Holland use loopholes to avoid regulating pay and conditions for certain vulnerable workers. The primary causes are competitive pressures in ‘lean’ retailing, and the authors convincingly argue for stronger unionisation and collective bargaining arrangements. Grugulis et al. explore the realities of leadership in UK supermarkets. Despite the organisational rhetoric for dynamic leaders, centralised controls restrict the influence and discretion of supermarket managers, whilst stringent performance targets create an intensification of work. Utilising a labour process frame of analysis, Mulholland, in Chapter 11, assesses the adoption of lean working methods in two branches of a major UK supermarket. The findings highlight task standardisation, fragmentation and increasing workplace pressures, which conflict with managerial attempts to develop a team working culture.

Part 4 centres on negotiating ‘good work’ in retail. Darr explores humour as resistance and the formation of occupational communities in a computer store in Israel. In a fascinating chapter, Andersson et al. report the findings from extensive survey research across the Swedish retail sector. There is a notable contrast with other studies in this collection, as there are relatively good working conditions, benefits and opportunities, which reflect the influence of strong unions and collaborative industrial relations in Sweden. Lynch et al., in Chapter 14, conduct comparative research into trade union representation and organising in the UK and Australia. In a well-written piece they articulate the challenges of organising retail workers, but arguably could have been more critical of ‘partnership’ strategies. In the closing chapter, Tilly and Carre challenge common perceptions of retail work and offer some useful suggestions for future research in order to influence policy and generate more rewarding employment.

Retail Work is a pertinent, timely and interesting book, which is part of the excellent ‘Critical Perspectives on Work and Employment’ series. The collection brings together contributions from established academics and early career researchers across several countries, addressing the variation of retail employment. Many of the authors critically analyse the continued expansion of global retail corporations, together with tensions over increasing workplace demands, high levels of attrition and low pay. This book will be particularly relevant to academics and students interested in retail management, industrial relations and the sociology of work.

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Labor Relations in New Democracies. East Asia, Latin America, and Europe
José A. Alemán
Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 196 pages + xv, $89.00; £60.00. ISBN: 978-0-230-62348-4

There is a paradox at the heart of the democratising process that has gathered strength across many regions of the world over the last 20 years or so. On the one hand, autocracies in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Africa and South Korea amongst others have collapsed, introducing in their place governments that have inaugurated free elections, freedom of speech and association, and union
On the other hand, many of these same new democracies have introduced greater flexibility into national labour markets and reduced forms of employment security in line with neoliberal adjustment policies aimed at remaining globally competitive. Collective bargaining has generally decentralised to local levels and union densities have fallen across almost all the new democracies, even though many governments have tried to incorporate labour into employment policy formulation through forms of social dialogue and tripartism.

In this context, Alemán poses two questions: have changes in the structure and practice of labour representation improved workers’ ability to bargain over pay and conditions? And what effect have these changes had on the radicalisation of labour in these countries? Indeed, as he soon demonstrates, wages have generally failed to grow in the new democracies, or at most only to a modest extent, not least because of poor labour regulation and weak political representation. He argues that a key issue is the degree to which labour is indeed genuinely incorporated into the political process— for example, unions may lack bargaining capacity even though they participate in tripartite negotiations—while workers are more liable to strike in those countries where labour has been more effectively incorporated. Union incorporation is generally regarded as a way to manage conflict at work, but his evidence suggests rather that workers in these countries organise strikes even as their unions negotiate with employers and government. He argues further that higher levels of labour market regulation give workers the strength to conclude agreements with the social partners, using the cases of South Korea and Chile to establish his point.

In South Korea, organised labour gained significantly from the democratic processes inaugurated in 1992, not least through improving its voice, but at the same time labour market flexibility has resulted in higher unemployment and levels of precarious work. Unions agreed unwillingly to flexibility, fearing corporate failures, and industrial conflict rose in response to increased levels of mistrust towards the employers. The basic tension between business that favours ‘an American style labour market with maximal flexibility’ and labour, that prefers ‘a comprehensive social contract’ (p. 112), remains unresolved. Chile, meanwhile, presents some instructive contrasts. The Pinochet regime, which had unleashed an unparalleled reign of terror on the Chilean left following its overthrow of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in 1973, eventually gave way to a quasi-democratic government in 1990. It soon concluded a series of agreements on social dialogue and industrial relations and amended the Labour Code to restore basic labour rights. These moves prompted the main trade union confederation, CUT, to demand sector-level bargaining and the facilitation of strike measures. Distrust grew, culminating in the 2003 general strike, demonstrating CUT’s frustration at employers’ persistent flouting of labour legislation. As Alemán shows, the early incorporation of Chilean labour back into political processes led to heightened industrial conflict, and since 1990–1993 no further tripartite agreements have been signed. But since then, the overall percentage of Chilean workers involved in strikes has fallen as the unions continue to lack the power to bargain effectively for better pay and conditions. Unlike their South Korean counterparts, the Chilean unions control fewer resources and so have drawn fewer advantages from democratisation.

This book is a dense read, and I would recommend it mainly to certain postgraduate students and researchers into comparative industrial relations as a most welcome contribution to the growing literature on the ‘new democracies’. Its 200-odd pages contain numerous acute and timely insights into the nature of democracy and labour.
relations in those countries. It skilfully blends a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods with case studies to establish the principal arguments: that employment protection is the key factor that allows unions to conclude agreements with governments and employers, with party politics hardly relevant at all (a somewhat depressing thought for political activists); that wage militancy tends to be a consequence of low wages, so the greater the influence of wage-setting mechanisms the lower the level of industrial conflict; and employment protection improves labour’s capacity to negotiate with the social partners (flexibility reduces employers’ incentives to negotiate over pay and conditions). Since, as Alemán rightly acknowledges, not all countries are able to implement European-style ‘flexicurity’ policies—that is, those that aim to combine flexibility with the security of safety nets like training and redeployment programmes—then all that’s left are the national trade unions, the only institutions ‘with the incentives and power to install a universalistic social welfare system that enhances solidarity among workers and thereby increases the political power of the working class’ (p. 144).

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Good Jobs America: Making Work Better for Everyone
Paul Osterman and Beth Shulman
Russell Sage Foundation, 2011, 181 pp., $24.95

In 2011, the Russell Sage Foundation fired off a barrage of works addressing job quality in the United States. These included Harry J. Holzer et al.’s Where Are All the Good Jobs Going? What National and Local Job Quality and Dynamics Mean for U.S. Workers; Arne L. Kalleberg’s Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s and Paul Osterman and Beth Shulman’s Good Jobs America. Recognising that the United States has the greatest inequality among nations of the industrialised world, with the richest 400 Americans having more wealth than 185 million US citizens, this foundation has funded studies fighting back against neoliberal conventional wisdom inclined to regard these disparities as largely inevitable in a free society.

The Wall Street Journal, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and other US opinion leaders commonly condemn aggressive countermeasures against inequality as opening the path to Pol Pot-style experiments in social engineering. Thomas Sowell, the Rose and Milton Friedman Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and recipient of the AEI’s Francis Boyer Award, observed in his syndicated column (5 December 2002): ‘[T]he concentration of political power necessary to try to reduce economic inequalities has allowed tyrants like Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot to impose their notions and caprices on millions of others—draining them economically or slaughtering them en masse or exploiting them sexually. Mao Zedong, for example, had harems of young girls—and occasionally boys—for his pleasure in various parts of China.’ For Sowell and his ideological allies, an egalitarian policy thrust unleashes despotism’s predatory lust.

The Russell Sage Foundation has not quite been cowed by these doom-laden prophecies. From the very early days of its founding, the foundation’s leadership