

### **Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice (3<sup>rd</sup> edition).**

Edited by Trevor Colling and Mike Terry, the 2010 volume contains eighteen chapters. Each chapter stands as an authoritative analysis in its own right and the whole knits together to provide a comprehensive overview of industrial relations in the UK after more than a decade of Labour government.

The chapters fall under five major headings. The first establishes explicitly the international context within which British workplaces are developing, a theme which then runs through many contributions. Chapters by Crouch and Hyman locate UK industrial relations within comparative contexts – of labour market dynamics and of European politics and regulatory frameworks respectively. The subsequent four sections address the key dimensions of the subject, looking in sequence at actors, contexts, processes and outcomes.

Commentary on the industrial relations *actors* goes beyond mere description to establish connections between workplace developments and changes in institutions, regulation, and competition. The chapter by Sisson and Purcell locates its analysis of managerial action firmly within changing structural and financial environments. Heyes and Nolan review conceptualisations of the state in industrial relations and recent developments in policy and structure. Similarly, analysis of trade union decline provided by Simms and Charlwood argues for an analytical approach, identifying sources of power and linking actors to contexts.

Britain's now permissive 'system' of industrial relations has created enormous scope for variation in employment practice, a theme explored in the section on *context*. Arrowsmith, for example, finds quite different approaches across the 'private sector' and urges analysis that recognises conditioning factors that vary by sector. These themes are echoed by Ram and Edwards, who examine presumptions about 'small firms' and advocate greater sensitivity to their location within different product markets and organisational networks.

The chapters on *processes* illustrate vividly dramatic shifts in regulation that lie at the heart of changes in our subject over the last forty years. Marked decline in the coverage of collective bargaining, traced by Brown in the present volume, provides a stark contrast in the current climate. While accommodations between employers and their workforces is an enduring feature of the employment relationship, the formal processes through which they are achieved have changed very substantially. Some of the tensions and dynamics in this new regulatory context can only be understood by reference to its 'voluntarist' past but legal mechanisms and institutions now have wider roles in setting employment standards, as Dickens and Hall and Colling respectively make clear.

This is reflected in the final section on *outcomes*, which is conceived broadly to explore the interplay of regulation, social change, and developing workplaces. Contributions here examine the influence of industrial relations contexts on pay and working time, skills, and economic performance. Labour market participation has changed substantially over the last forty years as shifting industrial and regulatory landscapes have drawn more women in particular into workplaces. Dean and Liff reflect on the important implications for industrial relations theory and institutions.