

BOOK REVIEW

Charles Tilly† and Roberto Franzosi‡

STRIKES IN THE UNITED STATES 1881-1974. By P.K. Edwards. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc. 1981. 336 pp. \$27.50.

I

WHAT AND WHY ARE STRIKES?

John R. Commons, the great American theorist of collective action, had two fundamental insights into strike activity. "People may question," he wrote, "why it is that even high wage workers go out on strike, and employers often think that by offering workers still higher wages they can induce them to stay at work or win them back to work. But what the union wants is a hearing for each individual before he is fired, or when he alleges that he has been discriminated against. This is the most that the members mean by 'recognition of the union.'"¹ As a lifelong member of the typographical workers' union, and an incessant promoter of institutions for collective bargaining, Commons developed a strong sense of the necessity of guarantees for worker collective action, while hoping to stabilize and contain worker-management struggles. Yet Commons also had this insight: "The question of *power* is the fundamental question of class war, or class struggle, breaking out in strikes, lockouts, and even in military revolutions."² Two insights, then, converge into one: industrial conflict concerns the rights to own and govern production as well as the strictly economic return workers receive for their labor.

While this double insight now seems obvious, students of industrial conflict do not take it for granted. In his recent book, *Strikes in the United States*, P.K. Edwards distinguishes among three alternative theories of industrial conflict, each with its own view of Commons' in-

sight.³ The *protest* analysis relatively direct expressions of content among workers.⁴ The trays a continuous competition government officials, in which hinge upon a much larger set approach accepts the same ideological expression of one side's discontents workers' and managers' demands strongly from one time, industrial shape the likelihood and content matically, protest theorists tend workers regularly seek to stabilize through negotiation with management the second (that strikes spring from single theorists give the two insights theorists tend to stress the second.

Not surprisingly, in explaining of industrial conflict lead to Two choices loom large: general row. By no means do they recognize the first dichotomy, if we treat a *general* phenomenon, we can stated models that have already hard evidence. However, we inappropriate assumptions about occur. If, on the other hand, we conditions currently affecting, we gain knowledge of those general features of industrial conflict at hand. Protest theorists more individual instances of conflict, we frequently aim at a certain kind theorists, on the average, find two.

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1. J. COMMONS, *THE ECONOMICS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION* 27-28 (1950).

2. *Id.* at 266 (emphasis in the original).

3. P. EDWARDS, *STRIKES IN THE UNITED STATES* (1981) [P.K. EDWARDS]. Edwards does not use these labels for the chief distinctions he makes. At times he refers to a school of thought, exemplified by A. ROSS, *INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT* (1960).

4. J. BRECHER, *STRIKE!* (1972).

5. W. KORPI, *THE WORKING CLASS IN FINLAND* (1978) [W. KORPI].

6. H. CLEGG, *TRADE UNIONISM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM* (1978) [H. CLEGG].

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sight.³ The *protest* analysis presents strikes and related actions as relatively direct expressions of the current level and character of discontent among workers.⁴ The analysis of conflict as *power struggle* portrays a continuous competition among workers, managers, and government officials, in which strikes and lockouts result from and hinge upon a much larger set of interactions.⁵ The *industrial relations* approach accepts the same idea of interaction (as opposed to the direct expression of one side's discontent), but stresses the containment of workers' and managers' demands within organizational forms that vary strongly from one time, industry, or place to another, and significantly shape the likelihood and content of industrial conflict.⁶ Speaking schematically, protest theorists tend to reject Commons' first insight (that workers regularly seek to stabilize and legitimize their collective voice through negotiation with management and government) and to stress the second (that strikes spring from struggles for power). Power-struggle theorists give the two insights equal weight. And industrial-relations theorists tend to stress the first, being at least dubious about the second.

Not surprisingly, in explaining strikes, the three alternative views of industrial conflict lead to different ways of treating the evidence. Two choices loom large: general versus particular, broad versus narrow. By no means do they reduce to the same choice. With regard to the first dichotomy, if we treat individual conflicts as manifestations of a *general* phenomenon, we can use and compare the existing, well-stated models that have already stood the test of confrontation with hard evidence. However, we run the risk that the models hide quite inappropriate assumptions about the contexts in which the conflicts occur. If, on the other hand, we read individual conflicts as signs of the conditions currently affecting *particular* sets of managers and workers, we gain knowledge of those conditions at the risk of mistaking very general features of industrial conflict for peculiarities of the situations at hand. Protest theorists more often give a particular reading to individual instances of conflict, while power-struggle theorists more frequently aim at a certain level of generality; industrial relations theorists, on the average, find themselves somewhere in between the two.

3. P. EDWARDS, *STRIKES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1881-1974* (1981) [hereinafter cited as EDWARDS]. Edwards does not use these labels or categories explicitly, but the categories represent the chief distinctions he makes. At times, Edwards also singles out an "institutionalization" school of thought, exemplified by A. ROSS & P. HARTMAN, *CHANGING PATTERNS OF INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT* (1960).

4. J. BRECHER, *STRIKE!* (1972).

5. W. KORPI, *THE WORKING CLASS IN WELFARE CAPITALISM* (1978) [hereinafter cited as KORPI].

6. H. CLEGG, *TRADE UNIONISM UNDER COLLECTIVE BARGAINING* (1976).

The choice between broad and narrow follows from the fact that the strike is only one form of industrial conflict—one whose very definition at any time and place is a result of previous struggles and administrative practices. Where should we draw the lines among absenteeism, shop-floor disputes, sabotage, lockouts, and strikes *stricto sensu*? If we choose a broad conception of industrial conflict, we gain the advantage of examining the interplay among different forms of struggle at the cost of taking on the study of phenomena for which the evidence is fragmentary and often intractable. If we choose a narrow conception (which usually means concentrating on strikes as currently defined and recorded), we gain the advantage of crisp, comparable, abundant evidence at the cost of being vulnerable to variations in administrative practice and of sometimes interpreting shifts in the forms or loci of conflict as changes in the overall level of conflict. Protest and power-struggle theorists align at the broad end of the range, insisting on the examination of several different forms of conflict. Industrial relations theorists remain more willing, on the whole, to concentrate on strikes as such.

Protest, power-struggle, and industrial relations views of industrial conflict all have pedigrees stretching back into the nineteenth century. General histories of the labor movement, for example, usually incorporate a protest interpretation of strikes and other forms of industrial conflict. Recurrent studies of industrial conflict as a social problem, on the other hand, usually adopt an industrial relations perspective, with its implication that different institutions for conflict management could make industrial conflict less likely, or at least less costly. Until recently, however, power-struggle interpretations have been relatively unpopular among professional students of industrial conflict.

Over the last decade or so, the balance has changed. Partly as a result of the intellectual ferment surrounding the movements of 1968 and partly as a concomitant of the renewal of Marxist work on industrial processes, power-struggle treatments of industrial conflict have flourished.⁷ Although the modern power-struggle works vary considerably—and, indeed, take aim at one another—they share a tendency towards generalization, a relatively broad conception of industrial conflict, a view of strikes as contingent outcomes of wider struggles,

7. J. CRONIN, *INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT IN MODERN BRITAIN* (1979) [hereinafter cited as CRONIN]; E. SHORTER & C. TILLY, *STRIKES IN FRANCE, 1830-1968* (1974) [hereinafter cited as SHORTER & TILLY]; KORPI, *supra* note 5; M. PERROT, *LES OUVRIERS EN GRÈVE, FRANCE 1871-1890* (1974); Hibbs, Jr., *Industrial Conflict in Advanced Industrial Societies*, 70 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 1033-58 (1976); Hibbs, Jr., *On the Political Economy of Long-Run Trends in Strike Activity*, 8 BRIT. J. POL. SCI. 153-75 (1978). Other recent work in this line includes Ragin, Coverman & Hayward, *Major Labor Disputes in Britain, 1902-1938: The Relationship Between Resource Expenditure and Outcome*, 47 AM. SOC. REV. 238-52 (1982).

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8. See *supra* note 7.

9. EDWARDS, *supra* note

and an inclination to assign national structures of power a good deal of significance in the shaping of strikes and other forms of industrial conflict.

II

P.K. EDWARDS ON AMERICAN STRIKES

P.K. Edwards has reservations about the "organizational" and "political" aspects of power-struggle models. They are organizational, as he sees it, in stressing worker organization as a prerequisite to worker collective action. They are political in claiming that strike activity has significant connections with national struggles for power. Edwards offers the works of Hibbs, Korpi, and Shorter-Tilly as examples,⁸ and takes the Shorter-Tilly analysis of French strike activity as his chief object of scrutiny.

Exactly how far Edwards stands from the power-struggle models remains unclear, for two reasons. First, he often turns from the sustained critique of the power-struggle argument to tussle with another group of antagonists: theorists who suggest that with mature industrialism and adequate mechanisms for the resolution of disputes, strikes calm down, lose significance, become less costly, or even wither away. Second, while his most general statements swerve sharply from the power-struggle view, expounded by Shorter and Tilly, their analyses of particular features of American strike activity frequently converge. Nevertheless, throughout the book as a whole, Edwards takes a position noticeably closer to the industrial relations school (and noticeably farther from the protest school) than do Shorter, Tilly, and their confreres. He argues that job control, not national politics, is the crucial issue.

Edwards sets out to answer "one large question: how and why has the American strike picture altered during the enormous industrial and institutional changes of the past century?"⁹ He attempts to answer this question in two ways. First, he conducts quantitative analyses of year-to-year fluctuations in strike activity, in order to test alternative models of the causes of industrial conflict. Second, he charts the differences in strike activity among industries, occupations, and geographic areas, concentrating on three broad periods: 1881-1905, 1933-1946, and 1947-1974. Together, the two parts constitute our most extensive quantitative account of American strike activity.

Edwards centers his work on the study of almost one hundred years of official strike statistics, as collected and published by the

8. See *supra* note 7.

9. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 11.

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹⁰ His empirical results derive not only from standard strike indicators—number of strikes, number of workers involved and number of hours lost—but also from a variety of other strike measures. These include trade union involvement in strikes, results of strikes, strikes by issue, official versus wildcat strikes, number of establishments struck, and so on. He often uses the data in ingenious, insightful ways.

His quantitative method consists of straightforward tabulations, simple correlations, and standard econometric analyses of the form $Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + \dots + \epsilon$. In these respects he stays a cautious distance behind the most current tools of quantitative analysts of industrial conflict. That quantitative reticence makes his presentation relatively easy to follow. As we shall see later,¹¹ it also involves unnecessary risks of error, and reduces the comparability of his results with those of other investigators.

Edwards discusses four main findings:

1. Unlike the experience of many other countries, the "shape" of American strikes (i.e., the particular configuration of frequency, size, and duration at any point in time) shows no significant long-term change over the last century.
2. Economic factors and the business cycle affect strike activity, but not to the extent that is generally believed.
3. American strikes do not follow the patterns predicted by a power-struggle model.
4. Bargaining structure has a strong effect upon strike activity.

If these findings hold as stated, they challenge ideas of the "institutionalization" of strikes, raise doubts about protest and power-struggle models of industrial conflict, and add weight to industrial relations models. For these reasons, and for the most comprehensive description of American strike patterns published so far, *Strikes in the United States* deserves close attention.

III

A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF EDWARDS' THEORIES

Several aspects of Edwards' book stand up well to close scrutiny. First, the volume is a welcome addition to the small number of extensive, longitudinal, quantitative studies of industrial conflict, a rarity for American strikes. The last comprehensive investigation of American strikes dates back to Griffin's study, which is now over forty years old.¹² Large-scale studies of single countries (such as Edwards has done for

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10. *Id.* at 254-330.

11. See Section III *infra*.

12. J. GRIFFIN, *STRIKES: A STUDY IN QUANTITATIVE ECONOMICS* (1939).

13. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3; KNOWLES, *STRIKES: A STUDY IN*

14. See EDWARDS, *supra* note

15. See, e.g., *id.* at 72-75.

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the United States, Shorter and Tilly for France, Cronin and Knowles for the United Kingdom)¹³ should eventually make cross-national understanding of strikes more meaningful.

Second, the work attempts to bring the more qualitative evidence of case studies to bear on the main arguments. Those case studies are especially rich and abundant for the United States. No other general work has made such extensive use of this large body of literature; it never seems to find its way into the bibliographies of quantitative investigations of industrial conflict. That is a pity, not only because the case studies provide another perspective on strikes, but also because they offer the means of validating the measures and interpreting the results of quantitative analyses spanning hundreds or thousands of events.

Third, most investigations of strike activity—notably quantitative accounts—analyze the decision to strike and the decision to stop striking almost exclusively from the workers' perspective. Edwards properly portrays strikes as outcomes of the interactions among workers, employers, and representatives of governments.

Finally, Edwards makes a convincing case for the role of bargaining structure in the pattern of strikes. His work makes one of the few attempts so far to follow up systematically on Clegg's seminal ideas concerning the relationship between strike activity and the particular organization of collective bargaining.¹⁴

Difficulties exist, however. First, the quality of his methods does not always keep pace with his grasp of theories—other people's and his own. We accept and reject theories on the basis of empirical evidence treated in comparable ways. Without competent technical work and comparable treatment of the evidence, we lose the ability to decide whether discrepancies among the results of different investigators result from technical errors, true variations from one case to another, or the superiority of one theory to another. On those grounds, several features of Edwards' econometric analyses are likely to make experienced practitioners uneasy: the use of unorthodox measures such as his “trough” and “peak” indicators of the business cycle; the use of an unlagged real wage variable instead of the usual distributed-lag relationship in Edwards' version of the Ashenfelter and Johnson model;¹⁵ the lack of a stated rationale for the particular choice of sample periods (1881-1910, 1900-1939, and 1946-1972) in the most general time-series analyses; the unexplained fluctuation in periodization from one table to

13. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3; SHORTER & TILLY, *supra* note 7; CRONIN, *supra* note 7; K. KNOWLES, *STRIKES: A STUDY IN INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT* (1952).

14. See EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 224-33.

15. See, e.g., *id.* at 72-75.

the next (e.g., tables 3.3 and 3.4); the lack of correspondence between these various periodizations and the general timetable proposed in the book's table of contents; the presentation of zero-order correlations between ratio variables with common terms (e.g., tables 3.1, 3.3, 3.4), despite Edwards' own cautions against just such practices.¹⁶ In sound econometric practice, an investigator who simultaneously seeks to innovate and to compare, conducts the crucial analysis in both the "old" way and the "new", thus constructing a solid bridge back to the previous analysis he means to refute, incorporate, or improve.

Edwards leaves cracks in the bridge. For example, he uses his unorthodox economic indicators—the "trough" and "peak" variable and the unlagged real wage—to gauge the contribution of business cycle theories to the understanding of strikes. He concludes that the business cycle has little or no impact on American strikes. How much of the discrepancy between Edwards' findings and those of previous business-cycle advocates results from his use of those particular variables?

Edwards' failure to use all relevant evidence likewise cast doubts on his results. Consider the case of union density, by which Edwards means the proportion of all workers belonging to trade unions. "The failure of union density," he writes, "to operate significantly in combination with the more general economic variables casts very great doubt on the view that organizational factors must be given an independent role in the determination of strike activity."¹⁷ Yet the relevant regression analyses use strike frequency alone as their dependent variable. Strike analysts generally believe that unionization is related to the number of workers involved in strikes rather than to their sheer frequency. Elsewhere, Edwards recommends that we "explore the role of the same model in explaining different features of strikes, while bearing in mind that strike frequency and worker involvement may be influenced by different factors."¹⁸ Why, then, doesn't he present results concerning duration of strikes, number of strikers, or the two in combination? Without those results, the junction with previous work fails.

Choice of sample periods is also critical. If institutional arrangements and bargaining structure play such a significant role, and if "the year 1934 was a turning point"¹⁹ in this process of institutionalization, why lump together in the same analysis periods as different as the 1920s and the 1930s? In his own analysis of strike data, Romagnoli

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For these reasons a address directly the discr tensibly similar studies, The discrepancies leave structure of conflict has c ences in the choice of m

Sometimes the disc against another. It is not tation he prefers. He de activity will depend on t ceptance."²¹ Statements "One cannot reject the h adequate predictors of th 1946-1972 periods];"²² "[strike activity was relatec nomic factors lay behind period]."²⁴ Since all th they amount to declarati stood by analysts of indu activity in 1900-1939 an 1972, the main periods I major conclusion Edwar from partial, somewhat in and evidence.

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16. *Id.* at 55-56.

17. *Id.* at 77.

18. *Id.* at 73 n.28.

19. *Id.* at 143.

20. Romagnoli, *Il Movimento Degli Scioperi Nel XX Secolo*

21. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3,

22. *Id.* at 80.

23. *Id.* at 148.

24. *Id.* at 179.

25. *Id.* at 83.

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found marked differences between the two periods.²⁰ At a minimum,
 we might have expected Edwards to introduce a before/after dummy
 variable to capture the effect of the proposed turning point.

For these reasons and others like them, Edwards' analyses never
 address directly the discrepancies between his findings and those of os-
 tensibly similar studies, for example the Ashenfelter-Johnson analysis.
 The discrepancies leave a nagging doubt: do they really mean that the
 structure of conflict has changed, or could they simply be due to differ-
 ences in the choice of measures and specifications?

Sometimes the discrepancies set one of Edwards' interpretations
 against another. It is not always clear from his writing which interpre-
 tation he prefers. He declares, for instance, that "the view that strike
 activity will depend on the business cycle has won rather too easy ac-
 ceptance."²¹ Statements to the contrary appear throughout the book:
 "One cannot reject the hypothesis that levels of economic activity are
 adequate predictors of the rate of strike activity [for the 1900-1939 and
 1946-1972 periods];"²² "[d]uring the 1930s as much as at other times,
 strike activity was related to economic conditions;"²³ "identifiable eco-
 nomic factors lay behind the rise in strike activity [for the 1962-1972
 period]."²⁴ Since all these statements describe time-series analyses,
 they amount to declarations that the business cycle, as usually under-
 stood by analysts of industrial conflict, had significant effects on strike
 activity in 1900-1939 and the 1930s generally, 1946-1972, and 1962-
 1972, the main periods Edwards singles out for study. Once again, a
 major conclusion Edwards draws from his analysis appears to come
 from partial, somewhat inappropriate, confrontation between argument
 and evidence.

IV

STRIKES AND POLITICS

Similar difficulties dog Edwards' rejection of power-struggle mod-
 els of industrial conflicts. He remarked, "[O]n empirical as well as on
 methodological grounds . . . a 'political' interpretation of American
 strikes cannot be advanced for any period since 1881."²⁵ Since Ed-
 wards directs his main fire at the work of Shorter and Tilly, let us be
 clear what that work claimed. Generally, they proposed that strikes
 increase as workers organize:

20. Romagnoli, *Il Movimento degli scioperi negli Stati Uniti (1900-1970)*, in *IL MOVIMENTO
 DEGLI SCIOPERI NEL XX SECOLO* (G.P. Cella ed. 1979).

21. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 67.

22. *Id.* at 80.

23. *Id.* at 148.

24. *Id.* at 179.

25. *Id.* at 83.

In the long run, changes in the organization of production, including the effects of technical innovations on work routines and supervision, shape both (a) the features of the work situation which workers seek to improve, eliminate or control and (b) the opportunities and constraints affecting collective action on the part of workers and of managers. Prosperity, governmental toleration and the mobilization of their opponents all promote collective action by the one party and the other. Largely as a result of their own collective action . . . organized groups of workers acquire places in the national structure of power. The strike becomes the principal means by which those organized groups display their strength and exert pressure on the other chief participants in the power structure—both employers and the government. As a consequence of these multiple long-run changes, strikes become more frequent and larger in scale, their responsiveness to changes in the national political position of labor increases and acquiescence or even collaboration on the part of government officials plays a growing part in the outcome of strikes. Strikes are power struggles; organized workers use what power they have to economic advantage, of course; but strikes expand as workers organize and as their organizations acquire increasing stakes in the national structure of power.²⁶

That is what Shorter and Tilly called their "political" interpretation of strike activity. On the basis of extensive quantitative analyses, they claimed to have made a reasonable case for such an interpretation of French strike activity from 1830 to 1968. Then they described the evolution of strike shapes—size, duration, and frequency—in a number of western countries from 1900 onward, and speculated on the application of political interpretations to those countries.

In the case of the United States, they suggested that "before the Depression collective action was as much political as economic, intended equally to build political organizations and press political demands and to elevate the standard of living by pressuring individual employers."²⁷ "Then during the Depression," they continue, "the North American working classes succeeded to political power. The 1930s meant in the United States the worker entry to the polity, as part of a coalition of farmers and ethnic groups. But strike activity did not wither away in the United States, as it did in northern Europe after a similar entry. Why?"²⁸ In contrast to northern Europe, they suggest:

[A]lthough American labor tried hard during the late thirties to obviate the strike through government intervention in labor relations, the weight of historic traditions of non-intervention, plus the indifference or opposition of other members of the polity, doomed these efforts to failure. Finally, American labor reconciled itself to a watertight divi-

sion between job action, gaining were to function political action, which v political parties.²⁹

Shorter and Tilly offered this interpretation, but investigation.

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26. SHORTER & TILLY, *supra* note 7, at 8.

27. *Id.* at 329 (footnote omitted).

28. *Id.* at 330 (footnote omitted).

29. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at

30. *Id.* at 80.

31. *See id.* at 80 (Table 3.9).

32. *Id.* at 83.

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sion between job action, where the mechanisms of free collective bargaining were to function unobstructed by government intervention, and political action, which was to be executed through interest-coalition political parties.²⁹

Shorter and Tilly offered no evidence—qualitative or quantitative—for this interpretation, but laid it down as a proposal for future investigation.

Edwards, then, takes up the proposal. He concludes that such a power-struggle argument does not work. "Economic factors," writes Edwards, "are common to all strikes, but political ones are likely to have an impact which is limited to a small range of strikes."³⁰ He continues: "Instead of concentrating on a supposed political orientation among workers . . . one should examine the role of the government and its decision of when to intervene in labor disputes."³¹ "Political factors," it appears, mean the explicit incorporation of demands concerning the national structure of power, or the direct intervention of national government in the course of a strike. Those are, indeed, rare events. But they do not exhaust the political context and significance of industrial conflict. A factory occupation movement can sweep a country while the bulk of workers' demands concentrate on wages, working conditions, and job security. Strike waves have far-reaching political implications, invariably attract significant governmental intervention, and depend, among other things, on workers' readings of the likely character of that intervention.

What evidence does Edwards offer on these matters? He rests his case on two regression equations, for the periods 1900-1939 and 1946-1972.³² In those equations, the president's party and the percentage voting Democrat are the proposed political measures, with strike frequency as the dependent variable. Once again, we must ask the two insistent questions: Why these periods, and no others? Why not look at other features of strikes?

V

AN "INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS" INTERPRETATION OF STRIKES

A. *The Significance of Bargaining Structure*

American strikes, in Edwards' view, can best be understood in terms of institutional arrangements. In particular, he claims, the bargaining structure makes a difference. "Collective bargaining—rather

29. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 81.

30. *Id.* at 80.

31. *See id.* at 80 (Table 3.9).

32. *Id.* at 83.

than economic or political factors—remains the centre of attention," he maintains.³³ A country's bargaining structure can best explain prevailing patterns of strikes: their frequency, duration, and size.

Edwards has a point. Bargaining structure can go a long way toward explaining prevailing patterns of strikes, even in countries traditionally thought to have poorly-institutionalized industrial relations.³⁴ To draw an example from Italy, the two-level bargaining prevailing during the 1970s deeply affected strike patterns. Industry-wide collective agreements, renewed every three years, are underscored by a few large, demonstrative strikes. At this level, size is the characteristic dimension; the workers of a whole industry strike for the renewal of their collective contract. Immediately after the signing of the industry-wide contract, however, plant-level bargaining opens, in order to catch productivity differentials among firms within the industry. Hundreds of firms throughout the country renew their plant contracts. At this level, frequency is the characteristic dimension. Quantitatively, strike size and frequency describe two out-of-phase sine waves with periods of three years and an average phase-lag of one year, as a consequence of Italy's specific arrangements for bargaining.³⁵

Yet Italy's bargaining structure can hardly be taken as the conclusive explanation in this case. In general, bargaining structure can only serve as a short-run explanation. First, as Walter Korpi has argued, the emergence of a given bargaining structure is itself the result of conflict, a function of changes in the balance of power between workers and employers.³⁶ While, then, a given bargaining structure, once in existence, affects the pattern of strikes, "the structure [itself] reflects the conflicts on which it was built," as Edwards himself recognizes.³⁷ To follow up on our Italian example, the increased decentralization of bargaining levels in the postwar period resulted from conflict. In the early 1960s, as a result of increased labor unrest, industry-wide bargaining came to parallel—not without much resistance from employers—national, centralized bargaining that had until then been exclusive. Again, plant-level bargaining only gained recognition during the wave of strikes that swept Italy during the late 1960s.³⁸

33. See Snyder, *Institutional Setting and Industrial Conflict: Comparative Analyses of France, Italy and the United States*, 40 AM. SOC. REV. 259 (1975).

34. See Franzosi, *Strikes in Italy: An Exploratory Data Analysis*, 70 RIVISTA DI POLITICA ECONOMICA 73 (Supp. 1980); Franzosi, *La conflittualità in Italia tra ciclo economico e contrattazione collettiva*, 22 RASSEGNA ITALIANA DI SOCIOLOGIA 533 (1981).

35. Korpi, *Conflict, Power and Relative Deprivation*, 68 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 1569 (1974).

36. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 237.

37. See Giugni, *Recent Developments in Collective Bargaining in Italy*, 91 INT'L LAB. REV. 273 (1965); Giugni, *Recent Trends in Collective Bargaining In Italy*, 104 INT'L LAB. REV. 307 (1971).

38. See *supra* notes 19-22 and accompanying text.

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40. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at

41. *Id.* at 234.

42. *Id.* at 237.

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68 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 1569 (1974).

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Second, the bargaining structure only helps explain some of the characteristics of strikes: why strikes are shorter or longer in some institutional settings than in others; why they are more or less frequent, more or less large. It also helps explain some of the behavior of strikes over time: in particular, cyclical and periodic movements in strike dimensions (size, frequency, and duration) and their interrelations.

There are, however, other aspects of strike activity which an institutional explanation cannot address. Strikes, for instance, also show short- and medium-term fluctuations, which are better explained in terms of the business cycle. To be more exact, the bargaining positions of workers and managers vary with some regularity through the business cycle, and therefore produce regular variations in the frequencies, forms, and outcomes of strikes. Edwards himself admits as much, with a good deal of ambivalence.³⁹

There is no reason, however, why economic and institutional effects cannot be combined to offer complementary explanations of different aspects of strike activity. Reliance on one explanatory factor (such as the bargaining structure) to the exclusion of others (such as economic and political factors) may be quite misleading. Instead of contests to the death, we need integration among alternative explanations and models that have proved to be successful within particular domains. Korpi, for instance, has shown convincingly how economic hardship, relative deprivation, or, more generally, economic factors can be incorporated in a power-struggle model.⁴⁰ Edwards' work does justice to one factor—bargaining structure—often neglected by theorists of protest and power struggle. But in calling attention to that factor, he has blinded himself to the insights of competing theoretical approaches.

B. Job Control and American Labor

If a country's "strike pattern undoubtedly reflect[s] aspects of its collective bargaining arrangements," the key variable is really job control or, better, "the intensity of struggle for control."⁴¹ It is job control, according to Edwards, that provides the running thread, the unifying force that can explain both the unchanging shape of American strikes over the last century and the decentralized bargaining structure prevailing in America. The very emergence of such a decentralized bargaining structure thus "reflects the previous struggle for control."⁴² The bargaining structure, with its emphasis on plant-level bargaining

39. Korpi, *supra* note 35.

40. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 241.

41. *Id.* at 234.

42. *Id.* at 237.

and job-control issues, therefore represents only the crystallization and institutionalization of previous struggles over job control.

That historical derivation of the American bargaining structure is very attractive. But it presents two related difficulties. First, "job control" can take a broad or narrow form. Second, in the United States, employers have struggled successfully to restrict job-control issues to the narrow form.

In a broad sense of the word, job control includes substantial power over the allocation of all the factors of production: labor, capital, and technology as well. At this extreme, job control means working-class domination of production. In a narrow sense, it includes only the worker's ability to shape his immediate work environment and tasks, to create or maintain a niche of autonomy within the industrial division of labor. Here is the problem: the present emphasis on job control in the narrow sense grew out of a lost struggle for job control in the broad sense. The broad struggle entailed a series of battles over power at the national level, over the relationship between government and industry, over the rights of different parties to use coercion in industrial disputes; it had an inescapable political component. Edwards rests his rejection of "political" interpretations of strike activity especially on his discovery of the importance of job-control issues in American strikes. That will not do; today's "apolitical" scope of strike activity is itself a political product.

American capitalists, with the aid of government, prevented American labor from taking a centralized, political stance at the national level, like its European counterparts. On the other hand, managers prevented "control" issues at the plant level from taking a more radical turn. A good example from Edwards' own analysis is management's deflection of workers' demands for disclosure of company profits.⁴³ This was the lost political struggle of American workers. It does not mean they failed to fight. One has only to read Brecher's narrative of major American fights to learn the contrary.⁴⁴ American workers tried hard, with some of the most violent, bloody, and bitter clashes in the western world. The difference from the European experience is that they lost even more emphatically than their European fellows.

This ability to maintain the separation between "economic" and "political" conflict, to prevent the "centralization and politicization of strike action,"⁴⁵ to limit industrial conflict to job-control issues and plant-level bargaining, to block the expression of working-class issues in national class-wide bargaining constitutes the great political victory

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In seeking to challenge activity, then, Edwards brought control. But bargaining structure and politics, of organization Edwards points correctly to conflict: to abandon the fruit and "industrial relations" power over the conditions takes us back to the agenda into industrial conflict.

43. *Id.* at 234.

44. BRECHER, *supra* note 4.

45. EDWARDS, *supra* note 3, at 234.

46. M. MANN, *CONSCIOUSNESS* (1973).

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of American capitalism. It has so far succeeded in maintaining a di-
vided working class, fragmented in the pursuit of corporatist plant-
level economism. The meaning of such an ongoing struggle is essen-
tially political. It concerns power, local and national. It helps us to
understand the institutionalization that took place in the 1930s. As
Michael Mann wrote, "[w]hat we call the institutionalization of indus-
trial conflict is nothing more nor less than the narrowing down of con-
flict to aggressive economism and defensive control."⁴⁶

In seeking to challenge the power-struggle interpretation of strike
activity, then, Edwards brings us to bargaining structures and job con-
trol. But bargaining structures and job control rest on a web of organi-
zation and politics, of organized struggles for power. Despite himself,
Edwards points correctly to the next round of work on industrial con-
flict: to abandon the fruitless opposition of "economic," "political,"
and "industrial relations" variables, and to see strikes as struggles for
power over the conditions and returns of work. In that sense, Edwards
takes us back to the agenda implicit in John R. Commons' old insights
into industrial conflict.

46. M. MANN, CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTION AMONG THE WESTERN WORKING CLASS 21
(1973).