

# Owners, Managers, and Industrial Relations in Coal Mining: An International Comparison

Seminar veranstaltet von  
Gerald D. Feldman  
7.-8. Juli 1988\*

*Teilnehmer:* David Brody (Davis and Berkeley, California), Youssef Cassis (Genf), Roy Church (Norwich), Reiner Hoffmann (Düsseldorf), Reinhard Kuhlmann (Düsseldorf), Ginette Kurgan (Brüssel), Franz Mathis (Innsbruck), Joel Michel (Paris), Manfred Peters (Bochum), Jean Puissant (Brüssel), Klaus Tenfelde (Innsbruck), Bernd Weisbrod (Hagen), Jonathan Zeitlin (London).

The purpose of the seminar was to discuss the drafts of the papers to be included in a volume dealing with employers and industrial relations in the coal mining industries of Austria (Mathis), Belgium (Kurgan & Puissant), France (Michel), Germany (Weisbrod), Great Britain (Church), and the United States (Brody). A concluding comparative essay will be written by the editor (Feldman), and the volume is to appear in the series organized and edited by Prof. Klaus Tenfelde in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the IG Bergbau.

Jonathan Zeitlin, whose approach to the problems of the history of industrial relations seemed particularly relevant to the projects, was invited to open the seminar with a general discussion of the categories of analysis that might prove most helpful in giving the project a measure of common direction and coherence. He urged that an 'extended institutional approach' be employed, that is, an effort to deal with industrial relations as a set of institutionally structured relationships, even where they involve informal processes, rather than either as simple responses to markets and technology or as class relations.

This perspective appeared particularly appropriate to the coal mining industry which has everywhere been regarded as a 'special' industry, not only because of the peculiar features of coal mining with respect to organization and structure of work, but also because of its national importance in the industrialization process, in wartime, and in current efforts to deal with its problems as, on the one hand, a declining industry and, on the other, as an important element in national energy policies.

\* Das Seminar wurde gefördert durch die Otto und Martha Fischbeck-Stiftung.

Both in the opening presentation by Zeitlin and in the subsequent discussion, there was general agreement that certain institutions and structures deserved particular attention for comparative purposes: the structure of firms and concerns and the degree to which they were parts of horizontal and vertical organizations; the role played by "paternalism" and "welfare policy" and their significance; the treatment of workers, especially such problems as discipline, safety, and cheating of workers; the organization of work and policies concerning rationalization; the regulation of product and labor markets; employer collective action; trade union organization and the relationship between unions, the political system, and Socialist movements; union and employer policies with respect to wages and employment as well as attitude toward nationalization and co-determination; the role of the state as regulator of the industry, mediator and arbiter of industrial disputes, and owner and employer in the industry. In every national case, the problem of 'tripartism', that is, the evolving relationship of labor, management, and the state appeared to be of great importance.

In the course of the seminar there was much discussion of the extent to which "national culture" could explain differences in the historical development of industrial relations. The general consensus was that regional differences and temporal development were more significant explanatory categories. Nevertheless, patterns of market control did appear to be an important difference among the national industries, a difference often closely related to legal systems and arguments could be made for the existence of differing entrepreneurial cultures based on social origins, modes of recruitment and training and education. This discussion suggested the importance of identifying the owners and managers more precisely, paying closer attention to the national and international markets served by the various coal industries as well as the reactions of various coal mining industrialists to developments outside their own region or country, and of accounting for and linking the economic and social aspects of the industry.

Gerald D. Feldman

## Note

1 See especially his "From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations", *The Economic History Review*, Vol. XL, No. 2, May 1987, pp. 159-184.