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Promoting Parental Rights at Work in the UK and Australia: A Convergence of Policy Institutions or Policy Narratives?

This paper examines the key similarities and differences in the approaches taken, and the institutional support for, the enhancement of parental employment rights in Australia and the UK.

In 2010 The Australian government introduced a statutory right paid maternity leave. This has been at least partly influenced by similar enhancements in parental rights in the UK in recent years. While both countries are customarily categorised as 'liberal market economies' in the institutionalist literature (Hall and Soskice 2001) some have questioned this (Wailes, Kitay and Lansbury 2008). However, it is argued here that while there has been some convergence between institutional *mechanisms*, there remain significant differences affecting likely outcomes. On the other hand, where there has been convergence, it has been in terms of the framing, orientation and justification of policy.

Differences

The obvious differences between the two countries are the stages of development in policy. However, there are also important differences in the employment system affecting the ways in which employee voice may influence the implementation in workplaces. While similar - sectoral - differences may be expected in workplaces with no union representation, for those with union representation, the Australian regulatory environment is different in character to its British counterpart.

Similarities

The similarities between the two countries' approach to this issue has been the terms in which policy has been framed. There are strong party political links between the two countries (Scott 2000) influencing policy. Also, recent intervention in employment matters has been marked by (1) a retreat from collectivist orientation of employment rights (2) a shift from an equality focus to a 'business case' focus (3) a shift in orientation away from welfare policy towards employment policy.

References

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