

The Lived Realities of Precarity and Post-Industrialism

Andrew Stevens

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REVIEW ESSAY / NOTE CRITIQUE

The Lived Realities of Precarity and Post-Industrialism

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Stephanie Procyk, Wayne Lewchuk, and John Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment: Causes, Consequences and Remedies* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2017)

Arne L. Kalleberg, *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies* (London: Polity, 2018)

Tracy Newmann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016)

Jamie Woodcock, *Working the Phones: Control and Resistance in Call Centres* (London: Pluto, 2017)

THE “PRECARIAT,” WRITES Richard Seymour, is a “particular kind of *populist interpolation* which operates on a real, critical antagonism in today’s capitalism.”¹ But it is not a class, he continues. His was not the first missive of a concept popularized by Guy Standing in his 2011 book, *The Precariat*, and later *A Precariat Charter* in 2014.² The term has indeed become a placeholder for the framework of contemporary class relations and often a stand-in for *proletariat* in the advanced stages of capitalism – and, much like the multitude of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*, understood by some as a new dangerous class struggling to achieve consciousness of its importance in the

1. Richard Seymour, “We Are All Precarious: On the Concept of the ‘Precariat’ and Its Misuses,” *New Left Project*, 2 October 2012.

2. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

world economy.³ Post-industrialism, as a concept, has been similarly invoked to characterize shifts in the configuration of capitalism and class, albeit through radically divergent interpretations by conservatives and Marxists alike. The texts investigated here explore the geography of post-industrialism and precarity through the prisms of labour, employment relations, and urban development. Together they mobilize these respective conceptual models to offer critical reflections on the contemporary experiences of work and help to ground these ideas in actual social relations.

Stephanie Procyk, Wayne Lewchuk, and John Shields assemble a collection of chapters covering the breadth of precarious employment in their edited book, *Precarious Employment: Causes, Consequences and Remedies*. Based on a joint university-community initiative led by United Way Toronto and York Region and McMaster University, the book showcases findings from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project. The editors begin by unpacking the origins of precarity as a lived reality from a workplace and community dimension. For agencies associated with PEPSO, the growth of precarious employment has generated new forms of inequality, impacting both mental and physical health outcomes. As the study suggests, employment insecurity has been expanding with the erosion of the standard employment relations (SER) regime that defined much of the post-World War II era, at least for a considerable segment of the workforce. Even information technology giants like Apple have dismissed assumptions of lifelong employment, embracing precarity as a norm rather than a labour-market anomaly among an otherwise privileged workforce. But precarity is also experienced differently, as Yogendra Skakya and Stephanie Premji demonstrate in their chapter on racialized immigrant women.⁴

Through the telling of powerful vignettes, Skakya and Premji show how employment uncertainty takes the shape of material and social deprivation, exposure to physical and psychological hazards, and the challenges of acquiring affordable child care. In some of these cases live-in caregivers are treated as servants by their employers, routinely underpaid and exploited by middle-class families who depend on a foreign-worker stream. What these and other authors in the collection point out is that the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) itself is a symptom of the absence of a universal national childcare program in Canada. Theirs is an intersectional analysis of precarious work, one that highlights how this particular system of employment generates varied outcomes premised on social position and identity.

3. Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000).

4. Skakya & Premji, “No One Cares about Us’: Precarious Employment among Racialized Immigrant Women,” in Stephanie Procyk, Wayne Lewchuk & John Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment: Causes, Consequences and Remedies* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2017), 18–30.

Aaraón Díaz Mendiburo, André Lyn, Janet McLaughlin, Biljana Vasilevska, and Don Wells take this further, exploring the impacts of repeated separation among foreign workers, specifically those employed through Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP).⁵ A precarious employment regime by definition, the SAWP has for decades enabled agricultural producers to reduce labour costs by sourcing workers from the Global South. Less explored in the existing literature are the consequences of prolonged estrangement from family and home – another feature of precarity. The families of migrants are required to shoulder the social reproductive costs by such means as caring for injured workers if they are hurt abroad, along with tending to children and family members. At the same time, work in Canada's fields and greenhouses has enabled workers to improve the life chances and living conditions of their families through remittances and income streams that are unimaginable in their home countries. But in some cases, migrant workers confess, these remittances are not always enough to “escape deep poverty,” and some families continue to suffer.⁶ Most importantly, the chapter supplies a prescription for reform, with recommendations including, for instance, offering workers more control over their contracts, extending health insurance to cover family members, and creating a midseason travel fund to help migrants return home in the event of an emergency.

Precarious Employment also confronts the precarious nature of employment in the non-profit and caring sectors. This is not without a sense of irony given the mission of these organizations. John Shields, Donna Baines, and Ian Cunningham discuss the convergence of precariousness within non-profit agencies, in which both those providing and those receiving services live in worlds of employment instability, marginalization, temporariness, and vulnerability. “Given the short-term and uncertain funding upon which non-profit organizations exists,” they argue, “the entire sector rests upon a foundation of perpetual temporariness.”⁷ Government retrenchment and the privatization of social service delivery has further entrenched this model of downloading welfare state functions onto non-governmental organizations forced to adopt neoliberal efficiency-seeking management models. In a separate contribution, the same authors further this examination as they dissect the “unitarist” non-union representative structures governing social service agencies.⁸ Student interns and volunteers are increasingly used as stopgaps in

5. Díaz Mendiburo, Lyn, McLaughlin, Vasilevska & Wells, “Sacrificing the Family for the Family: Impacts of Repeated Separations on Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada,” in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 44–56.

6. Díaz Mendiburo et al., “Sacrificing the Family,” 50.

7. John Shields, Donna Baines & Ian Cunningham, “Precarious Undertakings: Serving Vulnerable Communities through Nonprofit Work,” in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 32.

8. Ian Cunningham, Donna Baines & John Shields, “Austerity, Precarity and Workers' Voice:

a typically underfunded sector, working alongside paid staff who also suffer from employment insecurity; unpaid and poorly paid labour are woven into the fabric of the business model. Students who depend on letters of reference from service agency employers suppress their criticisms of a system that rests upon an exploitative model of labour relations in the interest of preserving future employment prospects.

Diane Dyson and Nasima Akter survey the exclusion of immigrants from their trained professions in a chapter aptly titled “The Immigrant Discount.” Frequently, workers recruited to Canada because of their education and training find that their credentials are not recognized by employers and subsequently struggle to find meaningful secure employment upon arrival. As such, the authors insist, “bad bosses enjoy an immigrant discount” and come to rely on the vulnerabilities of these workers, evidenced by a “disregard for basic standards.”⁹ Philip Kelly and Conely de Leon draw similar conclusions in their analysis of caregivers.¹⁰ Indeed, the LCP supplies a migrant workforce that exists in a context of inadequate or often unaffordable elder and childcare services. What they add, however, is an element of resistance through cultural production and caregiver advocacy. The Nanny Project, a visual art project portraying the lives of Filipino caregivers, surfaced as an initiative determined to profile the largely female workforce as dynamic through portraits that “evoke intelligence, humour and in some cases a degree of yearning or wistfulness.”¹¹ Jennilee Austria, Philip Kelly, and Don Wells advance the study of precariousness in immigrant communities by looking at the largely Filipino workers that constitute the LCP population. This racial division of labour is unpacked as the authors recognize the impact of precarity upon the children and other family members of paid caregivers and how the LCP in particular has helped to shape the public consciousness about immigrants from the Philippines.

Of course, a book on precarity in Ontario could not be without reference to a protracted campaign to increase the provincial minimum wage, on which hundreds of thousands of workers depend. Writing about what began as the \$14 Now! campaign, Serene Tan draws attention to the creative strategies deployed by activists as a means of elevating the lived experiences of poverty and precarity among minimum-wage workers.¹² These interventions

Representation for Precarious Workers in Non-Unions Social Services,” in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 123–136.

9. Diane Dyson & Nasima Akter, “The Immigrant Discount: Working on the Edges of the Labour Market,” in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 147.

10. Philip Kelly & Conely de Leon, “Re-scripting Care Work: Collaborative Cultural Production and Caregiver Advocacy,” in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 91–108.

11. Jennilee Austria, Philip Kelly & Conely de Leon, “Precarious Students and Families in Halton, Ontario: Linking Citizenship, Employment and Filipino Student Success,” in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 97.

12. Serene K. Tan, “\$14 Now!: Voices of the Minimum Wage Campaign,” in Procyk, Lewchuk &

were sensitive to both geography and the community themselves. Starting in 2010, this campaign secured successive minimum-wage increases, at least until the election of Conservative premier Doug Ford in 2018. Still, there are lessons here for workers across Canada in their push to improve basic employment standards.

Sean Patterson, Jenny Carson, and Myer Siemiatycki, meanwhile, dig into the lessons from Toronto's public-sector cleaners, who face potentially hazardous materials and unsafe working conditions, and their struggle against privatization and outsourcing. The latter process accelerated under the leadership of then mayor Rob Ford, who sought to cut city expenses by reducing labour costs on the shoulders of the most vulnerable workers. Civic unions marshalled little resistance to this trend, and it was left to community advocates and councillors to pressure city administration to explore the full implications of contracting out. In response to the outsourcing proposal, one councillor said it was turning Toronto into "a segmented city of inequality."¹³ Private-sector cleaners employed by companies tending to the properties of development giant Dream staged their own campaign against poor working conditions as they demanded dignity and refused to be "treated like dirt."¹⁴

Finally, Lewchuk and Procyk summarize the findings of the book's various contributions with a focus on solutions. As they conclude, the study shows how the gradual transfer of employer responsibilities - like hiring, training, insurance, pensions, and other supports - onto individual workers "creates new burdens on workers and their families."¹⁵ Their suggestion, to be clear, is not to turn back the clock to the 1960s and the old pattern of SER. Instead, it is to break a sense of inevitability about precarity and to develop mechanisms of support and legal frameworks appropriate to the structure of contemporary employment relations in such a way as to mitigate vulnerabilities and to secure a measure of dignity in today's labour market.

Precarious Lives, Arne L. Kalleberg's exploration of job insecurity and well-being in rich democracies, adds a global perspective to the conversation. The book is an exegesis of national statistics and labour-market information surveying work arrangements and the role of social welfare institutions in both allowing for and mitigating the effects of precarious employment. Through the lens of the Varieties of Capitalism (voc) thesis, Kalleberg draws from existing scholarship to give substance to the concept of precarity, which he defines as

Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 76–90.

13. Sean Patterson, Jenny Carson & Myer Siemiatycki, "Cleaners against Precarity: Lessons from a Vulnerable Workforce," in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 114.

14. Patterson, Carson & Siemiatycki, "Cleaners against Precarity," 111.

15. Wayne Lewchuk & Stephanie Procyk, "Workers' Precarity: What to Do about It," in Procyk, Lewchuk & Shields, eds., *Precarious Employment*, 150.

“work that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure and in which employees bear the risks of work (as opposed to businesses or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements.”¹⁶ The various economies are categorized according to their status as social democratic nations (Denmark), coordinated market economies (CMES; Germany, Japan), southern Mediterranean economies (Spain), and liberal market economies (LMES; the United Kingdom, the United States) in an effort to understand precarious employment from a macroeconomic and institutional level.

For Kalleberg, Europeans began organizing around the concept of precarious work after feeling abandoned by unions and devalued by businesses, alongside the shrinking welfare system and protracted security of the safety net these institutions once offered. Here, precarious work is further characterized by poor job quality, high stress, uncertainty, and riskiness, among other features. As an ontological concept *precarity* has been constructed, Kalleberg insists, by forces like globalization, technological advancement, neoliberalization, deregulation, the growth of the service sector, and the prominence of finance capitalism, as well as the decline of the power of labour relative to capital. And much like Procyk, Lewchuk, and Shields, Kalleberg cautions against romanticizing the employment relationships that defined the golden age of capitalism, especially for women and minorities, who frequently fell outside of the scope of the SER. Ultimately, the book concludes that the generosity of social welfare systems and labour-market policies have meaningful consequences and affect the incidence and experiences of precarious work. It is the process of assembling these findings that make *Precarious Lives* of importance to Canadian readers.

Kalleberg’s method is contingent on an assessment of country differences when it comes to labour-market policies specific to transitioning out of unemployment and between jobs, as well as the rules governing the use of nonstandard employment contracts and protections available to permanent workers. Using the VOC framework, the author is able to confirm that the *prevalence* and *experiences* of precarity depend on established institutions defying fatalistic assumptions that precarious employment is an inevitable and uniform feature of modern capitalism. These outcomes, Kalleberg adds, rely on the power of workers and unions to shape political dynamics. Work is changing, and along with it the prevalence of the SER, but how economies regulate such transformations determine the effects. The deregulatory liberalization path adopted by the United Kingdom, the United States, and, to a lesser degree, Canada, displaces collective mechanisms of labour regulation and impose market processes in their place. This course was charted through calculated political decisions.

16. Arne L. Kalleberg, *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies* (London: Polity, 2018), 3.

Insecure, low-paying precarious employment is seen as a pathway out of unemployment in LMES. On the other hand, CMES have sought to make nonstandard work less precarious by extending social protections using collective bargaining and active labour-market policies to enhance the quality of such work.¹⁷ In this regard, the book is equally about the *varieties of precarity*. For these reasons some of the research summoned in the book suggests that job insecurity decreased in some European economies, like Germany, following the 2008 recession as a consequence of particular interventions and labour-market policies. These are more effective markers of understanding employment realities than unemployment rates alone, which mask job numbers with non-temporary work and open-ended contracts. Still, Germany maintains a bifurcated or dual labour-market, split between well-protected “core” workers in certain sectors like manufacturing and “peripheral” labour employed on the margins of these industries and in the growing sector section. In some respects, the former benefit at the expense of the latter.

Although the book establishes precarity as a measure of status and in relation to labour-market institutions and policies, Kalleberg’s chapter on politics references the precariat as a potentially “dangerous class, capable of being mobilized by different groups for various ends.”¹⁸ Absent of a coherent class consciousness, the expression of this danger ranges from the disenfranchised youth who helped spark the Arab Spring to the discontented Germans who lean toward the far-right Alternative for Germany in protest over Chancellor Merkel’s immigration policies. In many Asian states, the realization of an emergent precariat, the author suggests, has given way to labour-market policies aimed at maintaining order. Basic income and taxes on financial transactions are toyed with as components of a broader strategy to mitigate the potentially damaging outcomes of allowing precarity to progress unchecked. Unfortunately, the strategies of resistance are less effectively mapped out in the book than the institutional constructs that might offer a beacon of hope for precarious workers through calculated reform.

Ethnographer Jamie Woodcock drills into a particular industry as he assembles a Marxist account of post-industrial informational work in his book *Working the Phones*. Woodcock’s treatment is one of the most recent instalments in the canon of call centre literature, along with its interrogation of critical labour process theory and perspectives on informational and technologically enabled employment. But unlike most accounts, Woodcock does so as a participatory researcher who takes on a job in a London outbound facility. It is from this standpoint that he sees the lived experience of post-industrial and precarious employment. Resistance and the rejection of work are features of this model. Indeed, he follows the Marxist tradition of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and other workerist tendencies in an effort to “understand the

17. Kalleberg, *Precarious Lives*, 81.

18. Kalleberg, *Precarious Lives*, 167.

exploitation of workers from their own perspective.”¹⁹ Students of this method will appreciate Woodcock’s attentiveness to the ethics of activist research and his reminder that the “workplace is not a laboratory” and that the unwitting research participants are at the same time individual workers with livelihoods on the line.²⁰ It is through this approach that Woodcock uses workers’ inquiry to craft a “ruthless criticism of the existing order,” as per Marx’s prescription.²¹ That order is defined by complex systems of workplace control and a political economic framework that has accelerated the commodification of communication and informational processes. It is here where the notion of precarity factors into the pages of Woodcock’s book, with but one caveat: that precarity “should not be understood as an exceptional form of employment relations under capitalism.”²²

Like much of the research on call centre work, Woodcock connects classic critiques of post-industrial capitalism with political economic relations that define work today. Starting with the pervasive management gaze enabled through technology and systems of self-control, Taylorism’s lineage in call centre research and labour process design is acknowledged. From there, various iterations of these workplaces were conceived to fulfill a number of functions that mediated interactions between consumers and citizens with businesses and governments; labour processes were refined to services these complex needs. From here Woodcock investigates the obstacles facing precarious workers on a day-to-day basis and considers the kinds of tactics necessary to overcome them. This is the thrust of his text.

Chapters 2 and 3 of *Working the Phones* present a detailed reflection on the day-to-day realities of call centre employment, from the journey to work to the pressure tactics Woodcock and his peers were made to use in their efforts to land the next sale. Terminally ill persons on the other end of the line were not to be sympathized with but seen as prospective consumers of a product. But workers would routinely push back against sales targets and petulant supervisors with their own strategies aimed at relaxing disciplinary control. It was, as the analysis suggests, an attempt to thwart the totalizing grasp of a system that tries to govern everything from how workers sit at their stations to how they pitch a sale.

Kate Mulholland’s framework of “slammin’, scammin’ smokin’ an’ leavin’” – cheating, work avoidance, and resignation – is summoned as a prominent feature of Woodcock’s anatomy of resistance.²³ None of these activities, he

19. Jamie Woodcock, *Working the Phones: Control and Resistance in Call Centres* (London: Pluto, 2017), 24.

20. Woodcock, *Working the Phones*, 120.

21. Woodcock, *Working the Phones*, 164.

22. Woodcock, *Working the Phones*, 161.

23. Kate Mulholland, “Workplace Resistance in an Irish Call Centre: Slammin’, Scammin’

points out, are captured by union membership, and he reminds readers that resistance is not limited to the strike. Even subtle acts of sabotage offer a release of frustration for workers, even if they fail to undermine the process of capital accumulation. Chapter 5 pushes this theme further by examining collective forms of resistance and organizing. Tactically, everyday acts of subversion should be recognized by unions as a resource from which to draw, if only to identify means of understanding how to challenge management's authority. But this necessarily creates a dilemma for unions, which have long attempted to channel conflict away from the shop floor. For these reasons, Woodcock points to the need for anti-bureaucratic and anti-capitalist union-ate models to act as catalysts for solidarity building in these workplaces. In this regard, the research methodology is also an invitation to construct labour-organizing strategies based on shop-floor realities. If the casualization of employment is, in Pierre Bourdieu's words, part of a new mode of domination "based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation," then such strategies are required to fracture precarity's hold on the consciousness of workers.²⁴

Finally, Tracy Newmann's *Remaking the Rust Belt* grants the reader a chance to explore how post-industrialism – and with it the emergence of new forms of job insecurity – has reshaped the manufacturing cityscape in her case studies of Hamilton and Pittsburgh. Newmann charts the growth of the post-industrial imagination following the publication of Daniel Bell's seminal work in 1976.²⁵ Aligned with contemporaries like management scholar Peter Drucker, post-industrialism became an ideology fixated on "privileged white-collar jobs and middle-class residents," along with political tactics designed to remake urban space through public-private partnerships, incentives, branding, and physical redevelopment.²⁶ This was not a mere academic exercise. Bell's book had become a blueprint for what a post-industrial society would look like at the street level and was quickly embraced in urban planning circles. But Newmann's treatment is a tale of two cities, one that examines how Canadian and US counterparts followed very divergent paths when it came to building this post-industrial society.

Deindustrialization hit Hamilton and Pittsburgh in very different ways. Pittsburgh's decline happened rapidly, resulting in the collapse of steel manufacturing almost entirely. Hamilton, meanwhile, witnessed restructuring and the survival of steel, even if the number of well-paid manufacturing jobs

Smokin', an' Leavin'," *Work, Employment and Society* 18, 4 (2004): 709–724.

24. Bourdieu quoted in Woodcock, *Working the Phones*, 136.

25. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

26. Tracy Newmann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 2.

plummeted. Similarly, Hamilton's political scene was never able to muster the same coalition of mayors and local business leaders as the type of collaboration that unfolded in Pittsburgh. However, the stories overlap in the broader adherence to what scholars identify as "neoliberal urbanism" – or, a particular deployment of an urban planning model intended to remove traditional working-class jobs and communities from the existing skyline. Political reforms in both countries were accelerating this process.

The urban renewal programs that initially emerged from the New Deal south of the border, and involved intensive federal investments and spending on housing, were giving way to policies that embraced the free market and business partnerships as central city-building mechanisms. Although Canadian municipalities were slower to adopt both trends, the direction has been virtually the same. Slum-clearing provisions in Canada's *National Housing Act* had, during World War II, sought to replace blighted residences with higher-quality affordable housing. Less than two decades later, conservative policymakers and think tanks were already pushing for the erosion of a growing welfare state.

With Trudeau and Nixon at the helm of their respective countries, both leaders eyed private-sector investment as a centrepiece of urban renewal. At the municipal level, political conflict and attempts to recruit business investment surfaced in the wake of these new federal directives. Only Pittsburgh was able to muster the kind of private support needed for this scale of transformational change. In Ontario, Hamilton struggled with a layer of regional government and competition from nearby Toronto when it came to attracting lucrative corporate headquarters that might facilitate the transition to a post-industrial city. But both cities were equally disadvantaged by national policies that channelled resources to the Sunbelt and the western provinces. As steel manufacturing globalized, the new "post-industrial" jobs were of the temporary, low-skill, and low-paying variety, hardly producing the professional middle-class occupations that had been promised. Resistance to this vision mounted.

In Pittsburgh, a well-organized coalition of labour activists and community members mounted an opposition to corporate actions that sought to displace working-class people. Such a movement against gentrification and post-industrial urbanism did not materialize in Hamilton with the same ferocity. William F. Buckley was lauding the new Pittsburgh as a "symbol of ascendant conservatism" by the mid-1980s, while policymakers to the north had tried to balance social and commercial needs when it came to revitalization.²⁷ There was also an outcry in Hamilton against the municipal leadership's approach to soliciting private wealth needed for the transformation. As Stelco moved its headquarters from Hamilton to Toronto, the *Hamilton Spectator* observed that the city's mayor had acted like a "kid begging for handouts at

27. Newmann, *Remaking the Rust Belt*, 107.

Hallowe'en."²⁸ This practice was true in both cases. Public money was spent to lure businesses and industries, even if the subsequent development failed to meet any long-term public objectives. In areas targeted for urban renewal, residents contested accounts that their communities were suffering from "urban blight" and rightfully feared displacement vis-à-vis gentrification. Municipal leaders used building code violations and expropriation to appease businesses that demanded concessions in return for their continued presence in the city. Ultimately, both cities marketed post-industrialism by celebrating the disappearance of industrial smokestacks in an effort to shed their blue-collar histories. Alongside the displacement of middle-class manufacturing jobs, precarious service sector employment grew.

Precarity remains a contested concept in academic circles, but the effects of insecure employment have material consequences for workers, as the contributions here establish. Whether or not the precariat can be considered a class unique from orthodox notions of working class or proletariat will continue to be debated. What the PEPISO-inspired collection makes clear is that precarious work is both racialized and gendered and functions as a determinant of other outcomes like well-being, occupational health, poverty, and social inclusion. Evidence from Europe, Asia, and North America suggests, however, that these particular outcomes are not inevitable, as Kalleburg's survey reveals. His book also makes clear that employment trends do not support the hypothesis that precarity is growing at the pace anticipated by Standing and others, nor is it a uniform pattern across economies. Put another way, institutional mechanisms and labour-market policies can successfully regulate nonstandard employment, with measurable outcomes for economies and workers themselves. Labour organizations can, as the German and Danish models make clear, be active participants in shaping these realities. For Woodcock, this presses activist scholars to use workers' inquiry as a means of summoning strategies of resistance and change. Newmann's text adds to this dialogue by focusing on how neoliberalism and post-industrialism functioned as projects that shaped the urban spaces in which new regimes of work, and precarity specifically, have been forged. This points to all three levels of government as contested terrains through which the struggle to improve workers' lives can be fought. Together these four books provide substance to the conversation about the usefulness of precarity as a concept helping scholars understand the lived realities of labour.

28. Quoted in Newmann, *Remaking the Rust Belt*, 127.