

Nonstandard Work, Nonstandard Workers

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REVIEW ESSAYS / NOTES CRITIQUES

Nonstandard Work, Nonstandard Workers

Eileen Boris and Francesca Degiuli

Françoise Carré, Marianne A. Ferber, Lonnie Golden, and Stephen A. Herzenberg, eds., *Nonstandard Work: The Nature and Challenges of Changing Employment Arrangements* (Urbana: Industrial Relations Research Association 2000)

Christiaan Grootaert and Harry Anthony Patrinos, eds., *The Policy Analysis of Child Labor: A Comparative Study* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999)

Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe 2002)

Jackie Krasas Rogers, *Temps: The Many Faces of the Changing Workplace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2000)

Bernard Schlemmer, ed., *The Exploited Child* (London: Zed Books 2000)

Guy Standing, *Global Labour Flexibility. Seeking Distributive Justice* (New York: St. Martin Press 1999)

THE PRECARIOUSNESS, LACK OF BENEFITS, low wages, and irregular hours of employment at the beginning of the 21st century recall the conditions of labour that marked the dawn of the 20th century. Since the mid-1970s a transition from one distinct phase of capitalism to another has disrupted the organization of labour and structures of the workplace that emerged out of the struggles of working people

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over the last 100 years. In the United States, the New Deal order has collapsed, and with it security of employment, living wages, and access to consumption. This was hardly a perfect system. Only in its waning phase did it include more than the white male workers in the core industrial sectors of the economy (and their families) whose actions in the 1930s did so much to forge its industrial relations regime. Just as the labour law extended to include white women as workers and men and women of colour, its validity came under assault. What counts as work and who counts as a worker has become an open question again as more and more jobs fall outside of the law.

If political factors, especially the union-busting Reagan Revolution, did much to undermine standard employment in the US, leading to a stagnation of the minimum wage and the erosion of collective bargaining, the emergence of its definitional opposite, nonstandard employment, remains rooted in global economic transformations. From the mid-1960s the share of corporate profit in gross domestic product began to fall sharply across the developed world. The costs of commodities rose steeply, while in all industrialized countries the level of wages climbed. Meanwhile, the international monetary system began to crumble. Since the 1973 oil crisis, the world has experienced three decades of de-industrialization, a shakeout of vulnerable competitors, and a restructuring of all sorts of financial and business institutions.¹ Workers began to lose contracting power, and, aggravated by slow economic growth, this created conditions for high unemployment. Technological advances, especially the microchip, have helped to compress time and space; such developments have allowed companies to move physical and financial capital ever more rapidly from one place to another, establishing production in previously less developed areas of the world. The new, faster nature of economic competition has transformed the organization of work under the mantra of "flexibility." A major characteristic of this new global economic order, however, is its relational unevenness. In some places in the world, child and family labour have persisted, re-constituted from the customary into the exploitative.

The books under review address this transformation in two main ways: they compare non-standard with "standard" employment and standard with "non-standard" workers, with special emphasis on children. Written mostly by social scientists, these studies usually lack historical perspective. Empirical and positivist in methodology, the collections among them reinterpret data sets, relying on government-generated statistics. Some essays do engage in more qualitative research, conducting surveys and interviews, constructing ethnographies, or partaking in participant observation, as does the monograph by Rogers. Only Hindman claims to be "history." Taken together, these books illuminate the demise and re-establishment of work regimes, which historians have long recognized as having

¹Bennett Harrison, *Lean and Mean. The Changing Landscape of Corporate Power in the Age of Flexibility* (New York 1994).

grown out of specific conditions. What economists and sociologists name "standard" employment, existed for no more than a half-century or so and then only among certain privileged — usually white male — workers. Child labour, in contrast, persists not as a relic from the past but rather as a category whose form and very meaning shift with cultural and economic context.

Non-Standard Employment

"[F]lexible, market-mediated, nontraditional, alternative, atypical, contingent, just-in-time, marginal, precarious, disposable, and secondary" (Carré *et al.*, 3) — when it comes to "non-standard" employment, the editors of *Nonstandard Work: The Nature and Challenges of Changing Employment Arrangements* contend, the standpoint of the scholar not merely shapes evaluations of the phenomenon but also the very language deployed. Researchers disagree on the extent of shifts in working conditions as well as their impact on workers, employers, institutions, and the economy. Neoclassical economists argue that the current transformations allow for a better match between the increased desire for flexibility from workers and the new requirements of firms, while trade unionists and their defenders insist that such flexibility has negative effects on workers. Rather than present definitive answers, this collection of sixteen articles on the US (commissioned by the Industrial Relations Research Association), offers a panoramic, albeit descriptive rather than explanatory, view of the problem in the US. Generalization proves elusive since there are substantial differences among various kinds of non-standard employment, which range from self-employment and independent contracting to temporary and day labour. The line between employer and employee often blurs through the decentralization of responsibilities, making the labour law with its strict definitions of the bargaining unit out of sync. From a historical perspective, we are witnessing a "feminization of the employment relationship" (Carré *et al.*, 292), as Dorothy Sue Cobble and Leah H. Vosko explain, in which conditions associated with marginalized workers constitute a new norm.

The book divides into four sections. The first offers an overview of the degree and manner in which the standard employment relation has disintegrated in terms of both variations in the labour contract as well as the demographic factors of age, race, and gender. Ann E. Polivka, Sharon R. Cohany, and Steven Hipple, for example, suggest that those with temporary jobs tend to be predominantly young, female, unmarried, African American, and either less or very highly educated — except for independent contractors, the self-employed, and some directly hired temporary workers. They most often live in central cities and other high-poverty areas; such workers are also less likely to receive benefits. Section II addresses changes in the nature of firms, workers, and labour markets that have generated these new arrangements. Marcello Estevão and Saul Lach argue that growth of the temporary help industry derives from the hiring behaviours of employers in all sectors, rather than from the increase of jobs in industries that employ more temporary

workers. While both small and large organizations make use of flexible staffing, Arne L. Kalleberg and Jeremy Reynolds show that large organizations tend to be more adept in utilizing these kinds of workers, possibly in order to avoid bureaucratization and unionization. The third section emphasizes the consequences of non-standard employment on individual careers, employment, and benefits and also on firms and their performance. Marianne A. Ferber and Jane Waldfogel find that both part-time and self-employment have negative consequences for wages and benefits in the short and long run no matter the race or gender of a worker. Aware of the threat of lower productivity among less loyal or motivated part-time workers, Shulamit Kahn discovers that companies seek to maximize flexibility and profits through a strategic use of nonstandard employees.

Authors in the final and most absorbing section present solutions to counter the negative consequences of nonstandard work. Though they advocate changes in federal or state policy, they have no illusions about the current political climate; practical responses will have to come, they seem to agree, mainly from a newly organized and responsible civil society, with trade unions leading the way. Françoise Carré and Pamela Joshi survey "bottom up" solutions developed by a wide range of organizations to address the needs of workers in temporary or short-term employment or working under a contractor. These organizations include for-profit firms, unions, public-private partnerships, and information and organizing networks. As sketched by Virginia DuRivage, the Communication Workers of America countered job restructuring in the 1990s through grassroots organizing combined with renovated forms of labour control, such as employment centers, training programs, and union alternatives to temporary staffing agencies. Chris Benner and Amy Dean present a regional response in their description of the Temporary Worker Employment Project in the Silicon Valley, initiated by the AFL-CIO Central Labor Council of San José, California.

Of particular interest to historians is the astute analysis of Cobble and Vosko of pre-New Deal occupational unionism as a model for post-New Deal employment. A century ago, crafts workers, from printers and waitresses to longshoremen and teamsters, moved among work sites and thus identified with their occupation, not company. With "benefits and union membership ... portable," their unions "offered employment or career security rather than job security." (Carré *et al.*, 295) Rather than organize individual workplaces, such occupational unions sought to expand the job supply and equip workers with skills necessary for those jobs. Thus they established hiring halls, employment bureaus, and training classes. They set workplace rules and regulated both entrance into and standards for various crafts. Bolstering their analysis through case studies of internal contracting in 19th-century factories and the specific history of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Cobble and Vosko recommend an economic realities test to determine employee status. They ask: "Why should worker autonomy and independent judgment be thought incompatible with the right to collective representation? Why

should the common law of master and servant dominate employment policy in the very era that celebrates discarding paternalism and loyalty?" (Carré *et al.*, 306) Unions should regain their capacity to act like professional organizations, Cobble and Vosko assert, with the help of workers who are once again willing to stand up for themselves.

Editors Françoise Carré, Marianne A. Ferber, Lonnie Golden, and Stephen A. Herzenberg generally have constructed a satisfying presentation of current research that also provides a stimulating look at what could be done to combat the negative consequences of these new working conditions. Workers, however, remain an abstract concept; we hear about their needs, but the voices of labouring people are missing from the analysis. Jackie Krasas Rogers, in contrast, lets the lived experience of temporary workers emerge. She offers an engaging and insightful account of workplace dynamics, such as deskilling and resistance, based in part on her own experience as a temporary employee. A comparison of clerical workers and attorneys, *Temps: The Many Faces of the Changing Workplace*, is a welcome addition to ethnographic sociology. It complicates the debate over temporary employment by considering the impact of this labour status on workers in different occupations. Through extended interviews (mostly in Los Angeles) with a racially and gender diverse group of clericals, as well as a mixed-gender set of white attorneys, it begins to unpack the dimensions of race, class, and gender too often ignored in social science scholarship on "non-standard" work.

Rogers underscores how the lived experiences of workers diverge from the promotional rhetoric of the temporary help industry. In most marketing literature, temporary help agencies sell themselves as providing individuals with entrance into the labour market and thus the ability to achieve a "dream job" through the acquisition of skills and new experiences. But employer practices of deskilling and devaluing block temporary workers from actually acquiring new skills, while those already skilled are unable to find placements that make use of their existing abilities.

Deskilling is manifested in two complementary forms. Material deskilling refers to the practice adopted by managers and, occasionally, permanent workers of reorganizing the labour process in a way that saddles temporary employees (judged as peripheral workers) with menial, low-skilled, and low-paid jobs, while freeing permanent employees (considered as core workers) to perform more skilled and better-paid ones. Yet temporary workers often carry out the same duties as permanent ones, bringing substantial skills and "human capital" that employers make use of without having adequate compensation. Ideological deskilling takes place when temps do not receive equivalent remuneration, respect, or reward, with their labour appearing less valuable.

That temporary employees still work hard on their assignments Rogers attributes to the power and control exercised over them. Each form of control — organizational, interpersonal, or discursive — closely connects to race and gender.

Rogers superbly uncovers the mechanisms of discrimination enforced through temporary work. A dual control structure, consisting of temporary agencies and the client firms that rely on them, generates a situation in which to be hired workers must demonstrate motivation, flexibility, and availability, and adhere to the "right" demographic characteristics, including appearance. The hope for a permanent position leads to self-regulation. As one "twenty-three old white man" explained, "I'd probably have the references from the people I work with to get a permanent job there." (Rogers, 37)

Mechanisms of control, however, are not all-encompassing. Temporary workers do not always cooperate and have found ways to resist. In one of the most engaging chapters, Rogers reveals the ways in which clerical temps — mostly white women and people of colour — improve the quality of their experience. Lacking identification with others on the job, they undertake not collective resistance, but individual daily acts of rule breaking and bending, deploying the "weapons of the weak" long wielded by the subaltern and powerless. They make long distance calls, design personal stationery with company paper, or otherwise use computers for their own ends. They steal documents and damage equipment. They deliberately mess up: as one confessed: "Yeah, I've hung up on people. What I do is I do it while putting them on hold or sending the call over." (Rogers, 101)

Especially important are Rogers' findings on the subjective meanings given this employment relationship. Temporary work generates stigma; labeled as "flakes," temps appear as the undeserving, responsible for their impermanency. They are made to feel guilty. If men, they suffer from a crisis of masculinity derived from the association of temping with "women's work": "men should be, like, takin' meetings and barking orders instead of just being subserveint," one explained. (Rogers, 74) Other temps felt like "non-persons," whom co-workers would refuse to invest any time in getting to know because they soon would disappear.

Temporary lawyers also undergo deskilling, but unlike clericals, they do not experience devaluing; their assignments usually are well remunerated. They report a sense of heightened control over their work, probably derived from agency recognition of their "professionalism." Not judged "flaky," they have no need to compensate. Resistance is not an issue for these workers. But lawyers also "naturalize" rather than "problematize" the idea of a temporary job as women's work. (Rogers, 158) Women law temps actually make use of the flexibility associated with such employment, but those in clerical work cannot. Here labour shortages, class standing, and a host of related factors further shape the meaning of nonstandard employment. This comparison is suggestive, but marred by the lack of ethnographic observations for the attorneys and absence of interviews with temporary lawyers of colour.

Global Flexible Labour: Seeking Distributive Justice provides a broader structural framework for explaining the increase in temporary work. It moves analysis of non-standard employment beyond the US, offering a vision of radical transforma-

tion at a time when any order other than neo-liberalism seems impossible. A senior economist with the International Labour Office in Geneva, Guy Standing seeks not merely to describe trends related to the global labour market and accompanying shifts in social policy. Rather he seeks a framework for achieving distributive justice. Drawing upon the work of Marxist theorist Karl Polanyi, Standing claims that when social stability becomes endangered by the inequalities and the insecurity promoted by the market, society responds by creating new institutions to protect itself. Now is the time, he argues, to "re-embed the economy in society through new redistributive mechanisms suited to the new forms of production and labour arrangements." (Standing, xiii)

Like the young Marx, Standing begins with the differences among work, labour, and employment, terms that hide very different meanings despite their interchangeability in media, policy circles, and academic literature. The notion of work involves creative human activity whose goal is human development, while labour is a hard, onerous, and alienating activity "done under some duress." (Standing, 4) Employment, by contrast, is a modern and class-based term used to denote the dependent status of a worker. While we should deem the right to work a basic human right, the right to labour and employment might be considered contradictory and therefore not particularly desirable. Standing claims that reformers have focused for too long on the right to labour rather than on policies that would promote the fulfilling and creative side of work.

Using data almost exclusively from developed countries, without breakdowns by race and gender, Standing analyzes the post-1945 era of statutory regulation and then the post-1970 era of market regulation. Through comparative international data on employment, wages, bargaining, income insecurity, and the progressive disappearance of social protection, he explores a growing insecurity in labour markets and employment, which undermines income and social security. Two alternative systems, welfare capitalism and state socialism, characterize the first era: in each workers experienced a certain degree of security and stability. During the second period, globalization, privatization, technological innovation, mass unemployment, and the entrance of increasing numbers of women into the labour market changed the balance of power in favour of employers. Responding to growing competitiveness, firms in general began to pursue flexibility, which caused widespread insecurity among workers. The old labourite policies of the past — like minimum wages, labour subsidies, and tax credits — he labels inappropriate for contemporary flexible markets. He particularly rejects welfare-to-work or workfare not only because of its paternalism, but also because of its coercive attempt at labour control. This policy, he contends, fails to address either the structure of contemporary labour markets or redress social inequities.

Standing concludes that the 21st century will depart from the model of the labouring man advocated in the 20th century. The new century will no longer regard labour as the center of human existence. So reformers should formulate a frame-

work for distributive justice that takes advantage of contemporary technological and economic changes. Central to this strategy should be a "right to occupation" that would allow "creativity, community, individuality and self-control that work can provide and labour cannot." (Standing, 337) This strategy also would include redistribution, income security, freedom, and the opportunity for all to pursue preferred occupations.

This is a fascinating, if not surprising, conclusion. A deep fracture exists between the first part of the book, with its rigorous, though overly dense, conceptual definitions and empirical analysis of labour markets, employment, and income security over the last five decades, and the second part, with its sketch of distributive justice. Standing's utopian strategy does not offer the reader a concrete way to gain such justice. At present, the signs leading to a global reign of justice are very feeble. Moreover, if it is unclear how advanced industrial societies could achieve distributive justice, this path is even more obscure for "developing" countries.

Non-Standard Workers: The Persistence of Child Labour

Child labour, as we have known it, certainly would fade away in Standing's new world order. *The Policy Analysis of Child Labor: A Comparative Study* represents an attempt by researchers associated with a key capitalist institution of global governance, the World Bank, to generate data for policy. Based on household survey sets for Côte d'Ivoire, Columbia, Bolivia, and the Philippines, countries chosen for their range of cultural views, it depends on this limited data to quantify the determinants of child labour. Through the variables of "household fertility behavior and risk management, labor markets, and technology," (Grootaert and Patrinos, 8) editors Christiaan Grootaert and Harry Anthony Patrinos, with their collaborators move away from reliance on the proxy variable school attendance — long seen as a reliable indicator of the extent of child labour — to focus on a wider range of factors.

This is a technical, econometric study, whose conclusions are worth considering, even if they seem obvious. It accepts the definition of child labour as "all nonschool, nonleisure activities," which includes unpaid family work. Children, it recognizes, are marked not only by chronological age but also by "social responsibility." (Grootaert and Patrinos, 2) Yet age joins gender as a key factor: older children are more likely to work, boys more in waged labour than girls because girls either substitute for their employed mothers or aid other female members of the household, including mothers, to perform domestic and family labour. Moreover, the greater the parents' education, the less likely the children's labour will be. Family ownership of a farm or household business, however, increases the likelihood of child labour. The cost of schooling is significant in some countries but not others, while rural and economically depressed areas have more child labour. Not surprisingly, the authors discover that poverty, rather than household demographics, causes child labour.

Such findings do not organically generate the gradualist approach toward the elimination of child labour advocated by the authors. Their policy recommendation instead reflects a kind of positivist realism that recognizes that "child labor exists because education systems and labor markets do not function properly, because poor households cannot insure themselves adequately against income fluctuations, and because perverse incentives exist that create a demand for child labor." (Grootaert and Patrinos, 155-56) Thus the authors call for measures to protect working children. First, to rectify the lack of enforcement capacity that undermines legislative bans, police and armed forces—not labour departments—should focus only on "the most ethically intolerable forms of child labor, such as prostitution, bonded labor, or the use of children in criminal or military activities." (Grootaert and Patrinos, 157) This appears a rather drastic and dangerous measure, given the police power in some areas of the world. Second, labour departments should regulate hours and working conditions of children. Third, measures like flexible school hours should alleviate the difficulty of combining work and education. Fourth, educational subsidies and other in-kind transfers should encourage school attendance. The authors further would target households where parents have low education and geographical regions that lack infrastructure.

Historians of child labour will recognize some of these proposals, like school scholarships, as solutions tried before. We have long realized the connection between increased child labour and home-based manufacturing and family farms. Nonetheless, in many areas of the world, home enterprise remains a major development strategy. These writers suggest that subsidies for school fees and related expenses, especially for girls, could counter reliance on child labour until greater household income kicks in to reduce dependence on children. But this proposal assumes that families value education as much as the researchers do, or that they are willing to renegotiate the gender division of labour for both mothers to work and daughters to attend school. Given the cultural dimensions of child labour, credit programs like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which the editors applaud, might not be enough. But increasing income certainly would help.

Bernard Schlemmer, editor of *The Exploited Child*, offers greater theoretical clarity, critiquing social science, no less than social policy, for seeing the child not "as an actor but always as ... the passive recipient of measures taken to protect him or her, i.e. to hold him/her 'outside' the world he/she is going to have to face on reaching adulthood." (Schlemmer, 4) The twenty papers in this collection come from a 1994 international symposium, "Exploited Children — Child Labour and Proletarianization," funded by the International Labour Organization and French Ministry of Cooperation and sponsored by French development agencies and the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences. More recent data may be available for some of these countries, but the best essays bristle with theoretical insights, and together they capture a significant moment in globalization at the end of the 20th century. While abstract, section introductions grapple with definitional issues, like

who is a child and what is labour, and offer sophisticated applications of Marxist paradigms. As Michaël Lavalette puts it: "child labour [is] a structural phenomenon of capitalist societies." (Schlemmer, 220) In these essays, theories of production intersect with those about reproduction. Influenced by feminist thought, authors defend the value of reproductive labour; they understand that the labour performed by women and children has become devalued because of the characteristics of the worker, not the skill of the work involved. Persistent patriarchy — meaning the power of actual fathers — appears to be a common factor in the sending out of children to labour under conditions harmful to their growth and maturation, as defined by various cultures.

In an insightful overview, Schlemmer explores why it is so difficult to define child labour. All children work, but the conditions of their labour vary. He characterizes exploitative labour as the confiscation of surplus value, which, in the case of children deprived of schooling or training, happens twice, in the present with underpayment and the future with low-paid jobs. There is no labour market in the ordinary sense for child workers, for extra-economic, familial, and cultural factors shape the outcome. The language of kinship and the ideology of paternalism, as much as the often domestic location of the labour, mask exploitation, generating the "illusion that he or she is guaranteed both protection for the time being and a job on reaching adulthood." (Schlemmer, 6) As minors, child labourers never earn equal pay for equal work; their wages are regarded as supplemental rather than necessary for their own reproduction. As minors, they are not "responsible subjects" and thus "have no right to express themselves and are expected to submit without a word." (Schlemmer, 7) Schlemmer passionately claims that "a genuine conceptual revolution needs to occur before people accept that the child really is a subject and not just the object of specific measures, a responsible social actor perfectly capable of exercising rights which are, or should be, the rights of every human being and, in particular, every worker." (Schlemmer, 11)

In a sweeping survey, "from the *padre-padrone* of a medieval house, workshop or farm to the *patron-père* of nineteenth-century French factories," Alessandro Stella also classifies children's labour as "domestic labour, which is to say attached to the family, the house, home economics." (Schlemmer, 33) What appeared appropriate for the child in its family of origin — provision of "bed and board" — became "normal" payment by the "surrogate family" of apprentice or servant. (Schlemmer, 34) Dependent status and subordinate labour reinforced each other. Martin Verlet, in his study of urban Ghana, further documents "the domestication of working relations," noting "the ways in which it is used serve[s] as a mask for exploitation." (Schlemmer, 77) Additional essays evaluate current forms of apprenticeship, documenting economic and physical abuse in places as different as Togo and France.

The factory system, while worsening working conditions, also removed children from the family. But while most laws regulate industrial child labour, most

children continue to labour in fields and households outside of the law. In his overview of "The Economy and Child Labour," Claude Meillassoux considers the demographic disruptions continuing throughout the world when "domestic economy encounters the market." (Schlemmer, 43) Many of the contributors further condemn the informal sector for intensifying exploitation. Thus Chantana Banpasirichote finds Thailand's commitment to economic growth discourages investment in "the child's social security" while "business exploits their labour" (Schlemmer 144) and parents put them out to earn. Additional case studies — including the carpet industry of India, the coal mines of Colombia, and coffee plantations of Guatemala — stress the interplay between family need, available jobs, and children's labour. In a particularly well-done contribution, Elvira Taracena and Maria-Luisa Tavera critique how sensationalist press coverage enhances the stigmatization of child street-workers in Mexico City. They deploy sociological survey methods to do the work of deconstruction. Rather than abandoned and engaged in criminalized activities, "the majority of child street-workers" (they find from their survey) were hawkers who "have largely kept ties with the family." (Schlemmer, 104)

Throughout the world, law has proven inadequate. As Alain Morice explains, "one cannot apply labour laws to persons not officially allowed the right to work ... Like their procurer counterparts in the prostitution industry (child prostitution included), employers of children are masters at the art of playing on that ambiguity; since it is not recognized, exploitation cannot exist." (Schlemmer, 201) Thus he calls for bringing children into the law. Even more important are what he takes as the demands of "exploited children regardless of their situation: ... first, to be released from all servitude; second, to be paid the wages they deserve; third, to be left in peace; and finally, to top it all, respect." (Schlemmer, 206) Though he distinguishes between "juvenile labour and child exploitation," (Schlemmer, 321) Meillassoux concludes the collection by rejecting the character-building lessons of work as an inadequate rationale for cheap labour under policies of structural readjustment. Only with a shift in direction by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other arbiters of global capitalism "to reform international natural resource management so that those resources might be distributed according to need" can he conceive of "eliminating the competitive use of child labour." (Schlemmer, 327) His is a moral cry for justice in the name of the children.

Progressive era reformers also brought moral indignation to the problem of child labour in US mines, factories, streets, tenements, and fields. During a conference panel on books to be written, historian Robin D.G. Kelley once asked for a history of children as workers. Hugh D. Hindman's study is not that book. Rather than capturing the perspectives of child workers, he uncritically re-presents the descriptions of investigators for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), a combination of social workers, women activists, ministers, and "liberal" capitalists (mostly from the northern financial sector), whose institutional story Walter Trattner more

fully provided over 30 years ago.² NCLC reports do contain poignant observations of conditions in a variety of worksites, but they require deconstruction. They were, after all, arguments for state action, exposés formulated to generate outrage through presentation of facts presumed to speak for themselves that muffle the standpoint of the maker through discourses of objectivity and science.³ Though it presents a useful chronology of child labour reform, this work begs a greater engagement with current historiography and research methodologies.

But Hindman, a professor of Labour and Human Resources, has a presentist goal: he views "the past as prologue," useful to understand global child labour. Agreeing with the contributors to *The Exploited Child* that poverty and industrialization created "bad" child labour, but without their critique of capitalism or sensitivity to unequal power relations, he further argues that technological advances, availability of schooling, and the reform movement generated by industrial excess "operated to curb child labor" (Hindman, 8) in the US. Presumably such factors will do their magic around the globe as "economically undeveloped nations" repeat a similar trajectory. (Hindman, 321) This logic of industrialization thesis, however, fails to account for globalization or to interrogate the political processes and market relations by which the forms of industrial society took shape, substituting determinism for the contingencies of inter- and intra-class struggle within nations and between them. Hindman concedes that the US experience does not apply to "nondemocratic, totalitarian nations" — this takes for granted democracy in the US — or to those nations suffering from famine, war, and epidemics or from forms of bondage — the United States having ended slavery before industrial child labour became a problem. (Hindman, 342) Such dismissal of the continuing impact of slavery on the persistence of child labour is typical of his narrow interpretative framework.

In this account, parents never exploit their offspring within household production, nor do fathers dominate family wage systems. "Widows and orphans" are to be pitied and wayward fathers and husbands become "parasites" and "cowards," (Hindman, 40) houses of the poor are "no longer a home in the sense of centering the child's activities," and "boys will be boys." (Hindman, 41) We read that "America had a continent to settle and a wilderness to tame." (Hindman, 46) Such ahistorical and essentialist judgments pervade this analysis, making it difficult to absorb insights into issues like labour supply and productivity, about which Hindman appears more nuanced and knowledgeable. A human resources perspective leads him to reject the exploitation paradigm because child labour brought only marginal productivity. Indeed, he argues that some children, like messenger boys,

²Walter Trattner, *Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America* (Chicago 1970).

³For a reading of these reports in light of internal NCLC memos see, Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (New York 1994), especially 93-122.

were paid rather well for the time. Because Hindman stays too close to archival sources, he falls into dubious assumptions. Thus, he pronounces the low point of child labour in tenement homework to be the Great Depression because of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) industrial codes, which other historians document as notoriously underenforced.

An internalist reading of NCLC papers does bring rewards. Hindman charts a shift in emphasis too often ignored by historians who focus on industrial labour: by the 1930s the location of child labour already had moved away from "factories, mines, and mills" to "commercial agriculture" and those places of nonstandard labour, the streets and homes of the poor. (Hindman, 78) Still, as Hindman observes, "All of the [National Child Labor] committee's work was directed to the labor of children that might otherwise have been considered legitimate work had it not [been] done by children. Nothing about work in the sex trades was considered legitimate, and so it was treated as beyond the scope of the child labor problem." (Hindman, 228) Ultimately Hindman defines child labour as the "industrial employment of children" in order to shed "some of the moralistic baggage that encumbers work detrimental to children," a prominent definition. (Hindman 306) Industrial labour thus becomes inherently suspect because it involves production for the market whose benefits accrue outside of the family.

Definitions continue to restrict the scope of legal remedies, but also beliefs about the appropriateness of labour. By the late 20th century, child labour in the US turned into the problem of "youth employment and unemployment." (Hindman, 297) White, middle-class twelve- and thirteen-year-olds hold "freelance" jobs, such as babysitting for girls and yard work for boys, that "may be expected to foster responsibility, dependability, punctuality, and self-confidence, traits presumed to have positive effects on future endeavors whether at work or at school." (Hindman, 297) But, African Americans and others from groups defined as economically and culturally "deprived," miss such "opportunities" to learn the work ethic. (Hindman, 297) In claiming that location mitigates "the potential for harm," except among farmworkers, Hindman mis-associates freelancing with the pre-industrial household mode of production. (Hindman, 319) Though he recognizes that "parents may act in what is seen as the household's best interests even if it is not the child's best interests," this work has little analysis of power relations between the genders and generations. (Hindman, 319) What we find is the general assumption that children lack the ability to act for themselves. Their labouring, then, stood for lack of freedom, not choice.

Hindman ultimately agrees with the World Bank economists of *The Policy Analysis of Child Labor* that supply and demand factors — from fertility, household income, and educational opportunities to employer needs for a tractable workforce — will shape the future of child labour as they have its past. He puts some faith in law and legal reform as necessary, though not sufficient. "While global standards and a global movement are important, and while wealthy consum-

ers and multinational corporations can play a critical role," he concludes, "most of the heavy lifting in the struggle to abolish child labor must necessarily take place on the ground, in one country or region and then the next, in one industrial or occupational sector and then the next." (Hindman, 340) Like Meillassoux he would reform global fiscal institutions — the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the IMF — though only by adding to trade rules, labour standards, and human rights in employment, which he believes by definition would mean the ending of industrial child labour.

Struggling globally, we agree, appears most appropriate, given the interconnected nature of today's economic system, but to do so requires abandoning the language of development and civilization that pervades Hindman's plans for action. The persistence of child labour in some forms of non-standard employment and in agriculture might not be a relic of the past but a consequence of historical processes of world accumulation. While recent scholarship on non-standard work and non-standard workers teeters between the descriptive and prescriptive or utopian, as evidenced by this mixed selection of studies, globalization and the discontent it has generated continue to rewrite the script not just for scholars, but for us all.