



Employee Relations: The International Journal

Conflict: trends and forms of collective action

John Kelly

Article information:

To cite this document:

John Kelly , (2015), "Conflict: trends and forms of collective action", Employee Relations: The International Journal , Vol. 37 Iss 6 pp. -

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ER-06-2015-0102>

Downloaded on: 24 August 2015, At: 02:09 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 0 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 2 times since 2015*

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:532276 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Conflict: trends and forms of collective action

Just under 50 years ago, in the wake of the 1968-74 world strike wave, labour-management conflict became a major topic of research both in Britain and elsewhere. Since then levels of industrial conflict have declined dramatically and so too has academic interest in the subject. Despite the widespread persistence of what Shalev (1992) described as “labour quiescence”, workers’ collective action remains a vital topic of study for three reasons. First, strikes have both economic and political ramifications, disrupting revenue flows to employers and, in the case of ‘political strikes, challenging government policies. Second, both strikes and other forms of disruptive collective action reflect the fundamental antagonism at the heart of the employment relationship and their study therefore provides a glimpse into the ongoing conduct of employment relations. Third, the patterns of collective action and their forms of organization provide invaluable information about the labour movement and about the shifting contours of class relations within society (Vandaele 2010).

This paper begins with an account of the major research questions that have dominated the study of collective action and then proceeds to summarize the state of our knowledge on the five issues that have dominated the literature over many years¹:

- Are there discernible trends over time in levels of collective action?
- What is the relationship, if any, between strikes and other forms of collective action?
- How do patterns of collective action vary across countries?
- How do patterns of collective action vary across sectors?
- How do we account theoretically for the overall patterning of strikes and other forms of collective action?

The next section of the paper then considers whether we are seeing the emergence of new 'repertoires of contention', novel forms of collective action involving new actors and new targets for collective action. The final section of the paper then considers an issue that has received little attention in the literature, namely the outcomes of strikes and other forms of collective action. Most strike research has focused on mapping the antecedents and contours of strike activity, but for strike protagonists one of the most important attributes of collective action is the outcome: did the strike extract concessions from the employer or from government?

Before setting out what we know about these questions we should mention four methodological issues that have provided recurrent foci of debate within the literature. They are important issues although none of them has seriously hindered the acquisition of knowledge about collective action. First, most research in the field has concentrated on strikes rather than other forms of collective action such as overtime bans or go slows. Partly this is a matter of choice, rooted in the belief that strike action is the most powerful and dramatic form of collective action, but it also reflects data availability. Many national labour ministries collect statistics on strikes; very few collect information on other forms of collective action. Second, there are different facets of strike activity on which there exists time series data: strike frequency, the number of workers directly involved in strikes and the days lost to strikes. These measures are often standardized in comparative research by expressing each of them in relation to total workforce size in order to allow meaningful cross-national comparisons. Each of these measures captures a different facet of strike action and there is some disagreement as to their relative advantages and disadvantages. Thirdly, the operational definitions of strike action vary from one country to another and render cross-country comparisons problematic. For example, Finland and Spain only record strikes lasting more than one hour yet many other countries include briefer stoppages (Lyddon 2007: 26).

Finally, reliable time series data is only available for a relatively small number of advanced capitalist countries. Strike data does exist for countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China but there are serious questions about its reliability (see the relevant chapters in Frege and Kelly 2013).

What we know about strike activity

Trends in strikes and other forms of collective action

Strike activity is highly cyclical and this has been true for more than a century. Figure 1 shows strike frequency in the UK 1890-2013 with strike peaks in the early 1890s, 1910-20, 1940s and 1968-79. In between these peaks, the level of strike action has either remained broadly stable – as in the 1950s – or has declined – as in the 1920s and from the early 1980s. Similar peaks of strike activity have occurred in every other country for which we have good time series data over comparable durations, such as France and the USA (Screpanti 1987). However, since the early 1980s we have witnessed the longest period of declining strike activity on record and the level of strike action in the UK is now lower than at any time since records began. Measured by days lost per 1000 workers, the level of strike action in Western Europe has fallen by over 80 per cent between 1980 and 2006 (Figure 2). In the UK, strike frequency and days lost per 1000 workers have both fallen more than 90% between 1970-79 and 2004-13.

Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 about here

British data is complicated by the requirement in the Trade Union Act (1984) for a strike to be preceded by a secret ballot in which a majority of workers votes in favour of industrial action. The level of strike activity was already falling when the Act came into

effect, and continued to do so in the ensuing years, but one consequence of the Act was an upsurge in strike ballots. Between 2002 and 2011 the number of ballots was approximately five times the number of strikes.² One interpretation of this evidence is that British labour statistics have overstated the decline in industrial conflict by failing to take into account the number of disputes that are resolved after a strike ballot, in effect a strike threat, but before recourse to a strike. That said, even the average annual number strike ballots is well down on the average annual strike total for 1970-79 of 2598.

Table 1 about here

The evidence on strike decline has far-reaching implications for our understanding of the roots of conflict in the employment relationship. If labour-management conflict is an integral property of the employment relationship then why have levels of strike action fallen so far and for such a long period? One response to this question has been the displacement hypothesis which states, in essence, that if one form of conflict is suppressed or declines, then conflicts of interest will emerge in other forms, either collective, individual or both. Exactly which forms of workplace action can legitimately be labelled as conflict is a difficult conceptual and theoretical issue (Belanger and Edwards 2013). The British Workplace Employment Relations Surveys allow a test of this hypothesis with unusually good time series data. The six surveys, conducted between 1980 and 2011, have collected data on the incidence of non-strike forms of conflict, such as overtime bans, go-slows and working to rule. The data have been adjusted to provide continuous and standardised information from workplaces with 25 or more employees and clearly shows that non-strike collective action in Great Britain declined sharply from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s before levelling off at approximately 25% of its peak level (Figure 3).³ In other words, evidence for Britain refutes the proposition that as one form of collective action declines then another will emerge in its

place (see also Gall and Cohen 2013). Reliable evidence on ‘individual’ forms of resistance and protest is almost non-existent although UK data shows a steep rise since the 1980s in the number of claims to Employment Tribunals (ETs) alleging breaches of employment rights. Interpretation of this data is problematic because the issues covered by strikes and tribunal claims are often radically different as are the types of workplaces which generate ET claims and collective action respectively: the former are predominantly non-union, the latter are predominantly unionized (Dix, Sisson and Forth 2009). Some research has examined the link, if any, between levels of absenteeism and collective action and the findings are very mixed. One reason is that the meaning of absence behaviour varies with the degree of worker organization and with the forms of managerial control system operating in different workplaces (Bélanger and Edwards 2013: 9-12).

Figure 3 about here

Cross-national and sectoral variation

One of the interesting features of cross-national data is the overall stability in the comparative rankings, at least within Western Europe and North America (Brandl and Traxler 2010). The most strike prone countries in the 1970s, measured by days lost per 1000 workers, were Canada, Finland, France, Ireland and Italy whilst the least strike prone were Austria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (Shalev 1992). Over the period 2002-06, the four most strike prone countries were Canada, Finland, Italy and Spain and the least strike prone were Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland (Hale 2008). However, comparative analyses of strikes will increasingly have to incorporate several important new developments: the industrialization of countries such as Brazil, China and India and the consequent emergence of unions and strikes (Dicken 2015); the rise in strike activity following the

collapse of authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere; and the increased availability of strike data in countries such as China and South Korea (Frege and Kelly 2013).

Silver (2003) has linked changes in global strike trends to shifts in the patterns of foreign direct investment by MNCs. In the case of motor vehicles for example, the main centres of car production have moved from the USA into Western Europe and then in turn through Latin America, South Africa, Mexico and China. More recently, multinational corporations from many advanced capitalist countries have outsourced production to China and thereby contributed to the substantial and rapid growth of the Chinese industrial labour force. Each of these geographical shifts in production has helped create a large, factory-based working class and eventually culminated in the emergence of trade unions and collective action. So whilst the advanced capitalist world presents a picture of relatively enduring and stable patterns of cross-national variation in strike activity, this is not the case when we broaden our geographical focus and include other regions of the world, both East and South. Strike decline is characteristic of the advanced capitalist countries but trends in the latter are far more variable (van der Velden 2007).

In contrast, the near ubiquitous decline in manufacturing employment and the rise in service sector employment have been reflected, in some countries, by a corresponding shift in the centre of gravity of strike action. With union membership increasingly concentrated in public services employment rather than private services, the changing locus of strike action appears as a simultaneous move from manufacturing to services and from the private to the public sector. In the UK for example, over 80% of annual days lost to strike action between 2002 and 2013 were in the public sector, primarily central and local government and education (ONS 2014). That said, there are significant cross-national variations in the changing balance of days lost to manufacturing and service strikes. Germany, for example, continues to display a predominance of days lost to collective action in industry, a feature that

partly reflects the unusual size and strength of its manufacturing sector. The changing employment composition of strikers also manifests itself as a significant gender shift because of the predominantly female composition of public services employment (Vandaele 2011: 33).

Explaining strike patterns and trends

Comprehensive analyses of strike patterns either in a single country or a group of countries have typically deployed a large set of explanatory variables, including economic, political and institutional factors. More recently, the growth of multinational corporations and of global competition have led researchers to explore the links between different facets of the global economy and strike rates. Piazza (2005) has shown that the degree of trade openness of national economies correlates strongly, and negatively, with days lost to strike action whilst unemployment levels are positively associated with strike rates. Trade openness proxies the degree of competitive pressures bearing down on firms, inhibiting both union organization and the likelihood of workers engaging in strikes.

The link between the institutions of industrial relations and strike rates is complex and it is difficult to discern clear cross-national trends. The coverage of collective bargaining has remained fairly stable across most of Western Europe since the mid-1960s and has declined dramatically in the UK and the USA since the early 1980s yet strike rates have fallen in both sets of countries. Likewise, bargaining has become more decentralized in many countries since the 1980s with a greater range of issues regulated at the level of the firm. But whether national or sectoral bargaining has been preserved (as in most of Western Europe) or largely dismantled (as in the UK) seems unrelated to trends in strike activity. The relationship between ‘corporatist institutions’, such as tripartite committees and coordinated collective bargaining, and days lost to strike action also appears to be fairly robust: the most corporatist

countries typically have very low rates of strike action, e.g. Austria, Netherlands and Switzerland and the least corporatist countries typically have relatively high rates of strike action, e.g. Canada, Ireland, Italy and Spain, although there are exceptions such as Denmark, Finland and Norway which all score high on corporatism scale and on rates of strike action. Yet although institutional analysis provides insights into the stability of cross-national variation, it tells us very little about the steep and almost ubiquitous decline in strike trends over time (Brandl and Traxler 2010).

Union density is undoubtedly one of the strongest correlates of strike activity and its trajectory of decline is remarkably similar to the downward trend in strikes. The association is far from perfect because union density has remained fairly stable since the early 1980s in a number of countries whose strike rates have also declined, notably Belgium, Spain and Scandinavia. Theoretically the union density-strikes association makes sense because union membership and organization represent the critical power resources necessary for collective action. Strike frequency, in turn, can boost union membership, generating, at national level, a virtuous circle of growing membership and militancy in the 1970s but a vicious circle of decline since the 1980s (Kelly 1998).

Finally, into this complex mix of variables we should add the policies of the main actors. In the main liberal market economies of the UK and the USA, right wing governments were determined to inflict major defeats on powerful trade unions in a policy famously described by Paul Edwards as ‘management by confrontation’. In 1981 newly elected Republican President Ronald Reagan fired 12,000 air traffic controllers just three days into their strike and replaced them with supervisory and military personnel. Within three months the air traffic controllers union (PATCO) was decertified as the bargaining agent and within one year it had collapsed (Weil 1997: 12-20). In the UK the Thatcher government, elected in May 1979 and re-elected 1983 and 1987, defeated strikes by a succession of then public

sector workers, notably the coal miners (in 1985) and the dockers (in 1989). Employers too often proved to be militant and intransigent: in the UK Rupert Murdoch's News International Group dismissed over 5,000 print workers, replaced them with strike-breakers and inflicted a major defeat on the print unions. On the assumption that worker participation in collective action is influenced to some degree by rational cost-benefit calculations, then it follows that such high profile defeats will reduce the likelihood of strikes both in these sectors and further afield, thereby contributing to the long-run decline in strike activity noted earlier.

Shifting repertoires of contention?

Dwindling union density represents a decline in the organizational capacity of trade unions, principally membership and finance. This means unions have fewer resources with which to organize both strikes *and* actions short of a strike, such as overtime bans or working to rule. In countries such as the UK, the USA and Canada (often described as the liberal market economies), reduced collective bargaining coverage means a contraction in the 'opportunity structures' through which unions can seek to influence employers. Even in some of the coordinated market economies such as Germany there is evidence of reduced bargaining coverage and a decline in the coverage of works councils (Behrens in Frege and Kelly 2013). But as Gall and Hebdon (2008) have pointed out, declining conflict *at* work does not entail declining conflict *about* work. Three questions can therefore be asked about contemporary conflict around work and employment: Are there signs of a significant shift in the types of actors involved in collective action; in the forms of collective action; and in the targets of collective action?

Coalition building and non-strike forms of collective action

There has been a recent upsurge of research interest in coalition building between unions and civil society organizations, particularly in the USA and the UK. One of the best known examples in the UK is the Living Wage campaigns that began in the early 2000s and were focused on low paid workers. The campaigns involve alliances between trade unions, community organizations (often based around ethnicity) and faith groups; they involve forms of action such as lobbies, demonstrations and petitions; they are less reliant on strikes or similar forms of collective action; and instead of targeting the workers' immediate employer, a cleaning firm for example, organizers move up the supply chain, targeting the large firms that contract with the cleaning companies (Holgate and Wills 2007).

These types of actions arguably entail an adaptation by unions to the difficulties of organizing and mobilizing low paid and low skill workers who are often weakly unionized and whose labour market power is minimal. Indeed the preference of Living Wage campaigners for non-strike forms of action has been criticized by some writers as an undesirable and unnecessary abandonment of labour's most effective weapon. In this perspective one of the key benefits of strike action is that it mobilizes people in contentious, collective forms of protest, inflicts economic damage on the employer and arguably helps develop a degree of class consciousness (Moody 2013). Viewed from another perspective however the Living Wage campaigns embody two valuable innovations. First, they have shown that companies are vulnerable not only to the economic costs of labour withdrawal but to the political costs associated with reputation damage arising out of hostile public campaigns. Secondly, as companies have increasingly outsourced a wide range of activities, from cleaning, catering and security through to the production of goods and services and the supply of materials, major companies now sit at the intersection of long and complex supply chains. The core companies in these chains, whether clothing producers such as Nike or food retailers such as Tesco, wield enormous bargaining power over the many other firms to which

they are connected. Under certain conditions, campaigners can pressure big companies to deploy that bargaining power and help achieve improvements in terms and conditions of employment in supply chain firms where industrial action would carry substantial risks (Wright and Brown 2013).

General strikes and protests against governments

The thirty-year decline in strike rates against employers in the advanced capitalist world does not actually tell the whole story of union collective action in recent years because the period since the early 1980s has witnessed a dramatic rise in the incidence of general strikes against governments (Figure 4). A general strike can be defined as “a temporary, national stoppage of work by workers from many industries, directed against the executive or legislative arms of government, to enforce a demand or give voice to a grievance” (Hamann et al 2013a)⁴. In Western Europe (the EU15 plus Norway) there were 21 general strikes in the 1980s, 36 in the 1990s, 39 between 2000 and 2009, and 52 between 2010 and 2014 (see Figure 4)

Figure 4 about here

While the majority of Western Europe’s general strikes and strike threats have occurred in five countries that tend to rank high in economic strikes (Greece 64, Italy 29, France 14, Spain 10 and Portugal 10), general strikes have also featured in countries with strong traditions of corporatism and industrial peace, including Luxembourg (4) and Austria (1). Only five countries have been free of general strikes since 1980: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the UK.⁵ Typically, national union confederations have organized general strikes to mobilize both union members and other groups in protest against governmental policies or policy reform plans. These policies involve reforms in five areas: pensions; welfare benefits; national wage policy; labour market regulation; and macroeconomic policy.

Evidence shows general strikes are most likely to be called against Conservative-led, single-party majority governments that exclude unions from policymaking under conditions of high unemployment and low economic growth (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013a). Through general strikes, unions attempt to pressure governments to rescind or at least modify their reform plans and evidence shows these are not simply futile expressions of anger but have demonstrable electoral effects. Ruling parties that experience a general strike during their term of office are likely to suffer a decline in vote share at the next election of around two-three percentage points, other things equal. Vote losses are larger for governments led by Conservative or Social Democratic parties rather than Christian Democratic parties and for general strikes closer to the election, suggesting potential leverage for unions in the timing of protests (Hamann, Johnston and Kelly 2014).

Two broad factors underpin the vulnerability of governments to union mobilization: first, many mainstream political parties in Western Europe – Social Democrat, Christian Democrat and Conservative – have been losing vote share at successive elections as voters have become less attached to particular parties and more willing to switch parties from one election to another or simply abstain from voting (Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2011: 309-13). Parties therefore have to pay more attention to voter preferences in order to appeal to an increasingly volatile and critical electorate. Second, the union movements of many countries are increasingly composed of public sector workers who are likely to bear the immediate costs of pension, welfare and labour market reforms and whose capacity for mobilization remains high.

The outcomes of collective action

Finally we turn to an issue that has been seriously neglected in the strikes literature and that is their outcomes. The UK Ministry of Labour recorded the outcomes of strikes between 1888

and 1939, categorising them as ‘worker victories, employer victories or compromises’ (Cronin 1979: 220-21). The only recent study of this issue analysed British strike data 1979-89 and reported a small positive impact of strikes on pay (Metcalf, Wadsworth and Ingram 1993). However it would make sense for researchers to broaden the focus of enquiry and include the two dimensions of union performance identified by Weil (1997) as key to their effectiveness: leverage (or bargaining power); and organizational capacity. The first category is familiar enough, although it should be analysed in both union-employer relations and union-government relations. Theoretically, there is no reason to assume that union economic power in relation to employers, especially large multinational employers, will necessarily correlate with political power in relation to central or local government. Organizational capacity refers to the internal organization, membership and financial resources and the culture of the union. If we broaden our focus still further, from the union movement to the labour movement, we may also want to explore the impact of strikes on the structure and policies of leftist political parties.

In the case of general strikes, governments offered concessions in response to strikes, or credible strike threats, in 35% of 92 strikes between 1980 and 2013. Concessions were more likely on pensions and welfare reform and least likely on general economic policy; they were also more likely to emanate from coalition governments, especially when led by Christian Democratic parties, and least likely to be offered by either Conservative or Social Democratic governments. Timing was also a factor: concessions in response to general strikes were more likely in the run-up to an election compared to strikes called early in a government’s term of office (Hamann, Johnston and Kelly 2013b).

In relation to organizational capacity, periods of heightened strike activity, such as the world strike wave 1968-74, are associated with significant growth in union membership, although the precise causal mechanisms remain unclear (Kelly 1998). In regard to individual

unions, Hodder et al (2014) examined the relationship between local or national collective action (strikes and actions short of a strike) by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and monthly flows of membership. There was a significant positive association between strikes and membership gains (recruits minus resignations) even when other variables were controlled. Net recruitment 2007-13 was approximately 26% higher during strike months compared to non-strike months. However the relationship was stronger between 2007 and 2010 and gradually weakened thereafter. Membership surges occur in the run-up to, and during, strike action and could therefore reflect non-member responses to heightened union presence, social pressures from members and organizing activities by local union leaders.

Finally, we consider briefly the links between strikes and the structures of working class representation. This is a complex and under-researched area that deserves far more attention from industrial relations scholars and political scientists. Let us take as an example the rise to power of the Greek leftist party Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) and the near extinction of the social democratic party, PASOK, that ruled Greece for much of the 1980s and 1990s. Greece has witnessed a substantial number of general strikes since 1980 but the number of strikes escalated dramatically after the Social Democrats began a programme of austerity in early 2010 which continued under the Social Democrat-Conservative coalition until its defeat by Syriza in January 2015. It is difficult to disentangle the many factors that contributed to the demise of PASOK and the rise of Syriza but it seems at least plausible to argue that the repeated strike and protest mobilizations against austerity helped undermine support for government policies and created a growing audience for Syriza's anti-austerity message. But the very different outcomes of successive general strikes in Italy show that the party political dynamics of general strikes are complex and the outcomes are highly contingent on a range of other variables. Italy experienced eight general strikes under the

Berlusconi government elected in 2001. At the next election, in 2006, the conservatives were defeated but just two years later the left suffered an historic defeat: not only did the social democrats lose power but for the first time in almost 60 years there were no communist or far left deputies elected to parliament.

Conclusions

Our knowledge of strike trends and patterns across the advanced capitalist world is detailed and comprehensive. Strike activity, measured by frequency, days lost or workers involved, has declined significantly in most countries during the past 50 years although the rates of decline differ between countries and sectors. Evidence on the use of other forms of collective action in the UK suggests they too have declined, and not increased, as some scholars had suggested. The main correlates of declining strike activity, increased international product market competition, capital mobility and declining union membership, are well understood. Research into collective action will doubtless continue to map the patterns of strike action over time and across sectors but this intellectual agenda is of diminishing interest to employment relations scholars. It therefore seems an appropriate time to refocus research on collective action and ask different kinds of questions. First, what forms of action, in conjunction with, or instead of strikes, are being used by unions to pursue worker interests? Such actions might include demonstrations, petitions, campaigns, both actual and online and lobbying. Second, given the increased use by trade unions of general strikes directed against government, we need to know more about the processes and outcomes of these strikes, particularly in the face of neoliberal governments. Third, we know relatively little about the pattern of outcomes of collective action, both strikes and non-strikes, and their explanation. The term 'outcomes' should be used broadly to refer to the impact of collective action on substantive union goals, on the organizational capacity of the trade unions, such as

membership and finances, and on the labour movement more generally, both trade unions and political parties. These questions are methodologically and theoretically challenging but they are also vitally important, not least for the organizers and advocates of collective action.

References

- Batstone, E., Boraston, I. and Frenkel, S. (1978), *The Social Organisation of Strikes*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Bélanger, J. and Edwards, P. (2013), “Conflict and contestation in the contemporary world of work: theory and evidence”, in Gall, G. (Ed.), *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, pp. 7-25
- Brandl, B. and Traxler, F. (2010), “Labor conflicts: a cross-national analysis of economic and institutional determinants 1970-2002”, *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 26 No. 5, pp. 519-40.
- Cronin, J.E. (1979), *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain*, Croom Helm, London.
- Darlington, R. (2013), ”“Striking unionism with a political cutting edge”, in H. Connolly, L. Kretsos and C. Phelan (Eds.), *Radical Unions in Europe and the Future of Collective Interest Representation*, Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 69-88.
- Dicken, P. (2015), *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*, 7th edn, Sage, London.
- Dix, G., Sisson, K. and Forth, J. (2009), “Conflict at work: the changing pattern of disputes”, in Brown, W., Bryson, A., Forth, J. and Whitfield, K. (Eds.), *The Evolution of the Modern Workplace*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 176-200.
- Edwards, P.K. and Scullion, H. (1982), *The Social Organisation of Industrial Conflict*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Frege, C.M. and Kelly, J. (eds.) (2013), *Comparative Employment Relations in the Global Economy*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Gall, G. and Cohen, S. (2013), "The collective expression of workplace grievances in Britain", in Gall, G. (Ed.), *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, pp. 86-107.

Gall, G. and Hebdon, R. (2008), "Conflict at work", in Blyton, P., Bacon, N., Fiorito, J. and Heery, E. (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, Sage, London, pp. 588-605.

Gallagher, M., Laver, M. and Mair, P. (2011), *Representative Government in Modern Europe, 5th edn*, McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead.

Gilbert, D. (1996), "Strikes in postwar Britain", in Wrigley, C. (Ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1939-1979*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, pp. 128-61.

Hale, D. (2008), "International comparisons of labour disputes in 2006", *Economic and Labour Market Review*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 32-9.

Hamann, K., Johnston, A. and Kelly, J. (2013a), "Unions against governments: general strikes in Western Europe 1980-2006", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 46 No. 9, pp. 1030-57.

Hamann, K., Johnston, A. and Kelly, J. (2013b), "Striking concessions from governments: The outcomes of general strikes in Western Europe 1980-2009", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 23-41.

Hamann, K., Johnston, A. and Kelly, J. (2014), "Protesting against policy reforms: the electoral effects of general strikes in Western Europe, under review at *Comparative Politics*.

Hodder, A., Williams, M., Kelly, J. and McCarthy, N. (2014), "Does strike action stimulate trade union membership growth?", Paper presented at the British Universities Industrial Relations Association Conference, London, 25-27 June.

Holgate, J. and Wills, J. (2007), "Organizing labor in London: lessons from the Campaign for a Living Wage", in Tuner, L. and Cornfield, D. (eds.), *Labour in the New Urban Battlegrounds*, ILR Press, Ithaca, NY, pp. 211-23.

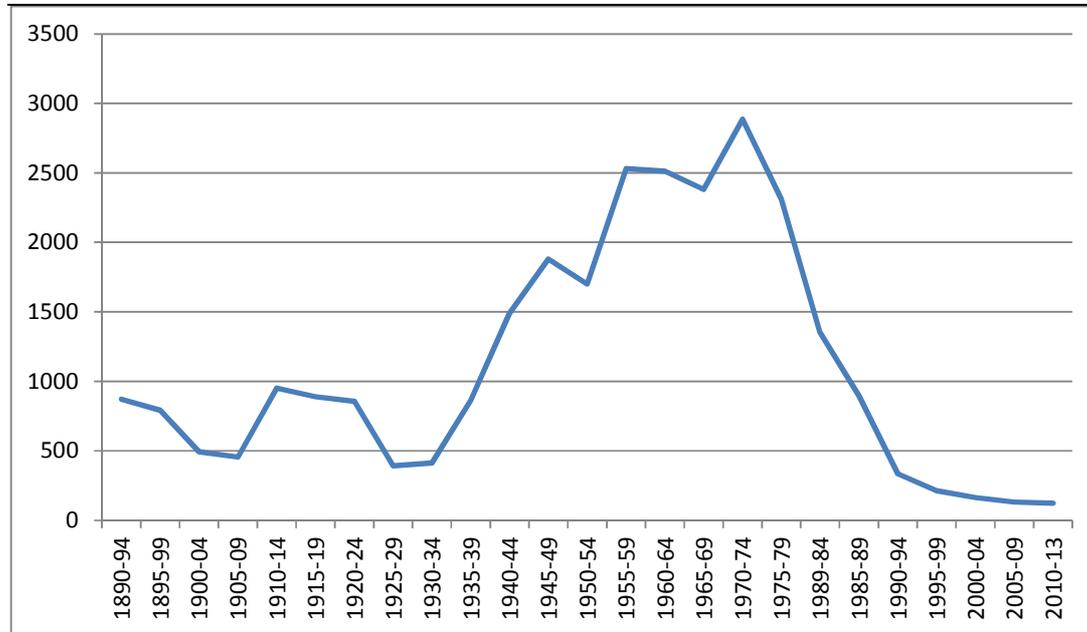
- Kelly, J. (1998), *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*, Routledge, London.
- Lyddon, D. (2007), “Strike statistics and the problems of international comparison”, in van der Velden, S., Dribbusch, H., Lyddon, D. and Vandaele, K. (Eds.), *Strikes Around the World, 1968-2005: Case-Studies of 15 Countries*, Aksant, Amsterdam, pp. 24-39.
- Metcalf, D., Wadsworth, J. and Ingram, P. (1993), “Do strikes pay?”, in Metcalf, D. and Milner, S. (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Industrial Disputes*, Routledge, London, pp. 179-93.
- Moody, K. (2013), “Striking out in America: Is there an alternative to the strike?”, in Gall, G. (Ed.), *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, pp. 233-52.
- Office for National Statistics (2012), “Labour disputes – annual article, 2011”, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/bus-register/labour-disputes/annual-article-2011/index.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).
- Office for National Statistics (2014), “Labour disputes – annual article, 2013”, online at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/bus-register/labour-disputes/annual-article-2013/art---labour-disputes--annual-article-2013.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).
- Piazza, J. (2005), “Globalizing quiescence: globalization, union density and strikes in 15 industrialized countries”, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 26 No.2, pp. 289-314.
- Screpanti, E. (1987), “Long cycles in strike activity: an empirical investigation”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol, 25 No.1, pp. 99-124.
- Seifert, R. and Sibley, T. (2005), *United They Stood: The Story of the UK Firefighters’ Dispute 2002-4*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
- Shalev, M. (1992), “The resurgence of labour quiescence”, in M. Regini (Ed.), *The Future of Labour Movements*, Sage, London, pp. 102-32.

- Silver, B.J. (2003), *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Van Der Velden, S. (2007) "Introduction", in S. Van Der Velden, H. Dribbusch, D. Lyddon and K. Vandaele (Eds.), *Strikes Around the World, 1968-2005: Case-Studies of 15 Countries*, Aksant, Amsterdam, pp. 12-23.
- Van Wanrooy, B., Bewley, H., Bryson, A., Forth, J., Freeth, S., Stokes, L. and Wood, S. (2013), *Employment Relations in the Shadow of Recession: Findings from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills.
- Vandaele, K. (2011), "Sustaining or abandoning 'social peace'? Strike development and trends in Europe since the 1990s", working paper 2011.05, European Trade Union Institute, Brussels.
- Weil, D. (1997), *Turning the Tide: Strategic Planning for Labor Unions*, Copley, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Wright, C.F. and Brown, W. (2013), "The effectiveness of socially sustainable sourcing mechanisms: Assessing the prospects of a new form of joint regulation", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 20-37.

Biographical note

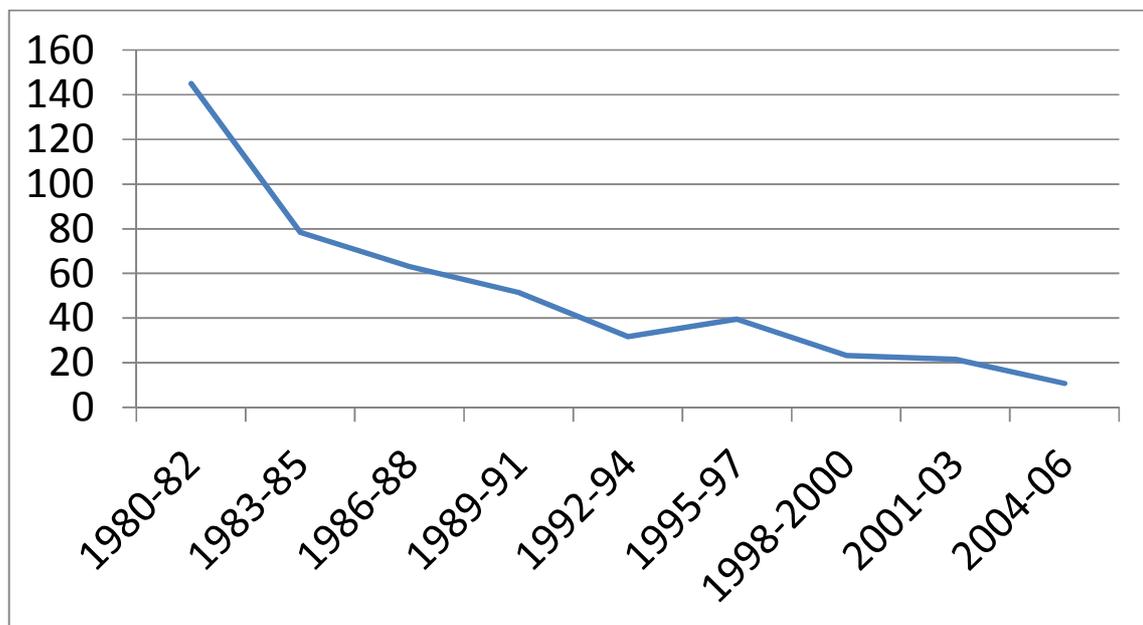
John Kelly is a Professor of Industrial Relations at Birkbeck College, University of London. His research interests include trade unions, industrial conflict and labour movements. His most recent books include *Comparative Employment Relations in the Global Economy* (with C. Frege, 2013) and *Parties, Elections and Policy Reforms in Western Europe* (with K. Hamann, 2011). He has also published in a wide range of journals including *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics* and the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*.

Figure 1 Strike frequency, five-year averages, UK 1890-2013



Sources: Cronin (1979) for 1890-1954 and Gilbert (1996) for 1954-1989 (strikes beginning each year); ONS (2014) for 1990-2013 (strikes in progress each year).

Figure 2 Median working days lost per 1000 workers EU14 1980-2006



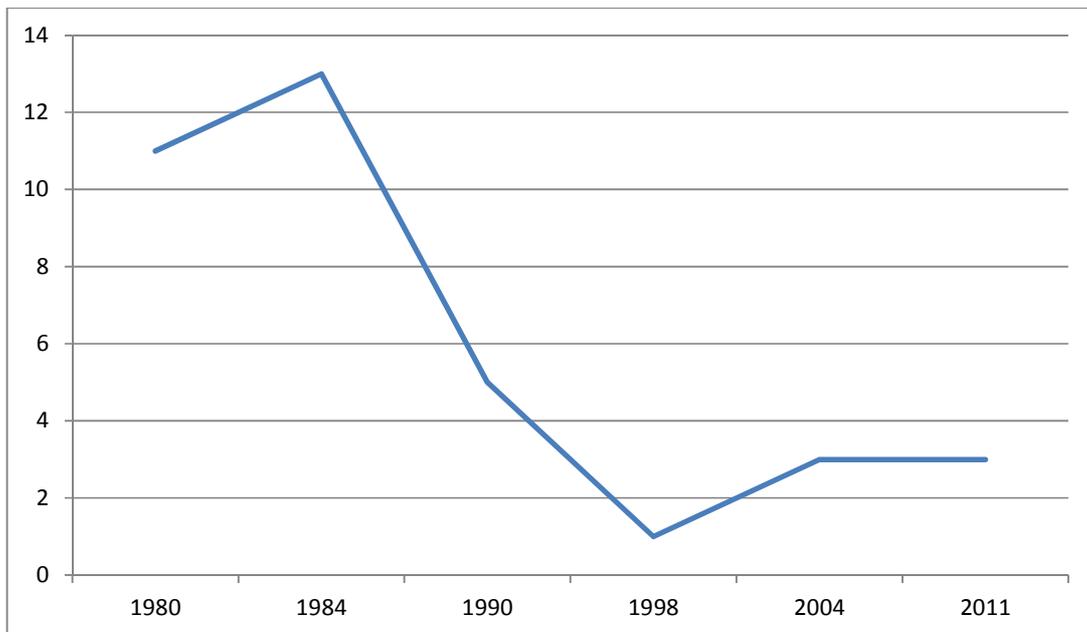
Sources: *Employment Gazette*, Vol. 99 No. 12, pp. 653-58 (1991); *Labour Market Trends*, Vol. 109 No. 4, pp. 195-201 (2001); *Economic and Labour Market Review*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 32-9 (2008).

Table 1 Numbers of strikes and ballots recording votes for strike action, 2002-11, UK

Year	Strikes in progress	Pro-strike ballots	Ballots/strikes %
2002	146	613	23.8
2003	133	684	19.4
2004	130	746	17.4
2005	116	663	17.5
2006	158	1094	14.4
2007	142	637	22.3
2008	144	658	21.9
2009	98	458	21.4
2010	92	487	18.9
2011	149	904	16.5

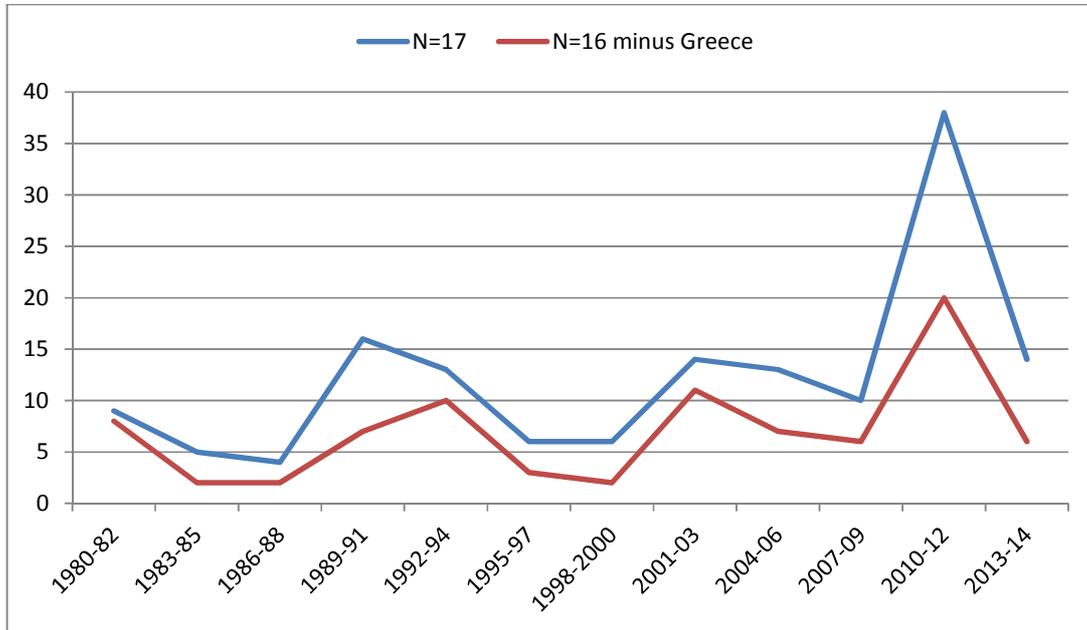
Source: ONS (2012)

Figure 3 Non-strike actions Great Britain 1980-2011 (%). Base: workplaces with 25 or more employees



Sources: van Wanrooy et al (2013); John Forth, private communication 11 Feb 2015.

Figure 4 General strikes in Western Europe 1980-2014



Source: Hamann, Johnston and Kelly dataset, available from the authors.

Endnotes

¹ Strike organization has also been the subject of a large body of literature, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, e.g. Batstone et al (1978), Edwards and Scullion (1982) but there are also more recent studies e.g. Darlington (2013) and Seifert and Sibley (2005). Space constraints preclude any consideration of this research.

² There is a minor problem with the figures reported in Table 1. The strikes data refers to stoppages in progress in each year rather than stoppages beginning in each year. The two series differ but only very slightly: in 2011 there were 149 stoppages in progress of which 139 began in that year. The balloting data refers to ballots conducted in each year but a small number of strikes will have been balloted at the end of one year and followed by strike action in the following year. Nonetheless the data clearly show that the overwhelming majority of successful strike ballots do not result in strikes.

³ I am grateful to John Forth for supplying this data.

⁴ This definition excludes stoppages by public sector employees protesting against the government in its capacity as employer (e.g. over public sector wages or pensions); regional stoppages; and national demonstrations against government policies that do not include a general workers' strike.

⁵ General strikes against government are unlawful in two of these countries, Germany and the UK.