

Defragmenting: towards a critical understanding of the new global division of labour

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a short introduction to this volume.

Conceptualising globalisation: fossil energy, global finance and the labour market

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ABSTRACT

Modern globalisation can best be described as a process of expansion and acceleration whereby production, labour and the conditions of life in all regions of the world influence each other. These effects result from the massive use of fossil energy. The imminent shortage of fossil energy ('Peak Oil') and the disastrous climate effect of the emissions of CO₂ are now major sources of public discontent with globalisation. Global finance, however, exerts a considerable pressure on production to increase growth rates and to reduce labour costs. As a result, labour is also subjected to the dynamics of the global economy with consequences for working conditions, wages, job security, skills and benefits. This is one of the reasons why the 'informal economy' is growing. An exit exists: from a fossil energy regime to the use of renewable energy and from informal and often precarious forms of labour to solidaristic and cooperative ways to organise production.

Capitalist flattening or flattening capitalism? class forces and political choices in the global knowledge economy

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ABSTRACT

The global knowledge economy is new, but its central drivers are not. Capitalist logics continue to set its trajectory. The character and strength of class forces continue to determine its development and outcomes. As industrial conditions standardise globally and as trade flows thicken, the class compacts established in core capitalisms in the immediate post-war period are everywhere under challenge, and the task for the Left is clear: to create and integrate movements capable of replacing that reactionary and capitalist logic with a progressive and socialist one.

The emergence of EMERGENCE: the challenge of designing research on the new international division of labour

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ABSTRACT

This paper anatomises a pioneering international research project on the global relocation of telemediated employment. It outlines the intellectual origins of the project in the literature on globalisation, the knowledge society, teleworking and other related bodies of work and discusses the limits of the empirical information available up to 2000, when the project was launched. It then summarises the conceptual and methodological framework developed for the project, before discussing some of its limitations, drawing lessons for future international collaborative research on the changing international division of labour.

Network economy or just a new breed of multinationals? relocation of eWork as a window to the restructuring of value chains

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ABSTRACT

The global information economy is subject to processes of profound restructuring based on new information and communication technologies. These processes follow different logics, with centralisation within international companies playing as significant a role as decentralisation or the development of networks. This paper makes use of findings from the EMERGENCE and Asian EMERGENCE case study research into telemediated work and relocation of work to shed light on the restructuring of global companies, the dynamics of boundaries between corporations and the emerging new international division of labour in the information economy.

Catching a butterfly? Mapping eWork in Europe and Australia

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the results of surveys carried out by the EMERGENCE project in 18 European countries in 2000 and Australia in 2002, this paper gives an overview of the

relocation of telemediated work in Europe and Australia, highlighting the persistence of traditional regional and national locational patterns. It concludes by reflecting on some of the implications of the new possibilities for the relocation of telemediated work for regional policy.

Navigating the seamless environment in the global supply chain: implications for Canadian regions and workers

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ABSTRACT

When work is 'boundless' and 'seamless' where and how do workers' lives intersect with the space-time continuum of place-based communities? Who and what are they accountable to? Telemediation is fragmenting work across increasingly complex, transnational networks. Workers in these networks must negotiate through a multitude of temporal, contractual and trans-cultural milieus. This paper traces the trajectory of the work experience using case studies of telemediated work relationships in various points in the global supply chain and analyses the implications of telemediated spaces for the quality of workers' lives. Drawing on an analysis of case studies conducted by the EMERGENCE Canada project, this paper argues that telemediated work represents a shift in the scale at which many aspects of daily life unfold, and that some of the assumptions upon which workers' lives are governed must be reconsidered.

Regions and firms in eWork Relocation Dynamics: Pittsburgh's call centre industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to contribute to our theoretical understanding of the relationship between regions and the location dynamics of telemediated employment through an analysis of the regional dynamics shaping the call centre industry in Pittsburgh, which has grown significantly despite the increased possibilities for offshoring. Focussing on fundamental dimensions of the call centre labour process, it suggests that there are particular features of the Pittsburgh region that are not only important components of firms' decisions to locate call centre work there but also influence their processes for doing so. These features are rooted in the industrial history, socio-demographic

dynamics and cultural factors in the region that increase the level of ‘stickiness’, or propensity of enterprises to stay in the area.

Smart City North: economic and labour force impacts of call centres in Sudbury, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

Geographers debate the value of telecommunications-mediated jobs (or ‘eWork’) for the economies of smaller, deindustrialised and rural areas. Against the backdrop of globalisation, various regions across Canada are courting knowledge-sector business development. Sudbury, a medium-sized northern Ontario city, has invested heavily in telecommunications infrastructure and touted its assets and resources to potential employers in order to help its ailing economy. Since the late 1990s, Sudbury has attracted some ten new call centres, with a combined labour force numbering about 4,000. In this article, we use Sudbury as a case study to consider the overall effects of eWork on a local labour force and a regional economy. From the combined perspectives of employers, unions, municipal planners, local economic development officials, and academic researchers, we assess the net impact of these new economy jobs.

Global forces and national institutions: call centre work in Colombia

Anita Weiss

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion about the relationship between global forces and national institutions, from a Latin American perspective. In addition to presenting some data about the diffusion of information and communications technologies in Latin America, we try to establish the relationship between some characteristics of Colombian society and the particular nature of the working conditions and employment relationships in call centres in this country, drawing on some exploratory case studies of call centres carried out in 2004, that formed part of a larger ongoing research project. It concludes that several features that are specific to the Colombian context appear to play a major role in shaping working

conditions in Colombian call centres, including the particular characteristics of the labour market, the low regulatory power of the State, low compliance with labour laws, the persistence of the armed conflict that weakens all social and labour movements and the existence of a 'culture of distrust'. This suggests that the national institutional environment exerts an important role in shaping local working conditions, even when powerful global forces are at play.

Behind the screens: telemediated work in the Canadian public sector

Norene Pupo

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ABSTRACT

Among the recent measures undertaken in Canada to adapt the public sector to the 'new economy' in order to maintain or enhance economic competitiveness on an international level has been the adoption of new technologies and e-government, affecting both labour processes and service delivery. All three levels of government – municipal, provincial, and federal – have adopted 'virtual service techniques'. This paper examines telemediated processes and new work arrangements in the public sector and raises questions regarding the impact on workers and their trade unions, working conditions, service delivery, and social citizenship.

Workers' knowledge in the 'knowledge society': voices from the South

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on first-hand interviews with call centre workers in Mumbai, participant observation and a variety of secondary sources, including email forum contributions by call centre workers, this paper takes a critical look at the concept of the 'knowledge economy' from the perspective of those who work in it. In particular, it questions the extent to which 'knowledge workers' have access to the knowledge that underlies the work that they do and points to the ways in which this knowledge is eroded as value chains are extended. It also looks at these workers' stakes in their skills and work, and concludes by pointing to a series of contradictions that are raised for Indian society by the rapid development of the knowledge economy there.

Productive restructuring and labour the auto industry in Brazil

Marcia Leite

Marcia Leite is Professor of Labour Studies at the University of Campinas in Brazil.

ABSTRACT

In the early 1980's, Brazilian industry underwent a crisis of the previous accumulation model, ushering in a period in which the country lost international competitiveness. This paper traces the changes that have taken place since then, including the further changes that have taken place since 2003. It concludes that the last four years have not differed much from the earlier pattern, even though several new industrial policies have been introduced with the aim of spurring technological innovation. The paper investigates the reasons for this, seeking to underline the limits and the potentialities of such policies, given the general global context. In order to do so, it analyses managerial strategies and innovative processes in the Brazilian manufacturing sector as a whole, with a special focus on the automotive sector, and discusses the implications of this restructuring for labour.

The nexus of informatisation and internationalisation: a new stage in the internationalisation of labour

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, it was the mainstream view that the internationalisation of labour is limited primarily to industrial manufacturing. However there are now signs that service employment, or more precisely, information work, has also become a focus of globalisation. As a result, a new phase of informatisation has arisen, characterised by the rise of the internet as a new global space of action and new opportunities for an international division of labour. For almost any activity comprising work with digitised information, global information networks have created a new, globally accessible space of production. By this means, geographical distances can be bridged in real time in many labour processes. The dynamics of this development are illustrated in this paper by the IT Industry and the rise of India to a new strategic position as a site for IT development, drawing on interviews carried out in India and Germany by the 'Export IT' project (www.export-it.de).