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Two discursive frameworks concerning ideology in Australian industrial relations

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Abstract

There are two discursive frameworks concerning ideology in Australian industrial relations. In many disciplines concerned with aspects of industrial relations, including political science, law and history, it is the traditional political ideologies of the industrial era which take centre stage: liberalism (classical, social and neoliberalism), socialism (Marxism, social democracy and labourism) and conservatism. By contrast, ideological issues in the discipline of employment relations are chiefly addressed in terms of Fox's three analytical perspectives: unitarism, pluralism and radicalism. The disjunction between these parallel discourses goes largely unnoted in the literature of the relevant disciplines, which all tend to proceed using their own preferred approach without making reference to the other. This article critically explores the relationship between these two discourses and investigates the broader implications that the existence of the two different discursive traditions has for the analysis of industrial relations phenomena in Australia.

Introduction

There are two discursive frameworks concerning ideology in Australian industrial relations. In disciplines such as political science, law and history, which are concerned with many aspects of industrial relations, discussion of political ideology is based around the three main discursive traditions of the politics of the industrial era: liberalism (classical,

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social and neoliberalism), socialism (Marxism, social democracy and labourism) and conservatism. By contrast, much of the literature in the discipline of Australian employment relations tends to eschew this conventional terminology and instead bases its discussion on the frames of reference typology developed by British industrial sociologist Alan Fox's (1966, 1973, 1974) unitarist, pluralist and radical perspectives.

This situation of dual discursive frameworks goes largely unnoted in the literatures of the relevant disciplines, all of which tend to proceed without reference to the other framework. This article argues that the use of Fox's typology occludes the employment relations discipline from other traditions of analysis, resulting in a critical approach that ignores the broader historical development of political ideology and the justifications often invoked by proponents and agents of change to the employment relationship. The broader political forces in society are not readily reduced to 'unitarist', 'pluralist' and 'radical' ideological actors. The use of Fox's typology treats the employment relationship in a manner quite at odds with mainstream social science traditions of hermeneutic and contextual entanglement.

There is no accepted definition of ideology, but Seliger (1976) is typical and well known in the discipline of political science:

> [An ideology is a] set of ideas by which men [sic] posit, explain and justify ends and means of organized social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order. (p. 14)

Obviously, the three main political ideologies of the industrial era – liberalism, socialism and conservatism – conform to the conventional definitions of ideology. However, there could be some doubt about whether the scope of Fox's three perspectives or frames of reference is sufficiently broad and political to be considered as ideologies. Fox himself certainly saw them as such (Fox, 1973), but others have drawn a distinction between the private nature of his frames of reference and the public nature of traditional political ideologies (Budd and Bhave, 2006). Fox devised his perspectives to deal with the management of industrial relations at the organisational level. However, as will be noted, Fox's frames of reference have developed beyond his original intended scope. Within the employment relations literature, they are used and defined as 'ideological' perspectives (Bray et al., 2014: 15), and for the purposes of this article, they will be treated as ideologies.

The next section of this article briefly outlines the political ideologies of the industrial era and their historical development. This overview illustrates the centrality of industrial relations issues to these political ideologies and argues that an understanding of them is crucial to an understanding of industrial relations. The following section explains the crucial role these ideologies have played in analyses of historical and contemporary Australian industrial relations in political science, history and law. The article then examines the development of the ideological taxonomy of Fox in the 1960s and 1970s. His typology subsequently became the defining paradigm of the discipline of employment relations in the UK and Australia, and it is the principal analytical and ideological lens through which the discipline examines industrial relations phenomena.

The fourth section considers the relationship between the political ideologies and Fox's framework. A final discussion section examines the use of both discursive frameworks in

the employment relations literature. It shows why an understanding of both languages of ideology is important for industrial relations scholars. The tendency within the employment relations literature to understate political ideologies serves to weaken the explanatory power of the discipline, dissociating it from the traditional frameworks of political analysis. The literature does not engage with the key ideological claims represented in the Australian political tradition (represented especially by the two largest political parties), compromising its ability to account for the historical and contemporary nature of capitalist work relations generally and Australian industrial relations in particular.

This study uses a traditional history of ideas methodology, having recourse to a review of a range of political, historical, legal and employment relations literature, and analysing research and teaching texts for the language and concepts they employ in relation to ideology. It takes a meta-analytical approach to the key (or canonical) texts and analyses of the three main received ideological traditions of the industrial era as they concern Australia and contrasts them with the reception of Fox's work, especially as it is reflected in Australian employment relations textbooks.

Political ideologies and industrial relations

This section overviews the main political ideologies of the industrial era and their historical development. It refers extensively to the British context, because of Britain's formative role in ideological discourse in Australia. It illustrates the centrality of work and industrial relations issues to these ideologies and argues that an understanding of these ideologies is crucial to an understanding of industrial relations.

According to the British philosopher John Gray (1986),

> Liberalism … is the political theory of modernity. Its postulates are the most distinctive features of modern life – the autonomous individual with his concern for liberty and privacy, the growth of wealth and the steady stream of invention and innovation, [and] the machinery of government which is at once indispensable to civil life and a standing threat to it. (p. 82)

Liberalism emerged during the Enlightenment as a radical ideology of liberation and has undergone much development since it was first articulated in the 17th century (Manent, 1995). In its earliest articulation, liberalism sought to free individuals from various social, economic and political constraints and tyrannies: the hierarchical feudal system in which position in society was determined by birth, the tyranny of absolute government based on doctrines of the divine right of kings, and economies based on regulation and privilege, rather than free exchange in a market.

Political scientists identify several central values and beliefs in liberalism, many of which are related to industrial relations. The principal values stressed by contemporary liberals are individualism and liberty:

> The central theme of liberal ideology is a commitment to the individual and the desire to construct a society in which people can satisfy their interests and achieve fulfillment … each individual should enjoy the maximum possible freedom consistent with a like freedom for all. However, although individuals are entitled to equal legal and political rights, they should be rewarded in line with their talents and their willingness to work. (Heywood, 2007: 23)

At the time of the breakdown of feudalism, emphasis on the individual rights represented a radical departure from the dominant notions that people were primarily members of communities: of families, villages, occupations or classes (Tönnies, 1887). They belonged to a society primarily concerned with relationships based on affection or tradition, not 'rational agreement by mutual consent' (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 41). Liberalism encouraged individuals to think of themselves in personal rather than communal terms.

The liberal conception of justice is based on the principle of equality before the law as it was described most famously by the political philosophers Locke (1690) and Montesquieu (1899 [1748]): all individuals should enjoy the same formal status, rights and entitlements in society and 'not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of another Man' (Locke, 1924 [1690]: iv, 22). The principle of equality of opportunity, formulated during the early years of liberalism, suggests that every person should have the same chance to succeed and fail. But this does not imply social equality or equal rewards, which would be contrary to the liberal principle of meritocracy. Since the foundational work of Smith (1776), liberals have tended to agree that because of differences between individuals' levels of talents and their willingness to work hard and take risks, unequal outcomes can be just. Influenced by political economists such as Smith, 'classical' liberals argued that society should be structured in such a way that provided incentives for people to maximise the talents they had (Arblaster, 1984).

Following Locke and Montesquieu, liberals have traditionally placed great emphasis on individual rights, including the rights to life, liberty and private property. Locke and Montesquieu were also influential figures in developing the key principles of the liberal state: state power should be based on the consent of the people; it should be constitutional and based on formal, legal rules; individual rights must be guaranteed and power should be fragmented (Manent, 1995: 39–64).

The economic foundation of early liberalism was advanced during the formative years of the industrial period in England. Agreeing with contemporary French economists, Smith (1776) sought to justify free trade and minimal state intervention in the economy on public interest grounds. According to Smith and his followers, the market system was self-regulating. Voluntary contractual exchanges driven by self-interest and private profits would maximise economic efficiency and national wealth:

> As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can, both to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. (Smith, 1937 [1776]: iv, 2, 9)

The government's role was to enable maximum individual freedom, and the market system of incentives, price mechanisms and the division of labour would naturally emerge. This analysis was also applied to the labour market, with the maximisation of free choices of employers and employees considered to be optimal for the parties themselves and society as a whole.

The transition from earlier forms of societies to a liberal dispensation was reflected in the British and US legal systems with the rise of the doctrine of freedom of contract, including in the context of the employment relationship. This was recognised in the legal

literature, encapsulated by the catchphrase of liberal legal historian Henry Maine (1908 [1861]): 'from Status to Contract' (p. 170).

Subsequent to these developments in liberal ideology, the Industrial Revolution began to transform British (and US) economy and society. New mechanical technologies and the factory system resulted in the emergence of the working class. Factory employment for adults and children was typically dangerous, degrading and low paid. Living conditions in the new over-crowded urban slums were squalid and unsanitary. Society was characterised by obvious poverty and inequality; with little educational opportunity for most, the prospects for them and society seemed bleak (Arblaster, 1984).

During the middle half of the 19th century, governments did little to try to rectify these problems. Classical liberals maintained an absolute commitment to small government, the market system and free trade under a doctrine known as laissez-faire (Robbins, 1952). In their view, the role of the state should remain extremely limited, essentially to ensuring national security, personal security and law and order, and a system of justice including enforcement of contracts. They believed that state intervention would violate individual property rights and freedom of contract, which would destroy individual initiative (Coats, 1971).

It was at this juncture that liberals were divided into two groups: the classical liberals, who adhered to the older view of laissez-faire, and new or social liberals. Social liberals such as J.S. Mill (1859) and T.H. Green (1884) maintained the commitment to the key principles of liberalism, including individualism and liberty, but modified their views on what the appropriate government response should be to achieve those ends. Rather than merely advocating negative freedom from government, they concluded that the state had an obligation to intervene to ensure positive freedom – that the state should act to enable the disadvantaged to have the freedom and genuine capacity to take opportunities to develop their lives.

In Britain (and Australia as discussed below), it was the social liberal strand which prevailed and held sway for the next century or so, until classical liberal ideas, often referred to as neoliberalism, re-emerged as a force in the late 20th century (Sawer, 2003). Thus, under the influence of social liberalism, governments embarked on reforms to reduce the inequalities and perceived social injustices of capitalism: public education, welfare, and protection for the poor, paid for by taxes on businesses and the wealthy (Brett, 2003). In the realm of industrial relations, social liberalism saw the advent of laws which regulated the terms of employment, legalised trade unions, provided immunities for union activities and encouraged collective bargaining. The subsequent decline of the classical liberal doctrine of freedom of contract during the 20th century was reflected in the legal literature – encapsulated in the title of Atiyah's (1979) *Rise and Fall of Freedom of Contract*.

In addition to fracturing liberalism into two schools, the Industrial Revolution and its negative consequences also gave rise to another ideology – socialism – which stood opposed to many of the key precepts of liberalism (Lindemann, 1983). Socialism focused on people as members of classes rather than as individuals and emphasised the values of community, cooperation and collectivism over individualism. Socialists argued that capitalist society was divided into two fundamental classes – owners and workers – and that the relationship between them was based on exploitation (Marx, 1867). The primary

value of socialists was equality rather than liberty. Socialists argued that true equality required the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a classless, socialist system in which the means of production were collectively owned. Socialists were themselves divided between two broad groups: the revolutionaries, following Marx; and those who were prepared to achieve socialism gradually through the democratic system, including the Fabians, social democrats and labourists (Lindemann, 1983). Both groups welcomed trade unions and their activities – the former as potential agents for revolution, the latter as a mechanism, along with the state, for humanising or reforming capitalism. The revolutionaries were and remain critical of their social democratic counterparts, whom they regard as little better than social liberals, and disparage as economism the attempts of labourist unionists to improve the conditions of their members under capitalism (Eley, 2002). In most Western countries, including the UK and Australia, revolutionary socialism has remained a minority ideology. Revolutionary socialism had greater influence in Russia, Eastern Europe and developing Asian countries where it inspired several communist revolutions, but had largely waned by the late 20th century.

The final enduring ideology of the industrial age is conservatism, which arose as a reaction to the dramatic political and social change and turmoil associated with the liberal transformation (Jones, 2017). Initially, conservatives sought to defend the prior aristocratic order, but under the influence of Edmund Burke (1790), conservatism became an intellectual ideology advancing the conservation of traditional customs and institutions more broadly: Christianity, social order, respect for authority, private property, traditional family values and morality, the monarchy and nationalism. Conservatives reject the liberal conception of society as comprised of atomistic individuals; they view society as an organic entity, in which authority is necessary and individuals should willingly submit to their responsibilities (Suvanto, 1997).

By the mid-20th century, many commentators were arguing that these conventional ideological categories had lost their salience in Western countries, a view encapsulated in Daniel Bell's (1960) 'end of ideology' thesis. Classical liberalism had seemingly declined to the point of irrelevance, and in practice, the milder version of socialism, social democracy, had more or less converged with social liberalism, to the point that many commentators could scarcely distinguish between them (Soborski, 2013). Policy-making in Western states generally converged around the promotion of mixed market economies, Keynesian economics, increasing taxation, expanding welfare states and acceptance and encouragement of trade unions and collective bargaining.

Predictions of the death of ideology, however, proved to be premature. Even during its lowest ebb in the mid-20th century, the ideas of classical liberalism did not die off completely. Writers such as Friedrich Hayek (1960) continued to write extensive critiques, from classical liberal precepts, of the ideas and regimes of socialism as practiced in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and of the social liberal, social democratic regimes of Western Europe and the United States. Hayek railed against state ownership and control of businesses, Keynesian economic policies, the welfare state and departures from classical liberal principles in industrial relations. When classical liberalism re-emerged in the West in the 1980s, under the Thatcher and Reagan administrations, it was the classical liberals (including Hayek) who were cited as the inspiration for those ideas, often termed neoliberalism by their critics. The 1970s also saw the emergence and growth of what are

called the new constructivist ideologies or liberation movements: feminism, environmentalism, multiculturalism and gay and indigenous rights movements (Eley, 2002).

Various arguments for the end of ideology have continued to be advanced, in light of developments of recent decades, including the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe (Fukuyama, 1989) and the rapid changes associated with globalisation. Some have argued that these changes have been so profound and disruptive that traditional ideological categories are of 'diminishing coherence' (Drake, 2010: 16), and the ideological map needs to be replaced with new categories such as the 'national' and the 'global' (Steger, 2008). Others reject these arguments and suggest that the competing responses to changes such as globalisation and the Global Financial Crisis 'demonstrate the enduring presence in today's political discourse of themes, ideas and issues that have long been seen as defining the main ideological currents' (Soborski, 2013: 7). Certainly, the traditional ideologies of socialism(s), liberalism(s) and conservatism remain the starting point for discussion of ideology in most academic disciplines. In politics and industrial relations, they remain the basis for identification of political parties and self-identification.

Political ideologies and Australian industrial relations

These broad ideological categories have long formed the basis for analysis of Australian industrial relations by historians, political scientists and legal scholars, as is illustrated by the following examples.

The concept of liberalism is fundamental to an appreciation of the nature of Australian society since European colonisation commenced in 1788. Colonisation began towards the end of the Enlightenment in Europe, in the decade after the French and American revolutions, at which point liberal ideas had largely gained ascendancy over earlier feudal ideas such as inherited intergenerational status obligations. Colonisation also began during the time of the first Industrial Revolution, and the nature of the Australian colonial state and labour law largely reflected its British inheritance. The fundamentally liberal nature of Australian society is generally unquestioned, characterised as it is by a mixed market economy and by widespread acceptance of notions such as property rights, meritocracy, rule of law and formal equality before the law irrespective of social class.

Indeed, some historians and political scientists argue that Australia was a 'transplanted appendage of a mature society', which took on the dominant form of liberalism at the time of nation building – in Australia's case, Benthamite utilitarian liberalism (Collins, 1985; Quinlan, 1989: 28; Sawer, 2007). Quinlan (1989) applies this hypothesis to explain 'why the dominance of an instrumentalist ideology within colonial society found ready expression in [19th century] labour legislation' (p. 28). Hancock (1961 [1930]), explains the acceptance of the compulsory arbitration on similar lines:

> Thus Australian democracy has come to look upon the State as a vast public utility, whose duty is to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number … To the Australian, the State means collective power at the service of individualistic 'rights'. (p. 55)

Accounts of the nature of Australian politics and economy during the 19th century also rely on these ideological concepts. Laissez-faire liberalism was never as powerful a force in Australia as it was in Britain and the US (Macintyre, 1989; Sawer, 2007).

However, it was not absent altogether. The Great Strikes of the 1890s, which precipitated the formation of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and compulsory arbitration, occurred in the context of the pastoralists' and ship owners' demands for the classical liberal right to 'freedom of contract', as opposed to the workers' demands for union closed shops and collective bargaining (Macintyre, 1989).

As in Britain, the historical literature also points to the influence of social liberalism in the adoption of ameliorative regulatory and welfare policies by the Australian state, including factory acts, workers' compensation and anti-sweating laws. Social liberalism is also said to have 'inspired the politicians and judges who created the system of compulsory conciliation and arbitration', the key feature of Australia's system of employment regulation (Macintyre, 1989; Sawer, 2007: 321).

Political ideologies have proved essential in understanding the nature of Australian unions. Since the 1880s, Australian unionists have been influenced by, and have embraced, a range of political ideologies. According to Bowden (2011), 'Australian radicalism in this era owed far more to the utopian socialism of Edward Bellamy and the ideals of Henry George … than they did to Karl Marx' (p. 57). Downplaying the influence of revolutionary socialism, Bowden (2011) cites a range of historians who 'contend that the thinking of most workers and activists continued to reflect the prevailing ethos of colonial liberalism, with its belief in piece-meal reform' (p. 57). After the Great Strikes, the creation of the Labor Party and compulsory arbitration, the mainstream of the labour movement embraced the ideology of labourism:

> Arbitration also underpinned the rise of 'labourist' ideology that soon dominated the thinking of most unionists … exponents of labourism argued that the interests of (white male) workers were best advanced through a White Australia policy, arbitration courts, a system of tariff protection and the election of Labor governments. (Bowden, 2011: 60)

Yet, the nature of labourism has been the subject of debate in labour history. The key issue, as Beilharz states, is, 'Was labourism then socialist at all? Australian Marxists have always scoffed at the idea, and since Lenin they have rejected the ALP as petty bourgeois or liberal rather than socialist'. By contrast, Beilharz (2007: 552) notes that most commentators consider labourism to have been 'the dominant form of socialism in Australia'.

There was always a significant minority of unionists who embraced other ideologies – particularly other forms of socialism – and parties with similar appellations. The socialist International Workers of the World gained some traction in the early decades of the 20th century, and members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), formed in 1920, controlled unions representing around 40% of union members by the 1940s (Bowden, 2011).

Similarly, the Industrial Groups of the 1950s, which took control of several unions and led to the formation of the Democratic Labor Party, are generally analysed using the conventional categories of political ideology: a combination of labourism and social conservatism. For example, Bowden (2011: 65) characterises the Industrial Groups as, 'a coalition of old-style "labourists," led by the AWU, and supporters of the Catholic Social Studies Movement' whose leaders 'wanted to reform the Labor Party along Christian-Democratic lines'.

The conventional ideological categories are also important for understanding the 'Australian Settlement'. This term is used to describe the consensus that emerged around the turn of the 20th century in Australia regarding the White Australia policy,

compulsory arbitration, industry protection, state paternalism and imperial benevolence (Kelly, 1992). Others have argued that the Settlement comprised additional elements such as democracy, political equality and state secularism, 'which embodied the major values of Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism' (Stokes, 2007: 57).

The Settlement represented a historical compromise between the major political forces and ideals at that time. Compulsory arbitration was implemented by social liberals and was subsequently embraced by unions and the ALP to become integral to its labourist ideology. The major point of contention in the early days of Federation was industry protection, in which the employers and non-labour parties were divided between the social liberals in favour of protectionism, and free traders, espousing economic liberalism, opposed. Labor was able to form an alliance with the protectionists to settle this matter. The accommodation between the labourists and social liberals embodied in the Australian Settlement represented the defeat of the classical liberals (Edwards, 2012). This Settlement began to break down in the 1970s with the end of the White Australia policy, then the dismantling of protectionism and compulsory arbitration in the 1980s.

The non-Labor side of politics is also typically analysed using the terminology of political ideology. Sawer (2007) describes the formation of the original Liberal Party in 1909 as

> … comprising seemingly incompatible elements: Deakinite social liberals who believed in the state as a vehicle of social justice, and free traders who combined a laissez-faire approach in economic matters with interventionist social conservatism. (p. 322)

Similarly, the current Liberal Party, formed in 1945, is typically characterised by political scientists as embodying conservatism and social (or 'small l') liberalism. In more recent times, however, the Liberal Party is generally seen to be also influenced by revived forms of classical liberalism (Sawer, 2007).

The influence of conservatism and classical liberalism is illustrated in contemporary accounts of industrial relations by political scientists. While the Liberals' 2006 WorkChoices legislation can be seen to have reflected economic or neoliberal ideals, it has also been depicted as embodying the conservatism of Prime Minister John Howard and his successor Tony Abbott:

> The 687 pages of regulation aimed at giving employers the authority to set pay and conditions in their workplace without having to negotiate. Howard said, 'Our position is very clear and that is that it's for the employer to determine the nature of industrial relations in the workplace'. The philosophy behind this thinking was articulated by Howard's protégé, Tony Abbott, when he equated the roles of bosses and fathers, suggesting that while they could be harsh at times, their actions were ultimately in the interests of their underlings. (Edwards, 2012: 179)

Roan and White's (2010) analysis of the rhetoric of WorkChoices is also couched exclusively in terms of these political ideologies.

The second discursive framework: Fox's typology

The second discursive framework is based on Fox's typology of the unitary, pluralist and radical frames of reference. The concepts of unitarism and pluralism had been used in

industrial relations prior to Fox: his 1966 paper refers to Ross' (1958) use of unitarism, and Hyman (1978) provides an overview of the use of pluralism as a concept in other disciplines and its introduction to industrial relations by Kerr (1955). But it is Fox's formulation of unitarism and pluralism, combined with his radical perspective, which popularised the use of these approaches in employment relations.

Fox first developed his typology in an attempt to argue against substantial reform of the extant British industrial relations system. The first two of Fox's frames of reference, the unitary and pluralist, were originally presented in a research paper commissioned for the Donovan Royal Commission into industrial relations in Britain in 1966. The Commission had been established because of concern among employers and the government regarding the high rates of industrial disputation in Britain, known colloquially as the 'trade union problem', part of a wider malaise known as the 'British disease' (Wrigley, 2002).

Fox's argument was that attempts at external legal reform would be futile because conflict was endemic in industrial organisations owing to the partly incompatible interests of workers and managers. Fox argued that conflict could not be eradicated but could be managed by the adoption of a pluralist perspective on industrial relations, which entailed the joint management of organisations by managers and unions. This perspective, he argued, was more realistic than the mistaken unitarist assumption of many British managers that there was a common interest between workers and the organisation.

In non-employment relations terminology, the unitarist perspective could be characterised as paternalistic, conservative anti-unionist. Unitarism was presented by Fox as a form of straw person or heuristic device, and he immediately set about ridiculing proponents of it. Fox's (1966) point was that only deluded, old-fashioned unitarists would suggest that substantial change to the British industrial relations system was warranted:

> The whole view of industrial organisation embodied in this unitary emphasis has long since been abandoned by most social scientists as incongruent with reality and useless for the purposes of analysis. If we are to have a model which explains the growing accumulation of evidence about how industry actually operates, we have to abandon ideal prescriptions which reflect wishful thinking rather than accurate observation. (p. 4)

Instead, Fox (1966) argued that '[b]oth management and the public need a more sophisticated frame of reference than this if industrial relations issues are to be handled and evaluated properly' (pp. 32–33). The rational perspective, consistent with the reality and facts, then evident in the British system was the pluralist position:

> We have to see the organisation 'as a plural society, containing many related but separate interests and objectives which must be maintained in some kind of equilibrium'. In place of a corporate unity reflected in a single focus of authority and loyalty, we have to accept the existence of rival sources of leadership and attachment. (Fox, 1966: 4)

It was a few years after the Donovan report that Fox introduced his third frame of reference, the radical perspective. This perspective was not Marxism as such but a critique of the pluralist position based on a Marxisant view that there is a fundamental

conflict between workers and managers deriving from the exploitative class nature of society (Fox, 1973, 1974).

The relationship between Fox's perspectives and the political ideologies

In his seminal exposition of his unitarist and pluralist frames of reference, Fox did not mention political ideologies at all. The closest he came to explaining the relationship between political ideologies and his perspectives was his discussion of trade unions and what he called market relations and managerial relations in the employment relationship:

> What is implied by a full acceptance of the pluralistic frame of reference? … Employer-employee relationships have two distinct aspects: market relations and managerial relations. Market relations have to do with the terms and conditions on which labour is hired – they are therefore economic in character. Managerial relations arise out of what management seeks to do with its labour having hired it. They have to do this with the exercise of authority and can for this reason be termed political in character. (Fox, 1966: 6)

Fox (1966) was clearly aware that the application of his pluralist framework was predicated on what could be described as the eclipse of the classical liberal dispensation in labour relations, which had occurred around the turn of the century in Britain:

> A century ago, the view of many employers on the first aspect was that market relations must be conducted through individual bargaining … Their view on managerial relations can be summed up in the oft-quoted phrase, 'May not I do what I like with my own?' Many employers tried to assert absolute prerogatives over their labour force, the argument being that these authority rights derived from their ownership of the means of production. (p. 6)

Fox (1966) referred to the then consensus (the then social liberal/social democratic consensus) regarding trade unions in market relations:

> When public support developed for trade unionism, it came in relation to market relations rather than managerial. Public opinion was moved by the often devastating effect effects upon the worker of unregulated labour markets … the acceptance of trade unionism came through its being recognised as a necessary protection for the worker in the economic aspect of his employment. (p. 6–7)

By contrast, his pluralist frame of reference was based on the role of unions in the workplace context:

> A pluralistic frame of reference recognises that this is quite inadequate. The legitimacy and justification of trade unions in our society rests not upon their protective function in labour markets or upon their success, real or supposed, in raising the share enjoyed by their members, but on social values which recognise the right of interest-groups to combine and have an effective voice in their own destiny … … [E]ven more important … is the role of union organisation within the workplace itself in regulating *managerial* relations, i.e. the exercise of

management authority in deploying, organising and disciplining the labour force after it has been hired. (Fox, 1966: 7)

Thus, Fox's pluralist frame of reference went further than the prevailing (social liberal/social democratic) consensus on the legitimacy of trade unions, but not in the direction of socialism – rather inwards to the organisational level.

There are some affinities or parallels between pairs of political ideologies and Fox's perspectives. Conservatism and unitarism have a common emphasis on respect for authority and the organic nature of society and the firm. Social liberalism and social democracy share with pluralism an aspiration to modify or humanise society and the firm, respectively, without seeking to destroy its fundamental nature. The consistency between industrial relations pluralism and the social liberal and social democratic political ideals associated with the New Deal and the Progressive movement in the US is a point made by some American industrial relations writers (e.g. Kaufman, 2010). And the radical perspective is based upon a Marxist-like view of class and power in a capitalist society.

However, these parallels can only be taken so far. Pluralism is not socialism in a workplace context and Fox's radical perspective is not socialism, it is a Marxisant critique of pluralism. Attempts to conflate the two sets of ideologies can be contrived and ultimately contradictory. For example, many writers characterise labour relations in communist China prior to the abandonment of socialism as unitarist (Taylor et al., 2003), so the political and organisational levels clearly do not necessarily correspond.

The ascendency and ubiquity of Fox's framework in employment relations

Fox's approach subsequently became the defining paradigm of the discipline of employment relations in the UK and Australia; it is the principal analytical and ideological lens through which industrial relations phenomena are examined. Initially, the discipline itself was seen to be pluralist in orientation, but subsequently, a modified version of Fox's pluralism, 'radical-pluralism', is said to have become 'the mainstream perspective for British and European Industrial Relations': it 'centres on a Marxian, sociological conception of the employment relationship, which structures explanations of power and conflict' (Ackers, 2014: 2608).

Fox's taxonomy has been utilised in a wide range of studies. Many of these concern aspects of what he called managerial relations, including those of industrial conflict, human resource management, management strategy and union-management partnerships – for example, Moore and Gardner (2004), Geare et al. (2006) and Ross and Bamber (2009).

However, Fox's framework has also been extended into what he termed matters of market relations, to become a broader ideological framework which is used to analyse industrial relations in general, and to some extent it has supplanted reference to the political ideologies in that discipline. For example, Giles (1989) fashioned a typology of theories of the state based on the categories of unitarism, pluralism, elite theory and class theory in industrial relations; Belford and Budd (2009) have used the concepts in the context of public policy.

Australian employment relations textbooks are illustrative of this tendency. Barely, a mention of socialism, labourism, liberalism or conservatism is to be found in them. Instead, they base their discussion of ideology on Fox's framework (Balnave et al., 2007; Bray et al., 2011, 2014; Sappey et al., 2009; Teicher et al., 2006, 2013).

Whereas political scientists debate whether the Prices and Incomes Accord could be characterised as consistent with the ALP's labourist or social democratic traditions (Dow and Lafferty, 2007), in the employment relations texts the Accord is rendered as an instance of pluralism, as are contemporary Labor ideology and policy:

> In Australia, the Accord between the ACTU and the Labor government under Prime Ministers Hawke and Keating during the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as practice based on pluralist values … while the Rudd-Gillard Labor Government made many statements and implemented many policy initiatives that bear the hallmark of pluralism. Typical was the rhetoric in support of unions and collective bargaining in the Labor Party's policy statement before the 2007 election … (Bray et al., 2014: 59)

On other issues, political ideology is omitted altogether. Social liberalism is an essential concept in explaining the emergence of the ameliorating regulatory state in Australia and the introduction of compulsory arbitration which came to dominate industrial relations for most of the 20th century. However, the textbook accounts of this historical development generally omit reference to social liberalism, with barely a passing mention by Bray et al. (2011: 87). Similarly, all of the textbooks cover in detail trade unions and the state in Australian industrial relations, including in the historical context; again, however, these analyses occur with barely a reference to liberalism, socialism, labourism or conservatism.

Liberalism is a key explanatory concept in the historical transformation of the nature and regulation of work relations from feudal, agricultural society to industrial society. Some of the texts describe the legal and economic aspects of this transition, but omit reference to liberalism from their accounts (e.g. Sappey et al., 2009). The title of Teicher et al.'s (2006: 26–30) extended discussion of this transition even borrows the famous catchphrase 'from status to contract' from the liberal Maine, but the following discussion proceeds without a single mention of liberalism.

The one political ideology that is mentioned extensively in the texts is neoliberalism. However, these discussions are undertaken without explanation of the fundamental ideological precepts or tradition underpinning classical liberalism or the alternative political ideologies which neoliberals aim to supplant – namely, social liberalism, social democracy and labourism.

Conclusion

The disconnect between the two discursive frameworks or approaches to ideology has several implications. First, it creates a shallow or inadequate understanding of industrial relations phenomena in the employment relations literature. Within the disciplines of political science, history and law, there exist extensive bodies of literature on many industrial relations phenomena based on the traditional language of political ideologies. By eschewing the terminology of these existing bodies of knowledge, employment

relations accounts of these phenomena can be rendered superficial and etiolated. They have difficulty engaging with the main political discourses reflected in the major parties of government – they are particularist and synchronic rather than universal and genealogical. On those occasions in which employment relations writers attempt to analyse these phenomena through the prism of Fox's taxonomy, they need to start afresh and construct their own disconnected analysis – such as Bray et al.'s (2014) analysis of the Hawke Labor Government's 1980s Prices and Incomes Accord. On other occasions, employment relations writers who eschew the traditional discourses on political ideologies lack adequate terminology to describe and analyse certain phenomena – for example, the ideological shift in the transition to liberal capitalism simply cannot be described using the terminology Fox's taxonomy.

Second, and perhaps most crucially, the use of its own discourse on ideology renders employment relations scholarship opaque to writers on and students of labour relations issues coming from other disciplines, familiar with the conventional political ideological categories, who are confronted with a different set of ideological terms, used for similar phenomena. This opacity hinders access to employment relations scholarship and limits opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. Fox's framework seems to exist independently of political ideology as it is otherwise discussed, developed and enacted in the Australian context. Fox's approach suggests that the employment relationship is sui generis within the larger political economy without first establishing this implicit claim. Above all, however, the use of Fox's interpretative framework as a substitute for political analysis of the type used elsewhere in social science adds unnecessarily to a fragmentation of intellectual production concerning the employment relationship and renders much employment relations scholarship unnecessarily abstruse.

Funding

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