

THE DYNAMICS OF EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

MANCHESTER, UNITED KINGDOM

3 – 6 September 2007

Track 1: Restructuring work: new approaches to pay and working time

Changes towards more flexible and individualised systems of pay and working time are reshaping work and the employment relationship. Employer strategies are prominent in implementing these changes but the underlying factors driving the direction and pace of change are not yet clear. Are new pay and working time systems required by new forms of work organisation- including high performance work systems? Is the pressure to change work systems to be found in new production and consumption paradigms or should we seek explanation in the changing balance of power in employment relations and the wider political system? Is change motivated by a need to adapt to- or perhaps to take advantage of- a more diversified and gender-mixed workforce? What role is public policy playing in promoting change in the employment relationship? Is it possible to develop new forms of collective regulation that allow for more individualised arrangements? This theme invites contributions that explore these relationships. Issues to be considered include: the factors driving employer action and trade union responses / initiatives at a national, sectoral or organisational level; the changing relationships between work organisation, organisational / workplace practices and individualised and collective regulatory systems; the impact of equal pay or work-life balance initiatives on workplace practices and collective regulatory systems; trade-offs and complementarities between equity and efficiency in the development of new pay and working time systems; the distributional effects of new developments; the implications of change for national models of employment relations; and the equity and efficiency effects of public policy in the field of wages, pensions and working time.

Track 2: Voice at Work: New Challenges, New Forms

It is widely believed that we are at a point of transition in the system of worker representation. On the one hand, the world of work is changing and a new set of worker interests require expression, voice. On the other, established institutions of worker representation, trade unions and works councils are declining and there is a need for renewal. The purpose of this conference track is to address these two sides to the contemporary crisis of worker representation. With regard to the first issue, we want to examine the implications for voice at work of four challenges: changes in workforce composition, including feminisation, migration and the rise of atypical work; changes in work organisation, including the diffusion of high performance practices and the rise of the networked organisation; the internationalisation of economic activity and the challenge of cross-border worker representation; and the juridification of the employment relationship. With regard to the second issue, the track will address two broad questions. The first is the scope for trade unions to undergo an effective process of revitalisation, whether through merger, the expansion of union services, organisational change or the rediscovery of the social movement origins of trade unionism. The second is the significance and effectiveness of non-traditional voice mechanisms – new forms of statutory participation, employer-sponsored involvement and single-issue identity and advocacy organisations that target the world of work. The relationship of these non-traditional institutions to trade unions and works councils is an absolutely critical issue. In a new phase of multiple channels of worker voice will coalition or competition define the future?

Track 3: Regulating employment: towards multi-level governance

The regulation of industrial relations across Europe is increasingly assuming a multi-level character. This multi-level framework reflects a combination of developments, including: the elaboration of a European-level tier of regulation in addition to existing regulation in the EU's member states, a development which has increasingly extended beyond the economy-wide level to sector and company levels; the additional appearance of global forms of regulation in some sectors and companies; the growing importance in many EU member states of regional and territorial levels as a source of regulation; 'organised decentralisation' within national collective bargaining systems, in which scope for negotiation at company and workplace levels within frameworks agreed by the actors at inter-sector and sector levels has progressively been enhanced; and the simultaneous re-emergence of national level concertation. These developments have been accompanied by changes in the nature of legal regulation (at both EU and national levels), changes in the kind of regulation invoked by collective agreements, the extension and deepening of social dialogue and the arrival of new regulatory mechanisms (co-ordination, target-setting, benchmarking and peer review). A pronounced shift from 'harder' to 'softer' forms of regulation has become evident. What are the implications of this shift? What are the rationales for, and effects on policy and practice of, regulatory innovations at the different levels? How do the different regulatory levels in a multi-level framework interact? What is the relationship between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of regulation, and how effective are 'reflexive' governance mechanisms?

Track 4: Public Sector Restructuring: Between State and Market

Public sector employment relations have come under increased scrutiny as governments aim to enhance competitiveness. Pressures towards economic integration have encouraged governments to prioritize liberalization and marketization. Demographic as well economic pressures have spurred social welfare reform. The process of welfare state restructuring has not been uniform, reflecting variations in state traditions. Identifying how common themes of competitiveness and efficiency are articulated in particular national and sectoral contexts remains a key concern. The track examines the changing institutional and regulatory context for the public sector and the consequences for employers, trade unions, the workforce and citizens of these reforms. To what extent are fiscal pressures and concerns about quality of service provision encouraging governments to erode the 'model employer' and 'employer of last resort' traditions? Have employment relations practices moved closer to those prevailing in the private sector? Structural reforms are altering patterns of joint regulation at enterprise, sectoral and national levels. How far are reforms associated with the 'new public management' compatible with attempts by governments to foster social pacts, even in countries with little tradition of tripartism? Do these state sponsored reforms result in new patterns of governance and accountability at enterprise level that enhance user and employee voice or exclude them? To what extent have employers fostered the growth of direct participation, new forms of work organisation and systems of performance management and how have trade unions responded?

Report on the IIRA 8th European Regional Congress Congress Report

By Professor Linda Dickens, Chair of Congress Organising Committee.

Over 370 delegates attended the 8th European Congress held during an unusually fine and sunny week in Manchester. Over half of the delegates came from outside the UK with 40 from outside Europe. It was pleasing to welcome delegates to the UK - the intellectual birthplace of industrial relations - and to Manchester - the place where the industrial revolution started. As noted by Professor Stephanie Tailby, President of BUIRA – the national association – it was over thirty years since the last IIRA congress had been held in the UK: the IIRA 3rd World Congress was held in London in 1973.

BUIRA organized some special sessions during the Congress for doctoral students and new researchers to present their work and hosted an enjoyable Welcome reception. Financial support from leading UK centres of research and teaching in industrial relations made it possible for us to charge reasonable and discounted registration fees and to provide a number of bursaries which facilitated attendance by younger colleagues.

The theme of the Congress- the Dynamics of European Employment Relations – was addressed through four major tracks, with papers presented in parallel workshops: restructuring work: new approaches to pay and working time; voice at work: new challenges, new forms; regulating employment: towards multi-level governance and public sector restructuring: between state and market. Over 200 papers were presented in workshops, special seminars and invited symposia. Stimulating plenary presentations were made by Lorenzo Bordogna, University of Milan; Simon Deakin, Professor of Law, Faculty of Law and Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge, UK, François Eyraud, Executive Director of the ILO and Director of the Turin Centre; Ida Regalia, University of Milan and Lowell Turner, School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. In addition there was a special plenary roundtable marking the 40th Anniversary of the IIRA. IIRA Secretary Guisepppe Casalle chaired a panel of distinguished past and present IIRA office holders - Manfred Weiss, Roger Blainpain, Russell Lansbury, Anil Verma. Janice Bellace and Tayo Fashoyin – to lead a debate on how the field had changed and whether it was time to change the name of the Association. In the ensuing discussion there was no obvious consensus on whether the label ‘industrial relations should be dropped – but there was apparent consensus that, if it were, then it would be impossible to agree on what might replace it!

High level practitioners were involved in the Congress through two expert roundtable plenaries and two special seminars (on Working Time and New Forms of Governance) organized by the European Foundation on Living and Working Conditions. The first expert plenary, chaired by Rita Donaghy, Chair of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services, focused on industrial relations in the host country. David Yeandle of the UK Engineering Employers Federation, Heather Wakefield of UNISON – the UK’s largest public sector union, and Keith Sisson, Professor Emeritus, University of Warwick. provided their perspectives on contemporary British Industrial Relations.

Delegates taking part in the pre-Congress study tours to Manchester United football club, leading retailer, Tesco, and to the Jaguar factory in Liverpool saw some of this at first hand.

In the second expert plenary, which closed the Congress on a high note, Mária Ladó, Director Inter-ministerial Working Group on Social Policy, Hungarian Ministry of Economic Affairs and John Monks, General Secretary, European Trade Union Confederation addressed the theme 'Employment Relations in Europe: future directions', with Professor Colin Crouch of Warwick Business School, in the chair.

The organizers invited well received symposia on the 'varieties of capitalism' approach to Industrial Relations and the impacts of EU enlargement and special seminars on the British experience of a National Minimum Wage; labour coordination and networking, the state and development of the industrial relations paradigm, and on the quality of working life and the impact of New Labour.

A session on 'Undertaking Comparative Research' was chaired by Richard Hyman with contributions from Evelyn Leonard and Ida Regalia, while Russell Lansbury organized a session on Getting Published in Journals, with contributions from editors of leading IR and HRM journals. This is becoming a regular, and much appreciated, event at IIRA Congresses.

At past Congresses, meetings of IIRA study groups have been scheduled for the day after the closing of Congress. Following a decision of the IIRA Executive, at this Congress they were scheduled in the main timetable. This was generally welcomed by study group convenors, although of course it made the three main congress days even more packed. I admit we provided a programme which spoilt delegates for choice as to where to be at any particular time. The study groups which met in Manchester were: Gender and IR (which held a lively session on valuing women's work and the struggle for pay equality); HRM (with papers around the theme of Fairness and HRM); Theory in Industrial Relations with presentations on key figures in the 'Oxford School' of IR) and Public Policy and IR. An informal meeting was held to explore re-establishing the Public Sector Employment Relations study group.

Animated discussion took place also outside the formal sessions - over lunches (and during a fire alarm evacuation during Wednesday lunchtime!) and at the drinks receptions, which were held each evening. The Congress Dinner, attended by around 300 delegates, took place in Manchester's historic Town Hall. IIRA President Russell Lansbury replied on behalf of the Association to the formal welcome from the Mayor of Manchester at the Civic Reception and expressed thanks for the financial support provided for the Congress by the City. Janice Bellace, IIRA President-elect, formally closed the Congress.