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The Brave New World of Work by Ulrich BECK, Oxford: Polity Press, 2000, 202 pp., ISBN 0-7456-2398-0.

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Recensions

Book Reviews

The Brave New World of Work

by Ulrich BECK, Oxford: Polity Press, 2000, 202 pp., ISBN 0-7456-2398-0.

Whereas industrial relations (IR) has long been associated with labour economics in the Anglo-Saxon countries, it has been much more closely linked to the discipline of sociology in Germany. Ulrich Beck's *The Brave New World of Work* is therefore a more sociological contribution to the debate over the future of work, though one that is situated in the German tradition of positivist sociology rather than in the more familiar critical theory tradition of the Frankfurt School.

In this new book, Beck builds on his previous work on globalization, modernization and, especially, the concept of risk developed in his *World Risk Society* (1999). The concept of risk can be seen as a perfect ideological tool for what German social philosopher and major contributor to the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer (1974), has termed the "eclipse of reason," a camouflage for class conflict. In brief, Beck's concept of risk (or the "risk regime") transcends any conflict between capital and labour. Beck writes that "dancing on the edge of the volcano is the finest metaphor I know of risk" and that "risk means a creeping or galloping threat to human civilization and civil spirit, a catastrophic possibility that progress will swing round into barbarism." Hence, new lines of conflicts are drawn in relation to exposure to risk and the avoidance of it. For Beck there is no longer any class conflict. Capitalist and workers alike are all exposed to the risk

of a catastrophic possibility of barbarism. Consequently, his earlier notion of risk and his solution set the scene for his new book on the world of work.

Beck starts *The Brave New World of Work* with an accurate critique of almost everything ever written in the field of industrial relations. He argues that "investigations of late work societies here rest, strictly speaking, upon an unexpressed More-of-the-Same dogma that fails to confront alternative scenarios either empirically, theoretically, or politically." In place of this "more-of-the-same" approach, Beck develops an intelligent and well-written alternative scenario to current models of work. The English title is a faithful translation of the original German title; however, it misses the second part of that title: "Vision of a World-Citizen-Society" (*Weltbürgergesellschaft*). This is Beck's alternative scenario and the main aim of the book. In the book's introduction, Beck portrays the old theme of barbarism versus socialism. Brazil, and to some extent the U.S.A., stand for *barbarism*. A better society—originally envisioned in socialism by Marx, Engels, and Luxemburg or anarchism by Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin and seen in present day anti-globalization protests in Seattle and Geneva—is downgraded to Giddens' theme and Tony Blair's conservative application of *The Third Way*. Beck's objective is to propose an alternative vision of, firstly, "civil labour" and, ultimately, of a "Post-national Civil Society."

Beck sees the future of “the neo-liberal free-market utopia in a Brazilianization of the West with a redistribution of risks away from the state and the economy towards the individual.” In chapter 2, “The Antithesis to the Work Society,” Beck discusses three historical stages of work. Greece and Rome saw “freedom from work” while the modern work-democracy locates work at the centre. The third stage is characterized by “the possibility of freedom and politics beyond the work society.” In Chapter 3, “The Transition from the First to the Second Modernity,” Beck explains the transition from a “tamed capitalism in Europe by the post-war welfare state” under nation-states and the emergence of “an open, risk-filled modernity characterized by general insecurity.” Chapter 4, “The Future of Work and Its Scenarios,” summarizes popular future models of work currently being debated. These range from the “knowledge society” to “capitalism without work,” and from “global apartheid” to the “free-time society based on a *homo ludens* of leisure.”

In Chapter 5, “The Risk Regime,” Beck details how the work society is becoming a risk society. Here he subscribes to the widespread notion that Fordist mass production is vanishing, a premise that, in my view, is a misconception; after all, most cars, washing machines, and other industrial and consumer goods are still produced on assembly lines! In any case, the Beck’s “risk regime” defined as “a foreseeable and conceptually clear principle of blurring or fuzziness which marks the picture of work, society and politics in the second modernity—even if the social structures or the individual, social and political responses associated with it cannot yet be truly foreseen, let alone detected.” Beck concludes this chapter with a rejection of the advice that we should “just swallow the bitter neo-liberal medicine, and everything will be fine.” He moves, in Chapter 6 (“A

Thousand Worlds of Insecure Work—Europe’s Future Glimpsed in Brazil”), to an apocalyptic vision of a future society. Under “Brazilianization” four groups will emerge: (1) “the Columbus class of the global age” as the winners of globalization; (2) “precarious employment at the top of the skill ladder”; (3) “the working poor with low or unskilled jobs where freedom makes you poor”; and (4) “localized poverty of the no longer needed.”

Having rejected Brazil as a future model, Beck goes on to also reject the U.S.A. as a future model in the seventh chapter (“The Great Example? Work and Democracy in America”). In essence, the U.S.A. can’t be a model for the future of work for Europe because of divergent values. While Americans favour freedom and no government intervention, Europeans tend to value equality and government intervention. With millions of working poor and wages falling from \$11.85 to \$8.65 between 1973 and 1993, Beck rejects the U.S. model. He quotes Jeremy Rifkin’s *The End of Work* (1995): “we also have a social net, only it is four times more expensive than the German one. It is called prison.”

Having rejected all these other models, Beck’s final two chapters discuss two other “visions of the future.” In Chapter 8, he develops the idea of “civil labour” which includes civil rights. Beck emphasizes that “civil labour is not paid work but is rewarded with civil money and thereby socially recognized and valued; civil money means a quantity for getting by with that at least matches the level of income support; civil labour should, as far as possible, be freed from worries about daily bread and personal future; it is market economy: yes, but market society: no; it is state approved exit from the market.” However, “civil labour is not a nice stopgap; it is not an institutional fig-leaf for government neglect” but “serves to defuse protest potential.” Here Beck reveals his

neo-Bismarckian thinking about state support and punishment by the state. Essentially, Beck's idea is an extension of Bismarck who gave Germany's working class an extremely rudimentary welfare state but harshly outlawed trade unions at the same time, preventing the development of a social-democratic welfare state such as the one constructed by British Labour governments between 1919 and 1933. At a theoretical level, Beck is somewhat in line with Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* (1995). Foucault's idea that "you don't need to publicly behead people, you have prisons now" becomes Beck's "don't outlaw and imprison trade unionists, you have civil labour now." According to Beck, the regime of civil labour integrates trade unions and protest into the present system as "a kind of cross between Mother Teresa and Bill Gates."

In his final chapter, Beck sees three ideal types of active solidarity: family, paid employment, and transnational political economy as "community-bonding through the sharing of risks." However, he also states that "in developed modernity there is no natural community of neighbours, family or nation." Therefore, "civil labour must pull itself up out

of nothing by its own efforts." Occasionally, Beck's argument resembles Lockwood's (1964) "social" integration, a freely organized interested association among equals such as trade unions. However, Beck's main emphasis seems to be "system" integration, Lockwood's second category. According to Lockwood, system integration targets a top-down integration of social groups into the present system of domination. In Beck's idea of "civil labour," such groups are integrated in a capitalist society. In sharp contrast to German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas who sees potential for social protest among groups unaffected by system integration, Beck favours their self-administration under a state supported system called civil labour. Habermas emphasizes "Communicative Action" (1997) and protest potentials under social integration. Beck wants these groups to organize themselves into civil labour to "defuse protest potentials." Habermas sees emancipation from domination where Beck seeks self-subordination and integration into the present system nicely packaged and cleverly sold as "civil labour."

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Sociologies du travail : quarante ans après

sous la direction d'Amélie POUCHET, Paris : Éditions Elsevier, 2001, 384 p., ISBN 2-84299-275-X.

Voilà un très bon livre : les problèmes de l'évolution de la sociologie du travail y sont répertoriés et traités par ceux qui ont vécu ces évolutions, et ils en tirent les leçons. Ce livre collectif n'est pas un assemblage de communications, mais une tentative réussie de synthèse sur les problèmes du travail dans les sociétés européennes et sur les débats auxquels ils ont donné lieu, synthèse qui s'appuie sur les publications des quarante années de la revue *Sociologie du travail*.

La réponse se construit en huit parties où se mêlent les champs traditionnels avec des thèmes transversaux comme la montée des initiatives locales, le contrat, la violence, les villes, etc. Ce type d'articulation permet d'englober la plupart des débats qui ont nourri la sociologie du travail et vers lesquels elle s'est élargie.

Historiquement, on est passé de l'idée de travail total, englobant toute la société, au questionnement sur la fin du