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relatives à la pratique dans les chapitres 2, 3 et 4. Le second usage, en lien avec l'introduction, les chapitres 5 (Discipline carrefour) et six (Ne pas gâcher la crise), est politique: il interpelle le lecteur dans une réflexion de fond sur le projet social poursuivi par l'ergonomie. Faisant écho à des réflexions contemporaines, telles que celles portées par I. Ferreras, D. Méda et J. Battilana, auteurs du livre *Le manifeste travail: démocratiser, démarchandiser, dépolluer* (Seuil, 2020), il nourrit un riche dialogue avec les autres disciplines des relations industrielles.

## The Return of History: Conflict, Migration, and Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century

Jennifer Welsh

*The Return of History: Conflict, Migration, and Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century*, Toronto / New York, House of Anansi Press, 2016, 347p. (ISBN: 978-1-4870-0130-8)

There is a certain tendency to relate the field of industrial relations to specific situations and micro-level events, and to concentrate often on a short- or mid-term time-frame. However, it is also important to consider industrial relations with regard to overall social, economic and political developments with impacts on various time frames. Such phenomena can have a broad impact and even become “game changers” for the world of industrial relations. The effects of COVID-19 serve as useful examples and suggest a number of questions for future policy-making.

The macro/micro preoccupation is, in fact, less a question of opposition than one of the identification of a continuum: from the global to the specific and vice-versa from the short-term to the mid-term and finally to the long-term. Moreover, this continuum has numerous intermediate points, and it is important to consider these various points with a view to both policy and action.

Jennifer Welsh's book on *The Return of History* definitely falls into the macro category and the issues she raises are destined to have a variety of impacts by *ricochet* at various levels of society. At first glance, through the title of her book, the anonymous opening quote<sup>1</sup> and the first chapter, Welsh targets Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* in what appears to be a debunking exercise. A good part of the first chapter is devoted to this subject and underlines the fact that, at many times in the past, socioeconomic-political advances have been

1. “History repeats itself because no one was listening the first time.”

subsequently reversed in spite of their significance and initial promise. She goes on in the next four chapters to highlight a selection of problems that we might have hoped had been solved but which, she argues, have come back to haunt us.

It will be recalled that Fukuyama's initial piece on this subject appeared in article form in the journal *The National Interest* in 1989 under that exact title. That was the heyday of reflection inspired by Gorbachev's policies of Perestroika (restructuring) and Glasnost (openness) in the Soviet Union and they would go on to have a definite effect on Russia's future orientations and those of its satellites. For starters, the Berlin Wall would be breached for the first time during the fall of 1989, followed by the abandonment of the practice of military intervention in satellite countries of Europe and, finally, the putting aside of aspects of the former Soviet state and its apparatus. Belgian scholar Nagels, writing at about the same time as Fukuyama, had his own take on what appeared to be in the works.<sup>2</sup> The old system, he argued, was a distortion of communism.<sup>3</sup> This is an argument with which Gorbachev himself seems to have been in agreement, as expressed in a more recent book, at least as far back as the early years of the Soviet state and the Stalinist era are concerned.<sup>4</sup> Thus, there appeared to be grounds for believing that the conflicts generated by the ongoing East-West crisis were coming to an end. Indeed, Gorbachev discussed this and provided his own hopeful impressions at the time, emphasizing nuclear *détente* and a host of other favourable considerations.<sup>5</sup>

Welsh argues, however, that hopes for an end to the various problems that had dogged the world during the Cold War were, at the very least, premature, and, at worst, dead wrong. They have all come back but with a twist, for, as she pointed out, history never repeats itself exactly. This argument serves as an introduction for the reader to chapters two to five of her book, which appear under the titles: *The Return of Barbarism*; *The Return of Mass Flight*; *The Return of the Cold War*; and *The Return of Inequality*.

*The Return of Barbarism* is associated with international terrorism of the Al Qaeda variety (in its different specific forms of executions, beheadings and cruelty). *The Return of Mass Flight* is associated with the massive refugee crisis, currently in the Near East and North Africa, the former having been provoked by the internal Syrian crisis and the latter by various changes in North Africa, such as the crisis in Libya. *The Return of the Cold War* is linked to Vladimir Putin's increasingly dictatorial regime and aggressive policies, such as the "non-official" invasion of the Crimean Peninsula and continuing hostility to the Ukraine. Finally, *The Return of Inequality* is associated with the repeated financial crises that have affected the world and created, or rather recreated, a problem of inequality of income and opportunity both within and between Western nations since the end of the "*trente glorieuses*." The first three questions are very much part of our thinking today. The question of increasing inequality has been recently brought even more to public

2. Jacques Nagels. *Du socialisme perverti au capitalisme sauvage*, Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1991, 305p.

3. He went on to argue that Russia had made a leap from an extreme form of communism to an extreme form of capitalism.

4. Nagels went on to argue that the new system that would emerge would be just as distorted, a radical form of capitalism.

5. Mikhail Gorbachev. *Le future du monde global: le testament politique de Gorbatchev*, Paris, Flammarion, 2019, 212 p., pp. 91-92.

attention through the recent work of three economists: Paul Krugman, Thomas Piketty and Joseph Stiglitz.<sup>6</sup> The pandemic crisis caused by the global impact of COVID-19 has furthered this reflection, but it took place after the publication of her book.

There are, of course, other major problems today. Gorbachev provides a clue or two on why things subsequently went wrong, beginning with what he calls the “triumphalism” of the West, and particularly that of the USA.<sup>7</sup> He went on to emphasize the abandonment of nuclear controls as well as a few other major issues.<sup>8</sup>

All of Welsh's points have direct or indirect implications for the field of industrial relations. The neo-barbarism identified by Welsh has had a major effect, leading to economic destabilization, potential military conflict and mass displacement. The extensive movement of refugees linked to such crises has become a significant factor in countries receiving them. The German case comes immediately to mind with Chancellor Angela Merkel's promise to receive one million refugees, and its political and social consequences. However, virtually all European countries have been affected. Countries further abroad, such as Canada, have also responded. The simple changing of the guard, between Harper's Conservatives and Trudeau's Liberals, doubled the number of Syrian refugees. This effort has meant integrating newcomers into the workforce and integrating their dependents within society

and giving them access to its various services.<sup>9</sup> A return of the Cold War, version 2, in addition to obligating the country to send troops to NATO member countries in Central and Eastern Europe, could also affect global trading patterns and industrial priorities, with consequences for employment. Finally, the inequality debate has many important implications for labour relations and conflict in the workplace. By extension, although subsequent to the publication of Welsh's book, the COVID-19 crisis has driven the importance of this issue home, particularly in the current discussion over essential workers and essential services.

Welsh also briefly raised another point in her critique of Fukuyama: he appeared to have ignored events in the People's Republic of China. She was referring, of course, to the largely student-led pro-democracy movement that had been violently suppressed by the government of the PRC in Tiananmen Square during the summer of 1989. She does not dwell on this point to any extent, but could have. That horrific event had taken place under the orders of the very Chinese government, that of Deng Xiao-ping, which had proposed realigning Beijing's economic policy along those of capitalism. In fact, the world was a witness to two diametrically opposed responses that year: the massacre in the PRC during the summer and the avoidance of a massacre in East Germany through the efforts of Gorbachev and the USSR's officers on the spot in Leipzig during the

6. Incidentally, the fourth question has been taken up by three economists, Krugman, Piketty and Stiglitz, who focus on the period since the early 1980s. See: Krugman, Paul. *Arguing with Zombies: Economics, Politics and the Fight for a Better Future*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2020, 444p.; Piketty, Thomas. *The Economics of Inequality*, Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 2015, 142p.; Stiglitz, Joseph. *People, Power and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2019, 371p.
7. Although his comments on events in Xi's PRC and Putin's Russia, such as the Tiananmen massacre, are fuzzy and much less than convincing.
8. Gorbachev, *op. cit.* See, for example, chapters 1 (*Notre sécurité commune*) and 2 (*Comprendre le monde global*).
9. In the Canadian case, there have been numerous examples: the Hungarian uprising, the Algerian war, the Vietnam “boat people” crisis, and the Syrian civil war.

fall. Russia seemed to be moving in one direction and China in the opposite. However, even people like Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher seemed convinced that the very experience of capitalism, as applied in Hong Kong, would inevitably have a salutary (read “Western”) effect on the PRC’s economy and ultimately on its political and social systems.<sup>10</sup> Other, more perceptive observers would concentrate on the impact of the PRC on the WTO and therefore on the world trading system. Further to an earlier study by Sylvia Ostry,<sup>11</sup> Paul Blustein has dealt at length with the impact of the presence of the PRC within the WTO, particularly in light of the trade war between the PRC and the USA during the Trump administration.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that we can have reservations about Fukuyama’s arguments. However, the way Welsh presents Fukuyama is not entirely accurate. Fukuyama developed his initial article by referring to the “End of History” in a global sense. He thus drew on Kojève’s analysis of the same theme, which was based in turn on the writings of Marx and Hegel. All three authors developed the same concept. Both Marx and Hegel predicted the “End of History,” but not exactly in the same way. The difference took the form of a confrontation between Hegel’s “idealism” and Marx’s “historical materialism” as motors of human development. Hegel was writing about the initial appearance of liberalism and democracy in what has often been called the beginning of “modern” history. Marxism in practice, according to Fukuyama’s rendering of Lenin’s pronouncements, favoured an authoritarian and decidedly non-democratic approach. Fukuyama’s position reflected both Hegel’s

position on liberalism and democracy and the presumed collapse of pre-Gorbachev rigid authoritarian Russian communism, although Putin’s and Xi’s regimes and their methods are impossible to ignore. However, the debate has shifted to varieties of capitalism. Is capitalism necessarily linked to democracy? Or can capitalism exist independently of democracy? This debate is still in full swing.

In closing, adding all of the elements identified by Welsh, as well as those the other authors referred to, one has the impression of an updating of the *Book of Revelation*, with its four grim riders of the Apocalypse, and their equally frightening steeds. Although in that case the biblical author was referring to the four fundamental scourges of mankind as he saw them: Conquest, War, Famine and Pestilence. Then again, perhaps these two lists of humanity’s constant problems are more compatible and/or complementary than appears at first sight.

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10. On this point, it might be useful to examine Margaret Thatcher’s position during the Hong Kong negotiations: Margaret Thatcher. *The Downing Street Years*, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, pp. 488-495.

11. Sylvia Ostry. *The Post Cold-War Trading System*, Chicago / London, University of Chicago Press, 1997, 309p.

12. Paul Blustein. *Schism: China, America and the Fracturing of the Global Trading System*, Waterloo, Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019. 266p.