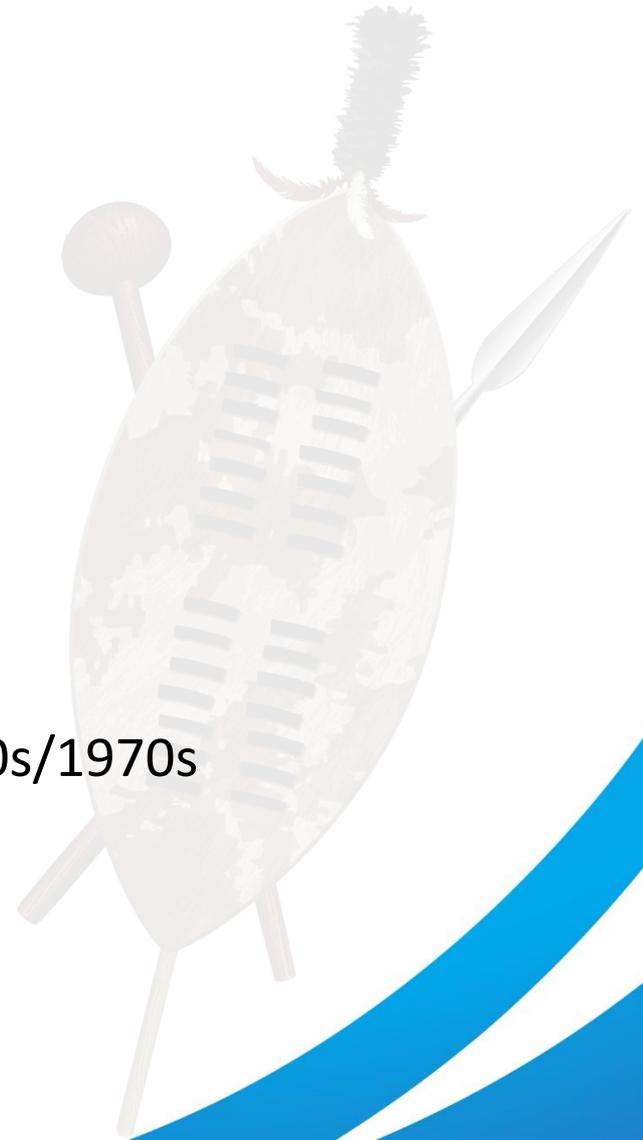


Pluralist industrial relations in the era  
of neoliberalism  
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# Purpose

- To examine contemporary IR pluralism
  - Research agenda
  - Types of explanation
  - Normative position
    - Standards for evaluation
    - Prescription
    - Critique of other frames
    - Practice as public & policy intellectuals
- Comparison with classic IR pluralism of 1960s/1970s
- Interpreting change
  - Adaptation to neo-liberalism



# Research agenda

- Labour problems
  - *Problems of labour: inflation, low productivity, strikes etc.*
  - *Problems for labour: low pay, high pay & wage inequality*
- Worker representation
  - *Workplace trade unionism and its contribution to ‘disorder’*
  - *Defending trade unionism: union economic effects*
  - *Union revitalization: labour-management partnership*
- Regulation
  - *Reform of joint regulation: workplace collective bargaining*
  - *Statutory regulation: National Minimum Wage*

# Explanation 1

- Evolutionary models
  - *Theory of Industrial Society*
    - *Collective industrial relations precipitation of industrial development*
    - *Convergence in function & form of IR across nations*
    - *IR sub-system regulates integrates industrial workers into capitalist societies*
  - Theories of post-industrialism
    - Benign evolution:
      - Post-industrialism requires flexible & humane forms of production, HPWS
    - Malign evolution:
      - Post-industrialism generates contingent & precarious work
    - Similar claims about the universality of causal processes & the functionality of collective IR to classic pluralism



# Explanation 2

- Comparative models
  - *Institutional theories*
    - *Cross-national variation in actor behaviour & effectiveness of IR systems explained by formal structure of those systems*
      - *E.g. Union behaviour shaped by structure of collective bargaining*
  - *Comparative analysis provides basis for critique & reform of domestic IR*
  - Contemporary institutionalism
    - Cross-national variation in actor behaviour & effectiveness of IR systems explained by characteristics of national business systems
      - E.g. Liberal market economies promote adversarial and short-term behaviour by employers
  - Contemporary pluralism relies on institutional explanation but attaches causal priority to a broader set of institutions
  - Comparative models continue to form the basis of normative critique

# Normative orientation 1: Standards

- *Classic standard*
  - *Social integration and the elimination of industrial ‘disorder’*
- Contemporary standards
  - Social integration:
    - E.g. inequality & precarity as threats to social order
  - Business performance:
    - E.g. demonstrating representation & regulation benefit both workers & employers
  - Labour standards as a categorical imperative:
    - E.g. labour rights as human rights

# Normative orientation 2: Prescription

- *Classic prescription*
  - *Reform of workplace collective bargaining to eliminate ‘disorder’ & promote productivity growth*
  - *Development of ‘bargained corporatism’ to control wage inflation*
- Contemporary prescription
  - Development of labour management partnership to support high performance work systems
  - Development of social partnership to integrate unions in aspects of labour market regulation
  - Hybrid systems of representation; fusion of union & non-union voice
  - Hybrid systems of regulation; fusion of joint and statutory regulation

# Normative orientation 3: Critique

- *Classic critique*
  - *Targeted at radical/critical frame*
    - *Miss-specify relative interests of workers & employers: exaggerate conflict of interests & minimise scope for cooperation*
    - *Unrealistic assessment of causal powers of the labour movement & critique of 'rank-and-file': rank-and-file movements as economistic & sectional*
- *Contemporary critique*
  - *Targeting unitary frame*
    - *Critique of HRM*
      - *Empirical critique: limited diffusion of HPWS; association with trade unionism; prevalence of 'bleak house' employment relations*
      - *Theoretical critique: financialization imposes a constraint on the voluntary diffusion of HPWS; employers need 'beneficial constraints' to upgrade employment systems*
      - *Ethical critique: SHRM makes profit maximization the sole criterion for judging HR practice & neglects social justice & categorical imperative*

# Normative orientation 4: Practice

- *Classic practice*
  - *Public intellectual: Fabian reformer*
    - *Producing blueprints for IR reform as a policy insider*
  - *Policy intellectual: Arbitrator*
    - *Resolving conflicts through third-party intervention*
- **Contemporary practice**
  - IR pluralists continue to act as Fabians & Arbitrators
  - **Public intellectual: campaigner**
    - Exposing labour problems; promoting radical change
  - **Policy intellectual: scholar-activist**
    - Providing advice & research support to unions & campaigning organizations

# Conclusion

- Complex adjustment to neo-liberalism
  - Accommodation
    - Neo-liberal policy
      - Switch from union to non-union IR
    - Neo-liberal argument
      - Acceptance of ‘business case’ standard
  - Critique
    - Neo-liberal policy
      - Failure of markets & managers to produce desirable outcomes
    - Neo-liberal argument
      - Promulgation of social justice & categorical arguments
  - Roy Hattersley effect
    - IR pluralism has become a more radical perspective on work as the context in which its assumptions are deployed have changed

