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Book Review

Guy Standing (2009) *Work After Globalization: Building Occupational Citizenship*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. ISBN: 978-84844-1644.

REVIEWED BY *Mona Meurer, Kassel University*

Guy Standing's *Work After Globalization* praises the work of Karl Polanyi but at the same time criticizes his conclusions. Standing uses Polanyi's theory of the 'Great Transformation' to analyze the world of work in times of globalization. Globalization – or the 'second great transformation' – is marked by the end of state welfare capitalism (p. 37). As an alternative to neoliberal globalization Standing offers the vision of a world of 'work after globalization' where workers enjoy 'occupational citizenship' and this way regain control over their working life. In *Work after Globalization* Standing presents strong theoretical and empirical evidence to criticize today's world of work and to develop an alternative to 'the horror of mass recommodification' (p. 212). His alternative, 'occupational citizenship', is based on the principles of 'civic friendship and social solidarity' (p. 10), a key element of which is a basic income grant for all.

Standing's theoretical approach is based on Polanyian theory and deals with 'the commodification of all things' and its harmful impacts on society. Polanyi argued that in the course of the 'great transformation' the market became disembedded from society's control which led to its disruption by economic forces. Standing shares Polanyi's moral concern about the disruption of society by the market (p. 240). However, Standing sees certain flaws in the way Polanyi expected history to develop. Polanyi did not foresee a Second Great Transformation as in his understanding society's natural reaction to the first transformation – the countermovement against the commodification of all things – would prevent this kind of disembedding of the market from society from ever happening again. For Standing this point of view was too optimistic. He describes in chapter two the decommodification of labour as undertaken by the welfare state and the ILO as 'ficticious decommmodification', because in reality labour remains a commodity and the market remains disembedded from control by society. According to Standing a new countermovement in the Polanyian sense is necessary in order to re-embed the market in society and establish occupational citizenship – control over the world of work by the working people.

Applying Polanyi, Standing analyzes in chapters three to eight in a detailed and compelling way how the second Great Tansformation – neoliberal globalization – has allowed a disembedded market to disrupt society. His methodology is rooted in the English empirical tradition: Standing offers us a detailed and well-founded analysis of the current world of work based on an intensive up to date literature review. Standing argues for a basic income grant as a way to decommodify labour because for him decommodification is connected to agency, to taking control over one's own work (p. 35).

According to Standing the welfare state was based on a class alliance between the working class and the capitalist class (p. 98). The time of this welfare state regime is over mainly due to

changes in the class structure, what Standing describes in chapter four as social and economic stratification. A shrinking core working class (the 'Proletariat') remains as the ever-weaker backbone of the welfare state while ever more workers become dependent on welfare benefits as their work relations become insecure or cease to exist. Those are precarious workers (the 'Precariat'), those constantly without a job (the 'Unemployed') and the most heavily excluded Lumpenproletariat (the 'Detached'). The wealthier classes are increasingly opting out of the welfare state and in this way eroding its economic basis. These classes are the top-earners (the 'Global Elite'), the high-income earners in stable employment (the 'Salariat'), and the well-earning but constantly stressed independent contractors or consultants (the 'Proficians'). A re-emergence of the class alliance as it has existed in times of the welfare state is not probable which is why today, just as it was in Polanyian times – fascism is a constant danger to society (p. 239). Standing strongly agrees with Polanyi who concluded in 'The Great Tranformation' (1944) that societies tend to extreme means to protect themselves against the disembedded market if the disruption becomes too severe.

In chapters nine and ten Standing provides an imaginative vision of a global economy that is reembedded in society. His solution for the problem of the disembedded market consists of two main elements: reversing the opting-out of well-earning classes through redistribution and increasing the core working class in regular employment relations. The first goal is to be met mainly by means of taxation. The second goal should be achieved through empowerment of workers (for example with a basic income grant) and through their increased organization (for example through occupational guilds or international trade unions). Workers would thus enjoy 'occupational citizenship' rather than pure 'corporate citizenship'.

However, the anchor concept of his argument – occupational citizenship – is nowhere defined in a condensed, precise way. It consists of many aspects, some of which are solidarity, identity and self-determination. These and other elements are mentioned on various pages throughout the book, but the concept remains vague and ill-defined which makes it rather hard to handle for the reader.

Standing's book offers us a utopia, a vision of an alternative society in which economic and social justice is realized, based on the values of occupational citizenship. Building a strategy to reach this society is the next step. What is missing in Standing's analyses is how to construct a countermovement in order to realize his inspiring vision. He talks about the need for a countermovement to neoliberal globalization but not about ways to build such a movement. In their 2008 analysis of 'labour in the age of insecurity', Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout explain the preconditions necessary to build an effective countermovement to the disruption of society by the disembedded market as the following: first, 'the existence of a convincing critique of the existing social structure', secondly 'the existence of a feasible alternative' and finally 'a realistic map of how to attain this alternative' (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout 2008: 21). Standing does mention that 'each transformation is resolved through the struggle over the strategic assets of an economic system' (p. 285). He gives an elaborate description of possible outcomes of this struggle, explaining which kinds of redistributions he would prefer. However, the struggle itself, the conflict already going on between the global capitalist class and the so-called Global Justice and Solidarity Movement (GJSM) is not even mentioned.

In order to establish a strategy to realize a society of 'occupational citizenship' it is crucial to identify key actors of a countermovement against neoliberal globalization – but exactly these actors are hard to find in Standing's work. Unlike Polanyi, Standing is not class-blind ('The Great Transformation' does not mention classes at all). He names as the key agent of the

countermovement the 'precariat' – the working class. But this is a rather vague and fluent category of little practical use. The key question remains unanswered: who should represent the working class? Standing does not identify the real agents that can or should realize 'occupation in full freedom' (p. 241). He harshly criticizes the original agent of the countermovement against the unregulated market: the ILO. Here, Standing repeats his basic critic on the ILO being an 'agent of (neoliberal) globalization' that tries to use the little maneuvering space the global flexibilization of labour has left to protect workers instead of challenging the neoliberal framework itself (Standing 2008: 364). But what organization could replace the ILO - international trade unions, NGOs, maybe a new international socialist party? Standing either has no answer to this question or does not share his opinion with the reader. While Standing overcomes Polanyi's class-blindness, he still lacks a theory of power. He does not identify possible sources of power for the proletariat. Neither does he deal with the powerful interests of the opposing class, the capitalists, and how to deal with them.

For Guy Standing's vision to come to fruition it certainly needs more than an intellectual war of position – intellectuals are also needed to build global strategies to inform and unite working people. The global war of movements is already going on worldwide. Intellectual guidance is needed to support the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement. Apart from theoretical analysis, intellectuals should take a side in this real world struggle.

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