

Chapter 3

Social Partnership: Global Expressions

ABSTRACT

Social partnership is a dynamic construction tailored to the context of globalization, the state, time, society, and culture. Snapshots of the experiences of regions and countries globally with modalities of social partnership arrangements are discussed. Further, global reflections on the contexts from which social partnerships were forged—economic chaos and recovery, weak political governance capacities, fractured political regimes, financial instability and governance responses, such as the institutionalization of social dialogue and social partnerships as prerequisites for European accession—are highlighted. Social partnership becomes the outcome of adjustments made by governments, sometimes reluctantly, in power-sharing arrangements, incorporating multiple actors and stakeholders in the way societies are reorganized, to respond and treat with destabilizing forces in the struggle for self-preservation. The chapter concludes around the value and benefits of social partnership as well as some recommendations for effective social dialogue arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

The social dialogue experiences of several states and regions worldwide are highlighted, giving rise to various types of tripartite and bipartite arrangements in reality which reveals the weaknesses in the ILO hegemonic discourse.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8961-7.ch003

Attempts are made to establish any patterns or trends evident from examining the conditions that initiate social dialogue arrangements.

Dominant as well as institutional discourses are explored and how they are represented by the states and the benefits of pursuing social dialogue as a form of governance. The review also provides a balance by examining the contending arguments to the dominant discourse and relevance within the context of developing states and the hegemony exercised in the relationship between the pursuit of the ideal versus the relevance to realities and the need to chart a new course or discourse. Elements of the evidence presented in the social world and experiences of several states and regions worldwide, in terms of types of tripartite and bipartite arrangements which reveal the benefits and value held and the rationale and insight as to why the course of social dialogue is pursued.

Benefits and Ways of Analyzing Successful Partnerships

The literature is replete with the beneficial outcomes from social partnerships (Bangs, 2007; Haynes & Allen, 2000; Goolsarran, 2006). Social partnerships have been transformative (Katz et al., 2004) and viewed as the backbone of economic policy (Baccaro & Simoni, 2004) as it promotes economic recovery (McCartan, 2003; O' Donnell & O' Reardon, 1996) and the shaping of social policy (Buhlungu, 2005; Iankova, 2008). Becoming a framework for consensus (Cook, 1998; Fashoyin, 2004) social partnership has reduced the potential for industrial relations conflict (Hethy, 2001) emerging as an instrument for building better understanding between social partners (Etukudo, 1995; Tokman, 2007; Weeks, 1999).

Three interacting elements have been presented as part of a triad of conditions precipitating the formation of social partnerships through social dialogue, namely globalization's effects, a weakened state and crisis conditions. The view of crisis being a prerequisite for social partnerships is evidenced also by the decline in such arrangements in states that are more developed and who do not exist within a cycle of crises as compared to many developing countries. One could argue that once the crisis has receded within the context of particular economies, that the need for such arrangements wane or decline, as exhibited in Italy and Japan. Furthermore, the motivation for pursuing social dialogue and subsequent arrangements could be temporary once the imposed dialogue process has satisfied a specific goal, e.g., EU membership on the part of Italy and Eastern European states under transition.

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