

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Globalization and Precarious Forms of Production and Employment: Challenges for Workers and Unions, edited by Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and Beatrice Appay, Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2010, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84844-593-2.

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Volume 68, Number 1, Winter 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014753ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014753ar>

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Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Cantin, É. (2013). Review of [*Globalization and Precarious Forms of Production and Employment: Challenges for Workers and Unions*, edited by Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and Beatrice Appay, Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2010, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84844-593-2.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 68(1), 178–181.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1014753ar>

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including the focus of the convergence/divergence and varieties of capitalism debates;

- a political economy perspective focusing on the inter-relationships between market forces, institutions and actors' strategic choices to explain the shift in power from unions to corporations, especially multinational corporations, and economically from the North and West to the South and East;
- legal origins theory focusing on regulatory and legal frameworks as the major set of explanatory variables in comparative analysis; and
- cross-cultural studies utilizing cultural interfaces and dynamics as explanatory approaches in comparative analysis.

Second, the book offers ten paired country comparisons. Although some of these countries are more similar than others, they are mainly based on a most similar approach in terms of institutions, political economy, legal origins and culture. The pairs include: Chile/Argentina, China/India, UK/Ireland, Japan/Korea, Belgium/Netherlands, Australia/New Zealand, South Africa/Mozambique, France/Germany, and the oil-rich Gulf countries. Finally, the book has chapters on the role of MNEs, the regulatory role of internal labour standards and corporate codes, and the impact of neo-liberalism on corporatist approaches in the two less similar cases of Italy and Ireland.

The book succeeds in its aim of being comprehensive, and the chapters on theoretical frameworks and global patterns of employment relations partially overcome the traditional focus on nation states. The countries covered are key players in the global economy and/or very good representations of different regional approaches. The variety of different pairings also provides some illustration of the different theoretical frames of reference. Most are based on most similar institutions, although these are often associated with shared legal systems

and culture. Nevertheless, in some cases the pairings provide strong arguments against an institutionalist approach, notably the chapter on Australia and New Zealand by Wailes. China and India, which share rapid recent economic development, otherwise obviously provide huge contrasts based on legal systems, institutions and cultures and it is interesting to work out their impact on similar economic processes. Mozambique and South Africa also provide interesting contrasts in legal systems, institutions and cultures, in part based on contrasting colonial heritages.

It would be good to see a couple of chapters on regional and industry comparisons in a book of this kind. However, it is already a very extensive collection, and this may be at the cost of other chapters. The density of the collection makes it most appropriate as a postgraduate text. The editors, authors and publishers are to be congratulated in producing such a comprehensive and innovative text, with very consistent quality in the contributions.

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Globalization and Precarious Forms of Production and Employment: Challenges for Workers and Unions

edited by Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and Beatrice Appay, Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2010, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84844-593-2.

In an introduction which is much too short to provide even a modicum of coherence to an eclectic collection of chapters, the editors argue that "[w]hilst economic globalization has been a tendency throughout the era of capitalist organization, the increases in its speed and spread in the last few decades, aided by forms of new technology and global deregulation, have made research in this area ever more pressing. Production has nearly everywhere become a movable feast. It can be switched off

and switched on, or relocated much more easily than ever in the past. With respect to production, a deepening deindustrialization process in the mature capitalist economies has seen important shifts of manufacturing and also some service activities to the newly industrializing countries (NICs), the former command economies within the Russian sphere of influence, India and China/South East Asia. Simultaneously wholesale shifts in governmental ideologies and policies have seen sweeping privatizations in both goods and services sectors, and a blurring of the public/private boundaries more generally. As a result of these processes, both production and employment are becoming systematically more *precarious*" (p. 1). By the rise of 'precarious forms' of employment, the editors essentially have in mind "the employment effects of the increasing concentration of world economic power", which they argue "have been experienced everywhere: full-time permanent jobs that were the hallmark of industrial growth in the second half of the twentieth century are in decline; the legal status of 'permanent' is being challenged in some countries, while everywhere the 'norm' is shifting towards 'flexible', part-time, fixed-term, temporary or agency jobs" (pp. 1-2). It is the hope of the editors that this volume "will stimulate debate and further research around the concept of 'precariousness'—and worker responses—within a burgeoning literature on globalization that has tended to neglect these aspects" (p. 2).

True, whoever speaks about 'globalization' should not keep silent about labour. 'Globalization' has become a popular, yet ambiguous and contested term, not least because in its dominant use it implies a justification for the demolition of 'normal', 'outdated' forms of employment. The debate on globalization in the business press gives the impression that we are currently witnessing the dawn of a new era of far-reaching, unprecedented innovations affecting the working world. The editors,

too, relay this impression. But is this really true? The editors, like many social scientists and scholars of business administration, appear to assume that, over time, "the era of capitalist organization" creates certain, so-called "normal" employment relationships. Recently, however, many have become convinced that the reality is significantly more complicated than was once thought. Capitalism has historically produced multifarious new "forms of production and employment" without abandoning the use of its older forms. Whilst the idea that normal employment relationships actually exist in capitalism has become entrenched in the thinking of social scientists like the editors, the concept is a "prevailing fiction" (to use Ulrich Mückenberger's apt phrase).

Besides its rather weak, ahistorical premises, the book provides some valuable and fascinating insights into the precarious nature of modern work. There are some excellent and interesting contributions here and it is very encouraging to see an English text which is not dominated by Anglo-centric views and some substantial empirical chapters from non-English speaking countries (even if these were mostly French cases). The substantive chapters cover a variety of employment forms and different methodologies. The progression of the book is meant to move "from macro (studies adopting a global perspective) through meso (studies looking at national elements and institutions impacted by the global) to micro (the micro-sociology of individuals, organizations and institutions)" (p. 3). The chapter by historian Nelson Lichtenstein (Chapter 2) explores "precarious work" and "authoritarian management" through a case study of the "retail supremacy" exhibited by the US-based Wal-Mart and its global supply chain, which employs largely female workers, both in the export zones of China, Central America or South Asia, and filling the sales stores. "In both instances, at both ends of the retail supply chain,

work has become precarious: low paid, highly contingent, non-union, and with relatively few social protections" (p. 12). Lichtenstein rightly emphasizes the *politics* that "underlies these global supply chains, either in the making of this new working class or in its potential transformation. In China, the disintegration of Maoism set the stage for the rebirth of laissez-faire capitalism under conditions of authoritarian governance that has deprived a vast new proletariat of a voice and a vision. In the United States and much of Europe, the erosion of the regulatory structures and working-class institutions long associated with mid-twentieth-century social democracy opened the door to the hyper-growth of a retail sector that depended on a vast pool of cheap and contingent labor. But supply chains, like workers' chains, can be both forged and broken" (p. 20).

The chapters by Appay (Chapter 3) and Coffey and Thornley (Chapter 4) are more theoretically driven. The former examines precarious work (with its focus on 'precarization', a term derived from the French *précarisation*) and the legitimization of the worsening working conditions with which it is associated. The process of precarization is finally "defined as the institutionalization of precariousness. It has been enabled by an important ideological shift in the way the individual, the state, work and society are comprehended. Within this new paradigm, the individual, his or her accountability and (supposed) empowerment, become the central focus of attention to the exclusion of larger and more destructive processes at work in the global economy. Individuals are imagined to be empowered by these processes, when in reality they are increasingly powerless to improve their circumstances, yet are held responsible for their own condition and own future" (p. 36). The latter provides critiques of what the authors suggest are the production 'myths' of post-Fordism and lean production, which are also seen as legitimizing

employment regimes that are antipathetic to workers' interests. Both "in writings of a post-Fordist cast, which have since absorbed 'lean' metaphors with little reflection", and in the chapter 4 that states, "we are in any case still firmly rooted in a world of retro-projection and myth" (p. 54).

Some of the chapters are not as well integrated into the central theme as they might be. Whilst interesting and worthy in their own right, a number of chapters focus on broader trends in union representation and international union coordination, for example European works councils and European trade union coordination in the motor industry (Chapter 5 by da Costa and Rehfeldt) or the general state of play of trade union representation in Central and Eastern Europe (Chapter 6 by Contrepois and Jefferys). It is not clear to this reviewer how, in comparison with the former, this latter chapter "moves us towards the meso-level" (p. 4), as "[t]he overall context is one where greater job security for some of those who are fortunate enough to secure employment in the 'globalized' sectors of CEE economies is counterbalanced by a huge extension of precarious working in the rest of their economies" (p. 94).

Chapter 7, in which Beatrice Mésini explores the experiences of migrant agricultural workers in Mediterranean agriculture, finally integrates globally displaced labour in processes of globalization: the migrant workers here come from many different parts of the world, including CEE countries. Mésini's chapter emanates from a study led jointly with a group of trade unions and other associations offering legal support for migrant workers in Southern France, and focuses on the legal precariousness suffered by these workers, and attendant poor conditions of work and security. The author argues that such legal precariousness is "sometimes purposely maintained" with policies which "advocate 'work without (permanent) workers' as well as an 'injunction for forced mobility'" (p. 110).

Some of the following chapters focus either on skilled occupations in relatively strongly unionized sectors—for example, restructuring and privatization in shipyards and the oil industry in Argentina (Chapter 11 by Frassa *et al.*) or the nuclear power industry in France (Chapter 15 by Chaskiel)—whilst other chapters focus more on what might be traditionally perceived as ‘precarious’ work in the sense that they are more directly concerned with low-skilled, low-paid and often non-unionized employment, for example: employment in the supply chain of global supermarkets (Chapter 2 by Lichtenstein); organizing cleaners in French railways (Chapter 12 by Connolly); union repression and collective action in retail, catering and software small and medium enterprises (Chapter 13 by Bouchareb). Others detail more general trends such as the ‘hyper-flexibility’ prevailing in the IT sector (Chapter 9 by Berrebi-Hoffmann *et al.*), the increasing marketization of working time in French collective bargaining (Chapter 10 by Thoemmes), or the rise in precarious work and union response in Australia (Chapter 8 by Campbell). The latter distinguishes two distinct but overlapping processes: the resurgence of certain forms of non-standard employment that are characterized by substandard rights and benefits; and the spread of precariousness within sections of what has usually been regarded as the core workforce, supposedly protected by a full-time ‘permanent’ employment contract. Based on research from a wide range of sectors exploring trade union responses, Campbell concludes that “[n]one has succeeded yet in reversing or even pausing the two processes that have been identified. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect at least a few promising initiatives and a certain amount of experimental energy”, which will “continue to be needed in the current phase of recovery from economic downturn” (p. 127).

Perhaps the most aptly-phrased common denominator of the many contributions

published in this collection is identified, not by the editors, but in Chapter 11 by Frassa *et al.*, which deals with union responses to privatization and restructuring of production in Argentina: “[n]eoliberal policies in the 1990s brought about significant transformation in the economic models of several countries. In the context of globalization, the world economy underwent a profound transformation which resulted in the erosion of former productive models and the emergence of what were later called ‘productive restructuring processes’. Such dynamics fostered the emergence of new production and work forms with new features according to each country’s existing economic structure and regulatory framework” (p. 163). The *concrete* definition of what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘precarious’ should thus be specified historically and geographically. From a historicist point of view this collection adds to a long list of failed attempts, such as the literature on post Fordism and lean production, which are aptly criticized in its pages. As an international survey of such dynamics, this collection is a bit of a hodgepodge. This reviewer actually disagrees with Leah Vosko’s endorsement of the book, which congratulates the editors for having produced a “tightly focused collection of essays”. But he will recommend the reading of some of the substantive chapters in courses dealing with the comparative and international dimensions of the contemporary transformations of the world of work.

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