NOTEWORTHY BOOKS IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND LABOR ECONOMICS, 2015*

The Industrial Relations Section is pleased to announce that this year’s winner of the **William G. Bowen Award** is *A class by herself: protective laws for women workers, 1890s-1990s* by Nancy Woloch. The winner of the **Richard A. Lester Award** is *Inequality: what can be done?* by Anthony B. Atkinson.


Based on his nearly 50 years of research regarding the economics of inequality in multiple countries, Atkinson argues that inequality is not inevitable within a capitalist society. Providing easily understandable explanations of complex economic concepts, the renowned economist discusses the various dimensions of inequality, describes changes in economic inequality over time, and suggests policies that could significantly reduce this inequality by shifting income distribution in developed countries. Atkinson presents 15 ambitious proposals to significantly reduce inequality including: global taxation of wealth, a minimum inheritance, increased spending on social protection, and guaranteed public employment. He then discusses the feasibility of his proposals, considers objections, and outlines approaches to implementation. Throughout the book, Atkinson maintains an optimistic view of the global economic future. He concludes with a call to action: “It is individuals who will ultimately determine whether the proposals set out here are implemented and whether the ideas are pursued” (p. 307).


Using content from interviews with policymakers and subject experts and data from Eurostat, the International Labour Organization, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Boling conducts a comparative analysis of work-family policies in France, Germany, Japan, and the United States (U.S.). The political science scholar emphasizes the key role these policies play in promoting gender equality and providing children with strong foundations. Main themes of the country case studies include the politics of work-family policymaking and why welfare states approach and respond differently to supporting working parents and their children. Considerate evaluation of relevant policies is followed by recommendations for work-family policy changes. Reforming policies to help countries improve support for working mothers and children is imperative because comparative data reveal that “more generous work-family policies help cultivate demographically stable, egalitarian societies” (p. 204). Effective reform requires serious consideration of historical context and political and institutional structure and power as well as understanding factors that facilitate and impede work-family policy adoption.

* International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) are given to facilitate ordering from vendors or other purchasing outlets. All issues can be found in PDF format at http://www.irs.princeton.edu/publications/selected-references.

Part of the “Research in Labor Economics” series, this volume deals with gender and labor force participation from an international perspective. Contributors explore relationships between converging male/female wages and occupational structures and other trends including relative education levels and labor force participation rates. The volume begins with a historical review of these trends, detailing considerable changes in the working lives of men and women in most countries since the 1950s. This is followed by introduction of a biological theory underlying domestic division of labor and gender wage gap trends, empirically supported by examining the effect of the one-child law in China on age and education gaps between husbands and wives. Additional contributions focus on various aspects of labor-related gender convergence including public policy and labor supply. Occupational segregation and the impact of family on gender gaps in wages and career progression are also discussed. Using quantitative analysis, contributors determine whether gender convergence has truly occurred within the global labor market.


Historical review of the protection of collective bargaining and freedom of association reveals a decline over the past 30 years. Concluding that protection of labor rights in general is “under stress” (p. 4), academic contributors representing multiple disciplines turn their focus to public and private initiatives designed to strengthen enforcement of labor rights. Included in their analyses are trade unions, corporate social responsibility policies, economic and trade policies, and emerging private initiatives. Through lenses of law, management, political economy, political science, and sociology, these experts assess and contemplate the strengths and weaknesses of these initiatives. Understanding that labor rights violations often transcend national boundaries, requiring coordinated action, contributors analyze complexities inherent in governing labor rights on a global scale. The legal framework of the International Labour Organization, which serves as the fundamental protection of labor rights, is woven throughout.


Contributors conduct comprehensive theoretical and empirical investigations of various aspects of economic and social inequalities that developed when the formerly planned European economies transitioned to market economies. Focusing on the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and new entrants to the European Union from the Baltic region and Central and Eastern Europe, they take both a macroeconomic approach, tracking aggregate levels of personal income inequality and functional income distribution, and perform microeconomic analyses of earnings inequalities. Using multiple datasets that cover up to 20 years from the start of the transition, with a focus on the effects of the recent global financial crisis, these academics employ various methodological approaches to analyze gender disparities, income mobility, and education and job-based inequalities. They conclude by describing welfare provisions and redistributive preferences, goals, and arrangements present in these post-communist economies, revealing an underlying complex interaction of factors that influence individual attitudes and institutional outcomes.

This volume consists of a collection of edited research papers presented during a 2013 seminar held at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research in Mumbai. Contributors examine recent developments in employment and labor in India, describing structural changes and noting institutional challenges. Dimensions of job quality, gender discrimination, an aging population, and their impact on the services and manufacturing sectors are explored. Several contributors take a broader view by focusing on the general labor market and national economic growth, while others perform qualitative analyses of the judicial interpretation of worker protection and labor laws during a period of relaxed restrictions on the national economy. Detailed empirical analysis of government data reveals developing patterns of change within and between sectors that challenge popular theories and the common understanding of employment growth within an economy undergoing rapid development. By highlighting India’s challenges rooted in employment growth and reallocation of economic activity across broad industry sectors, contributors hope to encourage policy discussions regarding employment and growth within India.


Based on updated empirical research contributions to the Asian-European Labour Forum, this volume deals with minimum wage, income inequality, trade unions, collective bargaining, and economic policy at a national level for eight Asian countries and eight European countries. Rich in data, each chapter addresses the role and effectiveness of minimum wage setting in relation to national income inequality, social security, and economic development. Individual country chapters are supplemented by chapters on Asia and Europe that compare and contrast relevant national aspects, resulting in macroeconomic policy implications. Contributors assess the progress of national economic recovery and consider the feasibility of a worldwide redistributive wage policy. They explore alternatives to export-led economic recovery strategies implemented in leading Asian and European countries including China, Japan, and Germany, which have compounded issues associated with rising income inequality. In particular, contributors focus on wage- and demand-led strategies “grounded on free collective bargaining and, if feasible, well-designed minimum wage-setting systems, supported by the expansion and strengthening of social protection” (p. xviii).


Non-standard (“precarious”) employment consisting of jobs that are low paying and lack long-term security have captured the attention of labor economists. Women, migrants, young people, the elderly, and low skilled individuals tend to be overrepresented and trapped in precarious work. Through comparative empirical analysis and country case studies, contributors to this volume explore patterns of non-standard employment in the U.S. and Europe. Case studies of Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. reveal that precarious employment is not distributed evenly across occupations. This may be explained by the degree of flexibility that employers have and worker supply, demand, and skills. Occupational differences in employment insecurity, flexibility, mobility patterns, and female non-standard employment are explored in depth. The volume concludes by investigating the role of trade unions and vocational training systems in reducing the prevalence of precarious employment.

Exploring multiple bases of discrimination and their relationship to the labor market in the U.S. and Europe (focusing on Italy and Spain), this volume draws from a report prepared for the 2012 European conference of the Fondazione Rodolfo Debenedetti and discussion during the event. Education and marriage data gathered by several contributors is analyzed to estimate self-selection issues (for example, married women staying home to raise children because they anticipate wage discrimination in the labor market) and typically unobserved choices (such as psychological traits and preferences). Analysis of data gathered from Milan reveals that college major and occupational choice are significant determinants of employment and wage gaps between men and women. Expanding the empirical research to consider other dimensions of discrimination including sexual orientation, religion, obesity, and other aspects of physical appearance, another team of contributors discovers drastic differences in employment and wage outcomes. These findings indicate there is room for improved enforcement of European anti-discrimination labor laws.


The decline of trade unions in the English-speaking world has left many employees without formal representation. Non-union employee representation (NER) programs are mechanisms for employees to be heard and become more involved in the workplace. Committees, councils, and voice and involvement forums representing workers during dealings with management are examples of NER created by companies in non-union environments. In this volume, expert contributors analyze data from an international longitudinal study and take a comparative approach that reflects both industrial relations and human resource management perspectives. Detailed case studies of NER plans established in twelve for- and not-for-profit organizations across Australia, Britain, Canada, and the U.S. provide insight into what drives the establishment of NER, the forms that NER takes, positive and negative aspects of NER from employer and employee perspectives, and organizational factors contributing to the success and failure of these programs over the long-term. Contributors discover that NER has experienced a “renewal” in the last three decades, “continues to be highly variegated in terms of structure, function, and motive,” and “comes in an amazing welter of forms, shapes, and sizes” (p. 34). Results of this research have action-oriented implications for decision-makers within business and government.


Academic historian Woloch analyzes the roles and influences of women-only protective legislation from the end of the 19th century through most of the 20th century. Supported by primary source records, personal accounts, and scholarship, Woloch reveals that this legislation was a double-edged sword, paving the way for modern labor standards while inhibiting equal rights for women. Woloch traces minimum wage, maximum hour, occupational exclusion, and other single-sex protective labor laws from their inception, to mid-century attacks by feminists, to their demise at the hands of workplace equality advocates. She reveals that these laws served a dual purpose, rectifying unique labor market disadvantages for women while opening the door to general labor standards for all workers. This rationale appealed to multiple constituencies and initially succeeded but ultimately led to the collapse of protective laws for women during the 1960s and 1970s. However, relevant debates continued and questions remain. Woloch’s narrative history and comprehensive analysis add to the scholarly conversation regarding this intersection of women’s history and legal history, considering the context, goals, effects, resistance, and ramifications of single-sex protective legislation in rich detail.