

Abstracts (English)

Wolfgang Streeck

Continuity and change in the German system of industrial relations: open questions

The German system of industrial relations gives an impression of remarkable continuity in times of profound economic and political change. On the surface new research results on the impact of internationalisation on the relations between management and labour in the 100 largest German firms seem to support this impression. However, a closer look reveals a growing dependence of the collective bargaining regime on the social welfare system; a tendency towards stable dualism in labour markets and employment regimes; encapsulation of the former universalistic system of industrial citizenship in a shrinking segment of the German economy; growing de-politicisation and "privatisation" of industrial citizenship arrangements; a trend towards integration of interest representation in the organisation of work; and a declining capacity of the national state to intervene in the private sphere of large corporations.

Key words: Co-determination, globalisation, Industrial relations, structural change, trade unions

Richard Croucher, Alison Mitchell

Privatisation and decentralisation: challenging Britain's public sector trade unions

The article describes the problematic impact at local level of privatisation and decentralised bargaining on UNISON, Britain's largest public sector trade union. These are acute versions of an international problem. Previous studies are reviewed, and it is shown that these have argued that the situation contains both problems and opportunities for unions. Two union branches, one operating in local government and the other in a major utility's call centre, are examined as case studies. These reveal a certain revival of activism in the union at the local level. However, the cases also show the new demands generated for union support as a result. These demands fall into three main areas: support to bargainers through information and advice; reconsideration of policies; and re-alignment of democratic structures to facilitate participation.

Key words: Britain, decentralisation, industrial relations, public sector, trade unions

Sebastian Hoering, Stefan Kühl, Alexander Schulze-Fielitz

Homogeneity and heterogeneity in group composition

A micropolitical study on decision-making processes within work groups

The paper refers to the discussion on the effects of homogeneous versus heterogeneous group compositions in partly autonomous work groups. It transcends the pursuit of finding a „one best way“ and focuses on the social processes within the work group. Based on a case study in a company which

employed partly autonomous work groups on the operational as well as on the lowest managerial level, a micropolitical perspective is elaborated, which allows to explain the dynamics of the social processes in conjunction with the tasks assigned to the groups. It is shown that the heterogeneous group composition facilitates an informal rehierarchisation within the work groups, which on the one hand leads to quicker decision-making in conflict situations, but on the other hand may obstruct technical discussions in the groups. While groups on the operational level are more easily lined up by the fact, that each member's contribution to the outcome can be easily observed, groups on the operational level show a stronger tendency towards escalating power struggles.

Key words: Decentralisation, group work, heterogeneity, homogeneity, micro politics

Sabine Raeder, Gudela Grote

Flexibility replaces continuity

New forms of personal identity and changing psychological contracts

In the context of workplace flexibility psychological contracts i.e. reciprocal obligations between employers and employees are changing. People increasingly request more flexibility regarding their employment or their career. In this study the change of psychological contracts experienced in companies as well as by people, who changed their profession, was examined with semi-structured interviews. The latter were interviewed with regard to their personal identity as well. The interview data were analysed with the method of qualitative contents analysis. Evidence is given that the change of psychological contracts varies from a conservative to a drastical version. Personal biographies are still dominated by the profession. The interviewees, however, plan their professional development considering various options and integrate the many changes within their life in their own definition of identity. Recommendations are given in order to support individuals to find security in their own competencies instead of identifying with a company or a profession.

Key words: Competence, psychological contract, work and identity, workplace flexibility

Alexandra Wagner

Delimitation of work and working time?

This article deals with the question as to whether a tendency towards a delimitation/liberalisation of standard employment can be observed with respect to the change in forms of employment and working times. The author shows on the basis of empirical facts, that changes can be seen rather at the top and bottom margins of the employment system, while the main area of standard employment is hardly influenced by the change, if at all. An analysis of the driving forces of that change suggests to interpret it as a co-existence of limitation on the one hand and delimitation/liberalisation on the other hand, i.e. a polarisation of employment structures. On the basis of international comparisons it is clear that politics and regulations have a strong influence on the change in employment structures. The author justifies her perception, whereby the term delimitation/liberalisation can be applied most aptly where changes in the working contract are currently executed.

Key words: Delimitation, standard employment relationship, working time regulation