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Employee Relations

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MACMILLAN

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Preface

There can be few subjects which receive as much attention as employee relations, or industrial relations as it is often called. It is constantly in the newspapers and on television; it is the source of countless pub discussions.

The first version of this book was called *Understanding Industrial Relations*. The title change – to *Employee Relations* – helps to distinguish this book, which has been significantly updated, from that one – and also reflects an important change that occurred in the 1980s. At the beginning of the decade trade unions were powerful and confident; it was generally considered that most issues in most workplaces would involve a trade union presence. By the end of the decade the unions were under pressure and on the defensive; the general wisdom now is that in many workplaces relationships between managers and employees will only occasionally, if ever, involve the unions. In practice, not all that much may have changed; and the structure of this book at least remains the same. The title change does, however, emphasise the wide scope of the subject matter.

This book then will generally use the words ‘employee relations’ and ‘industrial relations’ interchangeably, though more often utilising the former. Whatever we call it, the fact remains that for many of us our knowledge of the subject matter is somewhat scanty.

Often this may not matter too much – lack of knowledge rarely prevents people having an opinion! For two groups, however, such ignorance can be crucial: *Employee Relations* provides some basic facts and raises some of the central issues specifically for these groups.

There are, first, practitioners. These include managers – in industry, in commerce, in the public sector, in large and small organisations. A central part of their task involves managing their relationship with their subordinates, though often they have little training in or experience of employee relations. This practitioner category also includes union representatives.

Second, there are those who are about to face up to employee relations in the UK: students who are completing their courses and hoping to get a job, people moving into jobs with greater industrial relations responsibilities and managers from abroad coming to this country for the first time. This book will help them all to understand employee relations.

It is of course a contentious and value-laden subject. That is what makes it so fascinating. Facts about employee relations may be neutral but the way they are presented can vary. I have set out to challenge opinions – not to get you to change your mind, but to make you clearer about the basis of your opinion. In order to do so I have tried to make the book easy to read and to convey the excitement of the subject. Perhaps where it falls short of these targets you could take it as a challenge!

Whilst I have tried to write simply and clearly I have tried to remain analytical. This is not a schoolboy text. It requires, at least, an intelligent appreciation of the daily news and, at best, experience within employing organisations.

The first chapter of the book examines the subject of employee relations in general, and the next three consider the main parties involved: the management, the unions and the state. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the legal framework, and the following three chapters examine employee relations practice in employing organisations.

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C.B.