‘A Clear and Honest Understanding’: Alan Fox and the Origins and Implications of Radical Pluralism

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My driving force was to understand the society around me … If asked to justify this activity I would have argued that there is intrinsic as well as instrumental value in striving towards a clear and honest understanding of the social structures which we create and which help to create us.[[1]](#footnote-1)

There has been considerable soul searching in recent years among industrial relations theorists about the future of the discipline. Changes in employment structure, the decline of union densities and the erosion of collective bargaining across the industrialized world have led to a sense of unease and introspection among industrial relations academics. These have been exacerbated in the UK by the uneven performance of New Labour governments, which enacted new collective rights to union recognition, introduced the national minimum wage and signed the social chapter, but also failed to restore the bulk of the union rights removed by Conservative governments in the 1980s and 1990s.[[2]](#footnote-2) Since then, the Trade Union Act 2016 has revealed a renewed effort by another Conservative government to reduce the influence of organized labour still further.[[3]](#footnote-3) Industrial relations as a discipline has moreover come under attack as university departments and courses have been redesigned as human resource management (HRM), even though some observers argue that HRM lacks the breadth of industrial relations, reflecting merely ‘one facet of the managerial function’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

One of the consequences of this intellectual turbulence has been a renewed interest in the origins and history of industrial relations, which has helped to inform debate about the discipline as a field of study or even as a ‘paradigm’. Interest has focused in particular on the significance of the ‘Oxford School’ of industrial relations specialists responsible for the Donovan Report in 1968, arguably the high water mark of the influence of industrial relations academics in the UK.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Oxford School – whose nucleus consisted of Hugh Clegg and Allan Flanders[[6]](#footnote-6) – was distinguished by three features of its members’ work: the issues they identified for analysis (unofficial strikes, wage drift and restrictive practices); a pluralist frame of reference (as both a description of how the industrial relations system did operate and a prescription for how it should operate); and solutions (a reformist and pragmatic emphasis on re-establishing a new value-consensus and social order, both within the enterprise and within sectors).

Three key articles advanced this influential paradigm of industrial relations thinking: the first analysed the notion of collective bargaining as a rule-making process between employers and unions;[[7]](#footnote-7) the second examined the fragmentation of these processes in the 1950s and 1960s, concluding that the Durkheimian concept of ‘anomie’, or ‘normlessness’, characterized the result;[[8]](#footnote-8) and the third proposed a series of solutions – examined below – designed to rectify the perceived problems.[[9]](#footnote-9) These articles all reflect a certain understanding of ‘pluralism’, a term that notoriously ranges across ‘a loose and incomplete set of ideas, beliefs and values’.[[10]](#footnote-10) For Flanders and Alan Fox, ‘pluralism’ is here a theory of ‘social differentiation’ rather than a theory of competition, choice and decision-making as generally understood in political science. For them, ‘the key issue is the maintenance of social integration despite group autonomy and government non-intervention’.[[11]](#footnote-11) In their sense, ‘pluralism’ meant the preferred managerial ideology at workplace and company level, as well as the associated prescriptive strategy that informed the policies of ‘bargained corporatism’ adopted by Labour governments in the 1970s.[[12]](#footnote-12)

By the time of the so-called ‘Winter of Discontent’ (1978–79), it had become clear that such notions of pluralism no longer provided a sufficiently acceptable foundation for reforming industrial relations practice. The election of the Conservative government in 1979 inaugurated ideologically committed unitary anti-union policies at national, company and workplace levels that side-lined pluralist approaches. Understanding the state of industrial relations theory and practice today requires an analysis of how the vacuum that pluralist strategy left behind has been filled by policy-makers.

In attempts at such an analysis, recent work has focused on the legacies of Flanders and Clegg.[[13]](#footnote-13) It is surprising that the contribution of Fox (1920–2002) has been somewhat overlooked, though there are partial re-evaluations of his earlier and later work.[[14]](#footnote-14) Fox is widely known for his analysis of ‘unitary’ and ‘pluralistic’ frames of reference,[[15]](#footnote-15) but his most significant contribution to industrial relations theory remains his later elaboration of ‘radical pluralism’ (the ‘later Fox’), a frame of reference that continues to inform numerous contemporary textbooks and monographs.[[16]](#footnote-16) Radical pluralism, recently dubbed ‘this new IR conventional wisdom’,[[17]](#footnote-17) foreshadows the emergence of HRM, helps explain why the alleged achievements of HRM remain contested, and reinforces the case that industrial relations and HRM seek to cast the employment relationship in their own distinctive manner. In particular, it requires policy makers to address the social inequalities that structure the employment relationship when seeking to address workplace ‘problems’, without which sources of potential conflict cannot be removed.

Indeed, in his key works on radical pluralism, *Beyond Contract* and its ‘lighter’ version, *Man Mismanagement*, Fox acknowledged that policy needs to tackle the structural inequalities embedded in the employment relationship before high-trust relationships at work can ever materialize.[[18]](#footnote-18) The failure of pluralist strategy to tackle such inequalities in the 1970s left a policy vacuum with renewed forms of unitarism – HRM – apparently the only other significant option left to employers. HRM, which emerged during the 1980s, allegedly offered employers, against the political backdrop of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, ‘unitarism in place of pluralism, optimism in place of uncertainty and progress in place of retrenchment’.[[19]](#footnote-19) While HRM differs in its approaches between a ‘hard’ version, which views workers as a commodity and reasserts management control, and a ‘soft’ version, which aims to win workers’ commitment through motivational techniques, both – in ideological terms – share unitary, anti-trade union perspectives in one form or another.[[20]](#footnote-20) This is not to suggest that pluralism, as a management style, did not endure. It did, and in a variety of forms it remains a significant strand in industrial relations practice to this day.[[21]](#footnote-21) Nevertheless, HRM had consolidated by the early 1990s,[[22]](#footnote-22) and has since spawned a voluminous literature on its implications and effects, as well as numerous critiques.[[23]](#footnote-23) Its spread reflected complex economic, political and social circumstances in the UK,[[24]](#footnote-24) not least, as a precondition, the gradual replacement of industry-wide bargaining by single-employer bargaining as the dominant location of industrial relations by the late 1970s.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Fox himself made only one reference to the term ‘human resource management’ in his published writing. After his retirement, he embarked on what he called a ‘long, happy and enriching period’, working in the comfortable efficiency of the all-volunteer Oxfam bookshop in Oxford, when it came under pressure for better results with the arrival of ‘young men and women in suits asking searching questions’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Following visits ‘Human Resource Management style’,[[27]](#footnote-27) management called a meeting – ‘our opinions were not invited’ – and ominously told the volunteers ‘What Was To Happen’ (capital letters portentously in the original). Fox noted the changes that took place, and added laconically: ‘Takings have continued rising on the same gradient as they have pursued since the year of opening’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Given his work on radical pluralism, it is ironic that, so late in life, Fox and his volunteer colleagues suffered such low-trust treatment at the hands of unitary human resource (HR) managers. Yet, in that one anecdote, he summarized much academic research into HRM both in its characteristics as a management style (top-down) and in its impact on performance (none clearly demonstrable). He also gave a further clue to his views, reminding us of the ever-present power that managers can exert over workers, even volunteers, and hinting that there might be a better way to do things (such as consultation and building trust).

Fox’s significance lies partly in his having appreciated the apparent ‘dead-end’ that managerial pluralism had reached by the end of the 1970s, which subsequently allowed HRM the space to flourish, but it extends deeper into theory too. As this article will emphasize, it is critically important to distinguish – as Fox did – between analyses of industrial relations based on Marxism on the one hand and those based on radical pluralism on the other. Fox’s radical pluralism did *appear* Marxist to some of his pluralist colleagues, but he explicitly rejected revolutionary Marxist prescriptions on the grounds that they ‘offered no convincing procedures of defence against abuses of power and no convincing institutions of political accountability’.[[29]](#footnote-29) Instead, he relied largely on appeals to ‘economic expediency’ and ‘moral conviction’ on the part of management as a means of change, which resulted in his condemnation by Marxist and non-Marxist alike.[[30]](#footnote-30) Since then, various commentators have examined the influences of ÉmileDurkheim on the Oxford School,[[31]](#footnote-31) and Fox himself clearly acknowledged the specific influence of Durkheim on his later work.[[32]](#footnote-32) Yet some commentators continue to gloss Fox’s approach as ‘a Marxist or quasi-Marxist theoretical framework’,[[33]](#footnote-33) or refer to his ‘Marxian ideological conclusions about power and conflict’,[[34]](#footnote-34) or to radical pluralists as a ‘Marxisant group’.[[35]](#footnote-35) While ‘quasi-Marxist’ or ‘Marxisant’ may be understandable – there are indeed resemblances to Marxism – the terms ‘Marxist’ and ‘Marxian’ as such are seriously misleading.

This article, through close reference to Durkheim, demonstrates how radical pluralism differs from Marxist analysis, following other commentators who have argued that Durkheim’s ideas are radical but not revolutionary,[[36]](#footnote-36) and analyses the implications of these differences for industrial relations theory and practice. It then examines three criticisms levelled at radical pluralism by Peter Ackers:[[37]](#footnote-37) what he terms its ‘methodological problem’ (its alleged divide between sociological and historical procedure); its ‘ideological problem’ (the allegedly Marxist assumption that it prioritizes conflict at work over co-operation); and, consequently, its failure to engage adequately with public policy (such as strategies for workplace co-operation). The article concludes that the Durkheimian basis of radical pluralism does, in particular, help to reconnect industrial relations with policy-making, particularly in areas such as corporate social responsibility and the reform of corporate governance. While doctrinaire Marxist objectives, based on class struggle and revolution, may have little to recommend to early twenty-first century UK policy-makers, radical pluralism, with its nuanced understanding of the complexities of social inequalities, has potentially a great deal to offer.

Context: ‘From Donovan to Durkheim’

The Donovan Report had identified two systems of industrial relations in the UK:[[38]](#footnote-38) the ‘formal’ system which assumed industry-wide agreements covering a narrow range of issues, based on written codes; and the ‘informal’ system which gave prime importance to negotiations undertaken at factory or plant level, on a wide range of issues, based on custom and practice. The ‘two systems’ came into conflict since the informal undermined the formal by encouraging unofficial action in the face of established union machinery resulting in unofficial and unconstitutional strikes,[[39]](#footnote-39) wage drift and restrictive practices.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Rejecting the popular belief that excessive union power was to blame for these perceived problems, Flanders and Fox argued that the case for reform was summarized in Durkheim’s concept of ‘anomie’ which described ‘a state of normlessness resulting from a breakdown in social regulation ... [that] may be produced by an excessive proliferation of different normative systems which are unrelated and divergent’.[[41]](#footnote-41) They maintained that industrial relations systems were normative systems that regulated employment relations. In the UK, the main characteristics of this normative system were found in the primacy accorded to collective bargaining, the notion of voluntarism and an emphasis on uncodified procedures. These principles – like any normative system in general – provided ‘a framework of comparisons and constraints within which otherwise unlimited aspirations can be shaped with some concern for social proportion’.[[42]](#footnote-42) Social order depended, they claimed, on such a framework.

However, changes in power relations might become so great that the normative system – collective bargaining – was unable to deal with the ‘extra conflict’; for example, if one group unilaterally tried to alter the substantive norms (such as when an employer cut wages without notice) or if there was a splintering and breakdown of existing regulative systems. This might take place if larger units of regulation, such as a sector, were replaced by many smaller units, e.g. workplaces, which triggered the fragmentation of bargaining. The maintenance of order would become a problem since different groups established different sets of aspirations, and a multitude of normative systems grew up to deal with them. Indeed, both absence of norms and an excessive proliferation of norms might be described ‘in terms of Durkheim’s characterisation of anomie’.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Full employment and competition, the authors maintained, had created just such disconnected normative systems within British industry, each one sometimes covering no more than a plant-wide agreement. They endorsed Durkheim’s view that:

the strongest succeed in completely demolishing the weakest, or in subordinating them. But if the conquered, for a time, must suffer subordination under compulsion, they do not consent to it, and consequently this cannot constitute a stable equilibrium. Truces, arrived at after violence, are never anything but provisional, and satisfy no one. Human passions stop only before a moral power they respect. If all authority of this kind is wanting, the law of the strongest prevails, and latent or active, the state of war is necessarily chronic.[[44]](#footnote-44)

The clear implication was that a new moral order was required, given that:

Fragmentation today is the cause and effect of disorder of a highly visible kind which is regarded as serious by many opinion groups with otherwise little in common. Its economic effects are palpable; much of the disorder emerging as overt conflict, dislocation and inflation.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The question was how to reconstruct a new, normative order, which Flanders answered in his evidence to the Donovan Commission. His solutions were pragmatic, in that they ‘are all concerned in one way or another with the future of collective bargaining’.[[46]](#footnote-46) This entailed a greater role for the state in regulating hitherto voluntary structures and procedures; for example, a new labour tribunal to cope with problems concerning union recognition and procedures, a degree of legal enforcement for the substantive clauses in collective agreements, initiatives to reform the structure of collective bargaining, and an incomes policy to set collective bargaining within the context of national planning. Many of these features were evident in the evolution of bargained corporatism as the dominant prescriptive pluralist strategy in the 1960s and 1970s.[[47]](#footnote-47) By 1979, the electorate had come to view it as a failure, and the incoming Conservative government moved swiftly to replace it.

Flanders and Durkheim on equality of opportunity

Fox’s development of radical pluralism appears to have stemmed originally from an intellectual revision he carried out on his earlier work as a result of ‘striving towards a clear and honest understanding of the social structures which we create and which help to create us’.[[48]](#footnote-48) Its most immediate and trenchant application was as a critique of Flanders’s work, particularly his selective reliance on Durkheim.

To understand Fox’s critique, two stages must be distinguished in the use that Flanders made of Durkheim’s theory. The first, which was uncontroversial, centred on the distinction that Durkheim drew between ‘mechanical’ and ‘organic’ forms of social solidarity and formed the foundation for the second stage. This second stage involved an analysis of the conditions under which organic solidarity broke down in industrialized societies and ‘anomie’ emerged. It is this second stage that Fox criticized, out of which evolved his own theory of radical pluralism. Below, each stage is examined in turn.

*Durkheim on forms of social solidarity*

Steven Lukes has described Durkheim as ‘haunted by the idea of man and society in disintegration’.[[49]](#footnote-49) In his analysis of the forces of consensus and disintegration, Durkheim made a critical distinction between two forms of solidarity, the ‘mechanical’ and the ‘organic’. Broadly speaking, these existed in traditional and advanced industrialized societies respectively: ‘If there is one rule of conduct which is incontestable, it is that which orders us to realize in ourselves the essential traits of the collective type. Among lower [sic] peoples, this reaches its greatest rigor.’[[50]](#footnote-50) In traditional societies, these ‘essential traits’ became established in a tightly knit body of moral and ideological beliefs which Durkheim terms the *conscience collective* (‘collective consciousness’).[[51]](#footnote-51) He maintained that the main role of punishment – repressive sanctions – was to defend the *conscience collective* against any actions liable to threaten its binding and authoritative nature. Such was ‘mechanical solidarity’.

With the advent of industrialization, the *conscience collective* tended to lose its force because of the developing division of labour which affected not only economic and market relations but also the whole range of social functions, including politics, the law, education and public administration. Under these conditions, ‘the categorical imperative of the moral conscience is assuming the following form: *Make yourself usefully fulfil a determinate function*’ (original emphasis).[[52]](#footnote-52) A different form of solidarity – ‘organic solidarity’ – should then emerge to prevent the break-up of society. As links with tradition, religion and family splintered:

Man [sic] would no longer be sufficiently obligated; he would no longer feel about and above him this salutary pressure of society which moderates his egoism and makes him a moral being. This is what gives moral value to the division of labor. Through it, the individual becomes cognizant of his dependence upon society; from it come the forces which keep him in check and restrain him. In short, since the division of labor becomes the chief source of social solidarity, it becomes, at the same time, the foundation of the moral order.[[53]](#footnote-53)

So advanced societies were characterized by the growth of civil law and ‘restitutive’ sanctions designed to regulate social interaction where formality is necessary. A claim of damages, for instance, was intended to restore the relationships between the two parties to the position before the law was transgressed. Contractual relationships were central to ‘organic’ societies.

The difference between the two types of moral consensus was summarized by Anthony Giddens:

Where mechanical solidarity is the main basis of societal cohesion, the *conscience collective* ‘completely envelops’ the individual consciousness, and therefore presumes identity between individuals. Organic solidarity, by contrast, presupposes not identity but *difference* between individuals in their beliefs and actions. The growth of organic solidarity and the expansion of the division of labour are hence associated with increasing individualism.[[54]](#footnote-54) (original emphasis)

Durkheim did not suggest that commonly-held beliefs completely disappeared in advanced societies – they simply lost their primary role in creating and maintaining the moral consensus. As societies industrialized and developed, people’s functions brought them into certain types of social interaction which gradually evolved regular patterns: these regular patterns over time became rigidified into rules of conduct – or regulative norms – which operated at various levels, such as legal and professional. Acceptance of this moral ordering of society allowed individuals to locate themselves within a stable normative structure which provided the basis of social consensus.

At this stage, the relationship between Flanders and Durkheim is clear. Flanders, at subsystem level, stressed the same features of social organization that Durkheim stressed at societal level: regular patterns of interaction established normative systems. In this way potentially unlimited aspirations were moulded and given priority through the development of institutions; and so divergent interests were reconciled through the agents’ acceptance of the procedures designed to resolve them. Other writers besides Flanders have also pointed out analogies between the industrial relations system and the social system. John Dunlop, for example, observed: ‘the ideology of an industrial-relations system comes to bear a close relationship to the ideology of the particular industrial society of which it is a subsystem’.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Furthermore, Durkheim’s notion of ‘anomie’ is well represented in the quotations already cited from Flanders. For Durkheim, the normal state of advanced societies was one of order based on organic solidarity, which created a taken-for-granted acceptance of certain rules and procedures regulating social interaction. These rules were shared by all members of society who internalized them through the processes of socialization. Anomic behaviour was associated with a breakdown of such rules.

The originality of Flanders lies in having adapted the work of a nineteenth-century French sociologist, examining social disintegration, to throw light on the practical problems of twentieth-century British industrial relations theorists concerned with ‘shop-floor’ power. At this point, no violence seems to have been done to Durkheim in terms of accuracy of concept. Nevertheless, criticism may be levelled at Flanders for ignoring a major element in Durkheim’s thought and thereby de-radicalizing his intentions, in particular over the preconditions necessary for establishing social consensus.

Numerous commentators have pointed out the radical dimensions of Durkheim’s work.[[56]](#footnote-56) One such is Alvin Gouldner, who observed, in 1958, that according to Durkheim the increasing division of labour produced social disorganization only under conditions of anomieor where there was a ‘forced division of labour’ that required people to adopt positions in the division of labour out of kilter with their natural talents.[[57]](#footnote-57) Gouldner continued that Durkheim at this point could have developed two different arguments:

He could have focused either on the problem of anomie or on the study of the forced division of labor. If he had pursued the latter he could, for example, have examined the reasons why the hereditary transmission of wealth or position does not disappear and give way to new social arrangements more in keeping with the modern division of labor.[[58]](#footnote-58)

In fact, Durkheim focused on anomie rather than on the forced division of labour, an important observation to highlight in the context of the following section for three reasons. First, according to Gouldner, Durkheim believed that a degree of moral consensus was required to ensure social solidarity in any society, whether capitalist or socialist, and a focus on the forced division of labour would have reduced the distance between himself and the socialists. In an illuminating comment, Gouldner added that such a focus would also have led Durkheim into an analysis of ‘systems of stratification and power relations, in short into a greater convergence with Marxism’, which would have undermined his preoccupation with the conditions required for social order and stability.[[59]](#footnote-59) There is a striking parallel here with Flanders’s unhappiness with Fox’s later work which did indeed – as the following section demonstrates – pursue such issues of ‘stratification and power relations’. Second, Gouldner’s observations revealed that Durkheim’s radical intentions did remain secondary – if not somewhat obscure – in relation to his main concern with anomie. It is therefore perhaps not so surprising that Flanders might have overlooked this dimension to Durkheim’s analysis. Third, Gouldner repeated his analysis (‘the Durkheimian dilemma’) in his seminal later work, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*.[[60]](#footnote-60) This book was cited by Fox in two of his later works: a chapter on a social critique of pluralism and *Beyond Contract*.[[61]](#footnote-61) It is therefore reasonable to assume that Fox had assimilated Gouldner’s interpretation of Durkheim, however accurate the interpretation itself may be considered.

*Durkheim on anomie*

According to Durkheim, industrialization broke down ‘mechanical solidarity’, the tightly knit body of moral and ideological beliefs that characterized traditional societies. It was replaced in advanced societies by the development of ‘organic solidarity’, a taken-for-granted acceptance of procedures and institutions based on people’s understanding of their dependence on other members of society through the division of labour. Their dependence accordingly led to the development of regulative norms operating at various levels, such as legal and professional: ‘since the division of labor becomes the chief source of social solidarity, it becomes, at the same time, the foundation of the moral order’.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Anomie, the breakdown of these regulative norms, was for Flanders the key to remedying the problems of British industrial relations. However, Fox argued that Flanders ignored a significant aspect of Durkheim’s theory, and so de-radicalized his intentions, particularly with respect to the preconditions he considered necessary for establishing social consensus. Analysing the division of labour, Durkheim observed:

Since a body of rules is the definite form which spontaneously established relations between social functions take in the course of time, we can say, *a priori*,that the state of *anomy* [sic] is impossible wherever solidary organs are sufficiently in contact or sufficiently prolonged.[[63]](#footnote-63)

In referring to the circumstances under which such spontaneity arose, Durkheim was raising different issues from Flanders (who considered the circumstances under which robust social interaction, once established, broke down). Rather, Durkheim was here inquiring into the conditions under which organic solidarity arose in the first place:

the division of labor produces solidarity only if it is spontaneous and in proportion as it is spontaneous. But by spontaneity we must understand not simply the absence of all express violence, but also of everything that can even indirectly shackle the free unfolding of the social force that each carries in himself [sic]. It supposes, not only that individuals are not relegated to determinate functions by force, but also that no obstacle, of whatever nature, prevents them from occupying the place in the social framework which is compatible with their faculties.[[64]](#footnote-64)

The crucial question is, of course, what Durkheim meant by the kind of ‘obstacle, of whatever nature’ which could hinder spontaneity – that is, could prevent people’s occupation of those social positions which were in line with their capacities – and with it, the evolution of organic solidarity.

He distinguished, first of all, between ‘social’ inequalities and ‘natural’ ones. Under conditions of perfect spontaneity, social inequalities should correspond exactly with natural ones (which are left undefined). No ‘external causes’ should affect the role which natural inequalities play in leading a person to carry out the social function to which he or she was best suited. So, equality of opportunity was Durkheim’s central condition for the emergence of organic solidarity, in addition to which he alluded to the notion of redistributive justice to ensure that ‘external causes’ did not impinge on the operation of spontaneity.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Durkheim admitted that such a condition existed nowhere as a ‘realized fact’, and proceeded to list those features of society which counted as ‘external’ constraints on spontaneity. These included closed career-structures and the persistence of customs and prejudices through which ‘a certain distinction is attached to some individuals, a certain lack of distinction attached to others, independent of their merits’.[[66]](#footnote-66) He also emphasized the issue of wealth. Having noted that the suppression of conflict rather than its expression constitutes the real threat to spontaneity, he observed:

even where there remains no vestige of the past, hereditary transmission of wealth is enough to make the external conditions under which the conflict takes place very unequal, for it gives advantages to some which are not necessarily in keeping with their personal worth.[[67]](#footnote-67)

This ‘hereditary transmission of wealth’ must logically depend on the ownership of private property, which therefore became central for Durkheim. According to him, the division of labour produced organic solidarity only when it was spontaneous. In turn, spontaneity referred to the perfect freedom which members of society must enjoy for their occupation of social positions in line with their capacities. Such freedom never, in fact, existed, because of certain social constraints – the ‘hereditary transmission of wealth’ being one such critical example.

As societies developed, and depended increasingly for their cohesion on organic solidarity, it must follow for Durkheim that a major reason for their inability to establish a normative consensus lay in the unequal distribution of ownership and wealth within them:

If they [organized societies] bend all their efforts, and must so bend them, to doing away with external inequalities as far as possible, that is not only because enterprise is good, but because their very existence is involved in the problem. For they can maintain themselves only if all the parts of which they are formed are solidary, and solidarity is possible only under this condition.[[68]](#footnote-68)

However important progress towards justice had been in the past, Durkheim concluded that ‘it gives, in all likelihood, only a small idea of what will be realized in the future’.[[69]](#footnote-69) These passages show the importance that Durkheim attached to genuine equality of opportunity in advanced societies, a side to his work not apparent in Flanders’s adaptation.

Furthermore, since contractual obligations were an integral element in the concept of ‘organic solidarity’, private property, as well as hindering spontaneity, also influenced the balance of power in their settlement. If the parties to negotiation did not share equal access to resources, then the stronger might be able to oblige the weaker to submit to a solution irrespective of its fairness. The weaker might be forced to settle if negotiations disrupted earning power, while the stronger might be able to hold out indefinitely if the ownership of wealth allowed a living irrespective of any disruption. The inheritance of wealth was a device through which the stronger party was historically able to maintain its superior privileges.

Elsewhere, in an extended discussion of the morals of contractual relations, Durkheim stated that ‘It is obvious that inheritance, by creating inequalities among men [sic] from birth, that are unrelated to merit or services, invalidates the whole contractual system at its very roots’.[[70]](#footnote-70) Then, having established that ‘inheritance as an institution results in men [sic] being born either rich or poor’,[[71]](#footnote-71) he asserted that ‘as long as such sharp class differences exist in society, fairly effective palliatives may lessen the injustice of contracts; but in principle, the system operates in conditions which do not allow of justice’.[[72]](#footnote-72) Flanders did not consider this point in his three classic articles: that private property affected both the degree of solidarity that might develop in an advanced society, as well as the justice, or lack of it, inherent in the contracts which regulated behaviour within it.

At this point, the main arguments regarding the derivation of Flanders’s work from Durkheim can be summarized. For Flanders, industrial relations were based on a normative system which regulated the relationships between employer and employee. For Durkheim, organic solidarity evolved in advanced societies owing to the increased interdependence of function resulting from the division of labour. It was for this reason that both writers saw forms of deviant behaviour as a *problem*. Neither was at all self-conscious over imposing his own definitions on behaviour; Flanders, for instance, did not consider the possibility that the ‘informal’ industrial relations system might well work strongly to the advantage of shop-floor workers who would resent attempts to control it from above. Durkheim, in a similar way, stated that: ‘like all social facts, and more generally, all biological facts, … [the division of labour] presents pathological forms which must be analyzed’.[[73]](#footnote-73) The analogy of a social system with a biological one led to little or no attention being paid to the actors’ own self-perceptions, a criticism discussed further below.

A divergence occurs at this stage between Flanders and Durkheim. The former maintained that there had been consensual agreement on procedures within the industrial relations system but that it had since disintegrated as a result of the emergence of what the Donovan Report called the ‘informal’ system. Durkheim, on the other hand, maintained that consensual agreements based on contractual solidarity could not emerge without perfect equality of opportunity. To the extent to which this did not exist – owing in particular to inequality of wealth – then neither did solidarity. Durkheim, then, viewed property ownership and class relations as a problem. His analysis was more plausible than that of Flanders, who nowhere considered the possibility that unequal, structural power relationships in society might influence the kind of procedural or substantive agreements over which unions, for instance, were able to bargain collectively. Flanders never posed the question: what is the balance of power between the parties negotiating? Still less did he analyse ‘power’ in any depth or ask what *kind* of management/labour relations are possible within the existing structure of industry.

The implications of these insights were different for Fox and Flanders. Having made his progression to radical pluralism, Fox explained that his ‘personal academic preferences’ disposed him against continuing ‘an active interest in the practical reform of industrial relations’ based on ‘the conventional analysis that [he] now found unconvincing’, and chose instead ‘to try to understand the society’ around him and communicate his findings to others.[[74]](#footnote-74) By contrast, Flanders remained very much involved with policy making and the reform of industrial relations. There is little evidence that he engaged very deeply with Durkheim[[75]](#footnote-75) but, all the same, he used Durkheim’s concept of anomie superficially for his own purposes without having rigorously explored the analytical framework of organic solidarity in which it was embedded.

Fox regarded this as a serious omission. Although it is impossible at this remove to ascertain the degree of Fox’s indebtedness *directly* to a radical reading of Durkheim, he was – as established above – clearly familiar with Gouldner’s interpretation of Durkheim along these lines, and he acknowledged the ‘radical’ Durkheim in *Beyond Contract*.[[76]](#footnote-76) Fox followed Gouldner in stressing Durkheim’s insight that structural inequalities underpin obstacles ‘of whatever nature’ that create anomie:

This was not to say that mitigation of the forced division of labour would itself cope with the problem of anomie, but rather to assert it as a precondition. Power relations could be changed without eliminating anomie, but anomie could not be dispelled except by policies resting firmly on a foundation of equality and justice.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Hence Durkheim’s framework has much to contribute to our understanding of social inequality and how it affects social cohesion, and therefore also to the practical lessons for policy that Flanders presumed to draw. For Fox, this insight was simply a matter of intellectual progression, but for Flanders it was an unwelcome criticism of his policy-oriented work for the Oxford School. Small wonder that Flanders ‘found little to please him’ in this new approach.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Implications for pluralism in industrial relations

It was noted above that the Oxford School defined certain issues as *problems* and as a result tended to ignore the agents’ own perceptions of the phenomena – for example, the fact that workers did not necessarily agree that ‘restrictive practices’ were harmful.[[79]](#footnote-79) It was also fully committed to the pluralist *perspective* or frame of reference when analysing industrial relations, and proposed *solutions* to industrial relations problems in a reformist, pragmatic mould. These three aspects of the Oxford School’s work – the definition of problems, perspectives and solutions – were mutually reinforcing: a problem was whatever upset the balance between the pluralist partners and was to be resolved within the context of the existing system.

*Definition of problems*

Fox’s contribution to the Donovan Commission was not a technical one: his research paper was concerned with theory – ‘frames of reference’ and the ‘structural determinants of behaviour at work’ – and their relationship to problems in industrial relations.[[80]](#footnote-80) He was, then, never directly concerned – as were, for example, George Bain, Bill McCarthy and Arthur Marsh – with the more narrowly defined issues defined by the Royal Commission as problems. Perhaps for this reason it was easier for his theoretical scope to widen. His later work was concerned, broadly and historically, with the way in which authority was increasingly questioned and collective strength mobilized ‘not through convulsive and spontaneous gestures of revolt but through organised and calculated pressure on the policy-makers’.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Fox was concerned to widen the issues of investigation:

Those who do try to deepen their understanding [of human motivation and responses] may be tempted to reduce the problem by confining their attention to what goes on within the organisation itself … Attention becomes focused on the organisation alone, to the exclusion of the wider society in which it is embedded. This exclusion is fatal for a full understanding of the issues involved … Organisational issues, conflicts and values are inextricably bound up with those of society at large.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Social factors such as the family, class, peer groups, local environment and the media exerted an influence on aspirations which transcended the influence of the organization alone. This helped to explain the origin of the diverse perspectives towards the enterprise which co-existed among its participants: as a team, career structure, means of earning a living, and acceptance or rejection of the power of its managers.

It was within this context that Fox elaborated his views on work organization. He was interested in why an industrial relations ‘problem’ arose in the first place, that is, why some groups within an enterprise identified themselves with its goals (and so saw themselves as trusted) and why others did not (the ‘informal’ system). He pointed out that in the running of an enterprise, many decisions must be taken, regarding for example its objectives, the means of achieving them and marginal distribution of rewards. The company trusted those groups involved in making such decisions, and tended to distrust those groups not so involved.

In the creation of these categories [i.e. the trusted and the non-trusted], and in the changes which they generate, power is the essential agency. Power enables the few [management] to minimize their dependence on the many [the workforce]. It enables the few to minimize the discretion of the many in the making of decisions deemed by the few to be important for their purposes.[[83]](#footnote-83)

He continued:

The absence of commitment or moral involvement which the manager so often deplores in the lower ranks of the organization is, in considerable measure, a consequence of the low-discretion roles that he and his forerunners have designed for them and for earlier generations of employees who have bequeathed their low expectations and responses to their children.[[84]](#footnote-84)

For Fox, ‘low-discretion roles’ comprised five elements: role occupants saw themselves as distrusted by their superiors to carry out tasks properly; they were therefore subjected to close supervision; their activities were highly co-ordinated with others through rules and routines; failures were assumed to result from disobedience and therefore elicited closer supervision or punishment, or both; and conflict was dealt with on a group basis through bargaining. On the other hand, ‘high-discretion roles’ involved the opposite of these elements, following from occupants’ self-perceived trust relationship with their superiors. As a result, there ensued a reliance on self-discipline and responsibility in the performance of duties.

The central concept in this, then, was ‘trust’. So:

we are referring to the perceptions men [sic] have of the trust reposed in their behaviour as it is expressed and embodied in the rules and relations which others seek to impose on them … We follow Zand in using trust to mean ‘not a global feeling of warmth or affection, but the conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another’ … Trust used in this sense is compatible with personal dislike of the person trusted; distrust with personal liking and respect for him.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Fox proceeded to analyse the dynamics that had led increasingly to low-trust relationships, with the focus on work organization as the key. The trend observable in advanced capitalist societies ‘towards extreme differentiation and specialization of function … squeezes out the reciprocal diffuseness of obligations which is the necessary condition of high-trust relations. It is the movement from social to economic exchange’.[[86]](#footnote-86)

The sociological underpinnings of Fox’s work represented a break from the Oxford School because it looked *behind* the notion of a problem. Fox investigated both how problems came to be defined as such and the self-perceptions of the agents involved. In this sense, his work fed into the ‘sociological turn’ taken in the 1970s as radicals came to focus on the ‘informal’ rather than the ‘formal’ system of industrial relations.[[87]](#footnote-87)

*Perspectives*

Fox’s split from the Oxford School was also reflected in his critique of its perspectives. Most significantly, Fox contended that the ‘harmony’ which pluralism claimed to generate between management and unions took place between unequal partners. Work group or union representatives ‘have already been socialized, indoctrinated, and trained by a multiplicity of influences to accept and legitimize most aspects of their work situation; a situation designed in the light of the values and purposes of the major power holders’.[[88]](#footnote-88) His point echoed one of Durkheim’s, noted above, that contractual arrangements between unequal partners ‘do not allow of justice’:[[89]](#footnote-89) ‘Given a consciousness of bargaining under duress, what happens to the moral obligation to observe agreements “freely and honourably negotiated”? Those who feel coerced feel no obligation.’[[90]](#footnote-90)

Social conditioning led workers’ representatives to accept the main organizational structure of negotiations before they even began. Therefore, marginal adjustments could be made through collective bargaining or productivity bargaining, for instance, which left totally untouched the principle of hierarchical rewards or the concept of efficiency:

By accepting this definition of ‘problems’, those working with a pluralist framework implicitly accept the master institutions, principles, and assumptions of the *status quo* as non-problematical. In doing so they add their professional status, personal prestige, and influential involvement in public policy making to the forces and influences which lead subordinate groups to continue seeing the *status quo* as legitimate, inevitable, unchangeable, ‘only to be expected’, subject only to changes at the margin.[[91]](#footnote-91)

This appeared to be a very direct criticism of the Oxford School. Fox had highlighted the tension between, on the one hand, the social conditioning that led workers to accept the ‘*status quo* as non-problematical’ and, on the other, the feeling of coercion engendered by ‘bargaining under duress’. This tension is explored below in the final section, in a discussion of the relationship between co-operation and conflict; the point to be made here is simply that those employees who did see through the operation of power relations would not feel morally bound by decisions made within their ambit, but would rather accept them on pragmatic grounds because of the sense of ‘overwhelming odds’ stacked against them. This was clearly not the basis for the consensus that pluralists must assume for their system to function.

So, the fact of unequal power relations, particularly in their structural dimensions, and their consequent effect on the binding quality of contracts, suggested that pluralism and its apparent stress on equality was a managerial ideology aimed primarily at gaining the workforce’s consent. Fox bolstered this argument by pointing out that pluralists treated non-conformers as eccentrics or subversives; this view, he maintained, betrayed the pluralists’ underlying interest in upholding social consensus – and with it power inequalities – at the expense of giving adequate representation to the views and demands of the non-conformers. It is not difficult to see why such views may at first sight be regarded as ‘Marxist’, but in fact their implications for policy objectives and their implementation are more uncertain and contested. For Fox himself, they led in a different direction though – as the next section reveals – he was not to pursue practical policy solutions very far.

*Solutions*

It is this criticism of pluralism that leads to the third aspect of Fox’s relationship with the Oxford School: the kind of solutions he proposed to overcome the crisis in industrial relations. Central to Flanders’s work was the establishment of a new value consensus, in particular through state intervention. Fox’s views on government intervention had changed, however. In 1971 he had argued that it was the ‘values and norms, legal and otherwise’ of the wider society that sanctioned the ‘struggle and the methods’ used by unions to force management to ‘yield a share in decision-making’, with no reference to the inequalities of their institutional setting.[[92]](#footnote-92) But by 1974 he was arguing that ‘The legislative struggle [between capital and labour] takes place over measures designed to strengthen or weaken the ability of organised labour to challenge management only at the margins of the institutional structure of industry.’[[93]](#footnote-93) The fundamentals of the structure – ‘hierarchy, subordination, extreme division of labour, labour as commodity, and massive inequalities of treatment’[[94]](#footnote-94) – were left intact.

Yet Fox’s own solutions remained very much in the pluralist mould. He devoted barely half a page to ways to engender high-trust relationships in *Beyond Contract*, where he merely advocated a society that promoted and protected egalitarian principles; demonstrated concern for the low-paid and deprived; and recognized that intrinsic satisfaction contributed part of the reward at work, among other similar points.[[95]](#footnote-95) However, he did not explore the potential means to these ends, such as policies along the lines of workers’ control,[[96]](#footnote-96) Labour’s Alternative Economic Strategy[[97]](#footnote-97) or Swedish-style economic democracy through employee investment funds,[[98]](#footnote-98) all of which were under discussion in the mid-1970s.

He offered exhortation as a means to illustrate to workers the benefits of high-trust relations – even though he admitted that workers then showed no sign of interest in sacrificing extrinsic for intrinsic rewards from work if need be[[99]](#footnote-99) – and education as a means to illustrate to management the choices facing it. Such education would consist in asking whether management found social inequality morally offensive or not, and discovering whether for the purposes of simple expediency ‘a growing need for a readier rank-and-file response to managerial leadership’ was likely to be forthcoming given social inequality ‘along all the important dimensions of life and experience’.[[100]](#footnote-100) Fox assumed here that workers could be led to see the importance of work organization in their lives even at the expense of material well-being, though he offered few suggestions as to how such a change in attitude could be brought about, merely indicating that: ‘The growing debate about the quality of life will presumably touch the consciousness of increasing numbers of people, especially the young’.[[101]](#footnote-101) Wood and Elliott plausibly pointed out that attempts to eradicate low-trust relations, if initiated by workers, would be seen by management as an attack but, if initiated by management, would simply lead to further incorporation.[[102]](#footnote-102)

Fox himself gave only cursory treatment to the role that underlying economic control would play in the development of high-trust relations with public ownership as ‘the necessary but certainly not the sufficient condition for any change in the primary objectives and methods of work organizations’.[[103]](#footnote-103) Unfortunately, he did not elaborate on how high-trust relations could be developed in publicly-owned industry as a policy initiative. Instead, he still apparently held on to the possibility of their growth in privately-owned industry, thereby presupposing a value consensus, or ‘community’, which according to his own analysis did not exist.

Finally, there was no reason to suggest that management would ever become convinced by the moral arguments for social equality. And if it did become so convinced through expediency (as the development of corporate social responsibility might suggest, a point developed below), then the power contexts in which it continued to operate would, of course, remain the same; and it is these very power contexts which Fox himself criticized so trenchantly as the source of trouble.

This appraisal of Fox’s solutions, however, needs to be set in the context of his own analysis of the dilemmas involved in combining reform policies with structural critique. In a reflective commentary on ‘the appeal of pluralism’, Fox observed that acceptance of pluralist management practice does not necessarily result from personal identification with its values:

This approach [pluralism] expresses a belief that there are reforms and objectives worth pursuing within the *status quo*, but it may also be accompanied by a conviction that a radical analysis going beyond pluralism is not only of greater intellectual validity but is also a necessary stimulus and guide to the pursuit of more fundamental change. Such, at any rate, is the approach of the author of this essay [i.e. Fox].[[104]](#footnote-104)

He added that ‘there have been Communist trade union leaders who, while active in party counsels and policy, have played a role in industrial relations which was “as if” they accepted pluralist assumptions and values’.[[105]](#footnote-105) This comment – as Fox himself noted – succinctly captured his own approach to pluralism: his proposed reforms looked ‘as if’ he accepted its norms and values even as he exposed its intellectual bankruptcy.

The question then arises as to why he felt unable to propose more radical solutions more in keeping with his analysis. Writing years later in his autobiography, he explained his reasoning. Admitting that his analysis had become ‘a much sharper-edged one that carried something of a Marxist flavour’,[[106]](#footnote-106) he nevertheless firmly rejected the link between *analysis* on the one hand and *prescription* on the other: ‘Because Marxists, with their far harsher and immeasurably more critical analysis, always followed this up with draconian, revolutionary prescriptions, it was widely supposed that accepting the analysis involved accepting the prescriptions.’[[107]](#footnote-107)

As a result, some acquaintances thought Fox had ‘fallen headlong into the embrace of the Trotskyites’,[[108]](#footnote-108) while non-Marxists – including Flanders – condemned him ‘for betraying the social-democratic cause by offering an analysis which appeared to give intellectual support to the analysis of the far-left’.[[109]](#footnote-109) However, Fox stressed that he was more than ever ‘committed’ to the ‘democratic camp’:

Further reading had confirmed a long-standing belief that the generality of Marxists offered no convincing procedures of defence against abuses of power and no convincing institutions of political accountability. In Britain only Conservatives were likely to argue that our own rule of law and parliamentary procedure were perfect, but most of us followed [George] Orwell to some degree in conceding, if grudgingly, that heavily imperfect though they were, they were still among the more civilized creations of the human condition. Where *most Marxists* fell short was in emphasizing the exploitative power that derived from ownership of economic resources, but failing to show the same concern for the abuses and non-accountability deriving from positions in a bureaucratic hierarchy.[[110]](#footnote-110) (added emphasis)

Fox’s reference to ‘most Marxists’ is revealing as it shows that he understood that Marxist thinking on ‘solutions’ was not homogeneous. Commentators contemporary with Fox distinguished between the Communist Party’s ‘single-mindedly pro-Soviet orientation’[[111]](#footnote-111) – which Fox clearly found abhorrent – and the New Left, which condemned both the Communist Party and revisionist Labour thinking: ‘On the theoretical level, various New Left writers advocated a revolutionary conflict … [while others indicated] a firm commitment to a pluralism irreconcilable with full collectivism.’[[112]](#footnote-112) By way of example, Richard Hyman argued in 1975 that ‘The character of the socialist *alternative* to capitalist industry is rarely described in detail. This is understandable, for if socialism is to be established by the creativity of workers’ own collective action it will not be according to any predetermined blueprint’ (original emphasis).[[113]](#footnote-113)

It is impossible to speculate now about the kind of views Fox would have held towards such nuanced observations, or towards the work of Antonio Gramsci, or towards the emergence of Eurocommunism in Italy and Spain over the course of the 1970s. Maybe he had such non-doctrinaire formulations in mind when he accepted that ‘a Marxist framework can be a powerful analytical tool (though not the *only* one) for understanding Western industrial societies’ (original emphasis).[[114]](#footnote-114) What is clear, though, is that Fox generally identified Marxism with the doctrinaire ideology of the Communist Party, with the result that – despite a radicalization of his views on the definition of problems and perspectives – he retained a broadly pluralist notion of a ‘solution’.[[115]](#footnote-115) To repeat: he made limited suggestions about where or how the agency for change might be found; he held on to the lingering assumption of a value consensus in industry; and referred only in passing to the role of public ownership in establishing high-trust relations.

In a way, this failure to engage with policy is not surprising. Fox – unlike Flanders – was not concerned with ‘the practical reform of industrial relations’ but rather with ‘a clear and honest understanding of the social structures which we create and help to create us’. He was not particularly bothered about where this led him. In the following final section, this article argues that radical pluralism continues to reverberate among industrial relations theorists to this day and that its approach to practical industrial relations issues, based on a Durkheimian understanding of organic solidarity, remains fruitful, suggestive and underdeveloped. Fox himself lacked an interest in policy-making, but that does not imply that radical pluralism cannot form the basis of such.

Implications for industrial relations theory and practice today

To summarize so far: Fox contributed greatly to the subtlety of pluralist theory by widening the range of problems that it addressed (to include low- and high-discretion roles in organizations and trust) and by refining its perspectives (to take account of the unequal power relationships between capital and labour). From a policy angle, he placed himself intellectually in an apparently anomalous position by rejecting doctrinaire Marxist solutions (the only type he generally considered). Instead of class struggle and revolution, he advocated an egalitarian society, with public ownership as the necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of high-trust relationships, urging economic expediency and moral conviction as the means to overcome the structural inequalities of capitalist organization, solutions that convinced nobody, Marxist or non-Marxist.

Developments since the publication of *Beyond Contract* in 1974 suggest that Fox’s legacy centres on his uncompromising analysis of the limitations of pluralism, and his ideas have been increasingly accepted as mainstream. By the late 1970s, industrial relations reformism had, arguably, been taken as far as it could: ‘pluralist approaches to industrial relations were attractive in the full employment conditions of the 1960s before losing their lustre slightly in the changing market conditions of the 1970s’.[[116]](#footnote-116) At national level, the Labour government (1974–79) had adopted pro-union legislation, introduced industrial planning in various forms and had nationalized further key sectors of the economy, such as shipbuilding. The density of trade-union membership was at its highest recorded level, and social inequalities stood at a post-1945 low.[[117]](#footnote-117) Pluralists, such as Flanders, had made a major contribution to creating such a generally fairer society, and no doubt hoped to achieve more. Yet the government struggled to control inflation and unemployment through pay and price controls and restrictions on public expenditure in a low-trust dynamic of the ‘vicious cycle’.[[118]](#footnote-118) The social contract culminated in ‘the so-called “Winter of Discontent”, when corpses went unburied, social security benefits went undistributed, and rubbish went uncleared in rat-infested streets’.[[119]](#footnote-119) The election of Thatcher, as Fox puts it, ‘dealt the death blow … to any further discussion of “corporatism”’[[120]](#footnote-120) and – he might have added – to pluralist, let alone Marxist, solutions to the country’s economic and industrial relations challenges. Unitary solutions appeared predominant.[[121]](#footnote-121)

At the levels of sector and company, the retreat of union influence and collective bargaining coverage allowed management to introduce a variety of increasingly sophisticated unitary control mechanisms, including performance-related pay systems, performance appraisal, employee involvement and organizational re-engineering processes. As noted above, by the early 1990s, HRM was firmly established. Its rise can be understood not least as a response to the vacuum left by pluralist strategy, with its unresolved dilemma exposed by Fox: a guide to policy intrinsically and terminally constrained by its inability to grapple with and resolve the fundamental inequalities between capital and labour.

Yet against this inauspicious background, new analyses influenced by Fox’s radical pluralism have since promoted the integration of both industrial relations and HRM into a unified field of study of the employment relationship.[[122]](#footnote-122) The inequalities of the employment relationship – on which Fox continued to insist[[123]](#footnote-123) – transcend the specific characteristics of industrial relations in its collective aspects and those of HRM in its individualistic aspects. If we accept the validity of Fox’s radical pluralist critique, then the benefits of a unified field are considerable. The threat to industrial relations – or, rather, to *employment* relations – as a field of study fades as the field itself broadens to cover all forms of collective pay and representation systems at work, with HRM brought under the same umbrella. All forms of employment relationship – unionized and non-unionized, collective and individual, ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’, agency-mediated or not – become subject to the same type of scrutiny, in its broad economic, political and social context, with a focus on the degree of equality/inequality that it embeds.

Nevertheless, the validity of this approach must not be taken for granted. Ackers, for example, highlights ‘a methodological divide between theoretically ambitious social science explanation and a more historical or empirical approach’.[[124]](#footnote-124) He terms the former, which focuses on the employment relationship, *structural sociology* and the latter, *historical institutionalism*. He maintains that the ‘employment relationship’ as a concept is too broad to allow for the historical and social pressures that give it shape. In doing so, he comes close to rejecting the possibility that historical analysis might itself form an intrinsic part of any worthwhile sociological analysis and to arguing that generalization is not possible, a stance that risks retreating into empiricist history if followed through to its logical conclusion. However, his observation does not appear to be fatal. Fox himself analysed the employment relationship *both* sociologically[[125]](#footnote-125) *and* historically,[[126]](#footnote-126) rightly treating both approaches as two sides of the same coin. While sociology allows the elaboration of broad categories that focus on the common features of a phenomenon, history focuses on the detail and context. Fox treated the disciplines as complementary, not as mutually exclusive, and so revealed different types of insights depending, to change the metaphor, on the strength of the magnifying glass.

To develop Ackers’s example,[[127]](#footnote-127) a millionaire footballer and an Indian factory worker, despite outward appearances, do indeed share certain common characteristics: they both have some form of employment contract with their employer, which includes pay and hours of work; they are both subject to performance management (the wage–effort bargain); and they both may fear dismissal. Structural sociology hence focuses our attention on common features of their situation, notably the power relationships involved, which historical institutionalism then invites us to unpack: to what extent are their skills reflected in their terms and conditions? Have they negotiated individually or collectively with their employer? Are terms and conditions written or verbal, explicit or implied? What wealth and resources, if any, can each side rely on in the course of settling their contract? How negotiable, if at all, is the wage–effort bargain? Such questions flow naturally from our sociological understanding of the employment relationship and require answers informed by historical institutionalist explanation. Answers will depend on circumstances and settings, such as the state of the trade cycle, the occupations of those involved and the ‘variety of capitalism’[[128]](#footnote-128) in which the relationship is embedded, among many other factors, and such answers will accordingly enrich our understanding of its particular characteristics.

Examination of these circumstances also helps us to address a second criticism that Ackers levels against radical pluralism, namely its ‘Marxian emphasis on power imbalance and its assumption that conflict will predominate over co-operation for all “wage labour”’.[[129]](#footnote-129) A Marxist analysis would, indeed, assume the predominance of conflict over co-operation in the employment relationship, but Fox’s neo-Durkheimian perspective allows greater subtlety, in that it focuses on equal opportunity and – crucially – *degrees* of equal opportunity. We have noted above that Durkheim acknowledged that pure equality of opportunity existed nowhere as a ‘realized fact’,[[130]](#footnote-130) but argued rather that advanced societies *need to reduce sources of inequality to ensure the predominance of organic solidarity*. The sources of inequality for Durkheim lay not just in the ‘hereditary transmission of wealth’, but also in customs and prejudices and closed career structures.[[131]](#footnote-131)

In other words, the nature of inequality is not all or nothing, which implies that a fuller separation may be drawn between Marxist and Durkheimian perspectives, based not only on ‘solutions’ but also on divergent explanation and analysis. While Marxist theory entails the necessary antagonism of capital and labour in capitalist societies, Durkheim suggested that social conflict is a matter of degree: as equality of opportunity increased, conflict would reduce and the opportunities for co-operation would increase too. In short, even under capitalism, organic solidarity was more likely to develop in equal societies than unequal ones, a phenomenon borne out by the empirical evidence.[[132]](#footnote-132) Hence radical pluralism encourages a more nuanced discussion of the origins and nature of inequality, not only in contrast to doctrinaire forms of Marxism that insist on class struggle and condemn reformism as a betrayal, but also in contrast to more reformist forms too. This is because radical pluralism suggests that the employment relationship is less likely to be experienced as exploitative or conflictual in more equal workplaces, though its objective potential for causing conflict may emerge if circumstances change. That is, it allows for the possibility – or even probability – of high levels of co-operation at the workplace, as well as for its potential disruption.[[133]](#footnote-133) Returning to the earlier example, the millionaire footballer, unlike the factory worker, may be very happy indeed with his everyday working conditions, but – in common with the factory worker – these conditions are continually open to alteration by his employer, with the potential for conflict to erupt. It is this *underlying* potential for conflict that may be regarded as the source of exploitation.

Fox himself provided several striking instances of similar circumstances.[[134]](#footnote-134) For example, in his analysis of a strike at a gypsum plant in the USA – from an account originally published by Gouldner[[135]](#footnote-135) – Fox outlined how an egalitarian, relaxed and high-trust work environment was undermined by a new management team seeking to cut unit costs and retain market share in the face of increasing competitive pressures. Punitive supervision, strict performance monitoring and a new emphasis on hierarchical and status differentials soon degenerated into a low-trust environment, with the outbreak of a strike as a result. Fox’s analysis illustrates the critical point that co-operation/conflict at work exist along a spectrum; they are not an either/or. Edwards too, in a vigorous defence of radical pluralism, argues that concepts ‘relevant to more concrete empirical enquiry’ must not be confused with those ‘operating at the level of the mode of production’.[[136]](#footnote-136) Behaviour at work, however co-operative in appearance, is underpinned by what he calls the ‘structured antagonism’ of the employment relationship that, in capitalist societies, is ‘embedded in the pursuit of accumulation’.[[137]](#footnote-137) In the case of the gypsum plant, then, empirical observation revealed high-trust relationships until head office unilaterally decided to substitute low-trust policies in the ‘pursuit of accumulation’ that – as Edwards notes – exactly characterizes capitalism as a mode of production.

Radical pluralism, then, does not abandon the question of power and inequality to Marxist theorists. While unitary and pluralist perspectives notably ignore the structural dimensions of power in capitalist societies, radical pluralism has ensured its continued place on the agenda, outside the doctrinaire formulations displayed occasionally by Marxist writers of the type that unsettles middle-class sensibilities (as even Fox clearly unsettled Flanders). In this way, radical pluralism has ensured the accessibility of debates about power in vocabularies that are more accessible than those that focus on class struggle because they embrace a wider range of sources of inequality and thereby help to foster the ‘inner life’ of industrial relations and the creative tension between pluralism and Marxism.[[138]](#footnote-138) It has had an enduring appeal for those attracted to the analysis but not the solutions of Marxism, not least because it can explain the origins of underlying tensions as well as cooperation at the workplace.[[139]](#footnote-139) For example, the concept ‘creative tension’ helps to inform discussions about the mechanisms through which workplace compromise may be reached. The distinction between ‘zero-sum’ interests between employers and workers on the one hand and concerns over day-to-day issues that may be ‘win–win’ on the other demonstrates how areas of conflict and co-operation may co-exist and leach into one another over time.[[140]](#footnote-140)

This analysis has implications too for the third criticism directed by Ackers against radical pluralism, namely that it has little to offer policy-makers. This criticism, too, is contestable. Fox’s key insight, that the development of trust and high-discretion roles was undermined by the inequalities between capital and labour, has informed recent work on the role of trust in delivering the human resource function.[[141]](#footnote-141) More specifically, it helps to deepen understanding of a range of practical areas of HRM and corporate governance. For example, it sheds light on the unsatisfactory nature of the research into the impact of HRM, particularly high-performance work practices, on organizational performance. Findings have indicated a range of results – positive, negative and ambiguous – underpinned by a variety of methodological problems, such as defining terms and concepts, and ensuring comparison of like with like.[[142]](#footnote-142) At a deeper, structural level, however – following Fox – distrust and lack of commitment potentially characterize the very employment relationship itself.[[143]](#footnote-143) High-performance work practices remain fragile as management, particularly under unitary regimes, retain their freedom to alter the terms and conditions on which co-operation is based as they see fit[[144]](#footnote-144) and may achieve their aims not through the promotion of greater commitment but through greater work intensification and stress.[[145]](#footnote-145)

So while unitarism may have replaced pluralism in many workplaces, its failures to create high-discretion employment relations remain at least partly ascribable to the failure, diagnosed by Fox, to deal with structural inequalities at the workplace. Indeed, these structural inequalities undermine the HR function itself. A study of Electrolux in 1997, for example, revealed that the company – in order to ‘deliver sufficient profitability’ – axed 12,000 jobs (11% of its workforce), which resulted in its share price soaring 25% in two days. Such a story, comment the authors, reinforce ‘the argument that there are now *inherent system faults that blight the ability of HR practitioners to make a useful contribution*’ (original emphasis).[[146]](#footnote-146)

Radical pluralists are, then, well-placed to enter debates about inequalities at workplace levels, such as high-performance work practices, but also other areas of HRM that involve the balance of power shifting in favour of employers, such as those associated with the ‘gig’ economy: failure to pay the living wage, zero-hours contracts and the exploitative use of ‘self-employment’ and agency work.[[147]](#footnote-147) In all these cases, there are *potentially* advantages to the workers involved (such as flexibility and a degree of autonomy). The advantages and disadvantages exist along a spectrum of inequality that may be more or less acceptable to the parties involved. Radical pluralists are hence in a strong position to argue for ‘effective palliatives’,[[148]](#footnote-148) for example, through extending unionization and collective bargaining, and changing the status of ‘gig’ workers from self-employed to employed.

That said, a further criticism of Fox must be considered, namely that his appeals to economic expediency and moral conviction from management are implausible, particularly as employment relations have become dominated by the unitary perspective. This is a powerful criticism, but there is (limited) evidence that employers in the UK and elsewhere have increasingly focused their attention in recent years on their relationship with key stakeholders (beyond their shareholders) – such as their employees, suppliers, non-governmental organizations and local communities – through notions of corporate social responsibility. This term has been defined as ‘the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society’, requiring them to ‘have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders’.[[149]](#footnote-149) There are a wide variety of such practices, both voluntary and mandatory, but companies generally adopt them for business purposes: ‘investment in social and environmental initiatives leads to financial benefits for the firm in terms of stronger consumer loyalty, higher employee satisfaction, enhanced brand reputation, preferential access to input markets or a better understanding with regulators’.[[150]](#footnote-150)

These business-case rationales form the framework within which appeals to expediency (and public relations), if not morality, have assisted the spread of corporate social responsibility. While the effectiveness and value of such policies is debateable, and unions remain cautious if not sceptical, they have, at least, drawn the attention of unions, non-governmental organizations and activists to forms of corporate malpractice and, accordingly, led to attempts by the better companies to improve, learn and innovate.[[151]](#footnote-151)

Evidence for growing public concern over the social role of the private sector may be found in current discussions regarding the reform of corporate governance. Theresa May, on launching her bid for leadership of the Conservative Party on 11 July 2016, declared that she wanted to create a more equal Britain and to introduce worker directors on to the boards of companies:

The people who run big businesses are supposed to be accountable to outsiders, to non-executive directors, who are supposed to ask the difficult questions, think about the long-term and defend the interests of shareholders. In practice, they are drawn from the same, narrow social and professional circles as the executive team and – as we have seen time and time again – the scrutiny they provide is just not good enough. So if I’m Prime Minister, we’re going to change that system – and we’re going to have not just consumers represented on company boards, but employees as well.[[152]](#footnote-152)

Her words reflected anxieties over recent corporate scandals, such as those at British Home Stores[[153]](#footnote-153) and Sports Direct,[[154]](#footnote-154) involving exploitation of workers. The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee of the House of Commons subsequently set up an inquiry into corporate governance in September 2016,[[155]](#footnote-155) and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy published a Green Paper, *Corporate Governance Reform*,[[156]](#footnote-156) two months later, in November 2016. The Trades Union Congress (TUC), which has campaigned for the reform of corporate governance for years, includes employee board-level representation among its proposals, but emphasizes that its success requires not just the election of employee representatives to boards as such, but broader reform, such as expanding the fiduciary duties of directors to cover not just shareholders but also a broader range of stakeholders, and restricting voting rights to longer-term shareholders.[[157]](#footnote-157) The location of industrial relations reform within its broader institutional and legal context helps to address the structural inequalities that might otherwise undermine it, and raises basic questions about the extent to which such inequalities might be regarded as acceptable.

Overall, therefore, the neo-Durkheimian critique of pluralism focuses on inequalities in power and wealth as the kind of ‘obstacle, of whatever nature’[[158]](#footnote-158) that can hinder the development of organic solidarity. Accumulating empirical evidence supports the validity of this observation: ‘ in our society, income and wealth are closely related to whether people can achieve many … other more fundamental outcomes [such as education, health and security]’.[[159]](#footnote-159) Indeed, these ideas are currently gaining wider acceptance. Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, has warned that ‘the basic social contract at the heart of capitalism was breaking down amid rising inequality’,[[160]](#footnote-160) while Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, has argued that ‘rising inequality was also a barrier to growth, and could undermine democracy and human rights’.[[161]](#footnote-161) Jack Lew, US Treasury Secretary under President Barack Obama, expressed concerns that ‘an economy that increasingly seems lopsided … is a fundamental threat to liberal democracy and to free market capitalism’.[[162]](#footnote-162) Such observations focus attention on the levels of social inequality that become intolerable and make organic solidarity impossible, and their discussion may yet help to erode the apparently firm foundations of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy.[[163]](#footnote-163) Of course, Durkheim was also aware of the need for ‘effective palliatives’ in the absence of genuine equality of opportunity (which would involve, as he argued, the abolition of inheritance). It is well beyond the scope of this article to analyse the character of the agents and agencies that might pursue such radical reforms – and the degree of resistance that they would arouse – but there are at least indications of an emerging debate around these issues, for example the role of social wealth funds in reducing inequality[[164]](#footnote-164) and the benefits of an obligation-free universal basic income.[[165]](#footnote-165)

Radical pluralism – Fox’s legacy – continues to make a significant contribution to the field of employment relations, given its robust focus on equality that has acquired particular urgency following the financial crisis of 2008–09. Its pragmatic and non-dogmatic approach should appeal widely to those who seek fresh solutions to halt downward pressures on labour standards with a convincing theoretical basis on which to do so.

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1. A. Fox, *A Very Late Development. An Autobiography* (2nd edn; British Universities’ Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA), Keele: 2004), p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. P. Smith and G. Morton, ‘Nine Years of New Labour: Neoliberalism and Workers’ Rights’, *British Journal of Industrial Relations* (*BJIR)* 44:3 (2006), pp. 401–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. K. Ewing and J. Hendy, *Protect the Right to Strike: Kill the Bill* (Campaign for Trade Union Freedom and Institute of Employment Rights, Liverpool: 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. BUIRA, ‘What’s the Point of Industrial Relations? A Statement by the British Universities Industrial Relations Association’,in R. Darlington (ed.), *What’s the Point of Industrial Relations? In Defence of Critical Social Science* (BUIRA, Manchester: 2008), pp. 46–59, at p. 49; reprinted in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* (*HSIR*) 25/26 (2008), pp. 1–18, at p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. P. Ackers and A. Wilkinson, ‘British Industrial Relations Paradigm: A Critical Outline History and Prognosis’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47:4 (2005), pp. 443–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. P. Ackers, ‘Collective Bargaining as Industrial Democracy: Hugh Clegg and the Political Foundations of British Industrial Relations Pluralism’, *BJIR* 45:1 (2007), pp. 77–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A. Flanders, ‘Collective Bargaining: A Theoretical Analysis’, in *idem*, *Management and Unions. The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations* (Faber and Faber: 1970), pp. 213–40. First published in *BJIR* 6:1 (1968), pp. 1–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A. Flanders and A. Fox, ‘Collective Bargaining: From Donovan to Durkheim’, in A. Flanders, *Management and Unions. The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations* (Faber and Faber: 1975), pp. 241–76. First published as ‘The Reform of Collective Bargaining: From Donovan to Durkheim’, *BJIR* 7:2 (1969), pp. 151–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A. Flanders, ‘Collective Bargaining: Prescription for Change’, in *idem*, *Management and Unions. The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations* (Faber and Faber: 1975), pp.155–211. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. R. Hyman, ‘Pluralism, Procedural Consensus and Collective Bargaining’ (1978), in *idem*, *The Political Economy of Industrial Relations. Theory and Practice in a Cold Climate* (Macmillan: 1989), pp. 54–95, at p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid*., p.72. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. C. Crouch, *The Politics of Industrial Relations* (Fontana/Collins, Glasgow: 1979), pp. 188–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. J. Kelly, *Ethical Socialism and the Trade Unions: Allan Flanders and British Industrial Relations Reform* (Routledge: 2010); Ackers, ‘Collective Bargaining’, *BJIR*; P. Ackers, ‘The Changing Systems of British Industrial Relations, 1954–1979: Hugh Clegg and the Warwick Sociological Turn’, *BJIR* 49:2 (2011), pp. 306–30; *idem*, ‘Game Changer: Hugh Clegg’s Role in Drafting the 1968 Donovan Report and Redefining the British Industrial Relations Policy-Problem’, *HSIR* 35 (2014), pp. 63–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. J. Phillips, ‘Industrial Relations, Historical Contingencies and Political Economy: Britain in the 1960s and 1970s’, *Labour History Review* (*LHR*) 72:3 (2007), pp. 215–33; Ackers, ‘The Changing Systems’, *BJIR*; *idem*, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship: A Neo-pluralist Critique of British Industrial Relations Orthodoxy’, *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (*IJHRM*) 25:18 (2014), pp. 2608–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A. Fox, *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations,* Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations, Research Paper 3 (HMSO: 1966). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See, for example, P. Blyton and P. Turnbull, *The Dynamics of Employee Relations* (3rd edn; Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke: 2004); P. Edwards and J. Wajcman, *The Politics of Working Life* (Oxford University Press: 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ackers, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship’, *IJHRM*, p. 2609. E. Heery, *Framing Work. Unitary, Pluralist, and Critical Perspectives in the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford University Press: 2016), p. 37, suggests that ‘pluralist writing has assumed a more critical hue’ as it has come to engage more recently in critiques of neo-liberalism and to defend systems of labour market regulation. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A. Fox, *Beyond Contract: Work, Power and Trust Relations* (Faber and Faber: 1974); *idem*, *Man Mismanagement* (Hutchinson: 1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. D. Guest, ‘Beyond HRM. Commitment and the Contract Culture’, in P. R. Sparrow and M. Marchington (eds), *Human Resource Management. The New Agenda* (Financial Times and Prentice Hall: 1998), pp. 37–51, at p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. K. Sisson and J. Storey, *The Realities of Human Resource Management. Managing the Employment Relationship* (Open University Press, Buckingham: 2002). The authors distinguish between ‘traditionalist’ style unitarism, which is ‘based on a firm belief in management’s right to manage without interference’, hence ‘adamant hostility to trade unions’, and the ‘sophisticated paternalistic style’, which also avoids unions but by means of ‘an array of benefits and positive personnel devices to substitute for collective bargaining’ (p. 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibid*., chap.1. The same authors distinguish between two types of pluralist: ‘sophisticated moderns … recognized that, at least in certain industries, it would be unrealistic to seek to defend absolute managerial prerogative … Thus joint procedures which contained and institutionalized conflict were honed’, while ‘standard moderns represented the pragmatic stance … It was reactive and opportunistic rather than principled, the approach adopted at any one time depending primarily on the nature of the pressures experienced’ (p. 22). Much recent discourse on the ‘partnership’ between employers and unions remains based on pluralist assumptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See, for example C. Hendry and A. Pettigrew, ‘Human Resource Management: An Agenda for the 1990s’, *IJHRM*, 1:1 (1990), pp. 17–43; D. E. Guest, ‘Personnel Management: The End of Orthodoxy?’ *BJIR* 29:2 (1991), pp. 149–75; P. F. Boxall, ‘Strategic Human Resource Management: Beginnings of a New Theoretical Sophistication?’ *Human Resource Management Journal*, 2:3 (1992), pp. 60–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. K. Legge, *Human Resource Management. Rhetorics and Realities* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke: 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. P. K. Edwards, ‘Industrial Conflict: Themes and Issues in Recent Research’, *BJIR* 30:3 (1992), pp. 361–404. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. H. F. Gospel, *Markets, Firms, and the Management of Labour in Modern Britain* (Cambridge University Press: 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Ibid*., p. xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibid*., p. 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Ibid*., p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, p. 363; see also Fox, *Man Mismanagement*, pp. 175–6. Fox did not specify where these condemnations were made: Fox, *A Very Late Development*, pp. 258–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. M. Poole, *Theories of Trade Unionism: A Sociology of Industrial Relations* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1984); N. Cullinane, ‘Institutions and the Industrial Relations Tradition’, in A. Wilkinson, G. Wood and R. Deeg (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Employment Relations. Comparative Employment Systems* (Oxford University Press: 2014), pp. 222–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, pp. 229–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Kelly, *Ethical Socialism and the Trade Unions*, p. 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ackers, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship’, *IJHRM*, p. 2609. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Heery, *Framing Work*, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See, for example, S. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim. His Life and Work* (Allen Lane: 1973). I am indebted to an unpublished paper by Bernard Casey, ‘Industrial Relations – Back to Durkheim?’ (London School of Economics, October 1976), for originally suggesting this line of argument to me many years ago. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ackers, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship’, *IJHRM*, p. 2621. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers’ Associations, 1965–1968 (Donovan), *Report*, Cmnd 3623 (1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Unofficial strikes lack the support of the relevant union committee, while unconstitutional strikes are in breach of a disputes procedure. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. R. Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction* (Macmillan: 1975), p. 15, n. 3, argued that the notion of ‘two systems’ of industrial relations was misleading, as it implied ‘the existence of two detached sets of processes and areas of activity’. It was accordingly more appropriate to speak of ‘*one* system of industrial relations with formal and informal aspects, which are in part complementary and in part contradictory’ (original emphasis). This comment does not affect this article’s argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Flanders and Fox, ‘Collective Bargaining: from Donovan to Durkheim’, p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Ibid*., p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid*., p. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Free Press, New York: 1964; first published in French, 1893), quoted in Flanders and Fox, ‘Collective Bargaining: from Donovan to Durkheim’, pp. 258–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Flanders and Fox, ‘Collective Bargaining: from Donovan to Durkheim’, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Flanders, ‘Collective Bargaining: Prescription for Change’, p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Crouch, *Politics of Industrial Relations.* [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 260. J. H. Goldthorpe, ‘Industrial Relations in Great Britain: A Critique of Reformism’, *Politics and Society* 4:4 (1974), pp. 419–52, at p. 439 n. 36, observed at the time that ‘the transition in Fox’s thinking and the accompanying *autocritique* which is to be found in his writing is of considerable interest’. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. S. Lukes, ‘Alienation and Anomie’, in P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman, *Philosophy, Politics and Society* *(Third Series)* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1967), pp. 134–56, at p.149. For an analysis of the theme of social dissolution in nineteenth century French thought, see Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, pp. 195–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, pp. 147–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Ibid*., p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Ibid*., pp. 400–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. A. Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory. An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge University Press: 1990), p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. J. T. Dunlop, *Industrial Relations Systems* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville: 1958), p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Examples include: S. Fenton, *Durkheim and Modern Sociology* (Cambridge University Press: 1984); Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*; A. Pizzorno, ‘Lecture Actuelle de Durkheim’, *Archives Européenes de Sociologie (European Journal of Sociology)*, 4 (1963), pp. 1–36; K. Thompson, *Emile Durkheim* (Ellis Horwood, Chichester: 1982), pp. 87–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. A. W. Gouldner, ‘Introduction’ to É. Durkheim, *Socialism and Saint-Simon* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1958), p. xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Ibid*., pp. xviii–xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. A. W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (Heinemann Educational Books: 1971), pp. 248–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. A. Fox, ‘Industrial Relations: A Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology’, in J. Child (ed.), *Man and Organization. The Search for Explanation and Social Relevance* (Allen and Unwin: 1973), pp. 185–233, at p.232; and Fox, *Beyond Contract*, p. 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. *Ibid*., p. 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *Ibid*., p. 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Ibid*., p. 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Ibid*., pp. 380–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *Ibid*., p. 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. E. Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1957), p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *Ibid*. Durkheim did not discuss what these ‘fairly effective palliatives’ might be. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ackers, ‘The Changing Systems’, *BJIR*, p. 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, pp. 229–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *Ibid*., pp. 234–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Goldthorpe, ‘Industrial Relations in Great Britain’, *Politics and Society*, p. 452, summarized the issue: ‘the resolution of current problems of disorder in workplace relations can only be achieved with the co-operation of workers from whose point of view these ‘problems’ will often represent situations of relative advantage in terms of autonomy and control’. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Fox, *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations*. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Fox, *Man Mismanagement*, preface, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Ibid*., pp. 3–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Ibid*., p. 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *Ibid*., pp. 68–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. *Ibid*., p. 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ackers, ‘The Changing Systems’, [*BJIR*.](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1839132##)  [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Fox, ‘Industrial Relations: A Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology’, p. 217. Fox’s analysis here is strikingly similar to that of two other social theorists. The first is Robert Wolff: ‘But pluralism is fatally blind to the evils which afflict the entire body politic, and as a theory of society it obstructs consideration of precisely the sorts of thoroughgoing social revisions which may be needed to remedy those evils’: R. P. Wolff, ‘Beyond Tolerance’, in R. P. Wolff, B. Moore Jnr. and H. Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Jonathan Cape: 1969), pp. 11–61, at p. 60. Fox references Wolff in ‘Industrial Relations: A Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology’, at p. 233; and in *Beyond Contract*, at p. 394. The second is Steven Lukes, who elaborated ‘the three-dimensional view of power’. In developing a critique of behavioural or observable views of power, Lukes argues that the third dimension ‘can occur in the absence of actual, observable conflict, which may have been successfully averted – though there remains here an implicit reference to potential conflict. This potential, however, may never in fact be actualized. What one may have here is a *latent conflict*, which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude’ (original emphasis): S. Lukes, *Power. A Radical View* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke: 2005, first published 1974), p. 28. A. Fox, *Man Mismanagement* (2nd edn; Hutchinson: 1985), p. 58, also references Lukes. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Fox, ‘Industrial Relations: A Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology’, p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *Ibid*., pp. 219–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. A. Fox, *A Sociology of Work in Industry* (Collier-Macmillan: 1971), p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Fox, *Man Mismanagement*, pp. 139–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, p. 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Fox made fleeting reference to workers’ control in *Beyond Contract*, p. 312, and in *Man Mismanagement*, p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. S. Holland, *The Socialist Challenge* (Quartet Books: 1976). See in particular chap. 6, ‘On Socialist Transformation’, pp. 142–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. R. Meidner, ‘Our Concept of the Third Way. Some Remarks on the Socio-political Tenets of the Swedish Labour Movement’, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 1:3 (1980), pp. 343–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, p. 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Fox, *Man Mismanagement*, pp. 161–3, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. *Ibid*., p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. S. Wood and R. Elliott, ‘A Critical Evaluation of Fox’s Radicalisation of Industrial Relations Theory’, *Sociology* 11:1 (1977), pp. 105–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, p. 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Fox, ‘Industrial Relations: A Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology’, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. *Ibid*., p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. *Ibid*. He made a similar point in rejecting ‘tramline thinking’ in A. Fox, ‘A Note on Industrial-Relations Pluralism’, *Sociology* 13:1 (1979), pp. 105–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. *Ibid*., p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. R. Currie, *Industrial Politics* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1979), p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. *Ibid*., pp. 198–9. Currie referred to Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe as those who looked forward to ‘a successful revolutionary struggle’ aimed at ‘eliminating the capitalist system’ (p. 198), while E. P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, Ken Coates and Bob Rowthorn ‘appear to be pluralists in one sense or another’ (p. 199). H. F. Gospel and G. Palmer, *British Industrial Relations* (Routledge: 1993), pp. 27–8, make a similar distinction between ‘more doctrinaire’ and ‘less doctrinaire’ Marxists. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Hyman, *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction*, pp. 209–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Fox, ‘A Note on Industrial-Relations Pluralism’, *Sociology*, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Heery, *Framing Work*, p. 73, makes a similar observation with respect to contemporary writers in the critical labour studies (CLS) tradition (by which he means principally Marxist and Trotskyist). He notes: ‘Following the global retreat of the left since 1989, it has become rare for CLS accounts of employment relations to mention or infer the need for transition to some future socialist state … In exactly the manner of pluralist writers, therefore, critical scholars identify worker interests in the improvement of employment conditions and more effective regulation. Where they differ is typically in their interpretation of the means through which these interests will be attained; for the CLS tradition it is invariably through militancy and the mobilization of workers and other social movements that pose a challenge to capital’. The next section argues that radical pluralism potentially has an appeal among policy-makers extending beyond these means. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Phillips, ‘Industrial Relations, Historical Contingencies and Political Economy’, *LHR*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. S. Lansley and J. Mack, *A More Unequal Country?* (Poverty and Social Exclusion UK: n.d.), <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/editorial/more-unequal-country> (accessed 22 May 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. M. Gilbert, *Inflation and Social Conflict. A Sociology of Economic Life in Advanced Societies* (Wheatsheaf, Brighton: 1986), p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Fox, *A Very Late Development*, p. 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. *Ibid*., pp. 263–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. D. Marsh, ‘British Industrial Relations Policy Transformed: The Thatcher Legacy’, *Journal of Public Policy* 11:3 (1991), pp. 291–313. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See, for example, P. Edwards, ‘The Employment Relationship and the Field of Industrial Relations’, in *idem* (ed.), *Industrial Relations* (2nd edn; Blackwell, Oxford: 2003), pp. 1–36; B. E. Kaufman, ‘Paradigms in Industrial Relations: Original, Modern and Versions In-between’, *BJIR* 46:2 (2008), pp. 314–39; *idem*, ‘History of the British Industrial Relations Field Reconsidered: Getting from the Webbs to the New Employment Relations Paradigm’, *BJIR* 52:1 (2014), pp. 1–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Fox, ‘A Note on Industrial Relations Pluralism’, *Sociology*. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Ackers, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship’, *IJHRM,* p. 2610. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Fox, *Beyond Contract*, chs 2 and 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. *Ibid*., ch. 4; A. Fox, *History and Heritage. The Social Origins of the British Industrial Relations System* (Allen and Unwin: 1985); see P. Edwards, ‘The Analytical Heritage of Alan Fox’s *History and Heritage* (1985)’, *HSIR* 14 (2002), pp. 139–58. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ackers, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship’, *IJHRM,* p. 2616. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. P. A. Hall and D. Soskice (eds), *Varieties of Capitalism. The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (Oxford University Press: 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ackers, ‘Rethinking the Employment Relationship’, *IJHRM,* p. 2621. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, *The Spirit Level. Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (Penguin: 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
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