

Editorial

European labour law is becoming increasingly complex, though there has been little harmonisation of collective labour law so far, and legal systems continue to differ significantly from each other. The terms 'collective agreement', 'industrial action', 'workers' representation' and 'workers' participation' refer to different legal concepts in the various EU Member States. In his comprehensive analysis, Robert Rebhahn explains and compares these concepts, their differences and similarities, and contrasts them with the respective concepts in the US.

The only field of European collective labour law where harmonisation has taken place so far is information and consultation of workers. Besides a number of specific information and consultation rights laid down in several directives, Directive 2002/14/EC establishes a general framework for informing and consulting employees. It may be assumed that its implementation will bring about fundamental changes in employment relations of those Member States that do not as yet provide a general system of information and consultation, i.e. the United Kingdom and Ireland. In her article Pascale Lorber discusses this assumption in relation to the UK.

Compatibility of work and family life is another important issue in Europe. In this connection a statutory right to part-time work was introduced in the Netherlands and Germany some two years ago. After outlining the respective working-time patterns and provisions for leave and childcare, Susanne Burri, Heike Opitz and Albertine Veldman compare the right to part-time work under Dutch and German law. While stressing the evident benefits of the new provisions, they draw attention to shortcomings and difficulties that still need to be overcome.

In the next article the focus moves away from Europe. Globalisation and the high rate of economic growth in Asia give rise to the need to study Asian systems of labour law. However, it is difficult to get contributions dealing with labour law or industrial relations in this part of the world. This is why we are particularly glad to publish Mikio Yoshida's survey of Thai labour law, outlining the historical development and direction of labour law reform in Thailand.

A labour law reform aiming at reducing the number of unemployed has recently also been introduced in Germany. The reform proposals, which gained much public attention, were drafted by the 'Hartz Commission'.

Berndt Keller discusses them, providing a rather critical overview and stressing the fact that several important factors were not taken into account.

One of the Hartz proposals, which has already been implemented, concerns a 'hot topic' in Germany: further deregulation of temporary agency work, which is regarded by many as a 'bridge' leading the unemployed into employment. Bernd Waas analyses the new law, mainly from the constitutional point of view with reference in particular to the principle of 'equal pay' as provided in the draft EC Directive on temporary agency work, and identifies difficulties of a legal and economic kind that the legislator needs to deal with.

Finally, in this issue of the *Journal*, we publish two book reviews that we hope will be of interest to our readers: Jeff Kenner gives an analysis of Siofra O'Leary's study of the workings of the European Court of Justice, and Hartmut Oetker provides a review of the *Handbuch des Europäischen Arbeits- und Sozialrechts* by Peter Hanau, Heinz-Dietrich Steinmeyer and Rolf Wank.

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