

Hard Lessons from Alberta:

The Difficulties of Applying EU-style Social Dialogue in Canada

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Tripartitism / Social Dialogue

- European model of social and economic political-making – joint labour, capital and state decisions
- Few successful attempts in English Canada

Approaches Used in Paper

1. Examine from perspective of whether SD helps further labour's agenda
2. Adopt *Power Resources Theory* as analytical lens (Korpi, 1983)
3. Draw upon work of Haddow, Klassen and Sharpe, in particular the hypothesis:
“coordinative reforms might have succeeded if they had been attempted on a more modest scale.” (Haddow & Klassen, 2004; 156)

Origins of New Process

1. Employers and Labour unhappy with OH&S system
2. OH&S Regulations Needed Amending
3. Minister Responsible an advocate for tripartite approaches to policy-making

Case Studies

Case #1:

Provincial Strategic Working Group on Workplace Safety (2002-2005)

- Broad mandate to reform OH&S regime to achieve aggressive injury reduction

Case #2:

Occupational Exposure Limit Review Working Group (2006-2007)

- Mandate to recommend new OELs for thousands of workplace chemicals

Process Features

- Consensus-based
- Government commitment to implement
- All parties have seat at table

- Membership heavily weighted toward Employers
- Tempered government commitment

Results

- 1. Policy Outcomes
 - Fairly successful
 - High degree of consensus
- 2. Labour Agenda
 - Disappointing: perception of too much compromise
 - Some modest gains made, prevention of employer rollbacks

Results

3. Effect of Process

- Power resources unequal, despite consensus
- Labour veto illusory
- Fear of employer veto
- CAUSE: Labour lacked political ally in the State

Lessons Learned

1. Labour lacks sufficient power resources to achieve significant gains from SD
2. Possible confirmation of Haddow & Klassen's hypothesis about smaller SD
3. Labour faces a complex decision matrix whether to participate in SD or not