

Guest Editorial

Conflict and Co-operation: International Symposium on Collective Labour Dispute Resolution and Regulation

Beijing, December 2011

Labour law and industrial relations in China are at a fascinating stage of development. After three decades of extraordinary economic change, the circumstances of employment have been altered beyond recognition. The implementation of the Labour Contract Law in 2008 was a major acknowledgement of this. But it is only part of a continuing process of reform. China has a wide-ranging, evidence-driven debate underway on the institutions for labour relations that might be appropriate for its emerging market economy.

The international symposium on 'Conflict and Co-operation' held in Beijing in 2011 was the first of what is likely to be a series, bringing together Chinese and international scholars as well as government and trade union officials, to discuss research findings and policy proposals. The discussion was given added urgency by a much-publicized wave of industrial disputes across China in the previous year. There were over eighty research papers, the great majority written by the rising generation of young Chinese social scientists, for whom labour relations has become a lively topic.

The four articles published here are selected as being of interest more generally to an international readership. In his discussion of the legislation on the right to strike in China, Chang Kai argues that the existing law permits workers' reasonable needs to be resolved through negotiation, but that further clarification is required to make this generally effective. The integrity of the right to strike internationally is questioned by Keith Ewing in an analysis of the recent challenge by employers at the ILO. At a time when China is building its third-party dispute resolution institutions, Tom Kochan and Arnold Zack describe the increasing diversity of mediation and arbitration in the United States. Finally, William Brown discusses why 'wild-cat' strikes similar to those current in China, which were once such a feature of industrial conflict in the West, simply faded away.

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William Brown and Chang Kai