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978-0-521-42686-2 - Markets, Firms, and the Management of Labour in Modern Britain

Howard F. Gospel

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This book examines the development of employers' human resource management and industrial relations policies in Britain. It adopts a broad historical perspective, beginning with the inheritance from the nineteenth century and coming up to date with modern human resource management policies. It focuses on how managers organise the employment relationship, how they control work relations, and how they deal with trade unions and industrial relations. The author examines these in the context of the market within which the firm operates, and the strategy, structure, and hierarchy of the modern industrial enterprise, developing a theoretical approach which emphasises the effect of these factors on management choices.

The book shows that historically British employers tended to adopt market based strategies rather than internal ones. Despite a post-war trend towards 'internalisation', comparison with the US, Germany and Japan reveals that this has come about only slowly and unevenly, and has not been able to reverse the relative decline in economic performance and national competitiveness.

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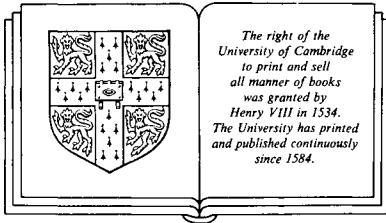
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To my mother  
and to the memory of  
my father

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## Preface

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This book is the outcome of many years' research and writing on the management of labour. Its origins go back to a doctoral dissertation at the London School of Economics on the role of employers' associations in the development of the British system of industrial relations. Subsequently over the years I sustained my interest in the central role of management in industrial relations and carried out further research on wider aspects of labour management in various industries and individual companies. The book provides a synthesis of my work and that of others in the area. I hope also that it makes new contributions in terms of concepts, knowledge, and interpretations.

Inevitably over the years I have accumulated a considerable debt of gratitude to various academic colleagues. B. C. Roberts and H. A. Clegg encouraged my original interest in the role of employers and my belief that they are the prime movers in industrial relations. Colleagues at the University of Kent have commented on various drafts of the manuscript and I would like in particular to thank J. Lovell, S. Glynn, J. Oxborrow, G. Crompton, and G. Rubin. Colleagues at the London School of Economics have also commented over the years and here I am particularly grateful to L. Hannah, T. Gourvish, S. Keeble, D. Baines, E. Hunt, R. Fitzgerald, and J. Tomlinson. Many others have helped with suggestions for improvement on specific themes and chapters. I have received assistance from economic and business historians who have corrected many of my historical errors and misunderstandings – G. Jones, J. Zeitlin, S. Tolliday, J. Melling, A. Reid, N. Whiteside, P. Thane, A. McIvor, R. Coopey, L. Holden, and A. McKinlay. Since this is also a study which comes more or less up to date, I have also benefited from discussions with industrial relations, labour economics, and business colleagues who have provided useful critical comments on more contemporary chapters – K. Sissons, R. Martin, P. Marginson, P. Anthony, A. Pendelton, O. Clarke, F. Bayliss, M. Rawlinson, A. Starkman, and P. Ryan. With such a long series of acknowledgements, it is clear that the usual disclaimers apply. I would also like to thank the various employers' organisations and

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companies who allowed me access to their records and who provided interviews. These are referred to individually in the notes. In addition, I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council and the Nuffield Foundation for financial assistance with some of the research which went into the making of the volume. Finally, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Cathy, without whose support and encouragement this book would not have been possible.

For many years in Britain, perhaps more than in other major industrial countries, labour has been treated primarily as a commodity subject to market forces. At the present time there is much talk about the development of a new approach to the management of human resources. I hope that the conceptual and historical perspective of this book will enable the management of labour to be seen as part of a more complex evolution and will illustrate the constraints and opportunities which we inherit from the past.