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Book Review — Digitized Version

[Rezension] Willy Kraus (Hrsg.): Humanisierung der Arbeitswelt : Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in Japan und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Tübingen [u.a.]: Erdmann Verlag, 1979

Modern law and society: a review of German language research contributions on law, political science, and sociology / German studies, section II

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KRAUS, WILLY (Ed.)

Humanization of Work in Japan and in Germany. Ways and Means for Concept Implementation

[“Humanisierung der Arbeitswelt. Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in Japan und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland”]

Tübingen/Basel: Erdmann Verlag, 1979; 337 pp.

The Japanese-German Cultural Exchange Seminar, organized by the two German professors of economics, Karl Hax (who died in 1978) and Willy Kraus (Bochum University), has gained a high reputation over a period of about 12 years. The proceedings in 1970 (*“Changes in Industrial Societies”*) and in 1975 (*“The Crisis of Economic Growth”*), respectively. The third volume is now available, presenting with some delay the proceedings of the conference held in Düsseldorf in October 1977. While the first conference was marked by “growth mania”, and the second by “the limits to growth”, the third conference was directly oriented towards a qualitative concept: *“Humanization of Work in Japan and in Germany – Ways and Means for Concept Implementation”*.

Economists, as growth men with a long tradition of quantitative thinking, are re-discovering qualities; and the two most illuminating growth societies, Japan and Germany, seem to long for economic re-orientation and the quality of life. The subject matter of the book in hand, therefore, is most up to date and appropriate to indicate these changes in professional thinking and in social aspirations. If these changes and aspirations are taken seriously, the underlying hypothesis for a relevant analysis most certainly should be in the direction that economic growth *per se* is no guarantee of the quality of life, and that hard and efficient work is not synonymous with the quality of working life. To put it in the empirical framework: while in the cases of Japan and Germany no one can dispute the remarkable success of a market-oriented, socially modified capitalist economic system in quantitative terms, the question has very much to be disputed as to whether these same systems allow for enough structural changes and qualitative improvements and of what has to be done (by whom) to provide for such changes. What else is the discussion on the humanization of

work and the quality of life for? Unfortunately, not all of the papers included in this volume make such hypotheses their own or take such questions seriously.

The initial essay, by Otmar Issing, which is declared to be an introduction to the theme of the book, in reality speaks for conservative liberalism and against structural policies. Apart from the highly abstract and fairly general nature of this essay – nothing is said about Japan and not much about Germany either – the author implicitly denies that the “humanization of work” is a public issue. He even calls in question basic rules of the welfare state: “I think the welfare state offends against the principle of justice” (p. 22). Is the quality of life then, to be supplied through the market-place? And is any government action in favour of humanization of work a violation of the constitution – in Japan or in Germany?

Fortunately, there are different positions assembled in the book, e. g. that of Karl Hax, who in his paper on the income situation of older people in Germany states the following: “Under the political and social conditions of our time, in a liberal market economy a welfare policy is indispensable” (p. 309).

In a different way Kiyoshi Tsuchiya sails round the theme of the book. He deplores the slowing-down of the growth rate of the Japanese economy, and declares that the demands of the industrial and developing countries in the field of foreign trade policies impede the growth process in Japan. Is growth in itself a guarantee of quality of working life? Or, to put it differently: Is the humanization of work really possible as long as quantitative economic growth is the dominant goal of society?

In the third paper of the book, too, not much is to be found on quality. Christian Watrin describes the economic developments in Germany between 1974 and 1977, confirms the critical changes that took place in the 70's, but ends up with an appeal to history: “The German example of the 50's and 60's shows that a market economy whose dynamic potential is promoted . . ., can cope with employment problems much bigger than the recent ones” (p. 56). This appeal to the 50's and 60's is most certainly – and in view of the totally different national and international economic conditions (in Germany as well as in Japan) – false therapy for the sickness of the economy of the 1980's.

Haruo Shimada's paper on public and private vocational training in Japan is the first that comes close to the theme of the book. In some detail the factors are analysed that made the Japanese labour market and the industrial relations system change in recent years. He shows where and for whom the working conditions have worsened or improved. He makes it clear that public vocational education in Japan is still marginal in its scope for improving the quality of working life.

Probably the most valuable contributions to the theme of the book, to my mind, are Kazutoshi Koshiro's paper on production technology and labour practices in Japan, and Theodor Ellinger's paper on humanization of work in industry in Germany. Koshiro, on page 126, gives the first conclusive definition of what might be understood by "humanization of work", presents indicators of work satisfaction in Japan (e. g. absenteeism and fluctuation rates, etc.), describes the innovations in the field of work organisation (substitution of hard work, work security, job enrichment, re-education and training, small group activities, etc.), and examines the efforts for qualitative improvements of the working place in Japan. Except for the traditional principle of lifelong employment guarantee, which by itself may contribute to the quality of work life, at least where work security is concerned, he believes that much remains to be done, especially with regard to spreading the relative privileges of the permanent workers to the non-permanent workers.

Ellinger right from the start comes to the point, i. e. that "humanization of work" collides with economic and technological goals, on the one hand, and social and human goals on the other. The way in which such conflicts can be rationally discussed is illustrated by a case study on a repair shop of the German national railways. Unfortunately, however, as with all the case studies in this book, all empirical details concerning the firm tested are withheld.

The following two papers of the book are on environmental policies in general, and no direct relationship is established to the theme of "humanization of work".

Of the five remaining papers, only the one by Taishiro Shirai can claim to be innovative in this respect. He enquires into the state and future development of worker participation in Japan. After giving a survey of the very recent discussion on this kind of social reform, he describes the special features of Japanese management-labour relations which make participation in the European sense of "workers' control" (England), "Mitbestimmung" (Germany), or "autogestion" (Frankreich) fairly unlikely for Japan.

Accordingly, Shirai ends with most sceptical statements. So far few labour union leaders have demanded worker participation in industry; it has never been demanded by the masses of the unions. "When regarding the power of the Japanese working class and the relations between labour and management, participation is nothing but a diffuse concept, the possible content of which is rather unknown... The labour class in Japan lacks the ideological and organisational preconditions for successfully pursuing the goal of participation in enterprise decisions. The labour unions and the political labour parties are unable to put participation through the legislative, or to push for reforms that would really change the foundations of the economic constitution of the

country" (pp. 225–256). It is a pity that Shirai does not analyse the experience with participation in other industrialized countries.

As there is also no thorough analysis given in the following chapters of the book on the special German experiences and intentions in this field, one may generally conclude by saying that the special value that makes reading this book very worthwhile is in the papers on the Japanese economy.

However, since no author goes into comparative analysis, one may call this reservation of judgement the main shortcoming of the book. This is the more so as an exchange seminar with a tradition of more than a decade could easily go further than exchanging individual statements. "Humanization of work" is also too important a question for Germans and Japanese not to learn from their respective achievements as well as deficiencies. It may be that such comparative analysis was undertaken during the conference discussions. Unfortunately, however, results of these discussions are not included in the book and therefore do not reach the interested reader, who may be anxiously awaiting the outcome of the discussion on the "humanization of work". The present reviewer would therefore like to suggest that the central theme of this book be again put on the agenda on one of the future Japanese-German seminars.

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