

Standing, G.: Work after globalization

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Guy Standing's impressive and very ambitious monograph takes the reader on a Polany-inspired grand tour of both past and more recent history of organized work in its different incarnations, all the while articulating in great detail its relationship with different ensuing forms of citizenship and social security entitlements. Standing's basic tenet is that we are in the middle of another global transformation which sees the end of embeddedness, industrial citizenship and the labourist model which may open the field for an era of occupational citizenship, one in which identity is defined by ones' occupation (whether paid or unpaid) and the latter is the premise for their citizenship.

The book convincingly argues using evidence from a variety of sources that the labourist model promoted and globalised by the ILO and international development organisations has implied a progressive recommodification of labour relations and wider relationships (including those in the family and in education) which can be observed in the relative importance of wages in social income (relative to self production, community support, enterprise benefits and state benefits) and which if not addressed poses both a threat to the wellbeing and identity of individuals and whole communities.

As a promoter of the citizenship income, Standing sees in the global transformation great challenges: one of his chapters is literally called 'the horror' and he offers throughout several examples of the effect of price-based incentives, top-down regulation and casualization on both high and low skill jobs. However he also sees opportunities for rebuilding societies around the more progressive aspects of professionalism and around occupations motivated by ethic and morality: 'Civic friendship is about a richer idea of work and leisure than conventional theorizing allows. Work

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that is not labour includes political participation in forging and reproducing human capacities and ethical behaviour. It is about social interaction.’ (p. 14).

Key to this is the idea that a happy person is someone who is doing what they aspire to do, and therefore pursues occupation: does work rather than labour. Occupational communities are seen as capable of combating commercial domination and ideologies and Standing feels that they should have been defended more during globalisation, citing convincing evidence from the medical, law and academic sectors. A key characteristic of the current situation is the shift that has occurred from idiosyncratic and contingency risks to systemic risks which are less insurable or suited to the existing social security schemes (ch. 3), which gives opportunity to rethink social security along radically different lines (as articulated in the last chapter: economic rights, the progressive agenda).

The book puts forward a complementary perspective to the rise in inequality to that offered by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett’s *The Spirit Level* and Robert Frank’s *What Price the Moral High Ground* and discusses the rise in world inequality caused by the wealthy gaining mostly from capital, the spread of winner-take-all markets and western governments’ giving up on an agenda of progressive income redistribution.

The new categories include a global elite, detached from national regulatory and social security systems both because they do not contribute to them financially and because they are neither psychologically nor politically committed to their maintenance although they use their disproportionate resources and power to influence governments worldwide; the salariat, which comprises a privileged category of high income earners in stable employment in civil services, parastatals, corporations and other bureaucracies who are least subject to commodification and have relatively high employment security; below them the proficians, a skilled and independent group with low attachment (independent contractors or consultants) which Standing aptly describes as ‘the craftsmen of the global flexible economy’; the working class, around which welfare systems were designed, is dwindling in numbers as a now much larger group is the precariat, a group with shifting low pay jobs and no security which globalisation exploits and has contributed to create and which includes a number of generation-Y members who are effectively downward socially mobile. Informal workers are mentioned but not specifically discussed as part of this group, and this is an important omission from the discussion given the rise in informalization documented in various countries (most notably in Latin America) during the global transformation. The section documenting recommodification in the family and in education is a welcome change from the normal focus of this type of analysis (which tends to ignore unpaid work and the role of caring), the author is however less at ease with this area and falls into a few of the usual but quite damning traps of those writing on these issues from a broader angle: most notably the lack of men’s and state’s roles in the analysis of changing caring and fertility patterns and a rather bold and perhaps not too well informed discussion of the contractualization of bodies.

When back on his familiar ground of discussion of the global transformation and the effect of weakened occupational controls over market, labour power, income and time and of the spread of regulation the arguments are again very persuasive and provide a strong background to the arguments of the final part of the book. The bold vision put forward is one of working life being chosen in freedom, with people able to ‘define

themselves through having a combination of competencies, a variable combination of work statuses and an ability to give more time to reproductive work and education, so allowing space for leisure alongside work' (p. 282). The danger for occupational citizenship comes from the current competitiveness paradigm that pushes corporate citizenship and social policy as a productive factor: Standing argues that the economy needs to be re-embedded within society, rescuing reproductive work (caring and civic friendship) which he seamlessly suggests will entail protecting the public sphere in the process. The progressive agenda of economic rights entails the redistribution of what the book identifies as the key assets of the tertiary economy: time, ecological space, information and financial capital. Neo-liberalism and libertarian paternalism stand in the way of this progressive project which is based on the advancement of associational freedom and deliberative democracy, which will, all going according to the book's plan, be advanced by the precariat who are most likely to become active.