

## Book Review

*Work after Globalisation: Building Occupational Citizenship*, by Guy Standing, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2009, 366 pp.

In *Work after Globalisation: Building Occupational Citizenship*, Guy Standing expounds a highly engaging and original thesis. An epoch of “industrial citizenship” consonant with Karl Polanyi’s Great Transformation has passed, Standing claims, undone by a Global Transformation that presents the possibility of a new era founded on “occupational citizenship”.

Polanyi’s vision frames the premise. The Great Transformation saw the market system being embedded in society, as various institutions were created in response to the disruptive effects of market expansion on socio-economic security. These institutions, such as unionisation, social security, and labour standards, counteracted the commodification – buying and selling without agency – of labour. In the first few chapters, Standing draws on these themes of market embeddedness and commodification of labour to explain the effects of globalisation on work.

The book is also underpinned by normative ethical principles and theories, starting with the conception and terminology of labour and work. Standing markedly departs from Polanyi here, in critiquing Polanyi’s confinement to a narrow concept of labour, without differentiating it from work. Work carries more positive implications, being open to “respect for inaction and contemplation” whereas “[i]n labour, there is no respect for reproductive activity” (p. 7).

The idea of occupation derives and expands from the distinction of work from labour. An occupation can be seen as a lifetime or extended period of work in a manner that is more self-determining than the mere selling of labour. Standing further extols the capacity for a thriving occupation to foster “civic friendship”, which is “essential for a just society” (p. 16). He maintains that the scope for social interaction, solidarity, reproduction and reciprocities within occupational groups provide grounds for occupational citizenship. He highlights how occupational groups, most saliently guilds, have historically safeguarded professional and ethical standards of the field of work in a self-governing manner. On the downside, occupational communities have a tendency to form cartels, impede technological progress and marginalise outsiders.

From the early twentieth century, the Great Transformation, in a sense, served to “rescue work from labour” (p. 28). But there were major omissions.

The institutional safeguards favouring workers that emerged, promoted by the International Labour Organisation and adopted across the globe, hinged on labour-based organisation, collective bargaining, and standards. As a result, “industrial citizenship” evolved, based on entitlements and norms associated with industrial wage labour, centred on labour unions and delineated by boundaries of nationality and formality. Thus, occupational bases of solidarity and organisation were omitted, as were the issues of migration and non-regular labour.

Continuing with the themes of market embeddedness and commodification, the rise of neo-liberalism from the 1970s is seen as reversing the market-society nexus of the Great Transformation. The middle portion of the book discusses how the Global Transformation disembedded markets from society and recommodified labour, with a number of distinguishing features compared to analogous trends that preceded the Great Transformation.

Under neoliberal globalisation, migration is of a more nomadic, transient variety, not a movement of worker-settlers. Aided by communication, information and transportation technology, casualisation and outsourcing, and labour flexibilisation in general, have burgeoned. Under political pressure and compulsion by international bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank, we have witnessed the decline of social income and social protection.

The magnitude and distribution of risk also became reconfigured. Systemic volatility and exposure to shocks and crises increased on the whole. However, some groups weather the storms with much less pain, especially the elite, with accumulated wealth and access to networks to buffer the shocks, the privileged salaried class, with high incomes in stable, full-time employment, and the independent contractors or consultants, who command high fees albeit with temporal employment. At the bottom end, new vulnerable groups have surfaced, particularly the “precariat”, a clever play on words. This wide category encompasses those in insecure, low-pay and low-status jobs, who lack occupational identity.

The main barrier to labour commodification, Standing asserts, is the system of occupations, which can control the pace and intensity of work and set standards of efficiency and quality, codes of conduct and social responsibility (p. 147). He emphasises the benefits and capacities for occupational communities to self-regulate. The scope for occupational communities to perform these tasks, however, has been undermined by increasing intrusion, regulation and control by corporations and the state, e.g. through privatisation of health care, which curtailed the autonomy of medical professionals.

The concluding chapters build a case for occupational citizenship as a means to resolve the malaise in the Global Transformation – multiple crises rooted in the prevailing income disparities, livelihood insecurities and

strictures on freedom. The Global Transformation calls for new perspectives beyond conventional notions of employer-employee relationships and labour. The book's description of the crises in global economies and discussion of implications are rather dispersed, and evidence could be adduced more substantively and systematically. Nonetheless, the book's thesis of occupational citizenship, and motivation to establish norms of work and decommodify labour, are illuminating and edifying.

Fundamentally, Standing advocates shifting the attention from labour rights to work rights, which can provide greater coverage of workers – if conceived broadly enough – and foster occupational associations. Forms of associations should “minimize the prospect of regulatory capture, optimize development of occupational pride, and promote deliberative democracy and reciprocity as part of a system of rights” (p. 275).

*Work after Globalisation* raises a number of questions, of which two stand out. First, the linkages between occupations, on the one hand, and skills, qualifications and experience on the other, warrant more consideration. The preponderance of cases within advanced economies, with highly qualified and skilled workforces, as examples of past and present occupational communities, suggests limits to the scope of the book's analyses. The prospects for occupational citizenship are especially unclear for less developed countries where professional, skilled labour constitutes a small proportion of the workforce.

Second, can occupations serve as a basis for solidarity and collective action, as well as tendencies to be inward-looking and captured by vested interest? These dilemmas are common to all forms of collectivisation, but discussion of specific challenges to occupational communities would enhance the book's claims. As it stands, however, this book is a recommended read for stimulating insights and alternative perspectives on work, labour and occupation.

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