

Response to reviews by Guy Standing

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I wish to thank all three reviewers for their thoughtful critiques and this journal for giving me the opportunity to respond. I will concentrate my remarks on two main points: the claims by Conley and Spencer that the book lacks empirical underpinnings, and Kalleberg's questioning of whether the precariat can be considered a 'class', which I had anticipated would be the book's most controversial aspect.

First, let me explain the book's genesis. I wanted to write an accessible book for non-specialists, with a narrative derived from several decades of empirical research and publications but unencumbered by numerous references to my past work, which would have been tedious.

This work included a series of studies and articles in the 1980s on labour market flexibility, in which I argued that flexibility was generating seven forms of labour-related insecurity, and predicted that policies introduced under the aegis of the Washington Consensus, promoted by the OECD, IMF, World Bank and neo-liberal economists, would worsen inequality and lead to workfare.

International data collected by the ILO's labour market research programme led to a book, *Global Labour Flexibility* (Macmillan, 1999), which showed how labour flexibility was spreading around the world. Among other things, this book did what Conley asserts has not been done, that is, critique limitations of 'the statistical treatment of non-standard workers and job (sic) insecurity'.

On becoming director of the ILO's Socio-Economic Security Programme, I then set out to collect data on international trends to socio-economic insecurity, leading to *Beyond the New Paternalism: Basic Security as Equality* (Verso, 2002), and construction of what is surely the largest global database on labour security. While one could criticise the data, to claim they do not exist is incorrect.

The database included macro-data from 159 countries, meso-data from firms in 20 countries, and micro-data from 20 countries, as well as secondary data from global databases. It led to many papers and a synthesis report, *Economic Security for a Better World* (ILO, 2004), which was widely reported in the media.

However, I would be the first to admit that the data we need for capturing the phenomena presented in *The Precariat* are inadequate. One reason is that national statistical offices are still stuck with labour concepts developed in the 1930s and 1940s.

To complete the genesis of *The Precariat*, by 2005 I had become convinced analysis had given too little attention (with distinguished exceptions) to the changing character of labour

regulation, particularly to the state regulation of occupations. This led to a fourth academic book, *Work after Globalization* (Elgar, 2009). That argued for an alternative to labourism, for a model of work going beyond labour.

So, the preceding books were building blocks. They prompted a desire to write an interpretative narrative. Tables were cut out of the draft, since they were making the book too long and technical. However, references to the earlier work are there and I hope Helen Conley will feel able recommend the data-strewn antecedents to her students.

Beyond that, what should be of interest to a writer is what is not picked up by reviewers, as much as what is. The issues not mentioned include the concept of social income, the precarity trap, the precariatized mind, occupational dismantling, tertiary time, the fourfold distinction between labour, work, play and leisure, the growth of work-for-labour and the panopticon state. All are central, but none struck the reviewers as worth mentioning. This is my failure. I hope students will pick them up.

Now let me return to the thorny issue of class. It is easy to be dogmatic on this. The way we conceptualise it depends partly on what we want to analyse and expose. I believe we are witnessing a global class fragmentation in which the precariat is growing, with distinct relations of production, unlike the old proletariat or 'working class', which were often vaguely defined without fuss. Conley and Spencer treat employment insecurity as synonymous with job insecurity. This is not so. The precariat is exposed to all seven forms of labour-related insecurity as defined in the book (p.10). It will come into sharper focus once we capture the truncation of occupational mobility, on which we have scattered data. Another feature is the high amount of work-for-labour. Social science moves from images to concepts to measurement. The first challenge is to escape from yesterday's paradigm. Those who start the process usually do it inadequately. Those who follow show them up.

A final point. Spencer asks if the answer is 'some form of socialism'. An answer is given in chapter 7, particularly on pages 170-71. There are realistic ways of 'ending capitalism' as we know it. The precariat will be in the vanguard demanding it.