Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work
Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance

Edited by Rob Lambert, The University of Western Australia and Andrew Herod, Distinguished Research Professor of Geography and Adjunct Professor of International Affairs and of Anthropology, University of Georgia, US

Since the renaissance of market politics on a global scale, precarious work has become pervasive. Divided into two parts, the first section of this cross-disciplinary book analyses the different forms of precarious work that have arisen over the past thirty years. These transformations are captured in ethnographically orientated chapters on sweatshops; day labour; homework; unpaid contract work of Chinese construction workers; the introduction of insecure contracting in the Korean automotive industry; and the insecurity of Brazilian cane cutters. The editors and contributors then collectively explore trade union initiatives in the face of precarious work and stimulate debate on the issue.

‘The anthology’s backbone is its ethnographic perspective that allows the reader to follow the articles not only from the particular circumstances of specific workers to international webs of relationships, but also to the impact of neoliberal capitalism on the very Earth itself. This switch in perspective is necessary for ethnography to expand beyond a collection of local experiences to highlighting similar conditions upon which to build solidarity. Geographically diverse, representing research from five continents, the authors do an outstanding job of relating how precarious impacts workers in a myriad of ways that are both relatable and situated in their own contexts . . . All social scientists and students can benefit from this book, as its multidisciplinary nature calls us to remember that there is no discreet geography without economics, labor, or sociology, and vice versa.’
– Misty Luminai, International Social Science Review

‘Precarious work is on the rise in the Global South and North alike. This important volume provides interesting examples about the hardship of long working hours, poverty wages and dangerous employment conditions. And yet, workers are not only victims but also agents with possibilities of resistance. The book points to the potential of a cross-border movement of the dispossessed based on a re-imagined role of the labour movement. A must read for everyone interested in resistance to capitalist exploitation.’
– Andreas Bieler, University of Nottingham, UK

‘As the world becomes increasingly global, labor’s response must be as well. As “standard” employment declines, and workers come to see “flexibility” as a four-letter word, the future of the labor movement hinges on the ability to develop creative responses to precarious labor. Anyone interested in stimulating examples of what is happening to employment and ways to challenge precarious work needs to read Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work.’
– Dan Clawson, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, US

‘All in all, the chapters of the volume provide insightful material about how different forms of precarious work are linked to specific institutional changes in the labour market and laws governing it but also how they are linked to each other . . . Situated in the field of Global Labour Studies, the volume goes beyond one of the most central weaknesses of the discipline: its optimistic bias. By systematically including cases in which trade failed or chose not to engage in the organization of precarious workers, the contributions pave the way to a deeper understanding of the challenges within this field.’
– British Journal of Industrial Relations
‘A clear and engaging global overview of the extent and nature(s) of precarious work and the link between such precarity and neoliberalism is provided by the editors’ Introduction. … I would thoroughly recommend.’
– Journal of Industrial Relations

‘The text will appeal to scholars and students of employment and workplaces, of labour movements, and of broader trends in the restructuring of capitalist relations of production. It is also highly accessible for readers with a general interest in the contemporary politics, economics, and cultures of work. Geographers will find many resonances with contemporary debates in the discipline, not least of which are those tracing the rippled effects of the global financial crisis and the unfolding immigration crisis.’
– Svenja Keele, Geographical Research