

BOOK REVIEWS

BUDD, JOHN W. *The Thought of Work*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca [etc.] 2011. xi, 247 pp. \$24.95. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000017

The history of work is of interest not only to historians. The author of this book, John W. Budd, is an economist who has published extensively on human resources and labour, and holds a chair in industrial relations at the University of Minnesota. Even if the object of the book “is not a historical narrative on concepts of work”, Budd’s intention is to integrate “various philosophical traditions” as well as “rich intellectual conceptions of work found across the social and behavioral sciences” (p. 4).

The fundamental idea of this book is that the concept of work has been interpreted in many different ways, each with its own justification but each, in turn, one-sided and thus somehow inadequate. Only the acknowledgment of multiple perspectives and a process of weighing them against each other do justice to the social significance and complexity of work. The author does not explicitly state to whom the book is addressed, but in numerous sections he makes it clear that he is writing not only for a general readership but also for readers who deal with concepts of work in their professional life: social scientists, government officials dealing with social policy, business and trade-union leaders, judges dealing with labour law, *et al.*

In order to bring out the multifarious meanings of work, Budd constructs ten perspectives that are in his view “key conceptualizations of work”, both in intellectual traditions as well as in recent discourses: work as a curse, as freedom, as a commodity, as occupational citizenship, as disutility, as personal fulfilment, as a social relation, as caring for others, as identity, and as service. Each of these ten conceptualizations represents a chapter of ten to twenty pages. The roots of this division are obviously in the European history of ideas, and, indeed, Budd derives support for these arguments from the familiar and regularly cited secondary literature on concepts of work in Western history. Quotations from non-Western sources strewn in occasionally open up a global perspective, though this is not developed systematically.

The historical perspective plays different roles in different chapters. In the first (work as a curse) and in the tenth (work as service), the author looks back to Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian intellectual traditions, and in the second chapter (work as freedom) to seventeenth-century British liberalism, in particular to John Locke. These sections are where the book is least convincing, and in the discussions of these topics, historians have already developed more multifaceted perspectives. In particular, the author seems not to be interested in the historical context and the social backgrounds of the various thoughts of work.

All the other chapters are dominated by labour discourses in industrializing and industrial societies up to the present day. In these chapters, Budd most effectively goes beyond previously published literature by giving extensive consideration to recent discourses in the social and behavioural sciences. Conceptualizations of work in economics, sociology, psychology, industrial relations, etc. constitute the basis of the respective chapters on work as identity, fulfilment, disutility, and so on. This is indubitably the book’s strong point. Very useful references to literature and generally accepted opinion of researchers in various fields are to be found in the text and footnotes. An introduction and a conclusion complete the book, which thereby offers a brief, compact, and well-written introduction to historical and contemporary structures of

discourses on work although, from a historian's point of view, on the basis of outmoded concepts of intellectual history.

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BREMAN, JAN. *At Work in the Informal Economy of India. A Perspective from the Bottom Up*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi [etc.] 2013. xiii, 457 pp. £32.50. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000029

Jan Breman's *At Work in the Informal Economy of India: A Perspective from the Bottom Up* is a magisterial volume which is at once an indispensable text on the concept of informality, as well as an important collection of the author's seminal contributions to the study of labor in south Asia. The book takes the form of a case study, as the evidence presented in it is mostly culled from the author's forty years of field research in the state of Gujarat. This regional ethnographic focus in no way limits the conclusions drawn in the book to the case of India alone. Indeed, Breman's theory of informality applies to global political economic processes, as we witness the increasing informalization of labor in the West, and not just in the "rest".

The book is divided into two distinct parts. The first part is intended as a textbook which covers the history of the concept of informality as well as key debates within the field – including structuralist and neoliberal perspectives on informality; the conditions of work at the bottom end of India's labor hierarchy; the increasing informalization of the state and governance; and the possibilities of resistance and collective action. The second part is a collection of ten of Breman's ground-breaking articles on informality and labor. These articles variously present: early ethnographic descriptions which challenge the conceptual division of the economy into two distinct sectors; the literature on the formal industrial sector in India; Breman's critique of Hernando de Soto's theory of property titling and prosperity in the informal economy; and a critique of informality as an endlessly expansive safety net for the poor. For Breman, unrestrained capitalism, rising inequality, and the growing informalization of labor under conditions of globalization present the danger of a new Social Darwinism, where "a huge reserve army waiting to be incorporated in the labour process becomes stigmatized as a redundant mass, an excessive burden that cannot be included, now or in future, in economy and society" (p. 142).

The breadth of Breman's theoretical engagement with informality, as well as the clarity and conciseness with which the text is written (for example, Breman dismantles the theoretical apparatus of dualism in twelve concentrated pages) make it essential reading on the topic. I assigned it to my first-year students, and on the first reading they were able to understand and critique the concept of dualism and engage in complex discussions of how informality shifted from being seen as a problem to a solution under conditions of neoliberalism. This is no mean feat. In the forty-odd years since K. Hart's coining of the concept, informality has been analyzed through a variety of theoretical perspectives, and Breman's work is one of the few which is able to present and analyze them coherently. Breman rejects reformulations of informality as a site of entrepreneurship and possibility,