Introduction to “Killing Unions with Culture: Institutions, Inequality, and the Effects of Labor’s Decline in the United States”

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Published online: 18 December 2014
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Much has been written in recent years about the factors contributing to the current weakness of the US trade union movement. Union density in this country, for example, has not reached such a low level since 1916. Coinciding with organized labor’s decline over the last 30 years is the concomitant rise in economic inequality in the United States which became a rallying point for the Occupy Wall Street Movement when it was formed more than three years ago. More recently, increasing economic inequality has been reignited as a hot topic of conversation in the United States with the publication of the English translation of Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* in April 2014.

The article published in this issue’s “Perspectives Section” deals with both topics – the decline of US organized labor and economic inequality. In this first-rate, perceptive, original and extremely well-written essay, Dr. Raymond L. Hogler, Professor of Management at Colorado State University; Dr. Herbert G. Hunt III, Professor of Accounting at California Polytechnic State University; and Dr. Stephan Weiler, Professor of Economics and Research Associate Dean at Colorado State University, take an interesting approach in trying to understand the foundation for the current weakness of the US trade union movement in the middle of the twenty-first century’s second decade. The authors contend that declining union density rates and increasing economic inequality is due to “America’s exceptional cultural values” which can be traced back several centuries to the country’s formation. Specifically, they claim that “cultural attitudes” were shaped through the development of colonization in the United States and the system of slavery which hindered the growth of general trust within the nation. Based on these cultural attitudes, which affects how people interpret the world as well as their political orientations, citizens come to support and advocate policy positions based on their “cultural cognition.” Hogler, Hunt, and Weiler argue that studies demonstrate that individuals’ viewpoints concerning “collective action and social justice versus individual efficacy and social hierarchy” is determinative of the implementation of public policies. The authors provide empirical evidence in defense of their position.

If any of the journal’s readers are interested in responding to any essays published in the “Perspectives” Section or would like to write articles on any topics in the field of employee relations, please do not hesitate to contact me with your proposal. I welcome both practitioner-based and scholarly-based articles written from any one of a variety of theoretical perspectives. I hope that you enjoy this article and find it most illuminating.

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