
Preface

Considerable changes in both the real world of industrial relations and the academic analysis of these have occurred during the 1970s. The decay of the postwar industrial peace in this period has once again brought the issue of conflict in industrial organisation to the fore. The successful institutionalisation of class conflict in advanced Western societies during the late 1940s and early 1950s reduced industrial strife to easily-managed proportions for a quarter of a century. The resurgence of more intense conflicts in the 1970s showed that the relative harmony of the earlier era had rested on precarious foundations. Moreover, modern industrial conflict embraces more than the traditional issues of wages and conditions, when people question the very basis of economic and industrial organisation.

Within the world of academic analysis there have also been changes. In the first place, there has been a great increase in the amount of factual knowledge available as the result of the empirical research conducted over the last ten years. In particular, we now know considerably more about Britain, continental Europe and Japan to set alongside the detailed accounts of North American industrial life which were once the empirical basis of industrial sociology. Secondly, the growth of new intellectual approaches has provided new answers to old questions and raised seemingly novel issues as legitimate areas of investigation. The influence of new perspectives is strong even among people who do not support them, because they have successfully structured the agenda of what is held to be worth discussing.

The traditional sociology of industrial organisation written in the 1950s and 1960s began to collapse at the same time as these changes were taking place. Old concepts were unable to cope with the industrial changes, while the new ideas that excited people in the late 1970s were incompatible with existing approaches.

In this book I attempt to reconstruct industrial sociology. I focus on the social relations involved in production and employment and their ramifications both inside and outside organisations. A major theme is the precarious nature of industrial peace given the

ineradicable opposition of certain interests; this feature is characteristic of the dominant forms of modern economic organisation. In support of this position I employ a wider range of material than has been hitherto customary in industrial sociology. This includes the historical and comparative study of labour and managerial organisation, the modern theoretical and empirical accounts of class structure and the role of the government in the economy, and the economics literature dealing with trade unions, labour markets and certain aspects of economic theory. Inevitably, the issues that I think are worth discussing and the framework within which this discussion takes place reflect the ideas that are current in sociology. The text draws in places on Weber's economic sociology because I am convinced that this has an enduring importance for industrial sociology which is not sufficiently appreciated. This perspective certainly produces a more relevant framework than the Durkheimian tradition in what used to be the dominant American approach to industrial organisation. It can accommodate a number of the insights of the revived Marxist perspective with which it is often thought to be in competition, as the following chapters demonstrate.

The book has its origins in lectures given to graduate and undergraduate students of sociology, industrial relations and personnel management at the L.S.E., and in a paper I published on the 'new industrial relations' (S. Hill, 1976a) reviewing Harry Braverman's seminal work, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Many of my ideas have changed during the course of writing and the text now departs substantially from its origins. I have refrained where possible from treating the subject as a history or thematic review of the various theories and schools that have existed in industrial sociology. This approach has so often led to a narcissistic and abstract sociology of sociology. I have also tried to avoid another pitfall, which is to present a collection of chapters covering everything under the sun without any thematic unity. Instead I attempt to demonstrate the empirical basis of the subject and to present original arguments which serve to select and organise the material. This has proved difficult in places, because in a text which is intended in part to instruct students there is clearly a need for some basic information about the subject that might otherwise be omitted.

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