Capsule Reviews

reviewed by Book Review Editor


This collection of essays outlines the various forms of “contingent work” that have become common in the United States, and considers the consequences of these arrangements for employees, their families, and labor institutions. The difficulty of identifying the nature and measuring the size of the contingent workforce is discussed, along with the disparate effect that the increasing use of contingent arrangements has on women. The myriad forms that contingent work arrangements take and their presence in firms with otherwise progressive human resource policies present questions concerning the organizational sources of these policies. It is unclear whether these employment patterns truly produce the flexibility and economic benefits that employers seek, and a section of the book is devoted to the psychological and social effects of contingent work on individuals, as well as its career implications. The question of whether contingent work has any impact on productivity is also raised. Current labor and employment law may not be properly designed to maintain its effectiveness in the face of these new employment patterns, and unions will have to adjust their own strategies and structure if they are to cope with these changes. Possible avenues for further research in this area are also considered. This collection would serve as a valuable reference on the subject for scholars, human resource specialists, those in management, and labor activists.


Economic and structural changes in the health care system of the United States would lead to a realignment of the interests of physicians and their relation to one another. Tracing the life of the Union of American
Physicians and Dentists (UAPD) from its founding in 1972, the author explores how this organization could be a model for future labor unions for medical practitioners. It is suggested that, as medical care becomes more corporatized and the discretion of doctors becomes constrained, the state of the medical profession could become analogous to that of industrialization-era workers. Distinctions are drawn between these prospective unions and professional associations, and the benefits such organizations may offer are discussed. Although it is conceded that unionization in the traditional sense may not be compatible with the societal image of physicians, organizations like the UAPD could serve as an example for other professionals or traditionally non-unionized groups seeking to redress problems in the workplace. The author closes with a discussion of the laws concerning the organization of workers, relevant caselaw, and contemporary examples of collective action among workers in well-paid and highly educated professions.


This wire-bound report on workplace violence law and prevention policy begins with a brief description of the different types of workplace violence and the effects that violence can have on the workplace. A section outlining the law regarding an employer’s duty to provide a safe workplace follows, including federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines, the guidelines of California’s Division of Occupational Safety and Health, a brief sketch of Florida and Washington state law on the subject, the law regarding workplace harassment, and worker’s compensation laws. This section also features guidelines for retail establishments operating at night and a discussion of the law regarding tort claims arising from employer negligence. The second chapter covers background checks and presents legal and practical information regarding criminal and military records, checks for substance abuse, honesty and psychological profiles, genetic testing, and references. Chapter Three examines the legal limits of an employer’s right to monitor and control the workplace through security guards, physical barriers, ID requirements, monitoring of employee telephone and email usage, and searches. Finally, the importance of contingency planning, recordkeeping, training, and threat assessment is examined.

The effect of plant closings and the threat of plant closings on freedom of association and the right to organize in the three countries that are party to the North American Agreement of Labor Cooperation (NAALC) is reviewed here, in the first report in the North American Labor Series. How the labor laws of each country respond to this issue, in theory as well as in practice, is examined in the context of each nation's unique labor relations regime, particularly the process of organizing a union in each of the NAALC countries. In the United States, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) sees scores of cases every year involving plant closings connected in some way to the country's rancorous union organizing campaigns. Although this situation arises much less often against the relatively calm backdrop of Canadian labor relations, the Mexican system offers management greater opportunity to use such tactics. Mexican law includes no effective recourse for threatened or actual closing motivated by unionization, and the economic regulations that could force the reopening of a plant are nearly always skipped in favor of severance pay for the affected employees. The study also includes sections on the broader economic and social effects of these practices, proposals for improvements in the administration of labor law, suggestions for future research, and a profile of North American labor markets.


Intended as a resource for both newly initiated and seasoned union stewards, this illustrated book provides practical, varied, and reliable advice on resolving the most common and difficult workplace problems. Based on material collected from the Steward Update newsletter, the guide offers a shop floor perspective of the role of union stewards as representatives of the union, leaders, and protectors. A steward's rights and responsibilities and the basics of handling grievances are outlined in the first two chapters. The book includes material on interviewing grievants, maintaining flexibility in order to improve the chances of success, anticipating management tactics, weighing the benefits of arbitration, and salvaging apparent lost causes. A chapter is devoted to the most common types of grievances, including off-duty conduct, and the chapter on health and safety issues tackles subjects such as the employee's
right to know, trauma disorders, air quality, AIDS, radiation, lead and asbestos exposure, and workplace violence. Mobilizing support for the union, responding to right-to-work arguments, representing anti-union workers, time management, diversity issues, dealing with substance abusers, and the full complement of employees' legal rights, in addition to dozens of other topics, are also covered.