

## *Book Review*

**Atzeni, M. (ed.) (2014) *Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism: Contemporary Themes and Theoretical Issues*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 9780230303171**

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*Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism: Contemporary Themes and Theoretical Issues* is an impressive compilation of several authors' work I already respect and admire, and this collection confirmed my appreciation for their work. Atzeni introduces 'Workers and Labour' in the first chapter, indicating that research in industrial relations and sociology of work has tended to focus on non-conflictual relations and has been too focused on Human Resources Management. Work and labour are usually not distinguished conceptually from one another in the Arendtian manner and control at/of work has tended to be looked at the institutional level without recognition of spatial and temporal dynamics and contemporary, very human pressures resulting from the power of capital as it is increasingly mobile and invasive.

Atzeni notes a recent resurrection of research on work and labour perhaps resulting from the increase in migrant work and the growth of the service sector. Workplace requirements of a new tenor include emotional labour, mobility, and self-management. There is also a resurgence in classical research on labour looking at trade unions, tactics and strategies and collective bargaining in the context of the rolling back of welfare states. I have made similar points in my publication 'Where is the Study of Work in Critical International Political Economy?' noting that research in this area also requires a shift in focus. International Political Economy has tended to focus on policy and elite level negotiations, forgetting that globalisation and neoliberalism are not forces existing outside of human agency. Documenting and observing policy is only one step toward identifying the reproduction of neoliberal structural conditions. How policy is put into practice and the pressures on people are of most importance (Moore, 2012). A growing body of work, very much including the Atzeni collection, calls researchers to address this oversight.

Atzeni's collection, as indicated in the title, intends to look at work and labour in globalised capitalism. 'Globalisation' as a concept is problematic and overused, but I was interested to see how this term would be operationalized and would drive the text. I think about globalisation as aligned with neoliberalization along the lines of Brenner (et al., 2010), points with which Atzeni does not disagree. In particular, he notes de-industrialisation gives way to the instability of precarity. However, these observations are not explicitly linked to globalisation in every chapter, and it is unclear whether the term 'globalisation' is needed at all. Nonetheless, chapters provide very sophisticated accounts of exploitation of workers and labourers, potentials for resistance and renewal and theoretical issues of class and the labour process. In this light, 'Parts' are organized as 'Theoretical Issues: Explaining the Centrality of Labour Within Capitalism'; 'Classical Issues: Explaining Workers' Resistance and Organisation'; and 'Contemporary Issues: Workers Organising in the Global World'.

First, David Spencer calls for a renewed discussion of labour process theory to assess to what extent it sits in antagonism to Marx's theory of value or whether arguments around deskilling and scientific management and the logic of accumulation are more compatible with Marxism than may be documented. Then Silver writes about the way in which spatial,

technological, financial and product 'fixes' work within the institutional context to keep the global working class in a subordinate position. Silver's chapter stands out with empirical and theoretical linkages showing the very tangible ways in which labourers are alienated despite the crisis of legitimacy capitalism as a global economic/political model faces. Van der Linden expands on class analysis by looking at the way class is expressed with reference to E.P. Thompson's acknowledgement that 'consciousness of class arises in different times and places but never in just the same way' (Thompson, 1963: p. 9). Federici then builds on her arguments that Marx was not able to understand value in work outside of commodity production, which could be interpreted to mean that his interventions do not take into account reproductive labour. She notes the rise in the proletariat as production is globalised. Globalisation takes the form of primitive accumulation, in the South through maquilisation, in the post-Soviet countries through de-collectivising agriculture and privatization and in the North via de-industrialisation and outsourcing. The myth of globalisation, Silver emphasizes, is that work has become automated and work needed to keep the capitalist system in tact, is removed. An extreme fallacy, the majority of the world's population relies on waged work but capital's dispossession results in continued oppressions and most endemically oppressions in reproductive labour.

Darlington then challenges readers to reflect on the role of trade unions as revivals of organizing and capacities for mobilisation are partial and varied. Nonetheless, historically trade unions have been seen as sites for revolution and change, and the need for collective representation has anything but disappeared. Cohen looks for new tools of solidarity and campaigning and gives a range of relevant examples for undermining of trade unions and workers' responses. Atzeni then contributes a chapter querying whether self-management and workers' control over workplace can sustain democratic decision making and operations, notably referencing Rosa Luxemburg's skepticism. In Part 3, then, Mollana looks at the difficulty in measuring labour and demonstrates the emergence of informal labour in this context. Gall then provides a transnational overview of labour conflict noting that various forms of protest have, rather than disappeared, intensified, from individual acts to occupations, industrial action 'short of striking', to a discussion of a return of the general strike. Ness draws the book to a resounding conclusion with a very interesting chapter that looks at the treatment of migrant labour in the still-powerful country, the USA, remarking on the difficulty for organizing in communities with little to offer but their labour.

This text is, as mentioned, a remarkable collection that takes note of most of the current issues facing labour, providing a rich historical context, noting the tensions in contemporary conditions for vulnerable groups including women and migrant workers. This text contributes well to the blossoming arena of research on related contemporary areas including forced and unfree labour (Morgan and Olsen, 2014; Strauss, 2012; Phillips, 2013; LeBaron, 2014), the marketization of development aid and the crisis for labour and global social protection (Moore, 2014), social media and the contemporary workplace (Upchurch, 2014), issues with transnational solidarity (Bieler, 2013) and continuous flexibilisation of workforces (Fernandez Rodriguez and Martinez Lucio, 2013). This text is a welcome addition to the growth in critical work looking at work and labour and will undoubtedly be read and appreciated by many.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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