

History of the British Industrial Relations Field Reconsidered: Getting from the Webbs to the New Employment Relations Paradigm

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Abstract

Sidney and Beatrice Webb are commonly cited as the founders of the British field of industrial relations. Are they, however, if the field is centred not on study of unions and collective bargaining but rather on the entire employment relationship? A 'qualified yes' answer is given; however, getting there involves major revision to the conventional historiography of the field. To illustrate, the article presents a traditional and revised family tree of British industrial relations. Numerous insights and implications follow.

1. Introduction

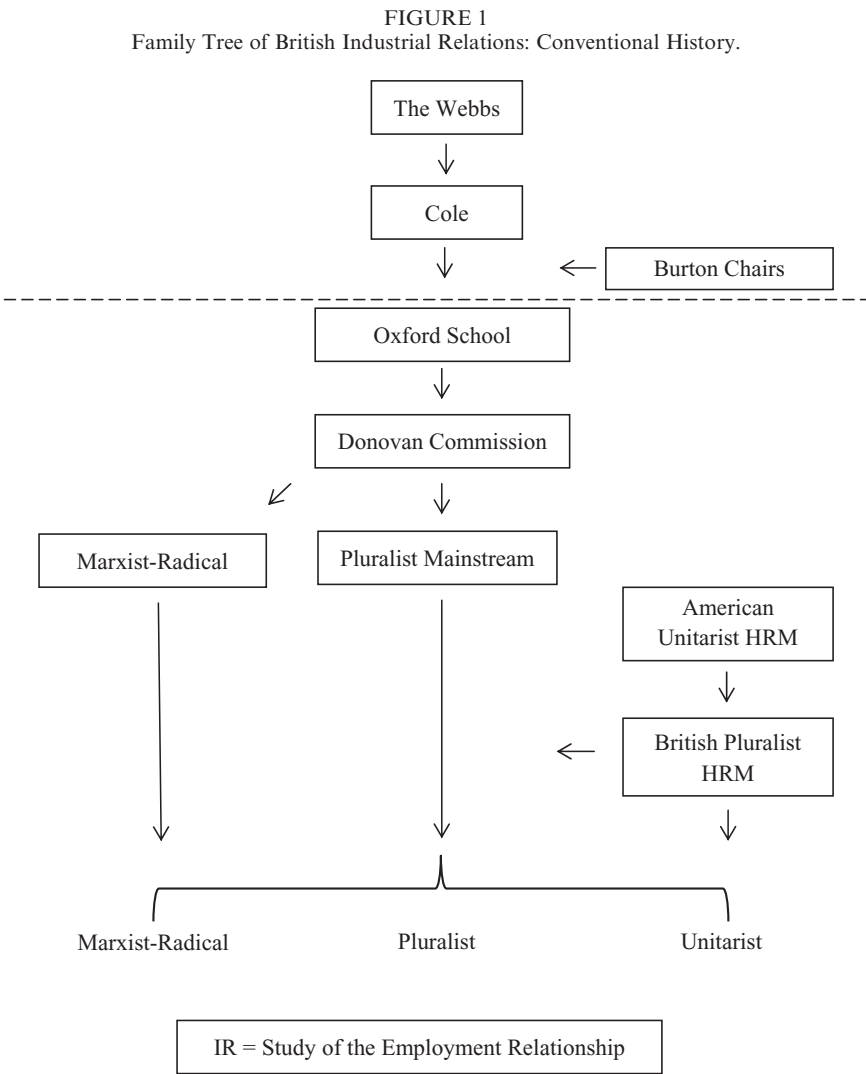
Sidney and Beatrice Webb are commonly cited as the founders of the British field of industrial relations (IR). Yet, at the same time, the field has evolved from a relatively narrow focus on unions and collective bargaining to a broader consideration of the entire employment relationship. The question examined here is: can the work of the Webbs at one and the same time serve as the foundation for both the original and new IR paradigms? Although the question is answered with a qualified yes, in the process the conventional historiography and understanding of the British IR field gets significantly revised at key place. Since history is open to multiple constructions and interpretations, this account is not claimed to be *the* history of British IR but rather an alternative way of framing it. Given space limitations and the length and breadth of the subject, I necessarily have to paint with a broad brush; also presumed is background familiarity with key persons and events.

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2. Conventional view

The history of academic British IR is described in Ackers and Wilkinson (2003b), Hyman (1989, 2003), Lyddon (2003), and Frege (2007, 2008). The main points are quite similar across studies and have been diagrammatically represented in Figure 1. It outlines the main features of the British IR family tree, as described in the studies just cited.

The IR field's history is typically divided into pre-history and institutionalized sections, demarcated by the horizontal dashed line. The pre-history starts with the landmark work of the Webbs in the 1890s, moves to G. D. H.



Cole in the interwar period, and ends with the formation of the Oxford School in the early 1950s. A secondary contribution, shown as entering from the right, is the three Burton IR chairs established in the 1930s. After the pluralist paradigm's high water mark in the late 1960s with the Donovan Commission, the IR field in the 1970s fractured into pluralist and radical wings. During the 1980s, the IR field shrank in the cold climate of the Thatcher/neoliberal era. In the 1990s, American unitarist human resource management (HRM) came to Britain (entering from the right), and after a period of extensive critique, was reworked into a broadened pluralist version and incorporated in the IR mainstream.

The IR field hit a low point in the 1990s and then staged a modest rebound. The traditional paradigm was broadened by bringing in lower and higher levels of analysis, a broader range of disciplinary perspectives, and pluralist, radical and unitarist frames (Heery *et al.* 2008). These elements are united and operationalized by a rejuvenated form of neo-institutional analysis centred on the employment relationship as a structured regime of regulation, rules and negotiated order (Ackers 2002; Blyton and Turnbull 2004; Colling and Terry 2010; Edwards 1995, 2003a). This outcome is pictured in Figure 1 where at the bottom, all the three frames of reference unite into one IR paradigm centred on the employment relationship.

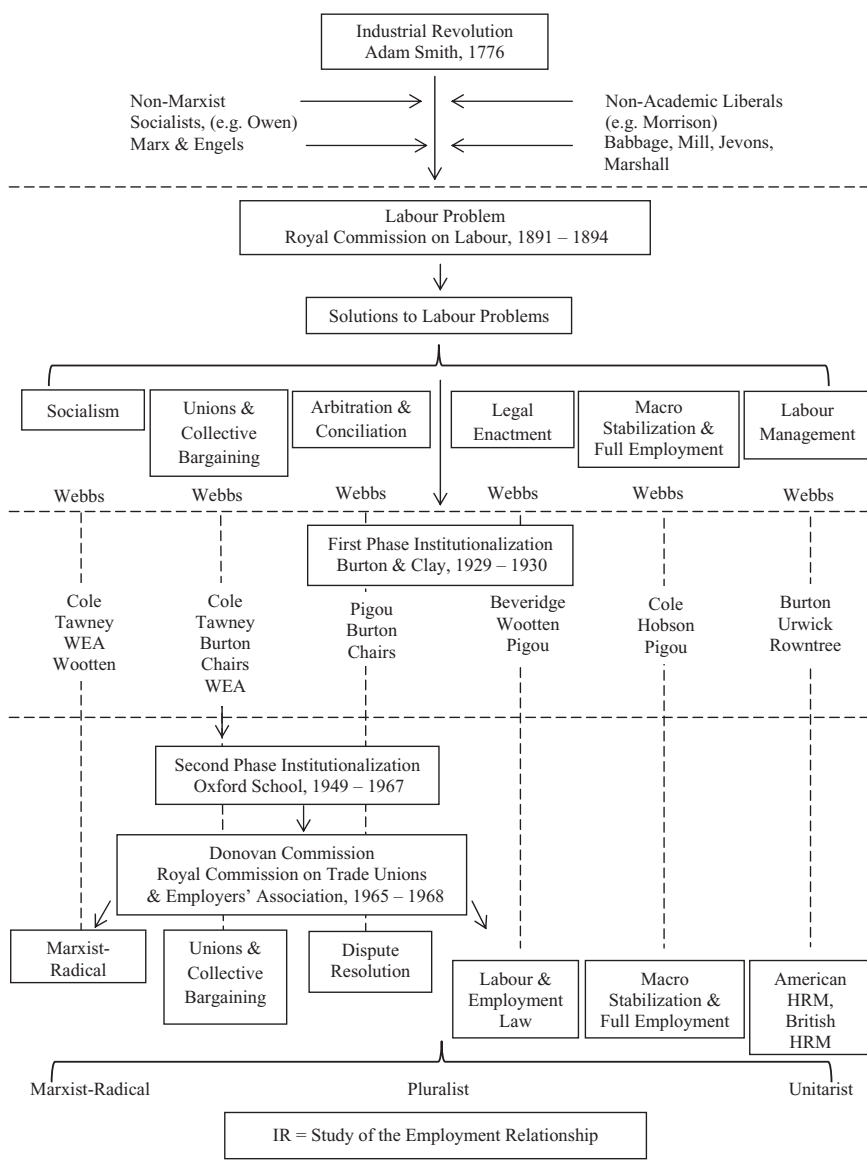
The take-off point for this article is the observation that recent writers have started to quietly make an 'intercept adjustment' in the intellectual line (the trunk of the family tree) that connects the Webbs to the modern employment relations paradigm. Illustratively, Ackers and Wilkinson (2003b) give the Webbs founders' status and cite as justification their book *Industrial Democracy* 'with its insights into the dynamics of *trade unionism and bargaining*' (p. 5, emphasis added). In a later article, however, the Webbs founders' claim broadens to pioneers of IR as 'an *administrative social science*' and '*interdisciplinary movement for social reform*' (Ackers and Wilkinson 2008: 54–55, emphasis added). Similarly, in the late 1980s, Hyman (1989) states, 'The origins of academic industrial relations thus lie in a public commitment to *collective bargaining . . .*', and cites Sidney Webb (with Beatrice) as 'the pioneer of scholarly analysis of industrial relations' (p. 5–6, emphasis added). In a recent co-authored article, however, the Webbs's founding status comes from their 'classic studies of the *regulation of employment* in Britain' (Clarke *et al.* 2011: 241, emphasis added); these authors then observe, 'it is one of the hallmarks of industrial relations that *none of these groups* [managers, employees, unions] is assumed a priori to be more worthy of study than any other (p. 251, emphasis added).

Evidently, the Webbs made different contributions to two overlapping but different IR paradigms, and yet are put forward as founders of both. One must ask, therefore, whether both intellectual lines originating from the Webbs are based in historical fact, or is one a perhaps convenient re-interpretation to support the IR field's broadened domain claims?

3. History of British IR: revised view

A revised family tree of British IR is presented in Figure 2. The diagram’s structure and content is created through ‘backward deduction’. That is, the chain of logic starts with the premise asserted in the current literature: the IR

FIGURE 2
Family Tree of British Industrial Relations: Revised History.



field's object of study is the *employment relationship* (Heery *et al.* 2008). The remainder of the diagram is then filled in with names and branches of thought assuming the employment relation has *always* been the field's generic subject domain. Inclusion is limited to writers who are British, take a scholarly approach, and emphasize the human, social, politically embedded and problematic nature of the employment relation (to screen-out clear non-participants, such as from neoclassical labour economics and organizational behaviour). No one is excluded based on normative/political positions.

Phase I of Pre-History: Smith to the Royal Commission

If the field is conceived as the study of the employment relationship, then backward deduction suggests that it starts with the first person who gave the employment relationship significant scholarly attention. The best candidate is Adam Smith and his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), written at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution (first box) from which sprang modern capitalism.¹

Smith introduces on the first page the concept of division of labour. This is important because without division of labour, the economy has no firms, labour markets, specialized jobs, wage system, or occupational, power, and status hierarchies, and therefore, no IR field. Smith gives attention to aspects of the social division of labour (Reisman 1976), later much elaborated on by Marx, Durkheim and Weber but emphasizes the economic dimension in terms of work specialization, skills and productivity.

However, the real antecedent of IR in *The Wealth of Nations* is the chapter 'Of the Wages of Labour'. In an oft-quoted passage, Smith observes that wage arises from a bargain that 'depends everywhere on the contract usually made between the two parties, whose interests are by no means the same', and in this contest, 'masters must generally have the advantage' (Smith 1776/1937: 66–67). Smith also notes the stultifying effect on workers of highly repetitive and narrowly divided jobs, observes that employers combine into collusive groups for purposes of forcing down wages, regards trade unions as usually ineffective but nonetheless forced on workers by overbearing and unfair employers, emphasizes the importance of fairness and justice in the employment relation, and embeds the market process in an institutional and political economy framework where property rights give the rich and powerful a social and economic advantage. This is the other side of Adam Smith not usually emphasized by economists (called 'Kirkaldy Smith' by Evensky 2005, as opposed to 'Chicago Smith').

Smith is an intellectual root of IR but is not a founder because labour/employment was not the central part of his academic work, and no identifiable labour studies field grew out of it. From Smith originates an arrow in Figure 2 that descends to the Labour Problem in the late nineteenth century (second box). The Labour Problem slowly grew over the nineteenth century and reached a peak from roughly 1880 to 1920. The Labour Problem, also called 'Labour Question' and later pluralized and put in lower case as 'labour problems', was the launching platform for what became several decades later

the field of study called industrial relations (Frege 2008: 35; Hyman 1989: 3). Along the way, however, four contributing branches of thought require note.

Two enter from the left. The first includes various nineteenth-century British writers who, in some way, addressed the Labour Problem and sought to solve it through various collectivist/socialist means, such as producer's cooperatives, syndicalism and profit-sharing. In this line are people such as Robert Owen (Ackers 2010; Cole 1953). Their work is, admittedly, only liberally interpreted as 'scholarly'.

The second group is Marx and Engels. Like Owen, one could argue Marx and Engels have no place in Figure 2, although in their case, the problem is not scholarly but nationality (German in this British-only survey). However, inclusiveness is again adopted, partly on grounds they (like Kahn-Freund after the Second World War) lived in Britain for several decades. In many respects, Marx and Engels are classic IR writers, with one major caveat noted later. The employment relationship and wage system define the essence of capitalism in their theory; the employment relation is grounded in highly specialized modes of commodity production and market purchase of labour power; and the capitalist employment relation generates numerous social problems and conflicts — all developed with support of detailed empirical evidence and integration of economic, social, political and historical perspectives.

Entering from the right are two other groups. The first is a diverse collection of non-socialist ('liberal') writers outside universities who, during the nineteenth century, wrote on capital–labour relations and the solution to the Labour Problem. Examples are Morrison (1854) and Makepeace (1881). Sometimes this work shaded into Christian socialism.

The second group entering from the right includes academic writers who addressed the Labour Problem. Examples include Charles Babbage, John Stuart Mill, W. Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall. Babbage (1832), for example, wrote on the division of labour, factory management of labour, and the idea of unity of interest in the employment relation. Mill repudiated the wage fund doctrine and concluded that trade unions could serve the national interest; Jevons' last book was *The State in Relation to Labour* (1882); and Marshall (with wife Mary) covers various aspects of the labour problem in *Economics of Industry* (1879).

These four contributing branches merge into the main trunk of the IR family tree in the first pre-history stage, marked off by the horizontal dashed line preceding the Labour Problem box. The key event that dates the ascendancy of the Labour Problem is, arguably, the formation of the Royal Commission on Labour (1891–1894). As with later commissions and the IR field itself, public attention to and interest in employer–employee relations waxes bright when these relations become inflamed. The emergence of 'new unionism', several strikes that aroused sympathetic opinion (e.g. the match girls) and growing concern with poverty of the lower classes (later spurred by Charles Booth's well-known surveys of London) all contributed to the creation of the commission. With regard to what later became the field of IR,

Hyman (1989) notes ‘the terms of reference of the Royal Commission could have served, until recently at least, as a passable definition of industrial relations’ (p. 4). The focus of the commission was on causes and solutions of labour problems, giving it an empirical and problem-solving complexion still evident in the IR field today, but these have their root in an institution of capitalism fully amenable to theorization — the *employment relationship* (Marsden 1999).

The arrow in the IR family tree in Figure 2 proceeds from the Labour Problem box to Solutions to Labour Problems box. Below Solutions to Labour Problems are listed six distinct methods or approaches. All six (in boxes) are contained in the Majority and Minority reports of the Royal Commission on Labour (1894). They are from left to right in the diagram: Socialism (a highly variegated concept at that time, extending from public ownership of gas and water works to various revolutionary and reformist replacements for capitalism and the wage system), Unions & Collective Bargaining, Arbitration & Conciliation, Legal Enactment (protective labour laws and social insurance plans), Macroeconomic Stabilization & Full Employment, and Labour Management.

Assuming IR is the study of the employment relationship, the scholarly founder(s) of the IR field need to have pioneered the study of the employment relation, the nature and causes of the labour problems originating in the employment relation, and alternative solutions to these problems. By these three criteria, do the Webbs qualify or does someone else?

4. The paternity/maternity test: are the Webbs founders?

The Webbs published *History of Trade Unionism* (1894) and *Industrial Democracy* (1897) within several years of the Royal Commission. These two books, and particularly the latter, are widely cited as the beginning of the IR field (Ackers 2010; Frege 2008; Lyddon 2003). Roberts (1972), for example, calls *Industrial Democracy* ‘the Webbs’ general theory of industrial relations’ (p. 247). But do these books give the Webbs a claim to founders’ status when the frame of reference is not collective bargaining but the employment relationship?

A helpful piece of information would be to know the leading academic expert(s) on labour in Britain at the time of the Royal Commission. One clue is the academic people selected to serve on the commission. Interestingly, neither Beatrice Potter nor Sidney Webb (they had not yet married) was included. Rather, the big academic name on the commission was Cambridge University economist Alfred Marshall (Groenewegen 1994).

Marshall’s claim to IR founder can be challenged on several grounds, however. For example, he was a co-founder of neoclassical economics, which has longed served as a rival — if not enemy — of IR (Kaufman 2010). Also, Marshall was a signatory to the Majority report of the Royal Commission, and it largely promoted a laissez-faire stance towards labour problems. Yet

Marshall is not so quickly ruled out since, in his own writings (e.g. Marshall 1890), he struck many of the themes first set out by Adam Smith — a sympathy for labour, recognition of labour's inequality of power in wage bargaining, a moderately favourable assessment of trade unions, and a need for certain kinds of regulation of work and employment conditions.

Now, what about the Webbs? It is not a cut-and-dried story. For example, they regarded Marshall as not only the pre-eminent economist in Britain but also as their 'leader' (Harrison 2000: 283). Marshall, however, might still be discounted because, like Adam Smith, labour studies were not the focal point of his work but only a secondary part. But, interestingly, the same is true for the Webbs.

The guiding star of their writings was not labour *per se* but rather the development of an encompassing case for collective ownership and management of the economy. Thus, *History of Trade Unionism* and *Industrial Democracy* are bounded on the front end by Beatrice's book on the co-operative movement in Britain, and Sidney's articles on income distribution theory and socialism, and on the back end, by several decades of books on topics as diverse as British local government, land nationalization, education reform, the poor laws and economic planning in the Soviet Union. Further, while the Webbs in 1895 founded the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), they did not introduce labour studies into the curriculum (Kaufman 2004).

The Webbs' writings on labour could, nonetheless, be of sufficient breadth, depth and influence to still qualify them as IR founders. This is the conclusion reached in a recent review by Farnham (2008), but it is not conclusive since IR is defined in its traditional sense of *collective* employment relations rather than modern one of *all* employment relations. Fortunately for the Webbs, the publisher of *Industrial Democracy* helps make the link to today's broad notion of IR. An abstract included at the back of the Webbs' next book, *Problems of Modern Industry* (1898), describes *Industrial Democracy* as an 'Encyclopedia of the Labour Question' and 'a storehouse of authentic facts about every branch of "the Labour Question"' (p. 287).

'Every branch' of the Labour Question seems to stake a broad claim to all aspect of employment. More evidence would be helpful, however. Further examination indicates that the case can be made by looking across three different books written by the Webbs. The first is *Problems of Modern Industry* (1898), a collection of 11 previously published articles. The last two articles, 'The Difficulties of Individualism' and 'Socialism: True and False', argue that the Labour Problem can only be fully and permanently solved by transforming British capitalism to an economy of (mostly) municipal- and state-level democratic socialist control (the Socialism box in Figure 2, defined by public ownership).

Part of the argument in these articles, and also in a third one in the volume ('The National Dividend and Its Distribution'), is that the competitive price system is 'anarchic' (i.e. lacks rational coordination) and produces the most serious of all labour problems — widespread joblessness and irregular

employment. Thus, the argument for collectivist planning in these articles also fills in the Webbs' name under Macroeconomic Stabilization & Full Employment.

Industrial Democracy (1897) fills in three more of the Solutions. It provides a classic empirical and theoretical treatment of Unions & Collective Bargaining, makes an equally influential case for use of Legal Enactment (including public provision of 'mutual insurance') to establish common rules and social minima in labour markets, and provides considerable discussion of Arbitration & Conciliation.

The remaining Solution, Labour Management, is the least-investigated piece in the Webbs' research program. This neglect seems paradoxical given their desire to centralize production in larger industrial units (e.g. to eliminate sweating in smaller workshops) and substitute planned coordination by administration and organizations for the unplanned coordination of competition and markets. An explanation, however, is that in the interest of protecting the standard rate, the Webbs heavily circumscribe what employers may do in personnel management. That is, they may use personnel techniques to select and train the best workers but should otherwise follow collectively bargained terms and conditions in the industry. Likewise, they should forego programs and activities designed to promote firm-level loyalty and integration of interests (e.g. pensions, health insurance, profit-sharing) because these undercut workers' class ('horizontal') solidarity, compete with union provision, and diminish unions' ability to negotiate and enforce cross-employer common rules (*Industrial Democracy*, p. 552). To the degree the Webbs' claim to the Labour Management branch of the IR family tree can be established, the published set of lectures by Sidney Webb (1919), *The Works Manager Today*, is perhaps the best basis (ending with the declaration 'from now to Utopia, management is indispensable and all-enduring' (p. 157)).

Therefore, the Webbs have a strong if not 100 per cent solid paternity/maternity claim to first writers in Britain who launched a broad-based theoretical and empirical research program covering the employment relationship and its problems and solutions. Immediately, however, a conundrum of a different sort arises — a problem also shared by Marx and Engels, and all other anarchist/collectivist opponents of capitalism and private ownership of industry. Their solution to the Labour Problem (e.g. Webb and Webb 1920, 1923) is to replace capitalism and the profit motive with an economy of socialism, cooperatives and administrative planning (framed as 'the substitution of the motive of fellowship and public service for that of pecuniary self-interest and craving of riches-enrichment . . . [leading to] establishment of a genuine co-operative commonwealth' (1923: 173)). However, it then seems a logical *non sequitur* to call the Webbs founders of a field devoted to study of the employment relationship when both their theoretical and political mission is to (mostly) *eliminate* the employment relationship, at least in the capitalist-pluralist 'wage labour' form that has characterized Britain and other modern private ownership economies for the last 200 years.

Also troublesome is the Webb's position on trade unions and collective bargaining. Like other collectivists, they tend to see unions in instrumental terms as a vehicle to help usher in a new socialist economic system but which then cease to have an autonomous bargaining role; they also have ambivalent feelings about unions because, in the short run they often exhibit sectionalism and economism, and in the long run serve as a stabilizing meliorative prop for capitalism. The Minority report of the Royal Commission, for example, was largely authored by Sidney Webb, and remarkably, the Union & Collective Bargaining solution is barely mentioned and given no advocacy; on the other hand, the Legal Enactment and Socialism solutions get considerable emphasis. Then, in *Industrial Democracy*, the Webbs effectively euthanize the long-run role of trade unions and traditional collective bargaining (pp. 825–6):

We may therefore expect that, with the progressive nationalization or municipalisation. . . and spread of the Cooperative movement. . . the Trade Unions. . . will more and more assume the character of professional associations. . . more and more concerned with raising the standard of competency of its profession.

A disinterested observer could, thus, be pardoned for asking: IR founders, really? Likewise, one could reasonably conclude that perhaps Marshall's program of moderate reform is actually closer to modern-day IR than the Webbs' program of radical reform via collective ownership of industry, producers and consumers cooperatives, and effective end of trade unions as independent bargaining agents.²

These issues are raised here for debate and factual accuracy, but no reconciliation is attempted. I believe, however, a balanced and ecumenical judgment is that the Webbs' labour scholarship continues to pass test criteria of breadth, depth and lasting influence. However, the other side of the Webbs' heritage also has to be recognized: a critical/leftist stance towards capitalism, labouristic orientation in research and teaching, and relatively shallow attention and legitimacy given to management and employers' solutions to labour problems. Therefore, a reasonable paternity/maternity verdict seems to be that the Webbs pioneered study of the employment relationship in Britain, earning them founder's status, but also cast it in a way that gives one side (labour) considerably more positive and normative emphasis than the other (employers). One reads the British IR literature for the next century and sees this coloration indelibly imprinted (e.g., a recent example is the book *What's the Point of Industrial Relations?* (Darlington 2009) published by the British Universities Industrial Relations Association).

5. From the Webbs to the Oxford School: diversity and first-stage institutionalization

The conventional history is summarized by Bain and Clegg (1974). They state, 'Although *Industrial Democracy* did not establish industrial relations as a separate field of study, once the subject began to be established some fifty

years later [shortly after WWII], this seminal work was recognized as its major and perhaps only classic. Few [other] works of note were published during those fifty years. The exceptions include G. D. H. Cole's *World of Labour* (1913) and *Workshop Organization* (1923) . . .' (p. 98). McCarthy (1994) raises Cole's contribution to co-founder; per his statement, 'one must begin with the three founders of our subject — Sidney, Beatrice and Douglas' (p. 201).

The revised history in Figure 2 provides a different portrait. The central theme is that IR emerged in generic form in the late nineteenth century as the study of labour problems in the capitalist employment relationship. Further, proto-IR had a definite theoretical, policy and normative perspective that separated it from its major rivals to revolutionary left and laissez-faire right. Illustrative is the observation by Marsden (1982) that '[it] [the field of industrial relations] was. . . born out of the clash between Marxian political economy and neo-classical economics' (p. 236). In this guise, IR was a middle way theory of social/institutional economics and associated program of labour reform and institutional reengineering in industry.

Given this context, let us reconsider the conventional portrait, starting with Cole. It is standard to draw a straight line from the Webbs through Cole to the Oxford School of the early 1950s. For example, Ackers and Wilkinson (2003b) state, 'The key early intellectual figures were G. D. H. Cole and the Webbs' (p. 5). They do not explain the nature of Cole's contributions (but see Ackers 2010), and paradoxically, neither his work nor ideas are cited in current IR textbooks and readers (e.g. Blyton and Turnbull 2004; Colling and Terry 2010; Edwards 2003a).

Frege (2008) gives more information, stating 'G. D. H. Cole, the outstanding Fabian of the post-Webb generation, had a huge influence on the field. Cole founded Labour Studies in Oxford. Cole's early "memorandum" advocated public ownership and workers' control' (p. 39). Similarly, Lyddon (2003: 99) calls Cole 'the outstanding analyst of trade unionism in the first half of the twentieth century', and then explains that 'Cole was responsible for the establishment in 1949 of a lectureship in industrial relations at Nuffield College, Oxford, occupied by Flanders while Clegg became a research fellow'.

Given this background, Cole seems to best fit three Solutions in Figure 2: Socialism, Unions & Collective Bargaining, and Macroeconomic Stabilization & Full Employment.

Cole, like the Webbs, was a non-Marxist evolutionary socialist (the Webbs advocated 'permeation', Cole 'encroachment') — albeit of a more radical left variety who championed guild socialism with greater decentralized workers' control (Wright 1979). Like the Webbs, the dominant thread that connects his voluminous writings is desire to advance the theory and practice of socialism. Books such as *Self Government in Industry*, *Guild Socialism Restated* and *A History of Socialist Thought* most directly speak to this theme. Next is the solution for which Cole is regularly cited in IR historiography, trade unions and collective bargaining. Examples of books include *An Introduction to Trade Unionism*, *Labour in Coal Mining Industry* and *British*

Trade Unionism To-day. The third is macroeconomic control through collectivization of industry to eliminate trade cycles and unemployment (*Gold, Credit and Unemployment*) and national economic planning (*Principles of Economic Planning*). On these matters, Cole (1935) states, 'the problem of unemployment [is] insoluble within the limitations of capitalist industry' (p. vii), and 'the *real unity of interest* between employer and employee will have come true through the suppression of the capitalist employer' (p. 348, emphasis added). Here, as with the Webbs, is the tension between Cole the socialist and Cole the writer on the employment relation.

Only one other pre-history element besides the Webbs and Cole is typically mentioned in the conventional history. As indicated in Figure 1, this is the establishment in 1930 and later years of three Burton chairs in IR at Cambridge, Cardiff and Leeds (Lyddon 2003).

Funding for the chairs was provided by Montague Burton, a clothing retailer and manufacturer. Burton was interested in promoting peace in both politics and industry, and hence created university chairs in international relations and industrial relations. In particular, the charge given to the IR chair holders was the study of 'the conditions of employment and the relations between employers and employed, with special reference to the causes of industrial disputes and the methods of promoting industrial peace' (Hilton 1931: 5).

The chairs' founding by an employer and orientation towards 'peace' is sometimes cited as idiosyncratic and outside the developing IR mainstream. Voskeritsian (2010), for example, describes them as 'an *ad hoc* attempt to guide research and teaching towards a specific ideological direction' (p. 8). When the pre-history of IR is viewed in the context of the employment relation and solutions to labour problems, however, Burton's concern with industrial peace places the chairs squarely at the centre of the original labour problems paradigm. Further, an employers' role in IR is fully in keeping with the tripartite nature of field, as established by the Royal Commission in 1891, while Burton's agenda was surely no more ideologically driven or distant from the British mainstream than the Webbs or Cole on the labour/collectivist side.

The interwar holders of the Burton chairs, following the negative assessment of Bain and Clegg (1974), are typically not given weight in modern histories as contributors to the development of the field. A broader view suggests this treatment is perhaps overly dismissive.

In his inaugural address, Hilton (1931) tells readers that '[a]t the moment the matters for the study of which the Chair was founded are not in the forefront of public concern. There is peace in industry, if by peace one means an absence of conflict' (p. 5). Yet this state of peace did attract attention *outside* Britain. A delegation of investigators came to Britain in the late 1930s from strife-torn America (led by Cornell University's B. F. Catherwood and newspaper chain owner Frank Gannett) to discover the reasons for Britain's industrial peace. Both Hilton and J. Henry Richardson (another chair holder) were invited to contribute chapters for the edited volume

subsequently published (Gannett and Catherwood 1939). The introductory chapter is titled 'How Britain Handles Her Labour Problem'.

At this point, the conventional pre-history stops, and attention shifts to the postwar Oxford School. The problem, now clearly evident, is that the conventional pre-history (Figure 1) is written with the union-centred postwar paradigm as its frame of reference and *not* the employment relation. Therefore, it is useful to switch frames and see if other interwar writers belong in one or more of the six IR Solutions pictured in Figure 2.

The most obvious name that stands out for inclusion is William Beveridge. Beveridge was a life-long associate of the Webbs, adopted their concept of a 'social minima', served as director of the LSE (1919–1937), was foremost expert on unemployment in Britain (perhaps the world), Britain's foremost expert on social insurance for working people (e.g. accident and unemployment insurance) and authored the blueprint (the 'Beveridge Report') for the modern welfare state adopted by Atlee's Labour government immediately after the Second World War (Middlemas 1979).

Beveridge was probably only second to Keynes in transforming the lives of British working people after the Second World War, yet paradoxically, his name is completely absent from the family tree of British IR (Figure 1). Why? Evidently, his place in the Legal Enactment and Full Employment boxes is not widely regarded as part of IR, anchored as it was for many years in the Union & Collective Bargaining box. In particular, Beveridge did not write on union theory or history; was not part of the Oxford trade union/Labour Party fraternity; expressed life-long ambivalent-to-critical opinions about unions, the Labour Party and the Fabian program of collective ownership; and was regarded by Fabian socialists as a social liberal along the lines of Keynes (Harris 1977; Pimlott 1984).

Other names come up for inclusion in the interwar IR family tree if the net is cast widely. Seven — intended to be illustrative and not comprehensive — include Henry Clay, John Hobson, A. C. Pigou, Seeböhm Rowntree, R. H. Tawny, Lyndall Urwick and Barbara Wootten. An eighth influence, the Workers Education Association (WEA), is postponed to the next section.

Hobson was an economist, mostly kept out of formal academic positions in England on account of his heterodox theories of macroeconomic under-consumption. Hobson was also in the Fabian line, and he and Sidney Webb did more than anyone else to adapt Ricardo's rent theory to the distribution of income. Essentially, Webb and Hobson offered a non-Marxian version of surplus value called the 'unearned increment' (taken from Mill). Sidney and Beatrice used it as the basis for their economic justification of trade unions developed in Part III, 'Trade Union Theory' in *Industrial Democracy* (1897). In books stretching into the mid-1930s, Hobson carried on this line of theorizing to explain some of the most pressing labour problems of the era, including poverty, income inequality, unemployment and economic depression. Hobson, therefore, seems to be writing on several dimensions of IR; indeed, it is claimed that during the 1920s, he surpassed the Webbs as the most influential intellectual influence in the Labour Party (Hutchison 1953: 127).

If Hobson is included, one could argue for Keynes, but perhaps he is too far on the edge of IR. Britain had, however, another economist in the interwar period who, by an employment relationship yardstick, was certainly in the IR ambit. She is Barbara Wootten. Wootten wrote on labour, combined sociology and economics, helped draft the Beveridge report, took a Webbsian investigative/empirical approach to labour research and served on four Royal Commissions including workmen's compensation. Her book *The Social Foundations of Wage Policy* is a penetrating critique of the orthodox commodity theory of labour. Wootten was also an advocate of economic planning and socialism, a Labour Party activist, and champion of egalitarian social policy.

Marshall's successor at Cambridge, A. C. Pigou, also followed his mentor in writing significant works on labour. His first book, for example, was *Principles and Methods of Industrial Peace*. He also wrote on wage determination, unemployment, human capital, minimum wages, and segmented/internal labour markets.

It was earlier noted that the Webbs emphasized the place of expert administration in the new socialist state they were trying to create. Indeed, the reason they created the LSE was not to promote labour studies; the goals were to educate people in the facts and conditions of modern society with the confidence that they would come to see the case for socialism, and more specifically, to train people to run the new administrative state. From the beginning, therefore, LSE offered courses of study in management and commerce. This fact would seem to open up places in the IR family tree for British writers on administrative subjects, particularly related to labour. In the conventional history, this branch of the family tree is omitted, although for reasons not made clear; that is, is it lack of people in the pre-history period writing on labour/personnel management, or alternatively, exclusion of this branch because it is not part of the IR field?

It seems indisputable that employers and the function of management are intrinsic parts of the (capitalist) employment relationship and are part of both the causes of labour problems and their solution. From a revisionist Figure 2 perspective, therefore, this branch needs to be included. Is there, then, anyone in the interwar period in Britain who fits in? By general agreement, the management side of business and IR in Britain lacked significant scholarly attention until after the Second World War (Childs 1969; Gospel 1992), reflecting in part the British industrial tradition of what Hyman (2003) labels 'unscientific management'. Two writers, however, deserve consideration as part of the IR family tree.

The first is Lyndall Urwick. Urwick wrote on general management but has ties to IR in three respects. First, he attempted to integrate the 'mechanical' management ideas of Frederick Taylor with the 'human' management ideas of Mary Follett — a synthesis not much in vogue in interwar Britain but much more so in interwar American IR and the subsequent human relations of school of the 1940s–1950s. Second, Urwick was closely connected to the International Labour Organization, and in particular served as director of

the affiliated Institute of International Management. Third, if a founding contribution of the Webbs was to establish IR as an administrative social science (Ackers and Wilkinson 2008: 54), then surely Urwick, a founder of what became the Henley School of Management and co-founder of the journal *Administrative Science Quarterly*, has a strong connection to this dimension of the field.

Urwick described industrialist Seeborn Rowntree as the 'the British management movement's greatest pioneer', so arguably he too deserves inclusion. In part, this accolade comes from the innovative personnel and welfare practices instituted at his family's company, including pension and medical benefits, a psychology department, and eight-hour day. Rowntree also qualifies, however, because he authored a number of IR-related books, of which several gained national attention. Examples are *The Human Needs of Labour*, *Industrial Unrest: A Way Out*, and *Poverty and Progress*.

Next is R. H. Tawney. Tawney, a Christian/guild socialist, Fabian, Labour Party activist and professor at LSE, is widely considered one of the most influential economic historians of the first half of the twentieth century. Fresh out of Oxford, he worked at the settlement house Toynbee Hall and formed an association with Beveridge. Most of his books are on non-labour topics, such as the land enclosure movement, but several dealt directly with socialism and labour policy, and had a large influence on the subsequent development of the British welfare state after the war. For over 40 years, Tawney also served on the executive board of the WEA and taught adult labour education courses. In Tawney's view, the origin of the Labour Problem stems from the workers' 'straightforward hatred of a system which stunts personality and corrupts human relationships by permitting the use of man by man as an instrument of pecuniary gain' (Tawney 1964). Nothing short of a decentralized democratic form socialism could, in Tawney's view, pass both the economic and ethical test of a decent society.

Last is Henry Clay, professor of economics at Oxford and Manchester, and long-time WEA tutor. Clay (1929) wrote the first book in Britain by an academic person that had the term 'industrial relations' in the title, *The Problem of Industrial Relations and Other Lectures*. Clay makes several points in this book worth citing. First, he uses the modern 'employment relation' definition of the field, stating that IR includes 'everything that is involved with the determination of the contract of employment' (p. 3). Second, he attributes poor IR to a combination of economic and political factors, the former stemming from the worker having to sell labour as a commodity in a disadvantageous bargaining position, and the second coming from lack of democracy in internal firm governance. Third, he states that the socialists are mistaken to identify the labour problem with private ownership of capital and the wage system since it arises in all forms of production (p. 8), and furthermore, public enterprise is a 'cumbersome and uneconomic way of securing the conditions desired' (p. 309). Finally, his solution to the Labour Problem is in the British social liberal tradition. That is, Clay recommends retaining capitalism and a market economy, but removing the inequality and

exploitation arising from free competition and substituting the spirit of cooperation and enterprise that come from 'equal competition' (p. 310).

All of these interwar contributors are inserted in one or more of the six IR branches growing out of the Labour Problem and Solutions to the Labour Problem. Their precise allocation is arguable but also not central to the larger issue concerning the construction and interpretation of the field's pre-history.

Ackers and Wilkinson (2003b) state, 'In effect, Clegg and Flanders had established a new paradigm', (p. 6); this new paradigm was contrasted to the 'older, more diffuse tradition of IR' and had 'a strong current of positivist Fabian social engineering' (p. 6); and 'the research subject was defined as organized labour, collective bargaining and other institutions associated with job regulation' (p. 7). All of these statements are factually correct; the issue is their interpretation.

Conventionally viewed (Figure 1), Clegg and Flanders created the first bona fide IR paradigm; in doing, so they brought together and integrated diffuse elements from a loosely circulating tradition, and the new paradigm was grounded in a Fabian and union history/theory intellectual line going back through Cole to the Webbs. A considerably different interpretation comes from Figure 2.

That is, an IR paradigm (if not by that name) had already formed in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries (Kaufman 2008). This new paradigm was grounded in the employment relationship and causes/solutions of labour problems; it can be characterized in the negative as 'diffuse' but also in the positive as 'broad and inclusive'. Clegg and Flanders did indeed create a new paradigm but made it distinctive and more tightly structured by greatly narrowing the domain of IR. For example, the Fabian and union history/theory roots represent only two of the field's six solutions to labour problems; also, the political grounding of the early labour problems paradigm (as in the Royal Commission) was more evenly tripartite and less heavily weighted to the interests and outlook of unions. Finally, the early labour problems paradigm draws attention to the fact that Fabianism (originally formulated) is a questionable root for IR since it promotes a socialist economy that solves the Labour Problem by getting rid of the field's very object of study — a market-mediated, profit-driven, pluralist employer–employee relation (also see Hyman 1975: x, emphasis in original, stating the object of a radical-Marxist analysis is 'the *abolition* of industrial relations as it exists today').

The revised history also suggests a different configuration for IR's pre-history and institutionalization. The first phase of pre-history extends from Adam Smith in 1776 (the first scholarly writing on the employment relationship from an IR perspective) to the hearings of the Royal Commission on Labour in 1891–1894 (marking out the Labour Problem as a priority social issue and delineating alternative solutions). The second phase extends from the Majority and Minority reports of the Royal Commission (Alfred Marshall and Sidney Webb) to the publication of Henry Clay's book in 1929, *The Problem of Industrial Relations and Other Lectures*, and founding in 1930 of the first Burton Chair of Industrial Relations at Cambridge. Clay's book is

the first in Britain to use the IR term in the title, and the Burton chair is the first academic position for IR in a British university; hence, both mark the start date of the first phase in the field's institutionalization. A second phase of institutionalization begins in the early 1950s with the formation of the Oxford School and its redefined collective bargaining-centred paradigm.

6. Second-stage institutionalization: the Oxford School

The conventional history draws a single arrow from the Webbs to Cole, to the Oxford School, to the Donovan Commission. The task of this section is to see how the postwar history looks if the IR family tree is rearranged into the six branches emanating from the Labour Problem in Figure 2. To conserve space in the diagram, people's names discussed in this section are not written in.

Did, in fact, Clegg and Flanders serve as founders of a new postwar paradigm, and if so, how is it still connected in a straight line to the work of the Webbs and Cole? Consideration of the six branches in Figure 2 suggests some possible answers. Part of the Oxford connection to the Webbs and Cole is in research approach, including exhaustive empirical investigation and institutional knowledge. In terms of subject matter, Clegg and Flanders, and almost all the rest of British IR of this period only fit squarely in one of the branches: Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining. Flanders and Clegg (1954) state in their text *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain* that '[t]rade union and employers associations are the chief institutions of industrial relations' (p. v), and Brown (1997) titles this period the 'high tide of consensus' (indicating widespread agreement).

No one in the 1950s with recognized affiliation to the IR field wrote on the three Solutions of Management, Macroeconomic Stabilization or Legal Enactment — with one significant but perhaps partial exception. The exception is LSE's Kahn-Freund, a recognized expert in labour law, author of a chapter in the Flanders/Clegg textbook and a Donovan Commission member. However, Kahn-Freund is a quasi-exception to the rule because his training and early career in labour law were in Germany, and he came to Britain in the 1930s as a refugee. Britain's attachment to 'collective *laissez-faire*' otherwise left labour law a mostly empty box.

The Oxford School also does not fit in the Socialism (public ownership) branch even though Clegg had, up to about 1947, been a member of the Communist party, and Flanders was a life-long ethical socialist (Ackers 2011; Kelly 2010). Both Clegg and Flanders came to reject the revolutionary socialism of Marx, state socialism of the Webbs, and Cole's guild socialism of workers' control for a pluralist and capitalist form of industrial democracy (Ackers 2010). According to Clegg (1960: 21), a useful program of industrial democracy recognizes three principles: independent trade unions, union representation of workers' interests and the irrelevance of the ownership of industry. Similarly, Kelly (2010: 129) states that Flanders' postwar IR

program also rested on three main elements: independent collective bargaining with multi-level negotiation, workplace productivity bargaining and tripartite national incomes policy.

These commitments are not compatible with Socialism; they do provide the basis, however, for putting the Oxford School into the Arbitration & Conciliation branch of the postwar IR family tree as dispute resolution is practically the other side of collective bargaining. This inclusion, however, is less by philosophical conviction (voluntarism was stressed over coercion and mandate) and more by extensive practical involvement (Brown 1998).

It appears, therefore, that the main way from the Webbs to the Oxford School via Cole is through the Unions & Collective Bargaining branch. The conventional history recognizes this too (earlier quotes from Ackers and Wilkinson, and Lyddon; also see Frege 2008: 39; Hyman 1989: 6), but with a vital interpretative difference. In Figure 1, the Webbs, Cole, Oxford School and Donovan Commission are connected in the family tree by one central trunk, indicating a unity and centrality to this line of intellectual development. In Figure 2, the same intellectual line proceeds down the Unions & Collective Bargaining branch (only one of six, indicated by the connective arrow) with the Oxford School box located under it, and thus 'off-center' relative to the original Labour Problem paradigm (Kaufman 2008).

The transition from broad to narrow IR paradigms is marked out by the different names of the two commissions that anchor the respective paradigms: the Royal Commission on Labour of 1891–1894 (broad) and Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations of 1965–1968, aka Donovan Commission (narrow). The British postwar settlement featured Keynesian economic full employment policy, collective bargaining, nationalization of key industries and a welfare state. The original paradigm effectively spanned all of these and had a base in economics but with substantial sociology (the Webbs considered economics part of sociology) and other social science disciplines; the Oxford School, in effect, chose one of these four as the core of IR studies, mostly left-out economics and sociology (at least in the latter case to the mid-1960s), and relied principally on a narrower base in history, political theory and trade union studies (Ackers 2007).

These choices can be defended. For example, the union-centric focus is a representative reflection of the postwar settlement where unions covered the majority of the workforce, and collective bargaining effectively set terms and conditions for a large share of employees. This focus was reinforced because the dominant industrial problems of the era, such as wage drift, strikes, anaemic productivity growth and inflation, were seen as union management-centred. The union-centric model also gave a more focused intellectual coherence to the field, moving it away from what modern writers regard as an unduly 'problem-driven' focus (Marsden 1982). The downside is that IR began its (fully) institutionalized life after the Second World War as a subject closely tied to the trade union movement and normatively linked to the social democratic/socialist political agenda of the unions and Labour party.³ Thus, it could be said that the Oxford version of the field could be more accurately

called 'union & labour studies' (one branch and set of interests) instead of 'industrial & employment relations' (all branches and interests).⁴

Interestingly, participants at the time recognized that the Oxford School was a narrower version of IR. Behrend (1963), for example, notes the presence of two paradigms: first, an 'all-inclusive' version that defines IR as 'all the relationships between management and employees in the community', and a 'restricted' version 'used to denote only collective relations between trade unions and employers' (p. 383). She does not cite specific researchers or traditions but states that the inclusive version is present in the 'syllabuses of many university courses on industrial relations' (p. 383). Again, no examples of such textbooks are cited, but one popular text of the time was by Burton chair holder J. Henry Richardson, *An Introduction to the Study of Industrial Relations* (1954). It is considerably different than its major rival, Flanders and Clegg's *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*.

Richardson defines IR broadly as 'concerned with the relations between the parties in industry' (p. 12), devotes eight chapters to the employer/HRM side (selection, training, etc.) and only six chapters to collective relations. The fact that the Richardson versus Flanders–Clegg approach was regarded as two different paradigms for the field is indicated, in turn, in an article by J. H. Smith (1955) on 'The Scope of Industrial Relations'.⁵ He describes the Richardson approach as giving 'the subject the widest possible scope', while Flanders and Clegg's approach is 'far narrower' (p. 81). Smith opts for the inclusive approach. He states, 'Oddly enough, the field of human behavior in industry [aka Richardson's definition of IR] is still regarded as being divided between "industrial" and "human" relations. . . . Distinctions like this are not only unrealistic, but they can do much harm' (p. 84). With regard to the narrower Oxford School approach, Smith states, 'Here the attitude of the trade unions is of great importance. The formal institutions of industrial relations are in a sense the vested interests of the trade union movement'.⁶

Roberts (1972) observes that the postwar IR field originally gave little attention to management, and on both positive and normative grounds, the Oxford group took a critical stance towards human relations, industrial sociology and personnel management (also see Wood 1982).⁷ For this reason, the standard history has no separate branch for the management side of IR until the 1990s. But, in fact, work-related management studies in Britain were starting to achieve international recognition in the 1950s and are today considered a progenitor of today's high performance work system (HPWS). Most important is the work of Eric Trist and associates (including Baldamus 1961) at the Tavistock Institute. Through studies of coal mining, Trist and colleagues discovered ways to reorganize the division of labour to increase worker autonomy, control and involvement through participative employee teams. This line of research led to the founding of the journal *Human Relations*. Viewed from the perspective of the employment relationship, Trist, socio-technical analysis, employee participation and the human relations

school are all part of the field and are listed in Figure 2 under Management. Indeed, in Nordic countries, socio-technical theory was regarded as a modern contributor to the literature on industrial democracy (von Otter 2002).

Another variable in the equation is the origins of the Oxford School in vocational trade union studies. Traditionally, British universities, particularly of the Oxbridge sort, did not regard union or management studies as intellectually respectable, particularly the latter because (quoting Roberts 1972: 252) '[t]he study of organized labour was regarded by most dons as academically perverse, and mainly inspired by political doctrine'. No British university, therefore, offered a graduate degree in IR until LSE in the early 1960s. Hence, there developed an alternative source of labour studies education through a network of labour colleges, residential and extension labour courses offered through the Workers Educational Association, and regular degree coursework through Ruskin College at Oxford (included in Figure 2 in the interwar period as WEA). Many of the prominent names in interwar and postwar IR started out here, and some had long-standing and prominent connections, including Cole, Tawney and most members of the Oxford School (Corfield 1969; Goldman 1995). On this subject, Hyman (1989: 7) observes,

The requirements of such practitioners helped encourage the extension of industrial relations teaching from the adult education courses which formerly predominated to fully fledged degree programmes. One consequence was a growing concern with the academic status of industrial relations.

Once can infer, therefore, that Flanders and Clegg's textbook *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain* (1954) had dual motives: to provide a reader for adult education/labour courses (see p. v; also Goldman 1995: 260) and to fashion IR into a better defined subject so it had a better claim to a discrete and mostly unfilled place in university curricula (Roberts 1972). Here again were political and normative commitments that also help explain the Oxford School's antipathy to employer-related subjects (human relations, personnel management), and also low regard for disciplines, such as economics, that were typically unfriendly to unions (Brown 1997). Indeed, many of the WEA instructors (e.g. Cole, Tawney) taught from a radical/Marxist perspective (Corfield 1969).

Various branches of the IR family tree have been filled in for the 1950s–1960s. Collective bargaining stands out; labour law features Kahn-Freund, and Beveridge remained active in the social insurance area; and management features the Tavistock Institute. Macro stabilization enters in via incomes policy, and here McCarthy, Flanders and Clegg played roles. The Socialism branch, strictly defined, lost a number of writers to Cold War disillusionment and repression, but some radical IR authors, such as Victor Allen, remained in union studies, and historians, such as Hobsbawm and Thompson, ran a Communist Party Historians Group and published seminal works on labour/working class history (e.g. Thompson 1963; more generally, Kaye 1984).

7. From Donovan to today

The hearings, report and research studies of the Donovan Commission are widely regarded as the high-water mark of the Oxford pluralist consensus. As emphasized above, to significant degree, this *was* a period of consensus, and hence the focus of IR was centred on the Union & Collective Bargaining branch of the family tree — to the point it looked like the trunk. However, the consensus and seemingly tight intellectual centre of gravity around collective bargaining also reflected the substantial (but not complete) transition to a truncated union studies paradigm that, by construction, tended to exclude from the field other branches that had earlier been part of the broader employment relation and labour problems paradigm descending from the Royal Commission of 1891 and the Webbs.

From the end of the Donovan Commission in the late 1960s to the present time, a gradual process of paradigm-(re)broadening has taken place. Although not possible to fully represent in Figure 2, the history of the British IR field very much resembles an hourglass with the Oxford School period representing the narrow neck in the middle.

Due to space constraints and also the fact that the story of the post-Donovan period in British IR is well known, no detailed account similar to what has just preceded can be given here. Suffice it to note a few basic points.

First, several of the Solutions are re-labelled at the bottom of Figure 2 to reflect current modern usage; thus, Socialism becomes Marxist-Radical, Arbitration & Conciliation become Dispute Resolution, Legal Enactment becomes Labour & Employment Law, and Labour Management becomes HRM. A qualitative shift also occurs as scientism takes holds post-Donovan, so less emphasis in each branch is given to applied problems and solutions *per se*, and more to the distinctive theoretical perspective, methodology and topic area (Strauss and Whitfield 2008).

Second, the process of paradigm re-broadening occurred in phases post-Donovan. This process can only be roughly indicated in Figure 2 due to space constraints; for example, the right-hand three boxes developed later, and are therefore shifted down relative to the left-hand three boxes. Again, individual names are not included post-Donovan.

The first phase of re-broadening started in the 1970s with the Marxist-Radical insurgency, exemplified by Hyman's book *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction* (1975). The labour process literature, spawned by Braverman (1974) in the USA but dominated in the 1980s and afterwards by British writers, also had a strong Marxist-radical element (e.g. Friedman 1977; Knights and Willmott 1990). A third stream is a large number of ethnographic case studies of workplace conflict and related topics, often framed from a radical if non-Marxist perspective (Edwards 1986). Sociologists were the dominant group in this work, helping to substantially broaden the disciplinary mix in British IR (Roberts 2003). One book in this stream (Kelly 1998) introduced a macro perspective into IR via the notion of Kondratieff long-wave economic cycles and attendant cycles of conflict and

working class mobilization. This branch of the IR family tree is labelled Socialism pre-Donovan but, like the Old Left that promoted it, faded in the Cold War period of the 1950s, and then reappeared as a Marxist-Radical branch led by a younger generation of the New Left (Gall 2003). Here is a very visible representation of the hourglass pattern, and also qualitative turn from concrete solutions (socialism) to a frame of research (Marxist-Radical).

Just as the left of the IR family tree in Figure 2 started to fill in again post-Donovan, so too did the right part, albeit with a lag of a decade or more. Management, mostly neglected and even ostracized in the 1950s, came back in a slow but steady process. Flanders, for example, can be said to have rediscovered the importance of management in *The Fawley Productivity Agreements* (1964), while the workplace ethnographic studies and labour process literature of the 1970s–1980s, although often critical of management, nonetheless brought the employer side back in as an active and important force in employment relations. Then, with the arrival of American-inspired HRM in the late 1980s–1990s, the attention given to management in IR accelerated, albeit again with an initial overlay of criticism and wariness (per characterizations of non-union workplaces as a ‘Bleak House’ and ‘Black Hole’, and HRM as an ‘American Dream’). A particularly large growth area, with links back to socio-technical literature of the 1950s, was HPWS (Procter 2008). Gradually, IR accommodated to HRM, and to some degree, incorporated it through a process of reworking the concept, introducing greater pluralism and colonizing it through teaching and journal editorships (Bacon 2003). A number of most visible names in British HRM after 2000 came from IR, such as Poole, Purcell, Sisson and Storey.

Three branches in the IR family tree remained, as in the pre-Second World War period, somewhat sparsely represented. Showing the most growth, stimulated by the shrinkage of private sector collective bargaining, rise of legal enactment in place of collective laissez-faire in UK employment policy and growing importance of European Union directives, is the labour and employment law branch (Ewing 2003; Deakin and Njoya 2008). The social insurance/welfare component of legal enactment remained lightly represented (e.g. no chapter in Ackers and Wilkinson 2003a; Blyton *et al.* 2008), but attention to gender and ethnic equality issues (both legal and social) greatly increased (Greene 2003; Pocock 2008). Both of these recent survey volumes and the IR journal literature shows, on the other hand, relatively small attention in Britain to the Dispute Resolution branch, and even less to the Macro Stabilization & Full Employment branch.

Remaining is the Union & Collective Bargaining branch. Despite the broadening of the IR paradigm since the 1970s, the subject of unionism, collective bargaining and associated topics remains the centre of British IR (Frege 2005; Heery *et al.* 2008). Voskeritsian (2010), for example, grouped papers presented at annual BUIRA meetings from 1954 to 2008 into nine topic areas, and after trend analysis, concluded that ‘[o]nly two clusters seem to occupy a steady space in all the years of their appearance — the *Trade Unions* and *Trade Unions Organizing ones*’ (p. 32). At the same time,

however, the Union & Collective Bargaining branch has also experienced considerable widening in its own right over the last two to three decades. The title of this branch could be re-labelled to include other collective aspects of employment relations, such as works councils, employee representation and formal voice mechanisms (Gollan 2006; Jenkins and Blyton 2008). Also of much greater importance is the public sector and comparative and cross-national analyses (Hamann and Kelly 2008; Hyman 2001). Finally, relative to the Oxford School days, IR analysis of unions and collective bargaining has substantially expanded in terms of level of analysis, ranging from the shop floor to the state, and tactical to strategic (Heery *et al.* 2008).

The modern IR paradigm has broadened by repopulating across many of the original branches of the field; also assisting is closer theoretical integration. In Figure 2, the six branches of the IR family tree come together in a common focus on the employment relationship (the box IR = Employment Relationship). Two theoretical constructs, then, help provide unity and cohesion. The first, coming from Flanders (1965) and earlier, Dunlop (1958), is to conceive of the employment relationship and associated institutions and outcomes as a structured set of rules or regimes of regulation (Edwards 2003; Heery 2008); the second, coming from Fox (1966, 1973), is to model employment relationships in terms of a threefold frame of reference: unitarist, pluralist and radical (Budd and Bhawe 2008).

Here is a tangible basis for IR's theoretical claim to cover the employment relationship. However, a balanced account also notes that the theory just described remains thin and provides a weak integrating force across the various branches of the employment relationship (per its absence in most chapters of recent survey volumes).⁸

Figure 2 ends at this point. Portrayed in it is the British IR family tree, stretching over a period of more than two centuries. It begins with the Industrial Revolution and Adam Smith's introduction to the employment relationship in *The Wealth of Nations*, and extends to the Knowledge Economy of the early twenty-first century, and the latest theory and research on the employment relationship.

This family tree is unique to Britain in terms of names and events; the origin of IR in the capitalist employment relationship, labour problem and solutions to labour problems is generic and applies to all nations. However, since Britain was the first country to embark on the Industrial Revolution, it was also the first to generate a scholarly and policy literature focused on work, labour and the employment relationship. Although qualifications and caveats attach, the fountainhead of this literature, as it was eventually to become IR, is the husband–wife team of Sidney and Beatrice Webb.⁹ Although IR as a field first emerged in a well-institutionalized form in the USA 30 years before the UK (post-First World War vs post-Second World War), the Webbs got the ball rolling — even if with a sharp leftist/collectivist spin that in the fullness of time may appear over-done.

8. Conclusion

The web page for the Employment Relations and Organizational Behaviour Group at LSE states, 'More than a century ago, two of LSE's founders, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, pioneered the first great social science studies of the labour and management problems of their day. They did so in the belief that efficient management and social justice went hand in hand'. Based on this and similar examples, this article asks the question: does the historical record in fact yield an intellectual straight line from the Webbs to the study of the employment relationship?

The answer that emerges has three parts. The first is 'No' if one's compass is the traditional 'Whig' history of the British IR field. This history establishes a convincing line from the Webbs to union/labour studies but not to the employment relationship. The second is 'Yes' if the net is cast widely to cover *all* writings and labour subjects of the Webbs. The third is that the answer has to, then, be shaded to a substantially 'Qualified Yes' once account is given to the Webbs' marked tilt towards labour as subject and social interest and desire to (mostly) eliminate the capitalist employment relationship through socialist planning and collective ownership of industry.

As an aid in developing this argument, the article first presents the conventional portrait of the family tree of British IR and then a revised portrait. The revisionist portrait assumes that the employment relation has always been the subject of IR, and then fills in the family tree with British writers who have contributed significant work on the subject. The field's pre-history root goes back to Adam Smith, evolved into the duality of 'Study of Labour Problems' and 'Solutions to Labour Problems' in the late nineteenth century, and then developed along six branches (rather than one conventional union and labour studies trunk) to the present time. In terms of attention given to study of all dimensions of the employment relationship, the British IR field resembles an hourglass, with the narrow neck in the 1950s and work of the Oxford School. The challenge for IR today is use ideas from the Webbs (and others) to create a broader and more integrative theoretical framework that binds together and explains the major parts of the employment relationship.

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Notes

1. Hichens (1919), in what appears to be the first publication in Britain with 'industrial relations' in the title (see Bain and Woolven 1979), begins with a discussion of the 'new spirit in industrial relations' created 150 years ago by Adam Smith (p. 9).
2. The Webbs took a radical position relative to traditional English economic liberalism; however, their program of gradual socialization, disavowal of class struggle and end goal of efficiency (thus promoting consumers' interests) earned them

Lenin's epithet of 'bourgeois humbugs' (Clarkson 1953: 462). The Webbs were part of a broader shift in the British polity between 1880 and the First World War away from classical liberalism, and towards 'new liberalism' in the middle and socialism on the left (Dangerfield 1997).

3. A Fabian Society Tract (1906) declares, 'The Labour Party is a party against the Landlord and Capitalist' (p. 3) and 'the policy of Labour is the policy of socialism' (p. 15). This stance was widespread into the 1950s and not fully rejected until the 'New Labour' of the 1990s. Bugler (1968) says of the Oxford group, 'All confess a commitment to the Labour movement. Politically, I'd guess they range leftwards from mainstream Labour' (p. 222). Martin (1998) states that McCarthy (Flanders' successor at Oxford) had a 'distinct leaning towards support for the union perspective — usually the "official" perspective' (p. 84); Fox (1990) said he hoped for a 'democratic socialist' society (p. 229). An interesting question not pursued here is the degree to which the modern reinterpretation of IR from union and labour studies to employment relations is a centrist/rightward 'tacking to the wind' in light of the philosophical shift from Old Labour to New Labour and concomitant steep post-1980s drop in union density.
4. Goldman (1995: 259–61) notes that workers' education at Oxford transitioned from the liberal (broad) education model before the Second World War to a vocational/skills-based model after the war, and that this was particularly true in the trade union studies taught by Clegg, Fox, McCarthy and others. He states that the program's director, Frank Pickstock, had 'misgivings' about the narrowness of the new education, regarded it as 'too akin to training', and 'by degrees economic and structural problems' were subordinated to the 'central issues of industrial relations, . . . the study of the institutions and relationships involved in collective bargaining' (p. 261). Thus, the recognized narrowness and descriptiveness of Oxford School IR (Ackers 2007; Brown 1998) had roots in the similar but earlier approach taken to adult education in extra-mural trade union studies. Fogarty (1955) argues that the Webbs developed economic and political theory, but the early books of Clegg, Flanders and associates 'rarely pass the level of common sense, journalistic discussion' and will 'dig the grave of their method' (p. 18).
5. As argued in Kaufman (2004), the American IR paradigm of the 1920s–1930s was more broadly configured than the British paradigm (certainly as conventionally interpreted), and gave much greater positive and normative attention to the role of management. Most British IR academics up to the Donovan Commission were relatively uninterested/unfamiliar with the American literature (described by Ackers 2005: 98, as 'very insular until we discovered Europe in the 1980s') and were sometimes hostile to it (following the Webbs and Cole). One plausible reason Richardson's text stands out as of a different (and also not widely followed) genre is that he spent time in the USA. Kaufman's (2004) position, to clarify, is that American and British IR have a common root in the Labour Problem, and IR as a field of study first emerged in the USA about 1920, and then three decades later in Britain. This asserted lineage, and common theoretical loci in a form of institutional analysis, does *not* mean that Kaufman is claiming British IR arose as a 'branch' of American IR, as asserted by Ackers (2005: 98).
6. Although he provides no syllabus *per se*, Burton chair holder Michael Fogarty (1953) outlines a typical set of courses in the undergraduate IR program at Cardiff circa the early 1950s. The disciplines and topics cover the entire employment relationship, and quite surprisingly, while a course is devoted to small work-groups (human relations), the subject of trade unions and collective bargaining is not

mentioned. In keeping with the prewar tradition, Fogarty describes IR as a 'synthetic field' devoted to 'solution of a given range of [employment] problems' (p. 6); states that IR practitioners serve the same function in industry as doctors serve in healthcare (p. 14); and says that the Cardiff program is 'economics biased' (p. 16). In a later article, he (Fogarty 1955) states that IR covers both trade unions and personnel work (p. 17). The narrow representation of IR is, correspondingly, illustrated in an early bibliography of the IR literature (Wylie 1950) where all 11 sections are devoted to unions, collective bargaining and conflict resolution.

7. Substantive criticism of unions was also largely off limits, as Ben Roberts of LSE discovered. He began to criticize unions' abuse of power at the time of the Donovan Commission and more generally, in the words of Gennard (1986: 12), became convinced, 'the commitment to state socialism, from which the trade unions and Labour Party could not free themselves, was the road to economic and social disaster.' In the eyes of those in the IR mainstream, this position moved him to the edge of the field — per Crouch's statement that Roberts had joined 'proponents of . . . a unitary approach' (Crouch 1982: 18). Outside Britain, Roberts was far better known than Clegg or Flanders (e.g., he was elected first president of the International Industrial Relations Association; Kaufman 2004) but, inside Britain, he moved into a peripheral position (e.g., 36 index cites for Clegg and Flanders but 0 for Roberts in Ackers and Wilkinson 2003a) even though he founded this journal and the first graduate IR program in the nation. Like Clegg, Roberts belonged to the Communist Party in the 1940s.
8. The quest for stronger and more integrative IR theory may be impossible by the nature of the subject. Two decades ago, Hyman (1989: 120) argued the field is an applied problem-solving area 'with no coherent theoretical or disciplinary rationale'; more recently he said (Hyman 2004: 267), 'while we certainly require more theory *in* industrial relations, it is neither possible nor desirable to pursue a self-contained theory *of* industrial relations' (emphasis in original). Kaufman (2010) takes the opposite side of this issue and Heery (2008) surveys and evaluates both positions.
9. The Webbs used the term 'industrial relations' in their early labour writings but did not invent it (like they did the term 'collective bargaining'), as other authors used it earlier. For historical accuracy, it should also be noted that Brentano in Germany and Ely in the USA wrote scholarly trade union histories before the Webbs.

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