

Editorial

Bradon Ellem and Marian Baird

JIR Editors-in-Chief, The University of Sydney, Australia

Stephen Clibborn, Rae Cooper, Alex Veen and Chris F Wright

JIR Editors, The University of Sydney, Australia

Journal of Industrial Relations
2021, Vol. 63(5) 657–660
© Australian Labour and Employment
Relations Association (ALERA) 2021
SAGE Publications Ltd, Los Angeles,
London, New Delhi, Singapore and
Washington DC
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/00221856211048616
journals.sagepub.com/home/jir



The November 2021 issue of the *Journal of Industrial Relations* (*JIR*) marks the official end of this editorial term. In this editorial, we round out our terms as editors by reflecting on the trajectory of the journal in the recent past and locating it in the wider field of industrial relations understood in terms of social practice, research and teaching.

The *JIR* was established by the Industrial Relations Society of Australia in 1959. Since then, the national association has appointed editors, most recently for set terms of five years. The University of Sydney's Kingsley Laffer, a pioneer of the industrial relations discipline in Australia, was the inaugural editor of the journal – at first published just twice a year – and continued in that role until 1974 when the stewardship of the *JIR* shifted to the University of New South Wales. Editors John Niland and then Braham Dabscheck were both extremely influential researchers and teachers and, in Niland's case, a significant force in policymaking. After a total of 25 years at the University of New South Wales, the journal was once again housed at the University of Sydney, initially under the editorship of Russell Lansbury, a distinguished scholar in international and comparative industrial relations, and Ron Callus who was then the director of a productive, high-profile government-funded body, the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training. Bradon Ellem joined Lansbury in the role after Callus retired in 2005. In 2009, following Lansbury's retirement, Marian Baird joined Ellem as joint editor-in-chief. In 2014, they successfully bid for a new term from 2015, adding Stephen Clibborn, Rae Cooper and Chris F. Wright as editors, with Alex Veen as book review editor. That term was extended for two years, during which time Veen became an editor.

In 1999, when the editorship of the journal returned to the University of Sydney, industrial relations – in workplaces and for researchers and journal editors – were very different from when Kingsley Laffer stood down as editor 25 years earlier. The economic and gender orders in which industrial relations were embedded had been remade. In many countries, chiefly in the global north, state tolerance for, if not active support of, union-based collective bargaining had been eroded, along with the Fordist model of capitalism and Keynesian economic policy. In the *JIR*, local, national and global studies and comparisons attempted to make sense of these trends. In the global south, industrial relations

had been barely studied in the 1970s but this journal, like others, began to examine those countries, in Asia in particular, where the nature of work, conflict and regulation changed with industrialisation and internationalisation. Across the globe, profound demographic and political changes saw gender relations in and beyond workplaces unsettled if not transformed, as the male breadwinner ideology and practice – and all the attendant state, employer, and union practices – were crumbling. The reconfiguration of the racial and ethnic fractures in working populations, partly through new patterns of migration, likewise challenged orthodoxy and was examined here in the *JIR*. ‘Special Issues’ organised by guest editors have allowed us to try to drive a response to these changes. Many of these papers, along with leading scholars’ overviews of key problems, have been among the most highly cited and, to that extent, most influential in the *JIR*’s history.

Readers of this journal need no reminder of the lineages of the world we now work in and write about. Articles in the *JIR* have charted the passage of these changes in various forms and through various methods – case studies, comparative studies, and quantitative analyses. The formal ‘aims and scope’ of the journal, and the nature of the scholarship, have also changed considerably, as we have all broadened our understanding of who and what makes industrial relations what they are.

Throughout our tenure, amid the changes around us, we have sought to retain the distinctive nature of the *JIR*. It is not a generalist journal about work, nor a specialist one about labour economics. It is neither a human resource management journal nor an organisational behaviour one. Of course, our authors at times draw on the scholarship of these fields (and the journal is multi-disciplinary, as the study of industrial relations has long been) but despite the rise of other fields of study and practice, the concerns of ‘industrial relations’ remained central to the journal. The remaking of work, employment, community, family, conflict, regulation and state policy remade but did not make redundant ‘industrial relations’.

The journal’s path over the last twenty years or so has itself been interwoven with changes in how knowledge is produced and how teaching and research are carried out. Academic journals have not been immune to the commodification and commercialisation of higher education. Like most academic journals, the *JIR* moved into arrangements with global publishers. A national practitioner association remained the journal’s proprietor but first Blackwell and then SAGE produced and marketed the journal. The *JIR* moved to five issues a year, and the volume of submissions increased almost exponentially. The geography of the submissions changed too, becoming much more global in scope than had been the case.

Commercialisation and internationalisation required and facilitated attention to the ever more pervasive and powerful tables of journal rankings. Citation-based quantitative measures of the apparent standing of the journal in which articles appeared have become standard practice, and while we might prefer to evaluate articles by reading and considering them, we recognised that rankings did affect the quality and quantity of papers submitted for assessment and refereeing.

We believe it is vital not just for the *JIR* itself but for the entire discipline in a country such as Australia to have at least one highly ranked industrial relations journal. The health of the field depends on it. There must be opportunities for emerging researchers to publish

in their home country; there must be an Australian journal that speaks not only to international debates but to national policy.

On these measures, we built the *JIR*'s standing with improved average article citations and impact factor. The impact factor increased more than three-fold; and 7 of the 10 most-cited papers in 2019 were from international scholars. The journal achieved and retained an 'A' ranking on the Australian Business Deans Council's journal list, the only Australasian-based industrial relations journal to do so. In this respect, there was an overlap of academic and commercial interests: higher rankings drove up submission rates and higher citations delivered a greater revenue flow for the proprietor.

While internationalising the journal was central to this success, we also thought it vital to maintain the *JIR*'s relevance for an Australian academic and practitioner audience, chiefly through the annual review issue which always attracts media and policy attention. The *JIR*'s ongoing challenge is that, despite its Australian origins, it must increasingly engage globally to maintain rankings and revenue. Addressing both goals meant publishing international reviews by leading international scholars and building local impact through the annual review's policy-focused papers.

While any journal must attend to these 'big picture' imperatives and seek to retain its identity within them, the routine work of editing goes on. Here we must acknowledge not only the authors of published articles but also the scores of referees and the members of the Editorial Board, many of whom were called upon at short notice to provide us with assistance to address pressing issues. We are deeply grateful to you all. Closer to home, we thank Rawya Mansour, who was the journal's editorial assistant throughout (and before) our terms, and whose organisational skills, patience and initiative were, to put it mildly, indispensable. We also acknowledge the significant financial contribution made by the University of Sydney Business School to the journal, under three successive deans, through our editorship and that of Russell Lansbury and Ron Callus before us.

We are also grateful to those whose papers were rejected but who took on board our reasoning and suggestions. We all know very well the relief and the uncertainty that, especially for early career researchers, comes with hitting the 'submit' icon and the disappointment that comes with rejection or a 'high risk' resubmission. We have tried to be encouraging and supportive, especially to those emerging scholars, both when we rejected manuscripts and, whenever we could, in steering such papers to publication.

We now prepare to hand over this journal to new editors. Mindful of its past and its ongoing importance, we feel honoured to have served as editors. We pass on (production timelines being what they are) two special issues and a full set of papers for 2022. These special issues speak to what are, or should be, two central issues in industrial relations, climate change and modern slavery. We were delighted when Frances Flanagan and Caleb Goods (climate change) and Martijn Boersma and Justine Nolan (modern slavery) brought these proposals to us. Both pairs of guest editors are well-credentialed in their fields and have assembled an impressive set of authors from around the world. We look forward to seeing the papers finalised.

The papers in this issue are representative of the *JIR*'s focus traditionally and more recently, topics ranging from industrial relations institutions to Indigenous issues, and all speaking to major conceptual debates or policy (or both). Half the papers are from

outside Australia and half from within, the latter three examining globally important issues around changes to labour markets, technologies and power relations. We are pleased to be able to sign off with papers of this quality, revisiting familiar tropes (and countries) while striking out into newer fields.