

ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a new approach to the study of employment relations in small firms by adopting a labour process framework within which to undertake the research and the analysis. Although the small firms' literature is informed by labour process theory, until this thesis was completed there had been no study of a labour process in a discrete group of small firms. It is a study of the labour process in the 612 racing stables in the United Kingdom and has established that there is a common labour process in these small firms.

The thesis makes an important contribution to the study of employment relations in small firms by actively seeking the experiences of labour, a group which has been under-theorised in the small firms' literature. It was found that staff have displayed a collective identity at periods in the past, despite working in a large number of small firms. There is latent collectivism amongst stable staff, derived from strong cultural bonds inside and outside the workplace and through the regular bringing together of workers at race meetings throughout the racing year. This group of workers has a strong labour market position and could have a stronger voice in the workplace.

Basic pay and conditions are governed by the National Joint Council for Stable Staff (NJCSS), the parties to the national agreement being the National Trainers' Federation (NTF) and the Stable Lads' Association (SLA). However, it was found that this was a 'hollow shell' mechanism, with the SLA being completely dominated by the employers. The SLA in turn was found to be a 'yellow union', created by the employers in response to a stable lads' strike in Newmarket in 1975 and effectively bringing about the withdrawal of recognition from the Transport and General Workers' Union which had represented stable staff since the 1930s.

It would found that there are long running grievances, surrounding pay and working hours in particular, but that stable staff did not articulate these through the SLA which they regarded as ineffective. However, individual voice was weakly articulated at the level of the workplace and staff were not inclined to use exit as a means of protesting against low pay and long hours. The problem for them was that their employer had considerable opportunity to exploit their emotional labour, working with horses which was their main aspiration in life.

It was found that employers had a range of means of controlling the labour process, through consent by manipulating emotional labour and also through simple direct control and through paternalism. Employers were also found to be part of a nexus of controlling interests in the industry, including the Jockey Club and groups such as racehorse owners and race course owners.

Finally, it is recommended that the labour processes of sports support workers be the subject of further study as this is a gap in the labour process and sports employment literature which, if addressed, could give new insights into these forms of employment.