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Introduction

Literature reviews attempted on aspects pertaining to most developing countries are not often smooth and sometimes a daunting task to analyse in any logical manner. It is basically because of the conduct of labour (industrial) relations that seems to have little resemblance to the models and descriptions familiar in the developed countries. Therefore, any attempt to review existing literature on Papua New Guinea (PNG) labour relations is going to be not straightforward but challenging. This is partly because most of the works done on PNG labour relations are descriptive, fragmented and lack the attention to theory displayed in industrial relations commentary developed and applied in the West. In part this is not the fault of the commentators on developing countries in general and PNG in particular. Rather it may be seen as a product of the complexity of the country lacking a homogenous economic, social and political environment.

This type of exercise, however, is not free of conventional caveats. For instance, most literature reviews are not truly exhaustive and this piece is no exception. This work traces writings describing labour relations between colonisers, employers and indigenous labour from early as 1920s to modern PNG as seen in 2005. Although there had been limited scope of (any formal) labour relations in the 1920s and the subsequent few decades, it is taken as a starting point to illustrate arguably the beginning of serious documentation of indigenous workers in work arrangements under various colonial circumstances. The period also signifies the starting point to highlight the progress made by Papua New Guineans who had seen the formal arrangement of work first as alien under the indentured labour scheme (that was demonstrated in a significant way in the Wau-Bulolo goldfields of the 1920s and 1930s) and the gradual acceptance of the concept as alternative livelihood over the following decades (Imbun 2006a).

An additional caveat has to do with the term ‘labour relations’ as a multidimensional concept. This literature review acknowledges the ‘usual’ employment relations between employers and workers as viewed by industrial relations commentators, and also to notes work on issues pertaining to labour recruitment, wages and human resource development from the perspective of respective commentators.

With the caveats noted, the review of labour relations literature commences with the broad chronological timeframe of colonisation, political independence and post-independence period of PNG. A particular theme characterises a period and the development of labour relations seem to be sequential. The literature review takes the following format: labour relations in the colony, imposition of Australian style of labour relations system, postmortem exercise, labour disputations, labour market analysis, developmental role of labour relations system, and human resource development (HRD). A concluding discussion provides a brief perspective to current commentary on labour associated works and predicts the emergence of further works in the subsequent years. Taken together it is hoped that this review will do justice to work on a significant, yet unheralded, facilitator of economic development and nationhood building in PNG.

Labour Relations in Colonial PNG

A country’s fundamental features of industrial relations whether in whole or segment, according to the late Dunlop, one of foremost American labour relations scholars,
depended on three factors: the effect of chronological period, the pattern of social change and the process of economic development (1958:38). In particularly the effect of chronological period appears to have had a lot of influence on emergence and development of labour relations in PNG. In 1884 the annexation of the island by Germany and Britain formalised imperial control. Labour control in the pursuit of colonial commercial interest was a by-product. No significant studies exists, which shed light on the labour dimension between colonisers and colonised, immediately preceding the annexation despite the availability of many administrative accounts of Germans in New Guinea and British in Papua. The impact of colonialisation, however, was deep and continuing in relation to labour relations.

First, the present industrial relations system of PNG and indeed for most developing countries was the product of colonialism. It was basically imposed during the industrialisation process when colonial powers used the colony to supply raw materials and markets. In that kind of arrangement the role-played by the colonial governments in direct support of commercial interest of employers is abundantly obvious (Fitzpatrick 1979). Accounts by Newbury (1989:37) and Frith (1972), document the imposition of German rule and the end of isolation for many independent village communities. Obvious is the fundamental contradictions embedded in the powerful German political and economic intrusion into enclaves where administrators, recruiters, planters and missionaries had objects and ways of behaving that locals could hardly comprehend. Both analyses showed a stratified labour relationship consisted of indigenous labour in a marginal role furnishing labour in the new order, where Asians and Europeans handled semi-skilled and skilled jobs respectively. That arrangement was the order of day until the 1940s.

In the British control of Papua, modest administrative and economic activity took place, and except for mining, yielded little contact between Papuans and Europeans. It is hardly surprising that there is relatively little literature focusing specifically on labour relations in this early colonial period. The one exception is Gibney’s study of independent white alluvial miners and their temporary native ‘bois’ (assistants) working the fruitless Laloki gold rush of 1887 (Gibney 1972). The activities of the local assistants as guides, and carriers as well as pick and shovel handlers, is documented (Parr 1974; Gibney 1972; Nelson 1992). Nelson’s insight that may undertook the work for the adventure of escaping their village environment and usually did so voluntarily is interesting (Nelson 1992:11). Yet, historical documentation is vague on the role of labour relations in the relationship between the locals and the alluvial miners. This was not true of the much later and larger Wau-Bulolo gold rush of the 1920s where the acquiring of the intricate knowledge and skills of alluvial mining by locals seems to be an exception to the racial demarcation between skilled and unskilled work. The Australian control of the entire Papua and New Guinea administration in 1914 and thereafter is the subject of a stream of studies. The commentators, mainly historians, provide an interpretive account of Australian involvement in administration and economy in the colony. The examination of labour relations is centered on the theme of colonial labour policies; — the indentured labour scheme and the highlands labour scheme established in the 1950s. Most of the writers (Jackson 1924; Timperley 1947; Rowley 1958; West 1958a, 1958b; and lately Ward 1990) detailed the salient characteristics of the policies and explain the inherent imperative of economic, political and social interests of the colonial powers. Particular emphasis is on the essential aspects of the policy that specified the master-servant relationship between the untenured labourer and employer. Jackson (1924), Parr (1974) and Nelson (1976) described it as incomprehensible and strange to most labourers in the Wau-Bulolo gold fields and plantations on the New Guinea north coast and islands. The incomprehension coupled with decades of harsh treatment of local workers
triggered the notable Rabaul Strike of 1929 which was the earliest collective industrial action ever undertaken by an indigenous workforce (Willis 1970; Gammage 1975). Yet, for many indentured labourers, instant withdrawal of labour was common when working conditions became harsh and intensified (Rowley 1968:11). Formalised industrial relations activities were confined to overwhelmingly skilled European workers who staged racial and labour disputes in the 1920s to 1940s as result of the shift up the occupational ladder for indentured labourers (Newbury 1975). For the latter, their work conditions were not an issue until the old system of indenture was abolished in 1948-50.

The broader economic implications of the Australian colonial labour policies were pointed out by Fitzpatrick (1978) and Hess (1983). They argued that the policies were not simply paternalistic, as various commentators (West 1958a, 1958b; Newbury 1989) had suggested, but were aimed quite consciously at laying the foundations of capitalism in Melanesia. More conservative historians, Latukefu (1989:xii) for example, explained that the colonial state and employers, through their employment related activities laid the foundations of the new nation of PNG. Moore (1990) recounted similar sentiments in the context of examining the colonial conditions of employment under which local workers served between 1884-1975. In a more recent paper, Newbury (1998) argued that the Australian colonial officers and their administration structure, served as a platform for previously inaccessible local communities to produce primary goods for the world market which played a significant part in building the political economy of the colony in the 1940s.

The inconsistency of colonial policy may be seen in the tension between policies facilitating unfettered undeterred development of mining and plantation economy and those, which placed restrictions on the employment of indigenous labour. Several commentators (West 1958; Newbury 1975:38; Ward 1990) conclude that the colonial state deliberately minimised employment of indigenous labour because of a traditional concern to isolate the Territory from the disruptive effects of social and economic change implicit in labour mobility and bargaining that was experienced in Africa. Development theorists such as Siddique (1989) argue that the maintenance of such a labour policy was not only paternalistic but a cautious and determined attempt to allow a dual economy to exist that could effectively reduce the costs of administration. This concern with stability was paternalistic but it had profound impacts on the development of an industrial relations system. It determined the size and composition of the labour market, the rate of urbanisation, and the speed and coverage of industrialisation. So rather than simply replicating the Australian system the Territory of Papua and New Guinea administration introduced a weaker form of the colonial model (Imbun 1999a). Amarshi, Good and Mortimer (1979) blamed Australia for this ‘sub-standard’ development which saw weak capital penetration in the colony thereby allowing the precapitalist economy to be maintained intact with an absence of industrial infrastructural developments.

Viability Concerns of Imposed Labour Relations System

The second theme, to be derived from the general literature on labour relations in PNG, is evident in a series of works, which began prior to, and immediately preceding the imposition of the new Australian style of industrial relations machinery in the colony in 1962. Most of the authors expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the machinery on the disorganised and indentured labour force in a largely tribal society. Isaac (1969) pointed out that the poor level of union development undermined the machinery’s potential for dispute resolution and wage fixing. Rowley (1968) blamed the colonial background for not preparing a local workforce for organised industrial relations. Bailey (1970) and Patterson (1969) respectively discussed workers’ lack of education and their ‘misconceptions’ about
how unions should operate in the new system. In addition, Chapman (1965) doubted the ability of the union leadership to recruit members and to maintain a stable membership base.

Similar observations were shared by Leggett (1976) who stressed the context and compared both general and labour development unfavorable to that of African and Asian other post-colonial countries. While Metcalf (1968), Stevenson (1968), and much later Hess (1982) provided detailed studies on union organisations. They found a common picture of capable, ambitious leaders who led the unions to brief political and industrial prominence but were unable to represent their members in mundane workplace matters. Yet, ‘they were not deregistered but were propped up by the Department of Labour and Employment to fulfill, on paper at least, the tripartite requirements of the industrial relations system’ (Hess 1982).

Earlier commentators would have seen this as a paternalistic attitude towards trade union development in the colony. For example, Lawrence (1964) and Martin (1964) who argued articulately that it would be unrealistic and unfair to view indigenous workers as acting abnormal in their behaviour towards employment and worker organisations. In this view, PNG workers had to be encouraged to form associations on the basis of what they saw as necessary. In time, it was asserted the transient commitment to work and industrial organisations would lessen as experience led onto the path of fully-fledged industrial organisations developing in line with economic and societal change. This line of argument was grounded in the Australian policy for the Territory in the 1960s, which advocated taking into account of the local conditions in which industrial relations system was going to work. However, generally the commentators doubted the viability of such an alien institution in a predominantly exotic society. So Kerr (1961) outlined the advances made in paving for establishment for a labour administrative machinery but cautioned against paternalism further endorsing official sentiments of the time. Langmore (1973) was more pragmatic and pointed out that the emerging indigenous state’s priorities of establishment of national minimum wage and localisation of expatriate jobs advocated by trade unionists-cum politicians were in conflict with labour policy. That type of policy challenge in the context of tuning labour policy to be consistent with national objectives was predicted to be the test of the new state.

Postmortem of Labour Relations System

The subsequent works on industrial relations mostly in the 1980s were generally postmortems, which examined how the parties, particularly trade unions, in the newly introduced industrial relations system, had fared. At least, three subthemes emerge from analysing the trade union performance in the post-independence period.

First and most prominent, are description of reasons behind the poor performance of the adopted industrial relations system. Hess (1982, 1983, 1986, 1987), viewed the long legacy of an indentured system, and a series of pre-existing factors such as tribalism, subsistence farming combined, a limited modern economic enclave and weak state institutions as some of the major reasons for the dismal performance of the union movement. Similar arguments were posed by Legget (1976) in identifying factors, which adversely affected the effectiveness of the entire industrial relations machinery. Hess (1989:115) later observed that the industrial relations system PNG inherited at independence from Australia was at its most successful at a bureaucratic level. It was largely a paper creation. But as a mechanism for expressing and resolving industrial relations grievances in the workplace it was frustrated by a lack of adequate union organisation.

Some of the postmortem works also provided descriptive studies on exceptional
organisations which were able to develop both the membership and leadership prerequisites for effective operation within the system of compulsory conciliation and arbitration. This sub-theme is exemplified in several studies of workers' organisations. Dwyer (1972) documented the genesis of the federation of workers associations and discussed the processes and challenges they faced in order to represent workers’ rights. Spaull (1974:74) studied the Papua and New Guinea Teachers’ Association (PNGTA), which was registered in 1971 and managed to claim membership of a significant portion of teachers in the country. He identified several factors for its success including the widespread and genuine desire by teachers to create an effective teachers’ organisation and also expatriate teachers’ commitment and dedication in doing ‘most of the spadework’ in creating a national organisation in which local teachers were openly encouraged to become leaders. Commenting on the same profession, but more confined to church-managed schools, Badely (1988) concluded that the Bougainville Catholic Teachers Association to be an ‘exceptional’ union whose membership covered most teachers on the island in Roman Catholic schools.

Similarly, Hess (1986) examined the emergence of Central District Waterside Workers Union (CDWWU) as a formidable organisation which did not bear the hallmarks of weaknesses familiar to many other PNG trade unions but had the capacity to take up members’ issues efficiently. Like PNGTA, it seemed to have an effective leadership and sound membership base which helped consolidate its industrial role. Recently, Hess (2000) revisited the union’s performance in the 1990s and concluded that it had consolidated its position from the earlier sound footing and continued to exist as one of the few successful unions courtesy of effective leadership and membership commitment in an increasingly difficult environment.

So over several decades the factors affecting the emergence and existence of trade unions as organisations for furthering workers’ interest had not changed much. More recently, Imbun (2002) observed some of the familiar features in the form of prevailing social and economic environment, weak state institutions, workers’ misconception as to the proper role of trade unions, leadership rivalries and management attitudes as still evident in the formation and operation of the Porgera Mining and Allied Workers Union. He concluded that despite the passing of time, only few trade unions have managed to effectively represent workers interest.

Despite the trade unions’ mixed performance, several commentators viewed them as legitimating the existence of the PNG industrial relations system. For example, Daley (1983) observed that PNG unions had remained weak and unable to use the industrial relations processes of conciliation and arbitration to their full advantage. However, he acknowledged that at least the industrial relations machinery continued to prove beneficial to those few unions, which utilised it. Hess (1988) also accepted this in observing the emergence of the first peak union council. He drew a parallel with the Australian industrial relations system and viewed its existence as fulfilling a ‘bureaucratic need’ of the country’s industrial relations system. However, he later acknowledged the establishment of the peak union body as one of the ‘single most significant developments’ in the history of trade unionism in PNG, Hess (1992:xii). In a subsequent work, Hess and Gissua (1992) maintained the same argument and wondered why the effectiveness of the PNG trade unions was never questioned (as was the case in Australia and New Zealand) despite the industrial relations system being ineffective in its ability to settle industrial disputes. They predicted that the real costs of settling industrial disputes would rise as a result of lack of sufficient capacity in the industrial relations system.

While these postmortems on trade unions’ performance were reasonably
adequate, the employers and state, as the other main actors, in the industrial relations system have attracted minimal from academic commentators. Daley (1987:160) is an exception and viewed the employers’ organisations as competent generally in representing their members’ interest and saw some of them as powerful lobby groups influencing government policies. A decade later, Imbun (1999) examining industrial relations in the PNG mining industry, found the management of industrial relations too confined to each individual mine with industrial disputes often resolved, using draconian mean and sometimes defying set dispute settlement procedures. The commentary on the state’s role in the industrial relations is quite critical. Daley (1987:13) viewed the state’s activity in industrial relations to be modest and weak, as it only dealt with its existing machinery and did this ineffectively. On the other hand, Hess (1989:118) found the general level of community acceptance of the state’s role in industrial relations and other areas to be low in PNG. However, he also observed that PNG Pangu Pati governments in the 1970s and 1980s went to some length to advocate unionisation at the workplace, which was quite unusual for a developing country. By the mid 1980s government policies aggressively promote economic growth at the same time appealing for enterprises to take due care of workers’ rights (Hess 1986:117).

McGavin (1991) saw the state’s minimal role in industrial relations as based in the make up of the PNG society. To him, the conventional structure of PNG society had no ethos of union organisations nor an economy that created large numbers of ‘proletarians’ who survived by selling labour to the capitalist. The great majority of wage earners, he observed, enter employment because it provides what is judged to be the most favourable alternative rather than the only alternative. Therefore, in such circumstances the state’s role in industrial relations has been rather minimal. Notwithstanding its weaknesses and constraints, the ability of the PNG state to influence industrial relations had been best demonstrated in the wage tribunals over the years after independence (Carrol 1993). Unlike many developing country states PNG does not exhibit the features of a corporatist or interventionist states, rather it is pluralist dealing only with its established institutions, (Imbun 1999).

Labour Disputations

Any review of industrial relations literature is not complete without assessing the record of industrial disputation. The available statistics on records of industrial disputes between the 1960s and the early 1980s in PNG show that most of complaints were dismissed by the employers and went no further. Only a handful went through the full gamut of the industrial relations (Daley 1983:85). Overall the picture remained the same in the 1990s (Imbun 1999).

However, what seems to be the dullness of industrial relations practice in PNG is contradicted by the analyses of several notable industrial disputes encountered in the mining sector. The theoretical position emerge from the analyses is that the PNG experience lends very little support to the Kerr-Siegel thesis of isolated workforces becoming militant (1954) despite the location of some of the workplaces in very remote areas (Imbun 1999). It does demonstrate that industrial conflict in PNG workplaces is influenced by a host of factors ranging from the conventional issues (including wages and safety), some unique ones (such as training and localisation and recognition of trade union activities) and some due to colonial history like paternalistic management attitudes. Mamak and Ali (1979:35) who analysed the country’s first major and violent labour dispute between Bougainville Mine Workers Union (BMWU) and Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) concluded that years of neglect of rudimentary worker requirements such as minimum wages by management exploded into mayhem accompanied by destruction of company property. In the end, the dispute was resolved through a hastily installed Commission of Inquiry composed mainly of
politicians, who called for a major review of the BCL employment conditions. BMWU members received the minimum wages and other benefits that had been denied, but more strikes occurred in the subsequent years, although none were as violent as the 1975 outbreak. Similarly, Hess and Gissua (1992) analysed the second major dispute also involving a mining union and found obvious parallels with the 1975 BMWU strike. The conflict between Ok Tedi Mining Workers Union and the mine management, which lasted 15 days, arose as the result of several outstanding demands, which were not contained in the existing award. Hess and Gissua commented that it was obvious that the outcome of this dispute favoured the union, as the BMWU dispute did because the claims the unions made were for very basic conditions. The central theme in industrial dispute of suppression of workers rights and management paternalism did not go away with the end of colonial rule. In the 1990s it was still being demonstrated in the Porgera dispute. Imbun and Morris (1998?) analysed this dispute and found that it represented a landmark on the road to industrial tolerance and a ‘pluralist’ mutual acceptance of the rights for employees and management. Unlike the previous violent disputes, the Porgera mine dispute had relatively few tragic dramas although it spanned some seventeen months. The dispute illustrated the successful overcoming of hurdles to settling strikes by protracted negotiation and the growth of industrial maturity by both the mine operators and employees.

Gissua’s (1993) doctoral thesis, looked at the operation of the industrial dispute settlement process in PNG since independence. He mainly examined contemporary developments including some examples of disputes in which the formal system was operating.

In general Imbun (1999) concluded that emergence of industrial conflict in PNG mines is a product of multiple factors some of which are of secondary concern to the mine and its employees. Moreover, the ability of unions to represent workers’ grievances is affected by a lack of union efficiency. This is in contrast to often well resourced and aggressive unions in western mines negotiating with tough managements on the core industrial matters of their relationships.

More recently Papua and New Guinea industrial relations commentary focus on less spectacular but important aspects of industrial disputes. For example, Kalinoe (1997) discussed the complexity of workers’ dismissal case as a result of being union members and found the case decisions particularly by higher courts to be antiunion and therefore having the potential to threaten the future of the legitimate trade union movement. Imbun and Ngangan (2001) in a study of significance of information disclosure in collective bargaining and the level of industrial dispute found that there was a correlation between information disclosure and industrial disputes in PNG. That was particularly obvious in the mines where industrial conflict reflected the low rate of information disclosure by management to the unions. This study recommended that the PNG Government formulate appropriate labour policies that require commercial enterprises to furnish unions with crucial information as a way of preventing disputes.

**Labour Market Analysis**

Another stream of industrial relations literature mostly written in the 1980s documents labour market issues in PNG. Mainly written by neo-liberal economists, wages and unemployment are the two most significant issues in these writings. All (e.g. Brogan 1980; Colclough and Daniel, 1982; Garnaut and Baxter 1982) note high wages and the centralised wage determination system as being major constraints in the economy and maintained a consistent view of the need to adjust wages policy in PNG if the economy was to attain its full potential. Levantis (2000) finds that the labour market policy of the 1970s created an addictive pattern of mass rural-urban migration leading to chronic unemployment. He goes a
step further and blames current law and order problems on this policy failure. He argued that to be unemployed in PNG was to be ‘criminal’ and advocated an overwhelmingly deregulated labour market (Levantis 1997).

In relation to the employment issue, several writers (Gupta and Polume 1984; Lodewijks 1988; McGavin 1991, 1995) have commented on the country’s alarming rate of unemployment in common with much of the developing countries. Although there are no accurate statistics on unemployment in PNG, their observation is that the level is high and rising. Particularly, reference is made to the chronic youth unemployment which is contributed to by a lack of new job opportunities to balance the 50,000 youths leaving schools each year. Generally, they call for a holistic approach, with particular reference to government policy which should promote investment in all sectors of the economy as a priority to provide employment opportunities.

**Developmental Role of Labour Relations System**

The commentary on industrial relations in PNG took a new twist in the 1990s as the focus shifted to the role of the discipline, particularly regarding the role of trade unions in the development of the country. The development theme was captured in several works of the general development of industrial relations. Hess (1992), gave an historically definitive account of the emergence of various unions in the country, although the study only provided details of the few which seem to provide landmarks in the history of union development in PNG. The unions were mainly private sector organisations and were viewed in the general context of economic development in the country. Hess took the view that PNG’s workers were an essential part of the nation’s story and that their labour was basic to the achievement of economic progress.

Hess (1992) also looked at the development of a peak union council, which was an initiative of the colonial government in the mid-1960s. According to him it was purposely set up for it to partner the state in its development endeavours. The peak council had two roles. One was industrial, and the other was a political role in the transition period to independence. Hess argued that this role was necessary because the colony lacked both national institutions and national leadership, and was under prepared for the eventual transfer of power. In such a situation the establishment of a national peak union council had particular significance for the broader political process as well as for the individual union leaders who were attempting to make their mark on national politics.

In a rare application of theoretical models to analysing industrial relations Imbun looked at mining, development and industrial relations in PNG (Imbun 1999). The application of ‘pluralism’ and ‘exceptionalism’ PNG’s industrial relations system demonstrated the development of embryonic pluralist independent unions, capable of operating and negotiating with employers and government in resolving issues. In this respect PNG is an ‘exception’ when contrasted with a number of developing countries. In these countries it is usually the state and employers that exercise unbridled authority over unions and labour.

More recently, Imbun (2003) observed that the country has not ‘advanced’ from the colonial government’s introduced industrial relations system, although it has partnered other institutions in facilitating economic development. He concludes that in the long run the pillars of the industrial relations system will continue to function as they have been.

**Human Resource Development**

The HRD dimension of labour in PNG has only recently received the attention of commentators. However, commentaries have been limited and pertain to pragmatic aspects of HRD in regard to large-scale resource exploitations. This is
typified by Harrison’s (1992) observations of professional localisation programs spearheaded by the Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Ltd (CRA) mining company in Bougainville during its operational peak in the 1980s and mid 1990s. A similar situation was encountered in the 1990s when Porgera mine presented a microcosm of the challenges foreign mining companies confronted with a ‘green workforce’ in the backwaters of PNG (Imbun 1998). In response to the acute skill deficiencies resource projects have invested heavily in HRD as evidenced in the long-distance commuting assisted skills transfer by expatriates to national employees (McGavin, Jones and Imbun, 2001). The current availability of skilled labour particularly in the mining sector is a testimony to the concerted effort put in by the multinational mining companies (Imbun 2006). Complementing the HRD literature is a number of studies generic to the development and practice of human resource management (HRM) in PNG. For instance, a comprehensive account of HRM in the country is provided by Hess and Imbun (2003) who also discuss the employment relations laws pertaining to work and workers organisation. A similar work looks particularly at the labour laws regulating workplaces and how crime and urbanisation are having a dual impact on poverty and restricting of the progress of the economy (Chand and Imbun 2003). This also discusses the HRD and labour laws in relation to economic and social development of the country and how they could be improved.

Discussion and Conclusion
This literature review is undertaken to evaluate methods and results of previous research done on the area of current scrutiny. The main aim is to knit together theories and results from a number of studies to describe the ‘big picture’ of the field of research. In this regard, this review makes a modest attempt in reviewing what seems to be the scattered literature on labour relations in PNG and also attempts to provide a systematic analysis of works centered on particular themes. Despite its modesty, the evaluation of the body of literature does identify the historical emergence of a labour relations system that continues to pose contradictions and challenges for a developing country.

This literature review described and analysed aspects of the PNG industrial relations and employment system. It is evident that work to date falls short of a complete, systemic picture. Many aspects of labour employment in PNG remain unclear. Much work is required before the body of knowledge on PNG employment relations approaches the level of the national literatures on employment in the developed world with their vast range of empirical data and numerous explanatory theories focused on specific issues such as trade union growth and decline, workplace bargaining and rule making. Research on employment and industrial relations in PNG, as is the case in most of the developing world, is still in at a pre-systemic stage. The theoretical explanation of industrial relations in PNG is perhaps clearest in the context of general macro systems theory about labour and the global industrialising process.

So what is the further prospect for PNG labour relations commentary? If this work is of any indication in identifying the trend of commentary, what probably might occur is there would be more analysis of HRD and HRM activity in the country.

What would therefore occur is the abandonment of previous topics of interest such as post-mortem examination of industrial relations system and its actors, which had characterised labour relation’s commentary for several decades. A possible alternative is commentators making continued reference to the role of labour relations in economic development. However, one thing that stands out in such an analysis is the rudimentary nature of PNG labour relations system. This is at least superficially independent and focused on collective bargaining and industrial tribunals that warrants the epithet ‘pluralistic’, and in this sense is also somewhat
‘exceptional’ when contrasted to labour systems in similar developing countries.

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