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

Case #2:
- 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