

Globalization and Labour in the Twenty-First Century, by Verity Burgmann, pp. 261, ISBN 978-0-415-52853-5, Price £37.99 (paperback).

Rarely has the acknowledgements section of a book been so revealing, both in terms of the importance of the work to its author; and the personal cost of seeing such a vast project through to its end. That Verity Burgmann resigned from her tenured academic position to finish this book is testament to her academic commitment in ensuring that this compelling and detailed work fulfilled its potential. Compiling a comprehensive overview of contemporary global labour responses to globalisation in the early twenty first century is a daunting undertaking. The core message behind the work is grittily optimistic and motivational; labour resistance to capital is not futile. Showcasing dozens of examples of organised labour challenging capital's dominion across its ten chapters, Burgmann builds a compelling case for the continued ingenuity, resourcefulness and stoicism of workers around the world.

Utilising both case study examples and theory drawn from a diverse selection of scholars working in the field of international labour relations, the aim of the work is to propose that through critiquing both using an anti-determinist Marxian lens, global workers now, more than ever, demonstrate that they have the resourcefulness to disrupt capital's hegemony over labour. Bergmann outlines across 261 pages the ways in which globalised capital has developed increasingly serpentine, and sobering, ways in which to find new sources of cheap labour, indenturing regional work forces through the complicity of national governments, augmented by the strictures of international neoliberal organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank. Working with a time frame that starts in

1990 and ends in the throes of riots and marches in response to worldwide austerity policies inaugurated by the 2008 global financial crisis, Burgmann documents the different ways in which international labour has responded to increasing levels of financial inequality, job precarity and worsening working conditions with dexterity and resolve. These include co-ordinated walk outs to disrupt just-in-time production methods across the global block-chain; collaborating with students and other civil actors to raise awareness of disparate worker conditions to brand-shame corporations and worker led creation of co-operatives and communitarian takeovers of failing businesses.

The book makes for a much needed resource for scholars and teachers looking for a comprehensive work that draws together current thinking around labour in the contemporary era. In particular Burgmann argues persuasively about the need to think widely about forms of work. She suggests that despite capital's attempts to create division through artificial reformations of class, whereby the nominal 'middle classes' are exempt from being described as labourers, her autonomist Marxian approach opines that all those who need to earn money to live are workers and so are subject to the same precarity and objectification experienced by all globalised workers, albeit to differentiated extents. This comes to a head in one of the later chapters, exploring the deliberate creation of pools of unemployed workers in order to stifle wage increase demands and calls for improved working conditions.

The case studies from workers within the global South make for particularly sombre reading. Although Burgmann's objective is to highlight the ability of workers to resist, in ways as diverse as 'wildcat' strikes through to the use of current social media platforms for sharing information to co-ordinate group action, the overall atmosphere conveyed to the reader is

one of the immutability of capital to labour's demands. As soon as labour finds methods to temper capital's dominance, capital morphs – re-siting factories; sourcing new resources; co-opting governments into ever more onerous trade deals. Despite Burgmann's heartfelt intent there appears to be little light at the end of the tunnel for most of the workers of the world.

It might be suggested that the immense work put into collating and describing the different examples of labour response around the world leaves little space for Burgmann to explore other elements of contemporary life which impact on globalised labour. This is evident in three crucial areas that receive scant analysis: the impact of crowd-sourcing in creating alternative labour economies; degrowth scholarship, particularly around Nowtopian anti-capitalist movements and imminent future challenges wrought by the Anthropocene.

The first, crowd-sourced and community funded enterprise, is concerned with value creation which troubles the labour-capital dichotomy. Labour, from a Marxian perspective, is a creative act, as long as surplus value is not lost to the labourer. Although co-operatives and community partnerships form one of the later book chapters, there is little interrogation as to how these models could be extended outside or away from tightly defined geographical spaces to become alternative models for global human exchange. Crowd funding does offer spatially dislocated examples of remote exchange between strangers based on empathy, mutual support and curiosity. It would have been interesting to see how this could have slotted into Burgmann's wider thesis.

The second lacuna within the book is its lack of engagement with degrowth scholarship. Now considered to provide radical treatise on forms of world-making in defiance of capitalism, there is a wealth of academic work, and activism, around demonstrating the viability, and the pressing need, to disengage labour from capitalist economics. Promoting prosperity without growth, degrowth attends to both the wretchedness that capitalism creates for humans subject to its logic and, using political ecology arguments, the devastating impacts on landscapes of industrialised global resource extraction. In particular the work around Nowtopianism, forms of community labour which serve to create sustainable forms of living together, exactly fits within Burgmann's purview, and is only briefly alluded to via referencing Paul Mason's work on volunteerism. It seems an oversight not to have included these perspectives in this work.

Finally, the lack of discussion around climate change and globalisation seems an obvious oversight. Although Burgmann does briefly discuss red-green social movements in her conclusion, it feels very much like an add on, whereas the issue of climate change and capital's likely response is fundamental to what happens to globalised economies in the imminent future. To conclude then, there is much to admire in this work. It provides an insightful, thought provoking read which will rightfully attract a wide audience. Rather than seeing the side stepping of the Anthropocene as a missed opportunity, maybe this will be the next work for Burgmann and her passionate entreaty for a more humane, communitarian world for global workers.

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