

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Interrogating the New Economy: Restructuring Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Edited by Norene J. Pupo and Mark P. Thomas, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010, 292 pp., ISBN 978-1-4426-0055-3.

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## Recensions / Book Reviews

### Interrogating the New Economy: Restructuring Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Edited by Norene J. Pupo and Mark P. Thomas,  
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292 pp., ISBN 978-1-4426-0055-3.

As conveyed by the title, this volume of edited articles explores various dimensions of the seismic economic changes that have beset the international economy over the past twenty years. While most of the chapters focus on various dimensions of economic restructuring and the fall out in Canada, one chapter by Huws and Dahlmann presents data from their work on European occupational shifts that have been occasioned by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the globalization of labour processes that they have enabled. The editors have done a good job in organizing the book around three thematic sections that examine the macro level changes that have been associated with economic restructuring, specific case studies of economic transition, and finally, the conditions that unions confront in the new circumstances.

Each chapter in the first section lays out what its authors consider to be the most important theoretical concepts for analyzing recent political-economic changes to the ways in which capitalism operates. There are subtle differences in emphasis. For example, Broad and Hunter stress the re-commodification of labour that has been associated with neo-liberalism and in particular the movement from Keynesian welfare programs to the workfare of the "third way." This has been the means by which capitalist dynamics have been "rebooted." Other chapters in this section suggest that the changes are more fundamental, with Clement *et al.* arguing that we have transitioned into a post-industrial, knowledge economy that is giving rise to more complex class systems and stratification. For reasons that I cannot go into here, I find that the approaches of Albo and Huws and Dahlmann are the most useful for understanding what is new in the "new economy." Albo identifies four main shifts which taken together represent a new phase

in capitalist accumulation. They consist of new labour processes, new, more precarious employment relationships, new spatial relations (i.e. the globalization of production) and financialization. A progressive counter agenda to these developments is outlined, but the vexatious question of agency is not posed.

The chapter by Huws and Dahlmann makes a further contribution based upon both quantitative and qualitative research. These authors examine the impacts of forming global value chains in service oriented work. The implications of computerization and outsourcing for occupational and class identities are explored in some detail, in what, for this reader, is one of the standout chapters of the book. The authors point to the increasingly elaborate social division of global labour, the rise of MNCs from the developing world and the greater centralization of command and control over labour processes. Importantly, this has diffuse effects on occupational and class formation, which makes such analysis all the more necessary.

A number of the chapters in the second section of the book also bring new insights forward through original primary research. Particularly noteworthy for me were those chapters that examined the fate of regional communities that have witnessed the loss of industrial employment. Chapters by Tufts and Holmes, Haiven, and Aguiar and Marten vividly convey the challenges that non-global cities confront in the new economy. For Tufts and Holmes it is a problem of whether "university towns" can leverage off of their educational institutions to provide long term quality employment in a new knowledge economy. Haiven poses a similar question in examining the possibilities for new cultural industries that derive their inspiration from an industrial past. His comparison of Cape Breton Island with the mining communities of country Durham in the UK is instructive. Aguiar and Marten turn their attention to the creation of a post-industrial leisure economy that is being built upon viticulture and associated pursuits such as golf and spa tourism in the Okanagan valley. Importantly they remind us that such industries are based upon the work of an "emotional proletariat," while their article commences an analysis

of what is involved in such work. While Haiven is “optimistically agnostic” about regional regeneration through new cultural industries, the other authors are more pessimistic about the prospects of a post-industrial future for such communities; the point being that taken together these papers can constitute the beginnings of an essential debate. Aguiar and Marten’s chapter on wine tourism and the labour that supports it also has nice synergies with Thomas’ contribution on the growing use of migrant labour under temporary visa programs. While Thomas does illuminate the important role of migrant labour in Canada’s immigration policy it would have been useful to tie immigration policy more specifically to those pursuits which are identified with the new economy. Additional chapters in section two address important changes in public sector work. Pupo and Noack provide informative data that examines the implications of adopting private sector labour processes (call centres) in the provision of public services, while Stinson tracks the growth of casual contract labour in the state sector. These latter chapters help to add substance to our notions of neo-liberalism by examining its implications for employment within the state.

The final section of the book specifically focuses on the responses of labour to the shifts that have been analyzed in the preceding chapters. Linda Briskin presents and reviews contemporary data on union membership trends in Canada. While strike activity has declined to a fraction of former levels, it is now centred in the public sector where women are more likely to be employed. According to Briskin this has led to a feminization of militancy as displayed by recent nurses’ strikes. While public sector unionization retains its vibrancy, other areas of the service economy continue to present seemingly insurmountable obstacles for union organizing. Clark and Warskett examine three types of fragmentation – in labour processes, between core and secondary labour markets, in small and relatively powerless bargaining units and between different unions with claims to representation – in the fast food, retail, banking and postal and courier services. For the most part the record is not

good. Small branches, high levels of casual work and associated labour turnover have led to successful decertification campaigns in numerous cases where trade unions have obtained initial support. Even in the public sector, as other articles by Stinson and Briskin make clear, casual employment is on the increase and this poses a challenge to established unions. The way ahead is far from clear.

Overall this is a strong collection of articles. The editors indicate that the book has emerged from an SSHRC grant to study what is euphemistically called the new economy. Some of the papers present more original empirical material than others and it is these that I have highlighted as making a special contribution. Given this genealogy, it is not entirely clear why each chapter ends with discussion questions which might be more appropriate for a text book format than for a research collection. In lieu of discussion questions, I would have preferred it had the editors taken more space to tease out the debates and implications for future research that this worthwhile collection surely invites.

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### **The Transformation of Labour Law in Europe : A Comparative Study of 15 Countries, 1945-2004**

Sous la direction de Bob Heppel et Bruno Veneziani, Oxford, UK : Hart Publishing, 2009, 393 p., ISBN 978-1-84113-870-1.

Un ouvrage collectif paru en 1986 sous la direction du professeur Bob Heppel, *The Making of Labour Law in Europe : A Comparative Study of Nine Countries up to 1945*, avait déjà exposé les sources et le développement jusqu’à l’après-guerre du droit du travail de neuf pays européens membres de la Communauté économique européenne en 1980 ; le présent ouvrage, dirigé cette fois conjointement par Sir Bob Heppel et le professeur Bruno Veneziani, de l’Université de Bari, prend le relais et entend exposer les transformations du droit du travail européen jusqu’en 2004. L’entreprise s’étend également cette fois à six autres pays ayant adhéré à l’Union européenne avant cette dernière année. À noter