tiny many more must have considered it in the smallest hours of the night. If the numbers (of critical letters in) . . . local newspapers were relatively few, many more must have refrained from voicing doubts, or confined them to private conversations with friends (p. 257).

Whatever its purpose, such speculation does not help answer the critical question of why the strike remained solid in Durham for so long. A number of factors are at play here, not least the longevity of the coalfield. She documents the relative absence of other industries and occupations, and the remarkable extent to which the employers could recruit not only locally but directly from mining families, most of whom lived in colliery houses. It is also the case that the coal hewers in Durham had established a working day limited to six and three quarter hours and had most to lose by the proposed extension. All these are brought together under one salient fact that Barron found inescapable and that challenges the revisionist thesis. Durham was not like Lancashire: here 'the occupational and union–dominated identity remained paramount' (p. 266):

> . . . for the vast majority of miners, some kind of attachment to the union underpinned all, and other ideologies . . . had to work in conjunction with the union to ensure support (p. 135).

The comparison with South Wales (mentioned at times throughout the book) is implicit here and would benefit from more systematic historical analysis. In struggling to explain Durham, Barron decides to redefine the mining community as one that is able to 'subsume and integrate other categories of identity', a move that, she admits, 'fails to explain wider loyalties to the MFGB or even the DMA' (p. 271). Clearly, such an explanation would need to go beyond community, and consider the 'association' and the form and character of the miners' union. It would also need to consider historical process and how (in the context of mines employing bonded labour until 1872) the early union activists in Durham organized the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) into a highly centralized county organization. In a real sense, the mining communities were *made* in this earlier period, with the union at their centre. Ironically, Edward Thompson's stricture against sociologists who, in their concern for categorizing, 'stopped the time machine' seems oddly appropriate.

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