

Labour protection across the North-South divide?

The issue of labour regulation and social protection has been a divisive topic in international economic arrangements over the past twenty years. This paper examines the nature of global labour regulation and suggests some possibilities for addressing the divisions it generates within and between northern and southern actors. The paper highlights the collection of supranational actors, ideologies and policies that compose global labour policy and assesses their significance for understanding national labour policy and positions. Although labour policy has been guided by the presence of a dedicated international organization (the ILO) for over ninety years, this paper argues that global labour policy is created by a much larger number of public and private authorities. These include: the competing and evolving ideologies which view the use and care of labour in starkly different terms; the activity of multilateral organizations such as the ILO, WTO, IMF, World Bank and OECD; the treatment of labour issues by regional bodies and agreements such as the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, MERCOSUR; the policy and activity of transnational corporations, including their attempts at self-regulation; and finally, the activity of civic associations working on global labour issues.

The paper will highlight the conflict over global labour policy between actors and ideologies in and across the North and South. It concludes by suggesting options for reconciling some of these positions and assessing the divergent ways in which global labour policy impacts national formations.

Contact information:

Dr. Robert O'Brien
LIUNA / Enrico Henry Mancinelli Professor in Global Labour Issues
Department of Political Science
McMaster University, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4M4, Canada

Tel: 001-905-525-9140 ext. 23705, Fax: 001-905-527-3071, E-mail:
obrienr@mcmaster.ca