The Impact of Inter-industry Wage Differential on Strike Activities in OECD Countries

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Suggested by the previous empirical studies on corporatism, the degree of inter-industry wage differential and the level of strike activity, both negatively related to union centralization, should have a positive relation between them. Proposed in this article is that if wage differential can be viewed and introduced as the intervening variable between union centralization and strike rates, then union centralization as an institutional arrangement might be replaceable for producing a stable industrial order and an egalitarian wage structure. Thus, facing the current decentralization trend in some corporatist countries, unionists and socialist parties should probably consider other policy designs instead of concentrating their efforts on keeping the unions centralized.

Using wage data from Swedish Employer's Confederation and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the statistical results of this research find that cross-sectionally the causal relation between wage differential and strike rates does not exist. And time-series results in respective countries are not consistent either. The most surprising time-series result is that this relation cannot be found in countries that have a centralized union. These results indicate that union centralization after all might be indispensable, and the current decentralization trend will lead corporatist countries to experience in the future a less stable industrial order and a less egalitarian wage structure.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Union Centralization

Since the late 1970s extensive research has focused on the social economic consequence of corporatism. Scholars are inspired by the fact that when oil shock happened in 1973, corporatist countries such as Norway, Denmark, and Sweden had a much better economic performance than the non-corporatist countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Many scholars believed that in the years following oil shock, the variation of economic performance among these advanced industrialized countries was resulted from different patterns of interest organization (Schmidt 1982a, 1982b; Crouch 1985; Klein 1985; Cameron 1984; Bruno and Sachs 1985; Calmfors and Driffill 1988). The fact that corporatist countries responded to the economic crisis better than the non-corporatist ones led scholars to be interested in investigating the internal mechanism of corporatism.

Labor quiescence, being one of the core characteristics of corporatism, thus has been quite widely studied. Labor quiescence, the combination of low strike rates and wage restraint, is claimed to be based on the political exchange of public for private income (van Arnhem and Schotsman 1982; Stephens 1980; Katzenstein 1983, 1985; Wilensky 1976, 1981; Cameron 1978, 1984; Hicks and Swank 1984). For such a political exchange to be successfully carried out, union centralization for a long time is regarded as a necessity. It is argued that when workers are not only unionized but the unions are also centralized, the threat of the working class to disrupt the industrial order becomes so severe that the state and employers have no choice but to bargain with them (Korpi & Shalev 1979). Through the bargaining, the three major actors in the industrialized societies, the workers, the employers, and the state, can all have their purpose served. The work-

ers restrain themselves from wage demand in exchange for either employment (if they are employed) or decent welfare benefit (when they are not employed). The employers agree to share the burden of welfare and get a stable industrial order. And the state, by proposing, monitoring, and executing such a social pact, gets the continuous political support. This basic scenario is actually how and why social democracy worked in the Scandinavian countries (Korpi 1983). Therefore, union centralization not only consolidates the strength of the working class but also instrumentally contributes to the low strike rates and wage restraint.

2. Union Centralization and Strike Rates

The relation between union centralization and low strike rates has been repeatedly confirmed by empirical findings. Even before the wave of the research on corporatism, union centralization has been credited for reducing strike rates (Ross and Hartman 1960; Ingham 1974). Douglas Hibbs (1976) in his post-war strike trend study clearly pointed out that the level of strike activity covaried with the degree of union centralization. Furthermore, the impact of union centralization on strike frequency exists both over time within single countries as well as cross-nationally. Ingham (1974) pointed out that during the interwar years Norway and Sweden were among the countries that had the highest strike rates. This trend, however, changed after the emergence of the union centralization in the post-war period. Norway and Sweden have the lowest strike rates in the post-war period among the advanced countries.

In explaining why centralized union has an negative impact on strikes, traditional wisdom says that since the workers have enough strength to translate their demand (wage increase) into social policy (welfare benefit), they do not have to resort to their last weapon--strikes. On the other hand, while recent studies on the cause of strikes have paid great attention

to the asymmetrical information problem,[1] Moene and Wallerstein (1991) supplied an argument to explain the empirically found negative relation between union centralization and strike rates: the existence of an asymmetry in the information held by an association of employers at the industry level and an industrial union is less obvious than that in the firm level held by individual employer and union. At the national level, the existence of any asymmetry of information is even less likely. It is much easier for unions to gather aggregate data of the employers since they are usually published by either the employer association or the state in official publications. Therefore, without the asymmetrical information problem, centralized union rarely fails to come to an agreement in the bargaining.

3. Union Centralization and Wage Differential

As often mentioned as its association with low strike rates, union centralization is also associated with wage restraint (Heady 1970; Lange 1981; Lehmbruch 1977, 1979, 1982; Cameron 1984; Crouch 1985; Bruno and Sachs 1985). Many scholars have noticed that centralized unions not only restrain wage demand, they also produce a more egalitarian wage structure among different industries. In other words, the relation between union centralization and wage differential is also found to be a negative one (Cameron 1984; Freeman 1988; Hibbs 1991). It is argued that centralized union can achieve a lower degree of wage differential because when the aggregate demand of wage is restrained, the aggregate wage is usually compressed from the high-paid end of the wage structure. Though wage equality is a result of union centralization, it is also regarded as one of

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[1] Economists think that many strikes are resulted from the asymmetrical information held by the unions and the firms. Unions usually have difficulties to gather important information such as the rate of return and the profit margin of the firms. Thus, it is hard for them to bargian and come to an agrement with the firms. See David Grassi. 1989. The Cause of Strike — A critical Review. The University of Chicago. Unpublished Manuscript.

the sources of the inherent instability of union centralization. Centralized union is a coalition, workers from different sectors, occupations, and regions decide to form a coalition to bargain with and make demands from the employers and the state. Workers within this coalition not only collectively bargain with the employers and the state, but also bargain among themselves over the distribution of the wage gains they have won from the employers (Moene & Wallerstein 1991). Thus, whether unions can remain centralized becomes a question of managing coalition. Since wage equality to some extent hurts the high-paid workers, therefore, whether high-paid workers will remain in the coalition becomes important. Their defection will suggest that no more do they want to exchange their private income for the public income, and the defection undoubtedly will also affect the corporatist arrangement. The decentralization trend since the late 1980s in Norway and Sweden shows that the defection has already started, especially in both countries the opposition to union centralization is from the relatively well-paid workers.

4. Wage Differential and Strike Rates

Since they are both empirically found to be negatively related to union centralization, a positive relation between wage differential and strike rates is implied by these empirical works. At the same time, theoretically, if the degree of wage differential has an impact on strike rates, it might mean that the effect of union centralization on these two variables are not separate. One of them, the wage differential, can probably be viewed as an intervening variable to the other, the strike rates. In other words, if the union is centralized, that means the grand coalition among workers remains and workers feel their relative wage gains, the wage differential, is acceptable, then workers will abide to the central agreement not to strike. If the union is not centralized, that means neither the grand coalition nor its

compression effect on wage exists, then workers who have strong individual bargaining powers in the labor market, e.g. the skilled workers, will threat to strike to push up their wages. And, as mentioned above, when the bargaining level is localized, the threat to strike is more likely to turn into real because of the asymmetrical information problem.

If the causal relation between wage differential and strike rates can be established, the theoretical implication is that union centralization might not be indispensable in having a stable industrial order and an egalitarian wage structure. The reasoning can be illustrated by simple figures like the following: based on the previous empirical works, our current understanding of the impacts of centralized unions on strikes and wage differential is like figure 1. What we want to know is if a relation like figure 2 exists. The reason we want to know is because, to some extent, it is suggested by the previous works and it has theoretical implications. If the relation in figure 2 does exist, then a relation like figure 3 which can lead us to more theoretical discussions might become possible.

Figure 1

Centralized Unions---> Low Strike Rates

Centralized Unions----> Low Wage Differential

Figure 2

Centralized Unions	----->	Low Wage Differential	----> Low Strike Rates
Therefore:			
		Low Wage Differential	----> Low Strike Rates

Figure 3

Other Policies	---->	Low Wage Differential	----> Low Strike Rates

To see if such a causal relation between wage differential and strike rates can be demonstrated by the empirical data, we construct a simple regression model to see if this relation exists.

II. DATA AND MODEL

The data of strikes are compiled and provided by Professor Larry Griffin. They are the number of days lost to strikes in 22 countries from 1948 to 1985. The sources of the data are International Labor Organization and national sources. For the data of inter-industry wage differential, two different data sets from different sources are used. The first data set is cited from Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg. On the basis of the Swedish Employers confederation's (SA) annual surveys of wages and labor costs for industrial workers, Hedstrom and Swedberg calculated a dispersion measure--the coefficient of variation of the average hourly wages for workers. This data set contains various industries in 15 countries from 1957 to 1979.[2]

The second data set is provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the United States. This data set contains the hourly compensation cost from production workers in 36 countries from 1975 to 1987. We use the same dispersion measure as Hedstrom and Swedberg's to calculate the inter-industry wage differential of 15 OECD countries.[3] Due to the difference of these data sets, when we trim the data, we have the SA data with strikes for 14 European OECD countries from 1957 to 1979, and the BLS data with strikes for 15 OECD countries from 1975 to 1985. Most of the European OECD countries are included in both data sets. To see if the inter-industry wage differential does influence strike rate, we regress strikes

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2 The industry groups included in SA's data are listed in appendix A.

3 Industry groups which we selected for this data set are listed in appendix B.

on wage differential.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

With the SA data set, both the time-series regression and cross-section comparison show no relation between wage differential and strike. (Table 1 and Table 2) We can see that the values of R-square in the cross-section regression as well as the 14 time-series regressions are all very low. Considering the possible effect of time lag, that means workers might strike before and not after the wage settlement, we take one lag of wage differential and regress strikes on it. (Table 3) The outcome is still the same. These findings indicate that the relation between inter-industry wage differential and strikes might not be like what have been suggested in the previous empirical works. In these findings we see that inter-industry wage differential has no impacts on strikes no matter what kind of labor market institution a country has. However, considering the fact that we use Hedstrom's calculation instead of the original wage data to get the measurement of wage differential, we probably should not make any strong claim about the relation at this stage.

The BLS data set is supposed to be better since we have a direct access to the original data of hourly compensation cost. The wage differential is then calculated based on the original data. Table 4 is the cross-section regression outcome. Though the relationship between the strikes and inter-industry wage differential showed here is quite weak (R-square = 0.20) and the B coefficient is, conventionally speaking, not statistically significant (P Value = 0.10), we have reasons to believe that these findings should be interpreted differently from the previous results. First, because these are aggregate data, R-square = 0.20 should be regarded as relatively significant in comparison with R-square = 0.00. Second, for the same reason, the B coefficient that has a P-value of 0.10 should also be treated as

relatively significant. Third, substantively speaking, the BLS data set is a better data set than the SA data set in the discussion of this topic. SA data set, as mentioned above, is hourly wages for workers, and BLS data set is the hourly compensation cost for workers. It is quite obvious that the BLS data set can produce a better measurement of wage differential since

Table 1 Cross-section Regression of Strikes on Wage Differential for 14 countries

Country	Average Wage Differential from 1957 to 1979	Average Strikes from 1957 to 1979
Austria	0. 165870	1805. 1
Belgium	0. 227478	673. 3
Canada	0. 162130	4785. 2
Denmark	0. 209783	343. 0
Finland	0. 123870	601. 7
France	0. 147217	9443. 3
Germany	0. 154130	726. 8
Italy	0. 132435	15776. 8
Netherlands	0. 191739	104. 8
Norway	0. 140348	5. 9
Sweden	0. 142136	84. 1
Switzerland	0. 143304	5. 9
United Kingdom	0. 129348	7886. 7
United States	0. 141217	33786. 7

Outcome of Regression:

Constant	Wage Differential	R-square (T) (T)
20737	-96890	. 102 (1. 55) (-1. 17)

Table 2 Time-series Regression of Strikes on Wage Differential from 1957 to 1979

Country	Constant (T)	Wage Differential (T)	R-Square
Austria	-3095.815	33290.619	.479
	(-2.719)	(4.397)	
Belgium	-298.920	5996.363	.050
	(-.319)	(1.053)	
Canada	915.964	18443.937	.001
	(.043)	(.180)	
Denmark	-666.625	8150.510	.015
	(-.380)	(.579)	
Finland	-2523.170	18837.100	.024
	(-.585)	(.726)	
France	890.558	55490.474	.001
	(.016)	(.153)	
Germany	624.061	775.572	.000
	(.256)	(.042)	
Italy	34024.127	-95167.442	.142
	(3.433)	(-1.870)	
Netherlands	95.531	-2.133	.076
	(2.832)	(-1.319)	
Norway	-45.408	808.804	.014
	(-.220)	(553)	
Sweden	253.644	-1182.886	.034
	(1.273)	(-.867)	
Switzerland	19.926	-108.696	.010
	(.671)	(-.476)	
United Kingdom	-3015.455	77201.189	.005
	(-.098)	(.354)	
United States	16009.127	78150.766	.008
	(.372)	(.415)	

Source: Swedish Employer's Confederation, International Labor Organization, and National Sources
Wage data Cited from Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg

Table 3 Time-series Regression of Strikeson Lagged Wage differential from 1957 to 1979

Country	Constant (T)	Lag(WD) (T)	R-square
Austria	-3187.277	34809.790	.475
	(-2.634)	(4.256)	
Belgium	1362.572	-5124.775	.152
	(3.061)	(-1.896)	
Canada	11240.322	-30212.375	.001
	(.348)	(-.195)	
Denmark	-191.693	4472.626	.004
	(-.102)	(.293)	
Finland	-2628.049	19573.862	.026
	(-.599)	(.740)	
France	-102746.922	724943.592	.177
	(-1.887)	(2.079)	
Germany	879.748	-1272.022	.000
	(.351)	(-.068)	
Italy	30648.959	-73821.391	.078
	(2.750)	(-1.306)	
Netherlands	160.685	-361.929	.001
	(.577)	(-.186)	
Norway	-1.788	512.892	.005
	(-.008)	(.339)	
Sweden	209.082	-853.034	.016
	(.972)	(-.585)	
Switzerland	32.364	-203.452	.037
	(1.079)	(-.881)	
United Kingdom	-10683.913	131367.697	.017
	(-.340)	(.592)	
United States	49603.543	-66402.248	.005
	(1.110)	(-.337)	

Sources: Swedish Employer's Confederation, International Labor Organization, National sources
Wage data cited from Hedstrom and Swedberg

Table 4 Cross-section Regression of Strikes on Wage Differential for 15 OECD Countries

Constant (T)	Wage Differential (T)	R-square
-4665.11	58959.09	.14

hourly compensation cost is a more comprehensive measurement. Thus, if the above reasons can be accepted, what we see in the cross-section regression outcome is that inter-industry wage differential does have a positive impact on strikes though this impact is not very significant. Whether there is a different extent of this impact in each country in concerning the variation of the labor market institutions, the time-series regression outcome will be the answer.

The time-series regression outcome of the BLS data set, unlike the outcome drawn from the SA data set, has shown some variations across countries. As we see in Table 5, Belgium, Canada, France, Japan, and United States are the countries which the inter-industry wage differential does have an impact on strikes. What seems to be puzzling as well as interesting, at least at this stage, is that the impact of wage differential on strikes in these countries are not all positive. In Belgium and France, the relationship is positive, which is consistent with the claim of previous empirical works and our hypothesis. In Canada, Japan, and United States, however, wage differential tend to have a negative impact on strikes.[4] That is, in these countries, the increase of wage differential reduces instead of

[4] One thing should be noted here is that Japan and United States do not pass the Durbin-Watson Test at the level of .01. To solve this error structure problem, the autoregressive procedure has been considered. However, after we check the autocorrelation function (ACF) and the partial autocorrelation function (PACF), we drop the idea to go through the autoregressive procedure because no spike was found in the data of either of the two countries.

Table 5 Time-series Regression of Strikes on Wage Differential from 1975 to 1985

Country	Constant (T)	Wage Diff (T)	R-Square	D-W
Australia	2705.69	-1173.32	.00	1.12
	(.80)	(-.03)		
Austria	-97.28	563.89	.07	1.89
	(-.79)	(.84)		
Belgium	-6269.77	40805.09	.47	1.15
	(-2.71)	(2.85)		
Canada	36703.56	-129459.09	.53	2.07
	(3.94)	(-3.20)		
Denmark	849.90	-3761.47	.00	1.24
	(.24)	(-.13)		
Finland	-230.12	9117.58	.02	2.25
	(-.08)	(.39)		
France	-25051.58	195112.76	.55	1.99
	(-2.98)	(3.28)		
Germany	6130.89	-32954.57	.01	2.33
	(.29)	(-.24)		
Italy	-15442.45	245973.93	.30	1.80
	(-.95)	(1.96)		
Japan	25126.54	-82066.21	.45	.99
	(2.90)	(-2.71)		
Netherlands	855.63	-6238.00	.08	2.93
	(1.00)	(-.88)		
Sweden	-9540.39	105969.58	.12	2.24
	(-1.04)	(1.09)		
Switzerland	5.69	-9.84	.00	2.04
	(.05)	(-.01)		
UK	19090.05	-51750.02	.00	2.13
	(.62)	(-.27)		
USA	145319.06	-429046.90	.45	1.02
	(3.35)	(-2.70)		

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 1989

increases strike activity. For other countries, we see that inter-industry wage differential almost do not have any impact on strikes. The R-Square of the regression and the t-ratio of the B coefficient are both very low for these countries. The outcome for these countries is consistent with the outcome drawn from the SA data set. The most intriguing outcome is that in countries such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Netherlands where centralized union is a main characteristic of its labor market institution, inter-industry wage differential does not show any impact on strikes in both SA and BLS data set.[5] For countries which do not have a centralized union, the SA data do not show the impact but the BLS data show different impacts across countries. Despite the inconsistency between the SA and BLS data for the countries lack of centralized unions, these time-series results indicate that, positively or negatively, the degree of wage differential does not have any impact on the level of strike.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings in this paper can be concluded in the following way: first, cross-sectionally speaking, regression outcome from SA data set showed no relation between inter-industry wage differential and strike, and the result from BLS data set showed a weak but positive relationship. Second, in terms of time-series results, SA data set showed no relation across countries but BLS data set showed great variations, not only in terms of the extent (R-square) but also in the directions (the sign of the B coefficient). The BLS result is interesting because it shows the relation can be negative. Countries that show a significant negative relation are Canada, Japan, and the United States. None of them has a centralized

5 The only exception here is Belgium. Belgium has centralized union but has shown a relatively strong relationship in the outcome from BLS data set.

union. Thus, what can be concluded at this moment is that though the findings in this paper are not very consistent with each other, one thing can be claimed is that the relation between inter-industry wage differential and strike does not exist in countries which have centralized unions. In other words, the effect of union centralization on strike rate is separate from that on the degree of wage differential. strongly suggested by existing literature on union centralization cannot be confirmed by our statistical findings.

These empirical findings imply that since inter-industry wage differential cannot independently influence the strike rates, especially in the countries which have centralized unions, union centralization might still be a necessary institutional arrangement to overcome the collective action problem of working class. Thus, facing the current trend of decentralization, countries that traditionally have a strong centralized union will either experience a return of centralization or a higher degree of strike rates and wage differential.

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APPENDIX A

Industrial Groups Included in SAF Wage Survey

1. Mining and Quarrying
2. Food Manufacturing
3. Beverage Industries
4. Manufacture of Textiles
5. Manufacture of Wearing Apparel (not Footwear)
6. Manufacture of Leather and Leather Products
7. Manufacture of Footwear
8. Manufacture of Wood and Wood Products
9. Manufacture of Paper and Paper Products
10. Printing, Publishing and Allied Industries
11. Manufacture of Chemicals, Chemical Petroleum, Coal, and Plastic Products
12. Manufacture of Rubber Products
13. Manufacture of Non-Metallic Mineral Products
14. Basic Metal Industries
15. Manufacture of Fabricated Metal Products, Machinery, and Equipment
16. Construction Industry

APPENDIX B

Industrial Groups Included in BLS Hourly Compensation Cost Survey

1. Food, Beverages, and Tobacco
2. Textile Mill Products
3. Apparel and Other Textile Products
4. Leather and Leather Products
5. Lumber, Wood Products, and Furniture
6. Paper and Allied Products
7. Printing and Publishing
8. Chemicals and Allied Products
9. Rubber and plastics Products
10. Stone, Clay, and Glass Products
11. Primary Metal Industries
12. Fabricated Metal Products
13. Machinery
14. Electric and Electronic Equipment
15. Transportation Equipment
16. Instruments and Related Products
17. Miscellaneous Manufacturing

先進工業化國家產業間薪資差距對罷工的影響

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關於組合主義在總體經濟政策上的影響，自七O年代中期以來，成爲許多學者關心的焦點。過去的實證研究，一再顯示因爲工會中央化的關係，組合主義國家的罷工率較非組合主義的國家低，薪資結構也比較平等。因爲工會中央化的程度和罷工率及它和薪資差異的程度都是負相關，所以這些研究暗示了在罷工率和薪資差異之間，也許存在著一種正相關的關係。在這篇論文中，我們嘗試將薪資差異視爲工會中央化對罷工造成影響的中介變數。也就是說，工會中央化對罷工率和薪資差異的影響並不是各自獨立的。如果薪資差異和罷工率之間的因果關係可以由實證資料來證實，那麼它在理論上的意涵是像工會中央化這樣的制度也許是可以被其他的制度設計所取代。因此，對近年來北歐國家中央工會逐漸瓦解的現象來說，政黨和工會幹部也許應該考慮其他的政策，而不是將焦點放在繼續維持工會的中央化。

以瑞典中央產業公會(Swedish Employer's Confederation)和美國勞工局(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)的薪資資料爲基礎，在實證的統計分析後，這篇報告發現，在跨國的經驗中，薪資差異和罷工之間並不存在因果關係。而就個別國家而言，統計的結果沒有一致性。最令人驚訝的結果是在有中央工會的國家，諸如北歐各國，產業間薪資差距的大小對罷工率的高低並無任何顯著的影響。這樣的結果所顯示的可能是就低罷工率和較爲平等的薪資結構而言，工會中央化仍然是一個不可或缺的制度。目前北歐組合主義國家中央工會的瓦解，將使得這些國家在未來面臨一個比過去不穩定的生產秩序和一個比過去不平等的薪資結構。