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Work Employment Society 2013 27: 379

DOI: 10.1177/0950017013489615

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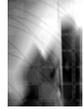
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Work, employment and society
27(3) 379–395
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0950017013489615
wes.sagepub.com


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Abstract

In this introductory article, the editors of *Work, Employment and Society* reflect on the journal's body of published work and present the main contributions of the 25-year anniversary issue. As a journal of record WES is now well established and offers extensive conceptual insights into, and empirical analysis of, contemporary trends and experiences of work, employment and unemployment. Yet academic scholarship should also aspire to comment, critique and counter; four themes are elaborated, with reference to the issue's contributions, to illustrate this: labour market change; work in the service sector; post-Fordism, disconnection and financialization; and moral economy and counter movements.

Introduction

Contemporary economic life is characterized by both continuity and change. For most in, or aspiring to join, the labour force it continues to be defined in terms of its negotiations, uncertainties and inequalities. As well as being socially necessary, paid work offers potential, in terms of personal fulfilment, identity, development and life chances and for society at large in terms of innovation, progress and well being. The question to what extent working life has changed, and with it the complex balance between work, family and private life, has animated the pages of *Work, Employment and Society* (WES) for the past quarter century. An extensive range of trends and practices related to work and employment have been carefully and empirically scrutinized and WES is now well established as a journal of *record* (Stewart, 2004). Increased attention has focused in recent years on topics such as working hours, contractual status, skills and training,

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emotional labour, union renewal, call centres, service work, labour migration and health (Rainbird and Rose, 2008). Such topics provide insights into just how working and economic life has been changing, while at the same time drawing out many aspects of commonality and continuity. But is it possible to reflect on the past 25 years and identify any overarching paradigm shift or epochal change? It is notable that none of the articles in this WES 25-year Anniversary Special issue succumb to crude generalizations or utopian visions of a 'new world of work'. Yet each, in different ways, draws out the profound economic, political and social changes that have impacted on and continue to (re)shape the policies, practices and experiences of work and society in the 21st century.

WES was launched in 1987, with an aspiration to become 'an essential source and point of reference for all those that are "working on work"' (Brown, 1987: 6). In historic terms the year can be seen as significant for at least three reasons. First, in the UK, the Thatcher-led Conservative government had been re-elected with a large majority, for a third consecutive term. Their election campaign had emphasized improving economic circumstances, even though the level of unemployment remained stubbornly high and was not significantly lower than the peak of well over 3 million people (approx 12% of the labour force) out of work. Second, the rhetoric of economic renewal chimed with the government's deregulatory agenda that in October 1986 had seen the opening of financial markets under the so-called 'Big Bang'; a move that significantly enhanced the competitive position of the City of London in global financial markets. Third, exactly one year later (on 19 October 1987, Black Monday) stock markets around the world crashed, starting in the Far East before spreading to Europe and the USA (Harvey, 2005). The single-day fall on the Dow Jones was the largest on record. These events themselves are, of course, only significant when put into wider context, namely the ideological politics of *neo-liberalism* propagated by the Thatcher government in the UK (and Reagan in the USA), the unleashed *financialization* spawned by the 'Big Bang' and wider *crisis tendencies* inherent to capitalism that can prompt such stock market collapse.

Forward 25 years and much seems the same. The global economy has still to recover from the economic crisis that hit in 2008, itself a consequence, some would argue, of neo-liberal policy and the unrestrained growth of financial markets. This has not, however, led to any deep questioning of the virtues of neo-liberalism among the political and economic elite (Harvey, 2010). The immediate future, in the UK, Europe and elsewhere appears to be an austerity-led recovery, with all its attendant consequences for work, employment and welfare. Differences do, of course, exist between national economies and there are varieties of capitalism and employment system. The changing dynamics and experiences of work continue to be shaped by different national policies and institutions. But hard fought social protections, even in the more coordinated economies, look increasingly fragile in the face of international competition and the politics of flexible labour markets.

For the past quarter century, WES has published research that has examined policy trends, institutional change and working life in an international and comparative context. A Special Issue of the journal in 2011 considered specifically the causes and consequences of the recent economic crisis (O'Reilly et al., 2011). In contrast, this 25-year Anniversary Special offers an opportunity for reflection, to consider just what has changed, the root cause of change and the contemporary dynamics of work and

employment. In introducing this issue, the article starts with a brief review of the coverage and impact of WES contributions over the years. It then introduces the substantive contributions of the Special Issue, across four key themes: labour market change; work in the service sector; post-Fordism, disconnection and financialization; and moral economy and counter movements. In conclusion, some consideration is given to the role of academic scholarship and to WES as a journal of record, comment and critical engagement.

The coverage and impact of articles in Work, Employment and Society

In their review of articles published in WES between 1997 and 2007, Rainbird and Rose (2008: 206) note that, 'It is difficult to do justice to the variety of topics, methodologies and debates covered in these articles, still less to identify clear trends.' This seems like an equally fair conclusion when surveying the 25-year back catalogue. Table 1 presents a snapshot across three decades, comparing articles published in 1987–9, 1997–9 and 2007–9, in terms of key topics, conceptual underpinning, methodological approach and internationality (both in terms of topic and authorship). Impact is considered with reference to Google Scholar citations and is presented in an Appendix. This lists the top 10 cited WES articles to date.

The key point to note in terms of coverage is its diversity and the journal's continued commitment to methodological pluralism. WES is not a journal wedded to any specific theoretical orientation or methodological approach. The key topics of interest in the early years of WES were around management strategy and employer control, skills and training, gender and women's work, the household and a contemporaneous debate around flexibility (the focus of the most highly cited WES article). These topics have proved enduring. What has proved less enduring is the conceptual point of departure. Early WES articles frequently engaged with the work of Marx and Marxist inspired concepts and debates, such as the work of Braverman and labour process theory. Conceptual points of reference have since this early period become far more eclectic. The main point of commonality historically would be research that takes orthodox economic notions, such as on skills or the household, as a focus for sociological critique, with for example reference to analyses of segmented labour markets or occupational gender segregation. During the late 1990s attention turned to debates around teamworking and quality, though such analysis was often located against wider debates around new production methods, flexible specialization and post-Fordism that had featured in early issues. More recently, there has been an increased focus on skills, training and learning, the role of trade unions typically with reference to debates around organizing, partnership and mutual gains and a growing body of research on insecurity, precarity and vulnerable workers (for example, migrant labour). The most highly cited articles of the 2000s looked at the topical issue of call centres and outsourcing. Again, no body of conceptual work has predominated, but concepts such as emotional labour, social capital, networks and human capital have come more to the fore. A review of the back catalogue also throws up many 'hidden gems' that connect well with contemporary concerns around issues such as labour market activation, youth unemployment and basic income.

Table 1. The coverage of WES articles by decade.

Period	Key topics	Conceptual/ theoretical touchstones	Methodological approach	UK/ International focus (authorship)
1987-1989 (64 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management/ employer strategy and control - Skills/ training - Women and work - Gender - Household and family - Flexibility 	Marx, Braverman and labour process theory, social class, segmented labour markets, post-Fordism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews – 34% Qualitative – 36% Quantitative – 37% (9% mva) Mixed – 3% 	UK – 70% International/ comparative – 30% (19% authorship)
1997-1999 (89 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management/ employer strategy and control - Women and work - Gender, segregation - Teams/ quality - Earnings/ Pay - Part-time, non-standard employment 	Post-Fordism, flexibility and new production methods, labour market segmentation, segregation and participation, social class, social networks, industrial relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews – 13% Qualitative – 40% Quantitative – 35% (27% mva) Mixed – 12% 	UK – 65% International/ comparative – 35% (27% authorship)
2007-2009 (117 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills, training, learning - Gender - Unions, partnership - Worker orientations, identity - Household, care, work-life balance - Insecurity, contingency 	Human capital, emotional labour (Hochschild), domestic division of labour, service work, labour markets, social capital, preference theory, IR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews – 26% Qualitative – 47% Quantitative – 21% (20% mva) Mixed – 6% 	UK – 63% International/ comparative – 37% (32%)

mva = multivariate analysis.

WES has become more international over time, both in terms of the focus of research and also authorship. Table 1 suggests that during 2007–9 approximately 40 per cent of WES articles had a primary focus that was international or comparative; with around a third of authors from outside the UK. This snapshot is likely to under-estimate the degree of internationality (see Rainbird and Rose, 2008). The methodological orientation of the journal has always been pluralistic, with neither qualitative nor quantitative research dominating, albeit with periodic ebbs and flows. Quantitative articles are, however, far more likely to utilize multivariate techniques than in the early issues and include a mix of cross-sectional, panel, novel and secondary data analysis. A notable fluctuation has been the number of review articles. In the early issues nearly a third of articles were reviews, typically theoretical articles or macro-level analyses of labour market change (and these account for the top four most cited articles of the period). By the late 1990s this proportion had declined significantly, prompting an outgoing WES editor to express concern about the contribution of WES as a journal of *comment* (Stewart, 2004). The journal's *Debates and Controversies* section was highlighted as a medium to encourage such comment and has resulted in a number of notable contributions, such as Thompson's (2003) original contribution on disconnected capitalism and more recently critical commentary on the impact of austerity on equality (Conley, 2012). The review articles in this Special Issue are testimony to the powerful contribution that theoretical engagement, historical reflection, macro analysis and polemic can add to the understanding of work and employment. Their key points of interest are now considered.

Labour market change

Economic and political change has had profound effects on the nature and dynamics of the labour market. One obvious impact is the number of people in and out of work at any particular time. While it has been suggested that, due to various adjustment measures such as short-time working, the impact of the current 'great recession' has not been as significant as anticipated (O'Reilly et al., 2011), many developed economies currently face a 'jobs crisis'. Unemployment in the euro zone was over 12 per cent at the start of 2013 and substantially higher in countries such as Greece and Spain. Levels of unemployment among young people were even higher. Following neo-liberal orthodoxy, the political elite has responded with measures designed to cut public borrowing, pay back debt, create new markets and increase labour market flexibility (Harvey, 2005). Critical observers question this logic as a means to stimulate economic demand, growth and ultimately new jobs (Appelbaum, 2011; Krugman, 2012). But, as Buchanan et al. (2013, in this issue) assert, there is also a wider question to be asked in terms of the *sustainability of employment* in developed economies; and here job quality as well as job quantity is important.

Buchanan et al. explore 'varieties of unsustainability' in what they label 'employment portfolios' in three liberal economies: Australia, the UK and California, USA. Against a backdrop of austerity and deregulation, an employment portfolio is used as an organizing frame to consider the sustainability of quality jobs in each national context. A 'lack of policy imagination' to stimulate business creation, employment and growth is seen as a major stumbling block in each economy; something that may be addressed by a more

sensitive understanding of employment portfolios. The authors argue that in different ways, the size, quality and mix of employment portfolios in each country is unsustainable. Policy responses could potentially be improved through analysis of key questions, such as: how large is the portfolio? What is the sectoral mix? And, how are jobs distributed between different groups? These factors are examined in each country with reference to the volume of jobs, the sectoral dimension and gender.

Buchanan et al. make a compelling argument that most wage and salary earners have captured only a small amount of productivity gains generated over the last 30 years – in essence, there has been a regressive distribution away from lower paid labour, with those at the top end gaining disproportionately. Real wages at the lower end of the labour market have either stagnated or declined and, while many more women are in low paid jobs than men, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of low paid men. During this period the remuneration of top executives has shamelessly increased and the multiples between the top and the lowest paid in corporations have risen from multiples of tens to multiples of hundreds.

There are also challenges raised by the changing sectoral profile of economies and the distribution of good jobs geographically within and across nations and regions. One notable finding is to expose the fallacy of private sector job creation. *Rather than the public sector crowding out the private sector, the public sector in each of the three economies has filled in for the failure of the private sector to create good jobs.* Analysis of net jobs growth in the UK between 1979 and 2010, for example, finds that 67.5 per cent of net jobs growth during this period was in the public sector.

Empirical evidence shows that each economy had unsustainable levels of good quality jobs which pose problems for future growth. While the drivers of liberalism were common in each economy, there were also notable differences in terms of reliance on a single domain of private sector activity, namely finance in the UK, mining in Australia and ICT in California. In each case public sector job growth in health, education and welfare 'filled in' the shortfall of quality jobs, but the current politics of austerity and neo-liberalism suggest this is clearly unsustainable. The data also reveal similar trends across the economies in terms of more involuntary part-time work, low paid jobs and under-employment – professionals and managers are often more likely to have their working hours extended rather than new quality jobs being created.

By providing insights into a range of issues and problems related to unsustainable employment portfolios, Buchanan et al. make a cogent case for more innovative policy solutions for economic revitalization. Such policies, they argue, need to be future focused, rather than backward looking (more of the same/structural reform); need to be concerned with employment portfolios at regional as well as national levels; and should value more highly the role of the state and public sector employment.

The contribution by Rubery and Rafferty (2013) is also concerned with recession, austerity and to some extent the public sector, notably in terms of the proportion of women in employment. They explore the extent to which women are more vulnerable to recessionary factors in general and the likely gendered impacts of contemporary recession and austerity. Drawing on emerging, indicative UK data, their analysis examines the impact of recession on women across three dimensions: the pattern of gender segregation

and its relationship to employment change; women's commitment to labour market participation; and state policy and support for women's employment.

In earlier recessions, greater vulnerability among women to cyclical volatility was, in many cases, interpreted as women taking on primarily buffer roles – acting as a flexible or contingent reserve – evidenced by women losing more jobs than their share of employment would anticipate. Using official national statistics for 2007–11 they examine whether men and women were in 'protected' or 'buffer' jobs, by calculating the proportion of job loss within sectors relative to gender representation. They find 'little evidence of women being protected within sectors'. Women lost proportionately more jobs in the business and financial services sector, the construction sector and the wholesale, retail and restaurant sector – while in the same period, in professional, scientific and technical sectors men disproportionately benefited from jobs growth. While men were net losers at the start of the recession, the evidence suggests that women have acted as a buffer in many parts of the private sector. Moreover, while the public sector did protect women's jobs and was a source of well paid, good quality jobs for women, helping to narrow the gender pay gap in the initial recessionary period, a very different path of development in both job quantity and job quality is expected to unfold as austerity policies including restructuring, redundancies and pay freezes grip.

Overall the picture painted is one pointing to the continued importance of gender segregation across sectors of the UK economy. It is the primary factor shaping outcomes, but within sectors women have borne a disproportionate share of job loss, despite women becoming more permanently attached to the labour market – illustrated through increases in involuntary part-time and temporary working; rather than women retreating from the labour market. State commitment to gender equality policy may be undermined through austerity, notably because one source of protection, the public sector, is likely to become a source of vulnerability for women in the years ahead.

Work in the service sector

Another notable feature of labour market restructuring over the last 30 years has been ongoing deindustrialization. All developed economies have seen a shift in labour market composition towards the service sector, although historical patterns, the degree of change and the wider ramifications vary. Some accounts, for example, differentiate between negative (such as in the UK) and positive (such as in Germany) deindustrialization, with the latter often supported by wider state industrial policy (Rowthorn and Wells, 1987). Sociological analysis has, however, tended to look more closely at the implications for the nature of work of the shift towards service employment and customer interaction. A large body of work has examined this shift in terms of the exercise of emotional labour (Bolton and Houlihan, 2006; Korczynski, 2003). Yet, Belanger and Edwards (2013, in this issue) argue that, while inclusion of the customer into the way front-line service sector work is theorized is important, this does not negate the significance of the employment relationship.

Contrary to post-modernist accounts, for Belanger and Edwards, service work is not all about consumption but all about work. They move away from the idea of the customer-worker-employer triangle and instead present customers as a form of interaction

with other elements of the economy, holding the employer-employee relationship stable. The idea of the triangle is a useful way of incorporating customers into accounts of front-line service work but, as Taylor and Bain (2005) have pointed out, the triangle is not equilateral. Customers are served to meet managerial goals, rather than vice versa; they have power but it is power located within a commodified set of relations. Tensions may occur in relationships with customers, but these are neither structural nor underlying as tensions with employers are. Analytically, customers need to be brought back into the wider political economy and that is what Belanger and Edwards aim to do.

The indeterminate nature of the contract for labour, the structured antagonism between employee and employer and management's need to secure both control and consent from its workforce are all long established debates and have salience here. In front-line service work relations with customers and clients are important and services only realize their use value in the broader circuit of capital. Instead of viewing service work as distinctive, Belanger and Edwards draw a line between different forms of managerial control, classifying front-line service work both by the extent of engagement workers have with customers and by the degree to which their tasks are rationalized and controlled by management. Using this classification they compared call centre workers and nurses. Both jobs involved interaction with customers but, while call centre workers did this in scripted and tightly regulated ways nurses, enjoying some professional autonomy, were vulnerable to management by both hospital managers and patients (generally via complaints).

The service sector is the major employer in both the developed and the developing world. After a long period of neglect, in which many sociologists focused on manufacturing labour, the service sector has started to attract considerable attention with much of that attention concentrated specifically on front-line service work. In most accounts the triangular relationship between customers, employees and employers has been emphasized with some moving on to discuss co-production between customers and firms. Belanger and Edwards, by relocating the customer to an important part of the labour process, but not a controlling element of work, put this in its proper perspective. Front-line service work is distinctive and the involvement of customers creates different dynamics, but these are a part of the employment relationship as currently theorized rather than a total subversion of it.

Post-Fordism, disconnection and financialization

The employment relationship is, of course, a defining feature of capitalist relations of production. This needs no rehearsal. However, the extent to which time has ushered in new regimes of capitalist accumulation continues to be widely debated. One crude form of distinction is between Fordist and post-Fordist regimes. The period following the Second World War is seen as an epoch of relatively high economic growth, based on class compromise between capital and labour, real wage growth and improved living standards. Various referred to as Fordism, Atlantic Fordism, embedded liberalism or organized capitalism (Harvey, 2005; Lash and Urry, 1987), this growth regime mitigated – in different ways in different countries – the most negative features of free markets, through a variety of social protections, such as employment legislation,

democratic institutions and collective bargaining arrangements. However, this accumulation regime started to unfold during the 1960s, initiating a major period of capitalist restructuring in the face of economic crisis during the 1970s and into the early 1980s (Harvey, 2010). A large body of work has attempted to theorize and stylize the new regime of accumulation that has emerged since then. Widely critiqued have been utopian versions of post-Fordism that elevate the significance of flexible specialization (Piore and Sabel, 1984) or a new competition of collaborative small firm networks located in industrial districts that thrive on innovative products and highly skilled labour. This has also found expression in more recent conceptions of the information or knowledge economy. The limitations of such perspectives have been widely debunked, as have the more positive readings of the Japanese production model, prompting commentators such as Thompson (2013: 472 in this issue) to assert that, 'Ultimately post-Fordism faded as a source of explanation of change because its core claims about markets, skills and employment relations turned out to be deeply flawed.'

Yet Vidal (2013, in this issue) argues that post-Fordism is best understood as an inherently dysfunctional accumulation regime: theoretically it therefore has value. However, for Vidal this necessitates a return to the earlier, Marxist inspired, French regulation school, notably the work of Aglietta (1979). This approach has been neglected in the justifiable critique of concepts such as flexible specialization. The regulation approach, integrated with other elements of Marxist political economy, offers a sound theoretical framework for understanding the relations between labour processes, employment relations, corporate forms, financialization and accumulation dynamics. Vidal nonetheless rejects a central plank of the Parisian wing of regulation theory, the mode of regulation, arguing that the coherent interrelations required across employment relations, competition, the state and money and credit, to ensure strong growth in an accumulation regime are simply not empirically viable. Instead, a distinction is made between functional and dysfunctional accumulation regimes, in which accumulation regimes are constituted by a full range of institutions relevant to supporting or hindering capital accumulation.

Vidal argues that Fordism was unique in its ability to temporarily contain inherent capitalist tendencies toward stagnation, but these have now been 'permanently unleashed' under post-Fordism. He sets out three forms of dysfunctional accumulation: a low profit rate, alongside a rise in the capital/labour ratio or a profit squeeze; under-consumption (slow growth along with a decline in the wage share); and debt-led growth (moderate growth levels and a declining wage share offset by rising/high household debt levels). These dysfunctional forms are empirically tested with reference to the USA, Germany and the UK. All three are dysfunctional. The USA has experienced moderate, debt-led growth, a declining wage share and no sustained recovery in the profit rate. The post-Fordist regime in the UK has seen stagnation since the 1970s, with no sustained recovery in the profit rate and a declining wage share for labour, indicative of under-consumption. Germany has not experienced a sustained profit-rate recovery and has experienced three decades of stagnant growth, driven by a low profit rate, in combination with overproduction. Vidal concludes that the underlying mechanisms shaping profit rates and wage shares are rooted in labour market institutions. In particular deunionization and job polarization are necessarily driven by the structural context of post-Fordist capitalism.

Thompson (2013, in this issue) too looks at paradigm breaks and elements of continuity with and discontinuity from Fordism or managerial capitalism, arguing that 'unified accounts' of capitalist development tend to be over-ambitious, seeking to link phenomena from macro-economic structures, state formations, labour markets and processes within the same explanatory framework. These frameworks, including regulation theory, tend to break down as exceptions and variations are elaborated. Particularly problematic is the functionalist nature of many frameworks, in which regimes of accumulation are 'guided' by modes of regulation, encompassing institutional structures and norms. Thompson instead argues that the dynamics of and interrelations between four institutional domains should be explicitly considered: political economy, firm governance, employment relations and the labour process. Looking at these as distinctive spheres, patterns of connection and disconnection within their different trajectories can be teased out, including, crucially, the impact of financialization.

Thompson's argument centres on a development of his disconnected capitalism thesis (Thompson, 2003): that shifts in the dynamic of accumulation have produced a new regime that can be designated as financialized capitalism. Yet, far from using 'regime' as a totalizing, all encompassing framework and theory, Thompson sees it more simply as a macro-economic regime whose source of profit is increasingly through financial channels and engineering rather than production and product markets. *It is financial developments that are driving accumulation.* Thompson looks at four areas of domain change to elaborate on the nature, drivers and effects of financialized capitalism: the nature of accumulation (the interconnections and pattern of dominance in the circuits of capital); the corporate (the modes of coordination and power relations between firms); work (technical and social divisions of labour and relations of control and coordination within the labour process); and employment (industrial relations policies that characterize national institutional structures, skill formation and wage-setting structures and institutions and employee representation/voice systems).

While there are elements of both continuity and change across these four domains, a key galvanizing theme is about how financialization interacts with accelerating and exacerbating longer term trends such as labour market insecurity, externalization and internationalization. Similar to Vidal, Thompson directs attention to the instability of this 'after'-Fordist regime, because the financial system and imperatives of financial accumulation have become detached from the internal value generating side of an enterprise. Contrary to the assertions of many, the global financial crisis has not significantly altered these trends, but it has exacerbated their consequences through recession, restructuring and the displacement of labour.

With the financial sector now larger than the productive one and in the light of the financial crisis, Walby (2013, in this issue) attempts to analyse finance from a social, rather than an economic, perspective and explores the relationship between finance and democracy. Four frameworks are elaborated. First, orthodox, which draws on Adam Smith and treats finance as a neutral medium within a self-correcting market. Money is simply an object and has no independent effect on the economy. Second, political economy, drawing on Marx, analyses finance within the development of regimes of capital accumulation. Finance is a social relationship. It constitutes one form of capital, set alongside and occasionally against industrial and commercial capitals, of which only

industrial capital can produce surplus value. The third framework is heterodox, drawing on Keynes and Minsky, which treats finance as a distinctive part of the economy; its expansion causes instability in the rest of the economy, but it could potentially be regulated by the state. However, this is not a self-regulating system but an inherently unstable one. Fourth, Polanyian, which considers the excessive marketization of money to be a consequence of the failure to regulate finance, which can be remedied by a democratic response. In this framework money, like labour and land, is a 'fictitious' commodity; commodification damages their effective maintenance.

From these analyses, Walby develops a new (complexity) framework, incorporating: finance as a social relationship; the relationship between finance and the economy, where it forms a distinctive and by no means neutral part of the economy with links to industrial capital subject to tension and change; the relationship between finance and the state, which is central to the extent to which finance destabilizes the other parts of the economy; the relationship between finance and society, mediated by democratic forces; and the nature of the social system as a whole, which is not self-regulating. These perspectives incorporate power struggles and institutionalized competition rather than efficient markets and economic rationality. They represent a clear shift away from orthodox economics. They also help to explain the success of the post-Second World War settlement in which the compromise between capital and labour included strong regulations on finance capital. It led to an unprecedented 30 years of economic growth, increasing prosperity, increasing state welfare provision, the partial transformation of the gender regime and reducing class and gender inequalities.

This is an incisive article, which illuminates a range of aspects of the current financial crisis and the existing system. It also raises a number of concerns. If the neo-liberal project is misconceived and it is not possible to rely on economically rational solutions but nor is the inevitability of societal self-protection realistic, then further social and democratic action needs to be taken to limit the powers of finance. Understanding the nature and dynamics of such action then becomes a key sociological task.

Moral economy and counter movements

The contributions by Bolton and Laaser (2013, in this issue) and Burawoy (2013, in this issue) both consider how potential social and democratic action may be framed. They do so with reference to the concepts of moral economy and counter movement and both give more detailed attention to the work of Polanyi (1944). Bolton and Laaser draw on the work of Polanyi (1944), E.P. Thompson (1971) and Sayer (2005), each of which offer different perspectives, at different levels of analysis, to construct a holistic analytic framework of moral economy. This is an important project, because while studies of work and employment are claimed to be strong in terms of a consideration of political economy, the role of human agency is often underplayed and the notion of moral economy rarely considered. Yet, a moral economy approach allows any analysis of the economic to be humanized and with it the opportunity to 'revitalize a social justice agenda where human dignity and flourishing are ends in themselves' (2013: 521).

At the heart of Polanyi's (1944) complex analysis was an eloquent and dynamic contradiction, a 'double movement', between a tension to create markets through the

disembedding of economy and society and a process of re-embedding as society responds to protect itself. This is because, as noted above, self-regulating markets, based on the fictitious commodities of land, labour and money, are destructive. Polanyi (1944) believed that the economy needed to be subservient to society and that markets needed active regulation through government intervention. Yet, as Burawoy (2003) observes, while Polanyi's analysis of the 'active society' is rich in terms of counter hegemony and how society emerges, it is weak in terms of the formation of class consciousness and how this is rooted in community and historical customs and norms. This is where E.P. Thompson's (1971) historical account of the way in which customs help to create, sustain and defend communities contributes to moral economy. For Bolton and Laaser (2013: 513) this account 'stresses the agentic capacity of people, who are bearers of historic customs and moral evaluations of their community, to oppose unfair and destructive economic practices'.

Taken together, Polanyi and E.P. Thompson highlight the way in which markets need to be legitimated and show how this is achieved through active struggle and interventions and the mediation of institutions, individuals and communities. To this description, however, Bolton and Laaser (2013) seek to layer an understanding of lay morality. Drawing on Sayer (2005), this understanding allows an appreciation of the pluralistic nature of people's reflections, experiences and decisions and a consideration of the 'moral dimensions and ongoing evaluations by people of everyday life'. The practical application of their holistic moral economy framework is illustrated with reference to a number of studies on work, highlighting how individuals and groups may flourish or be constrained within the market economy and also revealing how even in the most dehumanized and intensified of work environments people act to (re)define what is fair or unfair and struggle to cope and improve their situation, wellbeing and often their ability to do their jobs.

Bolton and Laaser (2013) do not articulate how their moral economy could be mobilized for the benefit of human dignity and flourishing, but it is suggestive of more than simply improving understanding of how workers cope with the inherent deprivations of work (Baldamus, 1961). They have a wider belief in human creativity and social justice. There are echoes here of Marx's (1954) conception of the 'two-fold nature of labour' and *ad hominem* critique; as Holloway notes, 'if we make it, we can break it' (2010: 95). Moral economy therefore ultimately relates to processes of struggle and the potential for counter movement, something that Burawoy (2013, in this issue) considers in his contribution.

In a highly reflective contribution, Burawoy re-evaluates the classic ethnographic studies that he conducted over the past 40 years, in Zambia, Chicago, Hungary and Russia and identifies six ethnographic fallacies that bedevilled his analysis. The first three fallacies are seen as 'traps' that await the ethnographer who seeks to comprehend the 'world beyond the field site' and the dangers of ignoring, reifying or homogenizing the relationship between micro processes and external forces. A further three fallacies relate to traps that result when the field site is not given a 'dynamic of its own'. This can happen when a researcher assumes that events at a field site will remain the same (i.e. they are eternal), that the present is seen as a 'point of arrival rather than a point of departure' and, finally, that a researcher's own ideals and hopes are projected onto actors (i.e.

wishful thinking). For Burawoy this is more than simply a lesson in research methodology, as ethnography is seen to have a wider social and political purpose – its own ethic, if you wish; it is important therefore to be cognizant of the fallacies to which ethnography may be prone.

Burawoy's reflection was prompted by the fact that all of the workplaces he had studied met with economic and social decline soon after. They had all fallen victim to 'third wave marketization'; yet his analysis had not anticipated this. This was not, however, due to any theoretical presuppositions but to an 'inadequate attention to theory'. In order to understand this, Burawoy also draws on Polanyi. First in terms of a *static* understanding that markets are destructive and need to be regulated, but second in terms of the more *dynamic* way in which counter movements may spontaneously arise to protect society from self-regulating markets. This suggests the possibility for new counter movements to emerge in response to the contemporary commodification of labour, land and money, with new solidarities that may bring together those 'struggling to defend the opportunity to sell their labour power', those struggling against environmental devastation and those struggling 'to defend themselves against the machinations of finance capital' (ibid, 534). In making visible and understanding the basis of such counter movements, ethnographers can play an important role in the struggle to 'save society from market fundamentalism'.

The focus on moral economy and counter movements helps to highlight the centrality of struggle. Counter movements can take many forms, may not always be progressive and have no predetermined outcomes. Moral economy is also in essence a battle of ideas. As Polanyi observed, 'we may find the path blocked by a moral obstacle' (1944: 265). Notably, in the same year as Polanyi's *Great Transformation*, Hayek (1944) published his *Road to Serfdom*, with its polar opposite (and highly moral) view on the basis of freedom. Polanyi of course recognized this and noted that, 'Planning and control are being attacked as a denial of freedom. Free enterprise and private ownership are declared to be essentials of freedom' (1944: 265). He recognized that advocates of liberal utopianism would defend their cause by asserting that genuine free markets had never been fully unleashed. His famous retort, illustrating Burawoy's static/dynamic distinction, was that 'laissez faire was planned, planning was not' (Polanyi, 1944). But advocates of market fundamentalism have nonetheless become ascendant.

The contributions in this WES Special Issue have all explored in their different ways the struggle between economy and society and the consequences this may have for work and employment. They have revealed the negative consequences of free market fundamentalism, explored the changing dynamics of capitalist accumulation and detailed how capitalism is increasingly 'disconnected', not least in terms of the increased significance of financialization. Polanyi's (1944) insights would suggest that there are limits to processes of commodification. The global financial crisis is compelling evidence enough of market crisis, but it has not resulted in any fundamental shift in neo-liberal agendas. For Harvey (2010: 10) neo-liberalism, the rhetoric of freedom aside, is fundamentally a project 'designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power'. In this light, political response to the crisis has largely sought to lay the basis for renewed capital accumulation.

But 'at times of crisis there are always options' (Harvey, 2010: 71). Problematically, one of the most significant consequences of neo-liberalism and the restructuring of capital over the past 30 years has, as Thompson (2013: 482) observes, been the fact that 'the

protective capacity of labour market institutions (as well as trade unions) is diminishing'. This all suggests that, while resistance to neo-liberal policy and its consequences may intensify in years to come, as will the formulation of new labour movement responses, counter movements based on universal and common agendas may be more challenging and may congregate around a more complex set of concerns that are as much to do with the environment or population ageing as with the world of work.

Concluding remarks

A previous *WES* editor (Stewart, 2004) noted in an outgoing editorial that the journal should have a three-fold agenda: it should be a journal of *record*, a journal of *comment* and, as such, it should be a journal of critique, *challenge* and even opposition. All *WES* articles in their own way are, of course, critical, but the point was about more than rigorous and tightly contained, empirical analysis. Stewart's concern was the generation of debate, theoretical development and an ethical engagement that exposed and challenged the basis of neo-liberalism and its consequences. There are deliberate echoes here with Burawoy's call for a public sociology and the value of research in saving 'society from market fundamentalism'.

The articles in this 25-year Special Issue are exemplary in the way they seek to *comment* and *challenge*. Taken together they offer deep insights into not only the changing nature of work and employment or the consequences of government policy, but also into the fallacies of contemporary political rhetoric, the deep restructuring and fissures of contemporary capitalism and the need for a new moral economy. This inevitably raises questions around response, counter movement and struggle: 'between equal rights, force decides'. The aftermath of the deep global recession that has gripped since 2008 has seen agendas of deficit reduction, austerity, deregulation, welfare retrenchment and labour market flexibility: neo-liberalism has been strengthened rather than weakened by the crisis (Harvey, 2010). The implications for work and employment will no doubt be exposed in future volumes and issues of *WES*, in terms of job insecurity, unemployment, activation, in-work poverty, wage inequality, discrimination and bad jobs. Capitalism is likely to remain 'disconnected' and financialization hegemonic for some time. Yet neo-liberalism and the rhetoric of free markets is a flawed moral economy. For all the talk of private sector jobs growth, it is the public sector that has been the source of stable jobs growth for the past three decades; scant consolation for those public sector workers currently under attack. For all the pejorative rhetoric of the suffocating role of the state, the state clearly still has a role, not just as a weapon to force change and create markets, but as a means to sustain and make effective capitalism itself. The diminished role of and support for labour market institutions is a major concern in this regard. Nonetheless, in the years to come the consequences and contradictions of austerity policy will create spaces for new debates, counter movements and alternatives and with it potentially new sources of social protection. As Rubery (2011) argues, even as states look to withdraw from some areas, they are compelled to enter others: reconstruction is possible out of deconstruction.

This suggests an exciting period for all those researching in the broad area of economic life. *WES* will continue to be a journal that offers a home for a diverse range of

topics, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. However, more articles of the type published in this special issue are needed, that deal with big ideas and that are rooted within more overarching and historical political economy frameworks. First, this could include articles that interrogate further the interrelations between processes of financialization, state policy and the realities of work, employment and welfare. Consideration could also be given to understanding the basis for legitimation crisis within the current hegemonic regime. Second, more careful analysis is needed that situates changing economic life through different levels of analysis, with sensitive appreciation of the links between macro forces and micro processes. Third, more attention is needed to new divisions in and beyond work, through intersecting inequalities and the potentialities that may arise for new solidarities and counter movements. WES as a journal should encourage its authors to be bold and adventurous in terms of ideas, new theoretical developments and methodological approaches.

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Appendix

Table A1. Top 10 highly cited articles in *Work, Employment and Society*.

Rank	Cites	Author	Article (date)
1	379	A Pollert	The flexible firm: fixation or fact? (1988)
2	311	W Streeck	Skills and the limits of neo-liberalism: the enterprise of the future as a place of learning (1989)
3	302	R Hyman	Strategy or structure? Capital, labour and control (1987)
4	260	P Brown	Cultural capital and social exclusion: some observations on recent trends in education, employment and the labour market (1995)
5	253	P Taylor et al	Work organization, control and the experience of work in call centres (2002)
6	246	SC Bolton; C Boyd	Trolley dolly or skilled emotion manager? Moving on from Hochschild's <i>Managed Heart</i> (2003)
7	237	W Streeck	The uncertainties of management in the management of uncertainty: employers, labour relations and industrial adjustment in the 1980s (1987)
8	211	C Smith; P Meiskins	System, society and dominance effects in cross-national organizational analysis (1995)
9	209	PE Taylor; A Walker	The ageing workforce: employers' attitudes towards older people (1994)
10	207	P Taylor; P Bain	'India calling to the far away towns': the call centre labour process and globalization (2005)

Metrics: **1987–9** Total articles=84; citations=2795; **1990–99** Total articles=711; citations=11,958; **2000–2009** Total articles =851; citations=14,338; cites/ year=1024.14.

Source: Publish and Perish (April 2013).