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The State of Working America 2008/2009 By Jared Bernstein, Lawrence Mishel and Heidi Shierholz, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009, 461 pp., ISBN 978-0-8014-7477-4.

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tences exigées dans ce secteur, l'auteure étudie les possibilités de carrière qui s'apparentent selon elle à un parcours d'obstacles; elle montre en particulier comment les progressions se voient bloquées pour les emplois de cadre et d'agents de maîtrise où la main-d'œuvre provient essentiellement de l'extérieur. De plus, face à des exigences de disponibilité spatiale et temporelle pour accéder à ces carrières, les femmes se voient écartées des carrières hôtelières. À celles-là, on proposera en revanche une plus grande conciliation « vie professionnelle-vie familiale » faisant oublier sa contrepartie, à savoir une division sexuelle du travail qui vient justifier les discriminations. Aussi, pour les femmes, l'emploi dans le secteur risque de devenir disqualifiant et ouvre sur la question de la sécurité d'emploi.

C'est à cette question que s'attaque la troisième partie du livre « Durer ou tirer sa révérence ? » qui se penche sur le devenir de jeunes rencontrés douze ans après leur sortie de l'école. Le cinquième chapitre s'intéresse ainsi au groupe de professionnels issus de formations spécialisées. Deux figures se détachent ici, celle du célibataire aspiré par un métier dévorant d'une part, celle des femmes vivant en couple et aspirées par une spirale de précarité d'autre part. Pourtant, pour ceux et celles pour qui les métiers du secteur constituaient au départ une transition, celle-ci aura souvent été une « parenthèse plus ou moins enchantée » à laquelle ils mettent fin en entrant dans la vie adulte. À cet égard, la force de l'origine sociale ou familiale se fait sentir. En conclusion, l'auteure s'interroge sur la liberté de choisir son emploi tout au long de sa vie quand on voit l'emprise du genre sur le marché de l'emploi.

Au total, en plus d'offrir un bon portrait des emplois du secteur de l'hôtellerie-restauration, ce livre ouvre sur des questions très actuelles qui se posent tant en Europe qu'en Amérique du Nord concernant le marché du travail. En particulier, au moment où se pose ici avec acuité la question de l'échec scolaire, il est intéressant de mieux

connaître les emplois où se retrouvent un grand nombre d'exclus du système scolaire. Une meilleure connaissance des emplois et des parcours professionnels de ces salariés pourrait aider à formuler des politiques du marché du travail plus adéquates, celles concernant entre autres la formation tout au long de la vie. Ce ne sont là que quelques unes des pistes ouvertes par ce livre.

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The State of Working America 2008/2009

By Jared Bernstein, Lawrence Mishel
and Heidi Shierholz, Ithaca, NY: Cornell
University Press, 2009, 461 pp., ISBN 978-0-
8014-7477-4.

The State of Working America (2008/09) presents a no-nonsense and straight-to-the-point exposé of key facets of the United States labour market in 2008/09. The report is the latest iteration of biennial publications which have been produced since 1988 by *The Economic Policy Institute*. The book deals mostly with the issue of inequality and has a chapter structure which plainly reveals this emphasis. In sequential order, sections deal with: family income and its historically noteworthy failure to grow throughout the 2000s business cycle; income-class mobility; wages and the gap between productivity and compensation during economic recoveries; diminished job expectations; wealth; poverty; health and life expectancy gaps which have emerged in response to declining medical coverage; and, international comparisons. The authors articulate their argument clearly in the opening pages. Throughout the work they present evidence which supports their thesis without straying from the message. Their argument is that, over the last several decades, ordinary Americans are working harder and producing more but are not sharing in the benefits of the fruits of their labor. Rather such benefits are flowing to a small group of people; those who are – and have always been – very wealthy. The authors build the premises of this argu-

ment using economic data. Throughout its 460 pages, the book contains many statistics tables which are thematically grouped using the chapter structure.

I think the book is quite brilliant. I will not use this opportunity to attempt to be critical because any negative comments I would make would be generic and/or merely matters of opinion. Rather, I want to explain how I see the scholarly importance of the work. First, there is the issue of its key argument. The message is compelling and unassailable. Indeed, it gives a salutary reminder that the so called *YOYO (You're on your own)* philosophy which is a key tenet of American capitalism may be fatally flawed. Because the argument is so clear and well grounded in research, policy makers will have difficulty ignoring it. Indeed, I think the authors have created for themselves a responsibility to follow up their analysis with a policy response; a task which I notice the *Economic Policy Institute* has done with its agenda for shared prosperity.

Throughout this book, the key message about economic inequality remains front and centre. However, it is supported by subsidiary points. For example, the authors demonstrate that, within the United States, income class mobility is less likely than mythology suggests. In practice, compared with other countries, an American child born to a poor family is less likely to improve their social and economic circumstances throughout their life. This supporting thesis is also well sustained by data. It is thoughtfully placed alongside other secondary arguments which focus on such things as the relationship between changes in capital (non-wage) incomes and rising overall inequality, the shifting wage/profit ratio, and inequality in life expectancy and other health outcomes. The authors prosecute their case in relation to these specific and somewhat technical matters as a means of building their overall argument.

Another reason why the book makes a seminal contribution to scholarship arises

from its structure and methodology. The authors handle these elements superbly well. In relation to structure, they present a limited and defined subject area and deal with it through exhaustively analyzing each of its sub-components in a logical order. Although its chapters could be read separately and, in this sense, the book can be used as a reference, it is also true that sections are well integrated so that a more general narrative emerges when reading from cover to cover. The structure of the book should serve as a benchmark for other scholars seeking to deal with a complex and multi-faceted object of analysis. Insofar as the methodology is concerned, conclusions and insights are based principally on quantitative analysis. The data is pulled from multiple official sources. It is not over-analyzed. Rather, the authors have opted for interesting and revealing presentation of raw data as an alternative to cumbersome statistical manipulation and transformation. The text itself simply highlights key points revealed in tables and figures. Sometimes, data sources are used to make the same point in a different way. Where this occurs, it is not distracting or redundant. In dealing with the tables, the authors have made clear the boundaries between data, information and knowledge. They have carefully kept the emphasis on numbers and mostly allowed the graphs to tell the story.

I have one pseudo-criticism of the book which I hesitate to label as a criticism because I consider that, overall, the work is exceptional. I think the title is wrong. It does not do the authors justice. It suggests, at least to me, an almanac or perhaps a perfunctory cross-sectional portrayal of the American workplace. But the book is the antithesis of a directory. Rather, the work addresses trends and context. It conveys a sense of how societal values and philosophies are manifesting as labor market outcomes. In so doing, its argument(s) could not be more explicit. My advice to the authors would be that the next edition

of their book should have a different and more animated title.

The authors of the *State of Working America* know how to communicate statistics about the economy. The evidence they present is well contextualized and handled with a deft touch. Of course, there are risks in reading economic data. However this book avoids, what I consider to be, the more obvious traps: *non-sequiturs*; favouring certain results over others without rationale; making unjustified casual inferences; and/or over-analysis. In essence, the authors have taken a back-seat with this work; minimizing the narrative and interpretation but rather arranging data so that it speaks for itself. The outcome of their style is a message which is dispassionate and straightforward. Beyond its arguments, this book represents best practice in social-science research. It should be mandatory reading for policy makers. It would also be valuable for social science researchers and PhD students searching for a benchmark of a great dissertation.

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Regulating Flexibility: The Political Economy of Employment Standards

By Mark P. Thomas, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, 248 pp., ISBN 978-0-7735-3528-2.

Mark Thomas' qualitative analysis follows firmly in the York tradition of political economy with its heavy emphasis on analysing the way in which institutions are both shaped by and shape the composition of social relations between class, gender and ethnicity. His study is thus able to offer insights on the way in which what would at first glance seem to be rather mundane legislative changes, have nonetheless significant impacts when analysed within the broader context of neoliberal economic restructuring.

In *Regulating Flexibility* Mark Thomas undertakes an analysis of the evolution of

labour market policy principally with respect to employment standards in Ontario. While the bulk of his analysis is concentrated on the period from the beginning of the 1970s to the new millennium, he nonetheless commences his empirical analysis with a concise presentation of the evolution of minimum standards legislation since the end of the 19th century in Ontario.

One of the central strengths of *Regulating Flexibility* is that it makes the firm link between economic restructuring in Ontario in the pursuit of deep integration with the US and the broader global processes restructuring of production and consumption. In this frame, policies designed to elicit greater "flexibility" from the workforce in general and individual workers at the level of the enterprise more often than not served to increase a sense of insecurity on the part of workers. That is, in many ways the pursuit of flexibility with respect to minimum standards legislation, by conscious design or not, served as a punitive form of (re)regulation which intensified the insecurity of already increasingly precarious and marginalized segments of the labour force. Moreover, all of this occurred in the context of a diminished and diminishing labour movement which was increasingly incapable of defending core labour markets.

The picture that thus emerges in *Regulating Flexibility* is one of a (re)segmentation of labour markets; with elements of secondary and tertiary labour markets creeping into primary labour markets while at the same time, in the pursuit of flexibility, producing noticeably deteriorating conditions in secondary and tertiary labour markets. Clearly minimum standards legislation is part of the broader labour relations regime.

Characteristically, Thomas concludes his book with a discussion of what is to be done about what he, rightly, views as a distressing turn in labour market regulation in Ontario at century's end. Here the familiar tension is drawn out between the evident need for transnational regulatory