



Globalization and Precarious Forms of Production and Employment

Challenges for Workers and Unions



Edited by

Carole Thornley • Steve Jefferys • Beatrice Appay

© Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and Beatrice Appay 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by
Edward Elgar Publishing Limited
The Lypiatts
15 Lansdown Road
Cheltenham
Glos GL50 2JA
UK

Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
William Pratt House
9 Dewey Court
Northampton
Massachusetts 01060
USA

A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010925943



ISBN 978 1 84844 593 2

Printed and bound by MPG Books Group, UK

Contributors

Beatrice Appay is a work sociologist and a leading figure in the analysis of precarization. She is Senior Researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and a member of Cerlis research centre (CNRS-Université Paris Descartes). She is Visiting Professor at the University of California and currently responsible for a four-year research programme on 'Precarisation and poverty in the USA'. She authored *La dictature du succès: le paradoxe de l'autonomie contrôlée et de la précarisation* (L'Harmattan, 2005) and is editor (with Steve Jefferys) of *Restructurations, précarisation, valeurs* (Octares, 2009).

David Bailey is Professor at Coventry University Business School and is currently Chair of the Regional Studies Association – a major international learned society. He has written extensively on globalization, economic restructuring and policy responses, the auto industry, European integration, and the Japanese economy. His latest book (with Lisa De Propris) is *Industrial and Regional Policy in an Enlarging EU* (Routledge, 2009). He has been involved in several major research projects and recently led an Economic and Social Research Council project on the economic and social impact of the MG Rover closure.

Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann is a Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) Researcher at the Paris interdisciplinary research centre in economic sociology Lise (CNRS-Conservatoire National des Arts et des Metiers). Her research explores experts and elites in a knowledge economy, service multinational firms, models of organizations and knowledge workers. She has recently edited *Politiques de l'intime: des utopies sociales d'hier aux mondes du travail d'aujourd'hui* (La Découverte, 2009) and co-edited 'A quoi servent les experts' 126, *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2009). She has taught at Wharton, University of Pennsylvania and at the HEC (Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales de Paris).

Rachid Bouchareb is a work sociologist and a post-doctoral member of the Paris Genre, Travail, Mobilités research centre (Centre de Recherches Sociologiques et Politiques de Paris, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique-Universités Paris VIII et Paris X). His research interests

include work conflict, resistance and the formation of collective opposition, and international comparisons, as well as the degradation of work and company rationalizations, with a particular focus on international chain stores and the resulting new forms of small and medium-sized firms.

Iain Campbell is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University (Melbourne). His current research examines changing working-time patterns, precarious employment, temporary migrant labour programmes, new forms of labour regulation and trade union strategies.

Patrick Chaskiel is a Professor at Toulouse 3 University and a member of the Centre d'Etude et de Recherche Travail, Organisation, Pouvoir (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique-Université Toulouse 2-Le Mirail). His research interests include trade unionism and industrial hazards, and more generally industrial risk as a sociological issue. His empirical research is focused on the chemical and nuclear industries, and on nanotechnologies, a new social challenge to the economic sphere. He has published widely in journals, including *Sociologie du Travail*.

Dan Coffey is Senior Lecturer in Economics at Leeds University Business School. His research interests span organization and operations in manufacturing industries, political economy and industrial sociology. He is the author of *The Myth of Japanese Efficiency: The World Car Industry in a Globalizing Age* (Edward Elgar, 2006), and (with Carole Thornley) of *Globalization and Varieties of Capitalism* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009), and editor (with Carole Thornley) of *Industrial and Labour Market Policy and Performance: Issues and Perspectives* (Routledge, 2003) and (with David Bailey and P.R. Tomlinson) of *Crisis or Recovery in Japan: State and Industrial Economy* (Edward Elgar, 2007).

Heather Connolly is Research Associate at the European Work and Employment Research Centre at the University of Manchester. She previously worked at the European Trade Union Institute in Brussels in the area of trade union interest representation. Her main research interests are comparative industrial relations and trade union revitalization. She is currently working on a research project on trade union responses to migration in Europe. Her forthcoming publications include a monograph to be published by Peter Lang based on her doctoral research at the University of Warwick on trade union renewal in France.

Sylvie Contrepois is Senior European Research Fellow at the Working Lives Research Institute of London Metropolitan University and a

member of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique–Paris VIII and Paris X Universities research centre (Genre, Travail, Mobilités, Centre de Recherches Sociologiques et Politiques de Paris). Her research interests are concerned with understanding the dynamics of social change in European societies. In 2003 she published *Syndicats: la nouvelle donne* (Syllepse) about the evolution of French trade unionism. She is currently co-editing two forthcoming books arising out of her recent and current work: a study of the export of the French social model to Central and Eastern Europe completed in 2009, and a comparative research project Sphere examining the impact of restructuring on social identities in six European regions.

Isabel da Costa is an economist. She is a Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) Senior Researcher and a member of the Institutions et Dynamiques Historiques de l'Economie research centre (CNRS-Ecole Normale Supérieure) in Cachan near Paris. She also teaches industrial relations at the University of Paris-X-Nanterre. Her research interests include industrial relations theories and comparative industrial relations in Europe and North America. She is author (with Volker Telljohann and Udo Rehfeldt) of *European and International Framework Agreements: Practical Experiences and Strategic Approaches* (EU, 2009) and has also published with the International Labour Organization.

Alex de Ruyter is Professor at the Business School in the University of the West of Scotland (Paisley campus). He is interested in labour flexibility, non-standard employment and the impact of globalization through foreign direct investment and labour market adjustment. He also researches public sector workforce issues and policy. He has published numerous articles in both these areas, including single and co-authored pieces in leading international journals. He is an active member of the Regional Studies Association.

Juliana Frassa is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, and has a doctoral scholarship from the National Commission of Scientific and Technological Investigations in the Centre of Labour Studies and Research. She specializes in the sociology of work and organizations. Her latest research interests include organizational culture and organizational change in state-owned companies. She has published in national and international journals and has participated in research projects about industry and territories, regional labour markets, and precarious and informal employment.

Steve Jefferys of the Working Lives Research Institute at London Metropolitan University is Professor of European Employment Studies.

He has authored books on the unionization of US car workers (1986), and (with Mick Carpenter) on the interrelationships of management, work and welfare in Western Europe (2000). His most recent monograph was *Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité at Work: Changing French Employment Relations and Management* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Currently he researches how companies and trade unions mediate workplace discrimination. In 2009 he authored a 27-country report on the Racial Equality Directive for the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency. The same year (with Sylvie Contrepois) he completed a French Ministry of Labour project researching the role of French multinational companies in exporting French social values.

Michel Lallement is Professor of Sociology at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers (CNAM) in Paris. His research affiliations are with the Lise research centre (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique-CNAM). He has published extensively on work, employment and industrial relations, and is the author of *Le travail: une sociologie contemporaine* (Gallimard, 2007), *Le travail de l'utopie: Godin et le Familistère de Guise* (Les Belles Lettres, 2009) and *Le travail sous tensions* (Sciences Humaines Press, 2010).

Nelson Lichtenstein is the MacArthur Foundation Chair in History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Director of the Center for the Study of Work, Labor, and Democracy there. He is the author of *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (Henry Holt & Company, 2009), and editor of *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) and many other books on labour and politics.

Michelle Mahdon works at The Work Foundation, London. Since joining in 2005, she has been involved in a variety of projects across the public and private sectors. She is a registered chartered psychologist, with an MSc and a PhD in Economic Psychology, and specializes in health and well-being issues in the workplace. She has been responsible for some of The Work Foundation's – and therefore the UK's – leading edge research in the field. Her recent projects include investigating the socio-economics of musculoskeletal disorders, mapping job quality of knowledge workers, following up well-being and job quality outcomes for ex-MG Rover workers and exploring the attitudes of organizations to improving job quality.

Béatrice Mésini is a Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) Researcher and a member of Telemme research group (CNRS-Université Aix-Marseille 1) at the Mediterranean House of the Human Sciences (MMSH) in Aix-en-Provence. Her research interests are multidisciplinary,

using tools and concepts from diverse fields such as geography, law and sociology, and include labour migration and mobility of capital in Mediterranean agriculture, social forums and the dynamics of resistance, the peasant movement, local and global rural alternatives, and sustainable development. Her research on circular labour mobility is part of a joint programme of the MMSH (2009–11), entitled ‘Places and territories of migration in the Mediterranean, XIXe–XXIe centuries’.

Leticia Muñiz Terra is a Researcher at the National Commission of Scientific and Technological Investigations and is working at the Institute of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences (IdICHS, Universidad Nacional de la Plata [UNLP]), in La Plata. She is a Lecturer at the UNLP. Her research interests include life course, labour paths and company restructuring. She has published several articles in national and international reviews and has taken part in research projects in the sociology of work and poverty.

Alejandro Naclerio is Lecturer at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and Universidad Nacional de Quilmes. He obtained his PhD at Paris 13-University, France. His research work is connected with the specific conditions for innovation in developing countries and with development topics.

Martine Pernod-Lemattre is Lecturer at the University of Lille and member of Clersé research center (UMR 8019, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique-Université de Lille). Her research fields include new forms of employment and working-time management, quality of work in services activities, the female labour market, gender equality policies and work–life balance. Her recent publications include a number of book chapters on these topics.

Udo Rehfeldt is a political scientist and Senior Researcher at the Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociales employment research centre based at Noisy-le-Grand (near Paris). He also teaches comparative industrial relations at the University of Paris-X-Nanterre. His research interests include European works councils, trade unions and employee representation at the national, European and global levels. He is the author (with Volker Telljohann and Isabelle da Costa) of *European and International Framework Agreements: Practical Experiences and Strategic Approaches* (EU, 2009) and of many academic articles.

François Sarfati is Lecturer in Sociology at the Paris Est University and is a member of both the Circeft and the Lise (Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers-Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique research

centres. He is interested in processes of socialization at work and emotional labour.

Jens Thoemmes is a Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) Research Director and the current Director of the Centre d'Etude et de Recherche Travail, Organisation, Pouvoir research laboratory (CNRS-Université de Toulouse Le Mirail). His research interests include the sociology of work, organizations, working time, social temporalities, collective bargaining and employment. He has published in several books and in journals including the *Sociologie du Travail*, and is author of *Towards the End of Working Time?* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2000).

Carole Thornley is Senior Lecturer in Keele Management School at the University of Keele. Her research interests include globalization, employment systems and structures, industrial organization, public policy and equalities. She is widely published in books and in leading international journals. She has worked on numerous commissioned projects, and submitted evidence to many official inquiries and reviews. She is editor (with Dan Coffey) of *Industrial and Labour Market Policy and Performance: Issues and Perspectives* (Routledge, 2003) and author (with Dan Coffey) of *Globalization and Varieties of Capitalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Contents

Notes on contributors

vii

1	Introduction: globalization and precarious forms of production and employment: challenges for workers and unions	1
	<i>Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and Beatrice Appay</i>	
2	In the age of Wal-Mart: precarious work and authoritarian management in the global supply chain	10
	<i>Nelson Lichtenstein</i>	
3	'Precarization' and flexibility in the labour process: a question of legitimacy and a major challenge for democracy	23
	<i>Beatrice Appay</i>	
4	Legitimizing precarious employment: aspects of the post-Fordism and lean production debates	40
	<i>Dan Coffey and Carole Thornley</i>	
5	Global restructuring of transnational companies: negotiations in the auto industry	62
	<i>Isabel da Costa and Udo Rehfeldt</i>	
6	Trade unions facing uncertainty in Central and Eastern Europe	77
	<i>Sylvie Contrepois and Steve Jefferys</i>	
7	Seasonal workers in Mediterranean agriculture: flexibility and insecurity in a sector under pressure	98
	<i>Béatrice Mésini</i>	
8	The rise in precarious employment and union responses in Australia	114
	<i>Iain Campbell</i>	
9	Hyper-flexibility in the IT sector: myth or reality?	133
	<i>Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann, Michel Lallement, Martine Pernod-Lemattre and François Sarfati</i>	
10	The increasing use of 'market' concepts in negotiations, and contextualizing factors	147
	<i>Jens Thoemmes</i>	

11	Trade union responses to privatization and restructuring of production in Argentina in the 1990s: similarities and differences in two state-owned companies	163
	<i>Juliana Frassa, Leticia Muñiz Terra and Alejandro Naclerio</i>	
12	Organizing and mobilizing precarious workers in France: the case of cleaners in the railways	182
	<i>Heather Connolly</i>	
13	Growing power asymmetries, individualization and the continuing relevance of collective responses	199
	<i>Rachid Bouchareb</i>	
14	Changing lanes or stuck in the slow lane? Employment precariousness and labour market status of MG Rover workers four years after closure	214
	<i>Alex de Ruyter, David Bailey and Michelle Mahdon</i>	
15	'Politics of production', a new challenge for unionism: workers facing citizens in the French civil nuclear energy	230
	<i>Patrick Chaskiel</i>	
	<i>Index</i>	245

1. Introduction: globalization and precarious forms of production and employment: challenges for workers and unions

**Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and
Beatrice Appay**

INTRODUCTION

When the collapse of one American finance house in September 2008 can set in train a process that the International Labour Organization (ILO) forecast led to 20 million people losing their jobs within a year, it is not surprising that globalization is now attracting an intense interest. Whilst economic globalization has been a tendency throughout the era of capitalist organization, the increases in its speed and spread in the last few decades,¹ aided by forms of new technology and global deregulation, have made research in this area ever more pressing. Production has nearly everywhere become a movable feast. It can be switched off and switched on, or relocated much more easily than ever in the past. With respect to production, a deepening deindustrialization process in the mature capitalist economies has seen important shifts of manufacturing and also some service activities to the newly industrializing countries (NICs), the former command economies within the Russian sphere of influence, India and China/South East Asia. Simultaneously wholesale shifts in governmental ideologies and policies have seen sweeping privatizations in both goods and services sectors, and a blurring of the public/private boundaries more generally. As a result of these processes, both production and employment are becoming systematically more *precarious*. While the main transmission mechanisms for these changes have been finance markets and transnational corporations (TNCs),² the employment effects of the increasing concentration of world economic power in a few tens of thousands of huge firms have been experienced everywhere: full-time permanent jobs that were the hallmark of industrial growth in the second half

of the twentieth century are in decline; the legal status of 'permanent' is being challenged in some countries, while everywhere the 'norm' is shifting towards 'flexible', part-time, fixed term, temporary or agency jobs. Much of this work is now increasingly carried out by migrant workers, whether fully documented or partially documented. Labour market segmentation is on the increase. The challenges for labour organizations – and for citizens and democratic concepts – produced by this increasing *precariousness* of production and employment, the process and politics of which can be defined as 'precarization', are the core issues addressed in this book.

This collection of research monographs brings together a series of international contributions. While the editors are based in the UK and France and speak both English and French, with two of them having lived and worked for a time in the USA, the book's contributors are based in North and South America, Europe and Australasia. One of the editors identified the shift towards precarization in the early 1990s.³ Chapters consider, from a number of viewpoints, the rapid changes in global production and employment systems being experienced currently in different parts of the world, as well as the implications for, and responses by, workers and their representative organizations. The chapters collectively encompass: new forms of production and working methods; the role and behaviour of TNCs; flexibility, insecurity, individualized and precarious work; individual and collective responses, including the role of trade unions; and ideological dimensions. Each chapter combines reviews of key contributions in the relevant literatures, while offering new reflections and research findings. The details of illustrative example and specific case studies employed within individual chapters draw on a full range of industries and sectors (manufacture [auto industry], services, agriculture, state and private).

The book does not lay claim to providing either a 'textbook' or 'exhaustive' coverage of countries or of themes. Its main contribution is in providing a reader with cross-disciplinary, up-to-date, specialist and innovative approaches – many of these from academics and researchers working in non-English-language environments whose work we proudly introduce to a wider international audience. While global, national or individual specificities are of interest in their own right, each contribution has been picked for its potential to cross boundaries and to offer insights and meaning for other contexts. It is hoped this volume will stimulate debate and further research around the concept of 'precariousness' – and worker responses – within a burgeoning literature on globalization that has tended to neglect these aspects.⁴

THEMATIC PROGRESSION

The progression of the book as a whole, from macro (studies adopting a global perspective) through meso (studies looking at national elements and institutions impacted by the global) to micro (the micro-sociology of individuals, organizations and institutions), coincides to a degree with a passage through the above themes. But this structure is not intended to limit: some issues – most obviously, ideological dimensions of changes in production and employment – run through the whole, and at each stage individual contributions pay attention to cross-connections. In many respects, this corresponds to the intuitive: ‘precariousness’ may be something which is induced by global events and national actors but which may be experienced by individuals as an isolating and frightening life event. Equally, any resultant collective intervention may occur at any of these levels, and it is frequently the interaction between levels and actors which is in itself a focal point of interest for our contributors.

The book commences with a chapter by Nelson Lichtenstein (Chapter 2) which well illustrates the breadth and depth of our core theme, and brings home the vital nexus between the individual, the national and the global in experiences of precariousness. Lichtenstein explores precarious work and authoritarian management through a case study of the retail supremacy exhibited by the US-based Wal-Mart and its global supply chain, arguing that the nature of globalization has itself changed in the very recent past. For Lichtenstein, the retail giant’s global supply chain is anchored by largely female workers, both in the export zones of China, Central America or South Asia, and filling the sales stores: ‘In both instances, at both ends of the retail supply chain, work has become precarious: low paid, highly contingent, non-union, and with relatively few social protections.’ The conditions of work for both groups of workers and high turnover rates are graphically illustrated in this chapter, which concludes with a note on the politics which underlie such supply chains and a call for ‘humane and democratic’ reconstruction.

The theme of democracy – and the challenges for it – is addressed in Chapter 3 by Beatrice Appay in her wide-ranging exploration of ‘precarization’, the process by which production, employment and social protection are becoming more precarious. It confronts the issue of flexibility as contributing to legitimize unfavourable changes for workers. Appay traces the provenance of each conceptual tool and explores linkages with global production and employment regimes (including that of ‘lean production’) and the degradation of workers’ conditions – both ‘full-time’ and ‘casualized’. Drawing in particular from research in the USA and France, she then analyses new forms of union response and argues that these are

clearly a response to 'precarization' rather than a narrowly construed 'casualization'. For Appay, the breadth and depth offered by this former concept, which 'refers to the making of precariousness and the changing relations of power', offers to the Anglo-Saxon corpus not only a more powerful analytical tool but also a potentially important tool for mobilization and social change.

Dan Coffey and Carole Thornley in Chapter 4 further explore global concepts and practices through a reconsideration of 'production myths' (including 'lean production') and their role in ideological legitimization of production and employment regimes that are antipathetic to workers' interests. Employing case study material from the global automotive industry *inter alia*, they argue that there is little empirical support for either 'post-Fordism' or 'lean production' as these concepts are commonly used by academics, policy makers and practitioners, but that these concepts carry a powerful 'baggage' which becomes a mediating tool in the ideology of production and employment and which skews the terms of debate. Coffey and Thornley conclude that 'new' and global terminologies are ones which themselves require careful re-evaluation both for analytical reasons and to inform collective response to the increasing precariousness of production and employment.

The restructuring of TNCs in the global auto industry and collective negotiations aimed at reaching transnational agreements is then the very timely topic of Chapter 5 by Isabel da Costa and Udo Rehfeldt. After a review of the global provenance and significance of this trend to transnational agreements, the authors review the European situation, providing case study examples from Ford Europe, General Motors Europe and Daimler. They conclude that the recognition of the European and world works' councils by these three companies is in itself an achievement, as is the further negotiation of European agreements with these new institutions for worker representation: trade union strength has been a 'necessary' if not 'sufficient' condition for this, but achievements are unlikely to be replicated in other sectors where unionism is weak, and a lack of clarity in European law and the recession and associated downward spiral of concessions to protect jobs may put gains at risk.

Chapter 6 by Sylvie Contrepois and Steve Jefferys moves us towards the meso-level and also focuses on the role of multinational corporations (MNCs) and trade unions, in a study focused on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), drawing in particular on case study research in Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland. The authors explore the complex processes behind the performances of CEE10⁵ trade unions as a result of changes before, during and after EU adhesion, and the increase in precariousness in all its forms which has gone further than in the rest of Europe. Contrepois

and Jefferys conclude that the evidence fully vindicates neither the ‘Euro-optimists’ nor the ‘Euro-pessimists’: ‘The overall context is one where greater job security for some of those who are fortunate enough to secure employment in the “globalized” sectors of CEE economies is counterbalanced by a huge extension of precarious working in the rest of their economies’, but it is early days.

Béatrice Mésini explores the experiences of migrant agricultural workers in Chapter 7. This chapter serves to act as a reminder of globally displaced labour in processes of globalization: the migrant workers here come from many different parts of the world, including CEE countries. Mésini’s chapter emanates from a study with a group of trade unions and other associations offering legal support for migrant workers in Southern France, and focuses on the legal precariousness suffered by these workers, and attendant poor conditions of work and security. The author argues that such legal precariousness is ‘sometimes purposely maintained’ with policies which (following Morice, 2004 and Morice and Michalon, 2009) act to produce ‘work without workers’ as well as an ‘injunction for forced mobility’.

Insecurity of employment is also the topic in Chapter 8 for Iain Campbell, who provides a detailed exploration of the rise in precarious work and union response in Australia. Campbell distinguishes two distinct but overlapping processes: the resurgence of certain forms of non-standard employment that are characterized by substandard rights and benefits; and the spread of precariousness within sections of what has usually been regarded as the core workforce, supposedly protected by a full-time ‘permanent’ employment contract. Research from a wide range of sectors is drawn upon to explore trade union responses, and Campbell concludes that ‘None has succeeded yet in reversing or even pausing the two processes that have been identified. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect at least a few promising initiatives and a certain amount of experimental energy.’

Chapter 9, by Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann, Michel Lallement, Martine Pernod-Lemattre and François Sarfati, explores the concept – and realities – of ‘hyper-flexibility’ in the IT sector, drawing examples from their research in France. The authors argue that the specificities of flexibility of IT work can only be understood if systems and interactions between actors are analysed simultaneously: sectoral firm strategies, the dynamics of transnational markets, and national industrial relations regulation. The authors find that the sector is in fact more characterized by an increasing concentration of production than by ‘start-up’ activity, with cost-cutting and ‘offshoring’ an increasingly important concomitant of global competition accompanied by increases in spatial and temporal flexibility requirements for workers. The authors conclude that the

elastic quality of professional time and working conditions – which at a time of offshoring, many employees feel are getting harsher . . . – as well as relatively uncertain and muddy career perspectives . . . oblige us to paint a landscape which decidedly has little in common with the fascinating image drawn by the advocates of out-and-out flexibility. Even if the stability of the contract is still the rule in French IT services, the trend is towards a work intensification and harsher conditions for workers.

The ‘hyper-flexible’ worker, in the sense of a ‘master of his or her own destiny’, is seen to be a myth, and precariousness is here experienced in the form of working conditions rather than the form of employment *per se*.

Jens Thoemmes in Chapter 10 explores working-time flexibility and the increasing use of ‘market’ concepts in negotiations, through a study of company-level agreements in a region of Southern France. Thoemmes traces the shift in the regulation of working time by state, employers and trade unions from a preoccupation with the ‘health’ of workers to a preoccupation with ‘market’ flexibilities. However, in a chapter which carefully documents accommodations and changes over time, Thoemmes notes that such changes have involved ‘core’ workers rather than a shift towards a more ‘casualized’ workforce, and has also involved renegotiating important elements of employment protection. He concludes that new rules were only able to be established through the ‘organizing work’ effectively conducted by trade unions, and that this represents a form of ‘negotiated globalization’.

Juliana Frassa, Leticia Muñiz Terra and Alejandro Naclerio in Chapter 11 explore trade union responses to privatization and restructuring of production in Argentina in the 1990s through two case studies of state-owned companies: shipyards and oil. Their analysis focuses on company dynamics and environment at a time of Argentina’s economic structural transformation, and on the actors’ behaviour. For these authors, similarly to Thoemmes above, change here needs to be understood as a ‘collective creation process’ rather than as imposed by a political or economic environment. In each case, trade unions adopted different strategies to address the precariousness involved in restructuring. The authors conclude that the variables explaining the differential track records of the companies under study were the particular characteristic features of each company, the international climate of the sector, and the strategies developed by actors towards privatization policy.

Chapter 12 moves the discussion further towards the micro level. Heather Connolly draws on ethnographic research of the new French trade union SUD-Rail to analyse the ways in which some of the most vulnerable and precarious workers in the cleaning sector in France are organized and mobilized, in part through unions building on strategies

conducted in other countries such as the USA. Connolly notes that the organization and management of employment are based ‘on a quest for maximum flexibility in terms of variation in both employees’ working schedule and wages, as well as on external flexibility – by outsourcing . . . by compressing production costs to a minimum’. In a detailed and carefully argued piece, Connolly concludes that organizing strategies have been very successful, but mobilizing strategies rather less so. However, the turn towards organizing the most marginalized workers is ‘important for helping to limit the worst aspects of global capitalism’.

Rachid Bouchareb in Chapter 13 continues the exploration of the ‘continuing relevance of collective response’ in the face of growing power asymmetries and individualization through case studies involving interviews with individual workers and trade unionists in the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector in France: IT, retail and hotel/catering. Bouchareb notes that, despite diversity in the sectors, they have generally seen a rationalization trend in production which has produced new forms of both SMEs and precarious working. Employees are scattered and individualized in their work but there are a number of attempts at resistance and collective opposition: whilst employees are pushed towards more individualized forms of defence, such individualization does not take place ‘without reference to more collective frameworks available in society’.

Chapter 14 returns us to the auto industry. Alex de Ruyter, David Bailey and Michelle Mahdon offer an unusual insight into the ‘aftermath’ of global restructuring: in this case the closure of MG Rover in the UK. The authors focus on precariousness and labour market adjustment as this pertains to tenure, income and union representation, utilizing the findings of a longitudinal survey of ex-MGR workers and qualitative data obtained from interviews with ex-MGR workers and trade union representatives. The authors note that an initial labour market adjustment was relatively successful. However, ‘low pay and insecurity of tenure are now the norm for many in the workforce’, along with a ‘decline in representation security’ which raises issues about union renewal: pressing issues indeed in a context of global recession.

The book concludes with another unusual chapter, Chapter 15 by Patrick Chaskiel, which brings us full circle to Nelson Lichtenstein’s broader questioning of political, social and economic rationales and democracy. Chaskiel’s topic is the ‘politics of production’ in the French nuclear industry and the divergences between workers as producers and consumers and as ‘citizens’, with the dilemmas consequently posed for trade unions. Whilst workers here struggle with the usual work-related dilemmas, in part a consequence of economic globalization, they are also