

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Plutocrats: the Rise and Fall of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else, Chrystia Freeland, Canada: Anchor, 2014, 352 p. ISBN: 978-0385669733

Anthony M. Gould

Volume 69, Number 4, Fall 2014

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1028117ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1028117ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Gould, A. M. (2014). Review of [*Plutocrats: the Rise and Fall of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else*, Chrystia Freeland, Canada: Anchor, 2014, 352 p. ISBN: 978-0385669733]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 69(4), 848–850. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1028117ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 2014

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

res : arrangements et réciprocité » traite des objectifs de la profession et de ces tensions vocationnelles et émotionnelles. Ensuite, le chapitre présente les résultats de questionnaires distribués au sein de cette population afin de connaître leurs avis (selon le genre du répondant) sur le soutien que les membres perçoivent recevoir de l'organisation et dans leur vie personnelle en matière d'articulation travail-famille. Ensuite, le chapitre se poursuit avec une description plus riche du vécu des policiers en résumant des propos colligés lors d'entretiens. On y parle ici surtout de la prise du congé parental (ex. : ouverture, moment, motifs, stress du retour), mais également de débordement des temps de travail, des adaptations comme des renoncements à la carrière.

Notons que les données issues du questionnaire de recherche sont présentées par de nombreux tableaux assez comparables et que de nombreux extraits d'entrevue sont communiqués pour illustrer les réponses des membres des trois professions lors des entretiens. Le traitement ou la synthèse des entrevues menées auprès des trois professions varie sur le plan des thèmes couverts possiblement parce que les propos des participants ont varié et/ou le contenu des questions posées a varié ou a évolué au fil de ce projet de recherche. Il s'agit là d'un projet de recherche concret, novateur et assez exhaustif sur les défis d'articulation travail-famille de trois professions regroupant bien des professionnels auxquels l'on peut associer des membres d'autres professions.

Finalement, le chapitre 5, intitulé « La conciliation emploi et famille : comparaison des trois professions : policiers, infirmiers et travailleurs sociaux » compare les résultats obtenus au sein de ces trois professions en regard des défis que posent la situation professionnelle, de l'appui organisationnel, de la satisfaction au travail, des sentiments ou des valeurs en regard de la conciliation emploi-famille et de l'usage des congés

pour raisons familiales (selon le sexe et la présence ou non d'enfants).

L'avantage de ce livre est de démontrer que le défi social de l'articulation travail-famille gagne aussi à être analysé et nuancé à travers les « lunettes » de la profession, chaque profession ayant

- un « éthos » différent qui transmet des attentes sur ce qui est plus ou plus attendu de ses membres, attentes qui sont plus ou moins favorables à la conciliation travail-famille de ses membres,
- des conditions de travail et des appuis organisationnels propres qui sont plus ou moins favorables à la conciliation travail-famille de ses membres.

Toutefois, quelles que soient les professions, il appert que les stéréotypes de genre persistent à travers les professions, et ce, tant en regard des attentes que du recours aux pratiques de conciliation travail-famille (congés, aménagement de carrière, etc.).

Ce livre devrait intéresser bien évidemment les professionnels, les cadres et les dirigeants des secteurs public et parapublic soucieux des conditions de travail des membres de ces trois professions ou de professions similaires tout autant que ceux du secteur privé soucieux de comprendre comment les défis de conciliation travail-famille peuvent varier selon les catégories de personnel au sein de leur propre établissement.

Sylvie St-Onge
HEC

Plutocrats: the Rise and Fall of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else

Chrystia Freeland, Canada: Anchor, 2014, 352 p.
ISBN: 978-0385669733.

This book is about the disappearance of the (mostly) American middle-class and an associated polarisation of Society into the extremely affluent and the other 99.9 percent. The work looks in an often whimsi-

cal way at who the 0.01 percent are. It does so through a discussion of data: what they earn; what they pay—or perhaps I should say don't pay—in taxes; how much they spend on their holidays and birthdays; and, through profiling demographic variables pertaining to where they live, etc. The volume is not overly technical but rather replete with anecdotes which are woven into more formal—yet accessible—statistical profiling. I should emphasise—and this is not a criticism—that Chrystia Freeland is a journalist and writes for a non-scholarly audience. She resists getting in to some of the heavy analysis that is seen in, for example, the *State of Working America* which deals with much of the same content matter—although with a broader focus (see my review in volume 68-1 of *Relations industrielles*).

Freeland's work moves discussion of the frivolousness of the rich into a more serious arena than—say—Robin Leach's 80s television series *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Indeed, it would be quite wrong to characterise her narrative as showcasing ways to be self-indulgent. It touches on these types of issues but really is about modernity. In what she calls the “New Gilded Age”, she makes a series of thematically-related points. For me, some of the most important of these are: that the super-rich identify more with each other than they do with, say, their country of origin; that they go to new and elaborate measures to cloister themselves from others; that they attempt to feel good about themselves—and achieve immortality—through forms of philanthropy which have a global focus; and, that notions of class have been recast to reflect particularised, highly technical, forms of knowledge and education.

There is another, somewhat implicit, message in Freeland's book which I found interesting; the 20th century American dream of being successful through hard work, charm and straightforward forms of risk-taking is apparently over. The world of the robber barons, of Dale Carnegie, and of

actually producing a product that someone wants to buy is *passé*. It seems now that advanced cleverness comes in the form of specific mathematical expertise; particularly as it applies to leveraged buyouts, credit default swaps, and collateralised debt obligations. Notice here that notions of restraint, concern about inequity, charm and relationship-management seem somewhat inconsequential. Notice also that the new game seems to be more about upward forms of wealth redistribution than about producing value and that the road to prosperity is genuinely and clearly closed-off to the average punter. This latter point about the path being blocked creates a new dynamic. In the 20th century it was possible to provide logic—along with plenty of examples—that showed that it is, at least possible, for everyone to make it. One could always hope and—perhaps in some cases—be blamed if it didn't work out. One of the things I like about Freeland's book is that she makes clear how it is now hard to even provide a credible narrative concerning how everyone can be successful—let alone give good examples of it.

In understanding who the super-rich are, what they do and how they think, Freeland's book also quite deliberately delivers a dark message about the trajectory of society. In the United States, in particular, there is a vanishing middle class. There is a particularly depressing phenomenon underlying this trend. This phenomenon is sort of tapped by Freeland but not—at least in my opinion—adequately placed in the context of 20th century economic history. I would have been more satisfied if she could have helped me better understand how and why a more just society results if it is built on a booming middle class. This is an important point because there is a lot of description of the problem (aside from Freeland's book) and not much substantial discussion of the less-obvious disadvantages that come with inequality. I have another related concern about Freeland's book. Putting aside debate

about Keynesianism versus supply-side economics, there is overwhelming empirical evidence from the Western World that rich and poor sectors of society move forward—more or less in unison—when the not so well off have the means to buy things of value that are produced by the well off. What I am saying—and this is a criticism—is that I don't think Freeland's work did enough to elucidate the difference between wealth creation (the 20th century paradigm) and wealth accumulation (the new paradigm). She let me down a bit here. On the other hand, perhaps not everything needs to be about analysis. Indeed, I stick to my initial point—the book is entertaining; a page-turned for those of us who don't own a private jet!

Anthony M. Gould

Université Laval