WORKS COUNCILS

Consultation, Representation, and Cooperation in Industrial Relations

Edited by
Joel Rogers and Wolfgang Streeck

National Bureau of Economic Research
Comparative Labor Markets Series
As labor union membership has declined in the United States, workers' influence in the workplace has decreased. Because industry needs workers to continue to be involved in changing production systems, and because both employers and workers have become dissatisfied with existing structures of workplace regulation, the search has begun for new ways of providing a voice for workers outside the traditional collective bargaining relationship.

Works councils—institutionalized bodies for representative communication between an employer and employees in a single workplace—are rare in the Anglo-American world, but are well-established in other industrialized countries. The contributors to this volume survey the history, structure, and functions of works councils in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Poland, Canada, and the United States. Special attention is paid to the relations between works councils and unions and collective bargaining, works councils and management, and the role and interest of governments in works councils. On the basis of extensive comparative data from other Western countries, the book demonstrates that well-designed works councils may offer a solution to many of the management-labor problems that beset America's workplaces today.

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Works Councils
Consultation, Representation, and Cooperation in Industrial Relations

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Comparative institutional analysis requires extensive communication between researchers from different countries. In directing our project, we were lucky to be able to hold two project conferences. A first workshop took place in May 1991 in Madison, made possible by grants from the Washington Bureau of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and from the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung in Düsseldorf, a foundation maintained by the German Union Federation (DGB) and devoted to the study of co-determination. Dieter Dettke and Gerhard Leminsky, respectively, represented the two organizations and helped give us the confidence that our work would come to a good end. The conference was also attended by a number of representatives of American unions—in particular, James Cavanaugh (Wisconsin South Central Federation of Labor), Larry Cohen (Communications Workers of America), Jay Foreman (United Food and Commercial Workers), Peggy Kelly (Service Employees International Union), Charles McDonald (AFL-CIO), David Newby (Wisconsin AFL-CIO), Chris Schenk (Ontario Federation of Labour), and Denny Scott (United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners)—whose comments and advice greatly improved our understanding of the problems of workplace representation in a North American setting.
One year later, the second project conference was hosted by the International Institute for Labour Studies at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva. We are still impressed with the unending attention to detail with which our friends at the Institute, in particular Werner Sengenberger and Duncan Campbell, helped make this conference as productive as it turned out to be. Conference participants also had the benefit of excellent comments on the draft papers from some of the leading experts on labor relations, who graciously took the time out of their busy schedules to contribute to our work. For their comments, we thank Robert Boyer, Duncan Campbell, Colin Crouch, Gerhard Leminsky, Charles McDonald, Bernd Marin, Werner Sengenberger, Tiziano Treu, and Kirsten Wever.

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Introduction