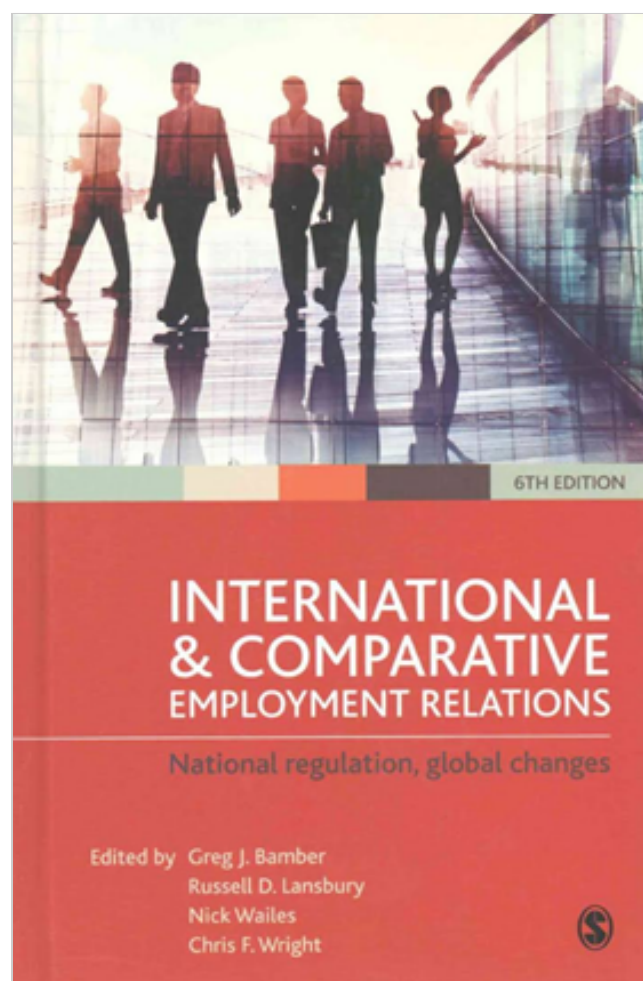


Navigating national regulations and global changes: international and comparative employment

International & Comparative Employment Relations: National Regulation, Global Changes, 6th ed. Edited by Greg J. Bamber, Russell D. Lansbury, Nick Wailes, and Chris F. Wright. Washington, DC: Sage Publications, 2016, 418 pp., \$73.00 softcover.

In this sixth edition of *International & Comparative Employment Relations: National Regulation, Global Changes*, editors Greg J. Bamber, Russell D. Lansbury, Nick Wailes, and Chris F. Wright revise their seminal work by sharpening theories that analyze the world of employment and updating their discussion of national employment systems in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, China, India, Japan, and Korea. With individual chapters authored by experts in those particular countries, the book is directed at policymakers, academics, students, and business and worker representatives seeking to better understand and navigate employment relations within and across a host of countries.

The book's approach is particularly important at a time when trends toward economic globalization are increasingly countered by governments trying to preserve the autonomy of their own employment systems. While, in some respects, national employment systems have moved toward convergence around international principles, in other respects these systems remain deeply entrenched in national legal, social, and cultural traditions. Indeed, as the authors note, rather than spelling the demise of the nation state, globalization enhances its importance in maintaining national economic competitiveness. As a result, global trends in employment, such as subcontracting, may be



treated very differently in different countries, trapping the unwary and uninformed policymaker and labor relations practitioner.

In an introductory chapter, which presents a framework for understanding the country-specific chapters, Bamber, Lansbury, Wailes, and Wright cite the great industrial relations theorist John Dunlop, quoting Julian Huxley, who, in 1958, observed that “[m]ountains of facts have been piled on the plains of human ignorance. . . . The many worlds of industrial relations have been changing more rapidly than the ideas to interpret, to explain and determine them.” Mindful of this warning, the editors aim to ensure that our analytical tools are informed by, and are relevant to, the bewildering complexity of evolving employment relationships under a range of regulatory schemes.

The study of comparative employment relations, as Bamber, Lansbury, Wailes, and Wright note, can help us (1) make more effective cross-border decisions with better knowledge of different systems, (2) find and apply useful models and best practices from other countries, and (3) improve our overarching employment theories through a better understanding of specific systems. Addressing the vexing problem of inconsistent use of common terms, they discuss conceptual equivalence (different measures for the same concept), contextualized comparisons, and “different case” comparisons (comparisons of similar issues in different countries), noting the traditional approaches to resolving conflicts of *interests* and conflicts of *rights*.

Because employment relations are best understood in the context of broader economic systems, the editors apply *theories of capitalist diversity*, emphasizing how different aspects of the economy interact and complement each other over particular domestic institutional structures. They note especially the difference between *liberal market economies* (LMEs) and *coordinated market economies* (CMEs), both having the following spheres in which firms must develop relations to resolve coordination problems: (1) industrial relations, (2) vocational training and education, (3) corporate governance, (4) interfirm relations, and (5) employee relations.

Following the introductory chapter are chapters on the LMEs of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Each of these chapters reviews that particular country’s labor force; the role of labor, management, and state actors; the country’s legal reforms and economic policies; and the actors’ approaches to dispute settlement, collective bargaining, and employment policy. In the first chapter, Jeremy Waddington focuses on national debates in the United Kingdom over “fairness at work” (in matters such as pay equity and treatment of immigrant workers) and the impact of European Union legislation on individual employment rights and worker information and consultation rights. Then, Harry C. Katz and Alexander J. S. Colvin discuss growing inequality, coupled with a growing variation in employment practices, as unions decline in the United States. Next, Daphne G. Taras and Scott Walsworth examine the differences between private-sector provincial and central-level employment practices, with their mix of U.S.-style individualism and European traditions of collectivism, and the rapidly changing public sector in Canada. Finally, capping the discussion of LMEs, editors Wright and Lansbury join forces to write about productivity, gender equality, and precarious employment in Australia.

The book goes on to examine issues relating to the mixed LME–CME countries of Italy and France. In the next chapter, Lucio Baccaro and Valeria Pulignano focus on the growth of a new form of corporatism in Italy after the financial crisis in that country’s private and public sectors. Then, Patrice Laroche considers the enhanced

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governmental role in France in light of the unstable nature of employment relations in that nation. In addition, he contrasts the French unions' relative power in public debates and collective bargaining with their declining paid membership.

As Berndt K. Keller and Anja Kirsch note in the next chapter, Germany, a CME, is a study in contrasts. On one hand, it has relatively strong unions in industry-level bargaining and work councils influencing corporate decisionmaking; on the other hand, it has moved toward increased labor market flexibility with a statutory minimum wage (with less reliance on industry-wide bargaining) and decentralized collective bargaining. Following that analysis is Jørgen Steen Madsen, Jesper Due, and Søren Kaj Andersen's chapter on Denmark, a country notable for the "remarkably robust" condition of its model of worker and employer associations, despite moving toward a multilevel approach to regulation and bargaining.

Japanese employment relations, note Hiromasa Suzuki, Katsuyuki Kubo, and Kazuya Ogura in the next chapter, are adapting to changes in production, with "atypical" employment growing, manufacturing moving to other countries, and the workforce changing (e.g., the pensionable age increasing from 60 to 65 because of the country's aging population). In Korea, by contrast, says Byoung-Hoon Lee, despite the labor-management councils' role in promoting cooperation and active collective bargaining (required in all enterprises with 30 or more employees), the "quality of working life" is declining sharply.

The chapter on China is particularly useful, given the importance of the Chinese economy and its significantly different characteristics from those of other countries covered in the book. Author Fang Lee Cooke explains that the Chinese economy's mix of market-driven government control and *guanxi* (personal, family, and community relationships), combined with rapid growth and centralized institutional employer and worker organizations, must be understood in order to properly evaluate the impact of a raft of new labor laws and dispute resolution processes.

Although, like China, India has a large population and a strong central government, it has a very different system for resolving disputes and regulating worker–employer relations. In the final chapter in the body of the text, Anil Verma and Shyam Sundar observe that, despite economic reforms encouraging "liberalization, privatization, and globalization," India's relatively complex set of restrictions that protect those working in the formal sector do not extend to the majority of the country's workers, who toil in the informal sector.

In sum, in this most recent edition, the editors and contributors build, refine, and expand their analysis of employment relations and apply it to a much larger set of workers and employers than they did in previous editions of the book. Next, I hope that we will see a further expansion to cover other countries, such as Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Vietnam, and perhaps even Tunisia or Morocco, in the Middle East–North Africa region. Casting the net this wide, however, might require an additional volume rather than just a new edition.