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The International Political Economy of Work and Employability **By Phoebe V. Moore-Carter**

Author's Reply by Phoebe V. Moore-Carter¹

The reviewed book, *International Political Economy of Work and Employability* (Palgrave, 2010) was published in the *International Political Economy* series and was launched at Blackwell's on Oxford Road in Manchester 12th November 2010. In the first instance, I would like to thank my reviewers, Ian Bruff, John Smith, and Owen Worth for their generous and fair comments. And secondly, I encourage the wider audience to have a look at my latest work as well as my previous interventions, and as a strategy to keep the discussion within the parameters of the narrative made across my range of publications, I make reference to several points I've made over time, in my response to the reviews for *Global Discourse*.

There is no dispute across reviewers that the empirical material in my book is excellent, which I was fortunate to have funding to carry out from the Economics and Social Research Council (2005) and from the European Studies Research Institute at Salford University (2009). I travelled to South Korea on a number of occasions and was privileged to be able to hold a range of semi-structured interviews with a number of decision-makers as well as with workers and unionists. I travelled across the UK to carry out similar interviews. In my theoretical analysis, my work has been largely influenced by the neo-Gramscian school, but as I point out, this school, which exists within the critical strand of International Political Economy has not put 'work' at the centre of its research agenda, which I would encourage (2010, 2011).

My 2010 book follows the course set within my monograph entitled *Globalisation and Labour Struggle in Asia: A Neo-Gramscian Critique of South Korea's Political Economy* (I.B. Tauris 2007). This 2007 book, to be published in paperback in March 2012, traces the history of South Korea's vocational training policies from just after the Second World War, noting how skills required of the workforce have been explicitly linked to perceived global demand. I was perplexed by the seeming contradictions that these policies revealed when placed alongside Korea's fierce nationalism and militant unionism. Gramsci's theoretical insight which he called *trasformismo* is the tool I choose to use in order to understand these complexities in both this 2007 book, and my latest 2010 monograph. Crucially, how does a government convince a decidedly resistant nation to embrace what are communicated to be global norms and requirements for citizens? The role of the powerful economic international institutions the IMF and UNEVOC come to the fore in this context, as their policies were used for legitimisation and for externalisation of responsibility. So in the 2010 book I argued that Gramscian hegemony, which is defined by the lack of explicit social unrest, is not evident throughout Korea's

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globalising trajectory, as in noted by my documentation of a series of uprisings. Passive revolution, I indicate, is a project engineered and authored by the organic intellectual class.

Trasformismo, which occurs in the cultural and social dimensions of what Marx defined as the 'superstructure', prevents a complete revolution from occurring and is seen within cultural, linguistic, and educational practices and norms. Worth points out in his review, 'throughout the many reproductions of the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci has made a vast array of comments on how cultural, linguistic and educational practices articulated both inside and outside the workplace that contribute towards the bottom-up process involved in the construction of hegemony'. The reviewed monograph addresses educational practices as dictated by employment and education policies noted in three areas of the world. Cultural and linguistic dimensions are only unfortunately only alluded to, but this comment in Worth's comprehensive review is an indication of further research that will enhance the remit of available work in this area. Educational skills policies, I argue, increasingly place responsibility for employability onto the individual over time, and this has resulted in passive revolution, rather than revolution. This is clearly defined throughout my work. The following quote from my 2010 book clarifies how I operationalize Gramscian concepts, and indeed addresses most of the points brought out in Bruff's review, which misreads the clear delineation of concepts I offer. The concepts of Gramscian hegemony, passive revolution and *trasformismo* are outlined here:

Passive revolution creates an ambiguity between rule and resistance by consolidating ideologies from contrasting perspectives, through what Gramsci called *trasformismo*. The Gramscian concept of hegemony is an idea that overall represents leading ideas and assumptions held by leaders and leading class cadres within societies, but leadership is not sustainable unless the hegemonic ideas saturate society to the extent that it 'constitutes the limits of common sense for most people under its sway' (Williams 1980) and *trasformismo* controls 'common sense'. In the current trend of neoliberal capitalist societies, common sense is increasingly hard to separate from good sense, and it is the project of this book and of the critical theorist to disentangle these, and to get to the heart of emancipatory projects that are as restricting and isolating as the processes of Taylorism and piecework management of the industrial age. *Trasformismo* is enacted by managers, politicians, civil servants, and educators who can be seen as members of the transnational capitalist class (van der Pijl 1984, 1997; Sklair 1997, 2001a, 2001b). *Trasformismo* is seen in policy discourse and application that appears to give power to workers, in a way that might impress the *autonomistas*, except that in practice, this discourse looks nothing like the *operaismo* movement as envisaged by Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri, Mario Tronti, and others (2010, 13).

Toward the end of the writing process for my 2007 book, I began to recognise a pattern whereby *trasformismo* of policy results in a passive revolution, and thus prevents complete revolution and social, anti-capitalist change in an expanding number of locations. Governments across the world have created utopian visions of skills policy, intended to become common sense and universally accepted (and thus, hegemonic in the Gramscian sense). Visionary projects that enable *trasformismo* are evident in Korea's policy campaign 'Edutopia', also entitled the 'Skills Revolution' that is addressed in the 2007 piece. So my 2010 monograph looks at uncannily similar policies in the UK, where I discovered the emerging 'Renaissance for a New Britain' policy campaign; and Singapore's campaigns which paint this city state as the world's

‘Talent Capital’. Instead of choosing to defend human rights of workers’ rights in the context of rampant globalisation and a rapidly changing world, governments focussed on the personal and reflexive responsibilities of workers. I even go as far as to claim that governments increasingly neglect to take responsibility for welfare particularly during times of crisis and structural adjustment in the context of the Asian Tigers.

So *trasformismo* allows a ‘passive’ control of labour workers increasingly rely on ‘self-woven safety-nets’ (Moore 2006). Bruff is correct to point out that *trasformismo* in the way I have utilised the concept is very similar to Foucault’s concept of governmentality, and I would even go as far as to argue that postmodern and poststructural work owes intellectual currency to Gramsci for ideas of ‘interpellation’ (Althusser 1969) and ‘subjectification’ (Foucault 2010). Marxists are less likely to accept that these philosophical points are valid, because poststructural writers do not perhaps position themselves as ‘revolutionary’ or expand on the exploitative dimensions of the care of self in the way that Marxists might like. However, the practices (if they can be called as such) of *trasformismo*, of interpellation, of governmentality, and subjectification do NOT bring about hegemony in the way Gramsci defines it, even in its inherently transitory conditions. These are projects of domination, and my book does not stray from this commitment at any point. Indeed, my claim in this 2010 monograph is that policies I outline contribute to an international passive revolution.

Unlike Bruff’s interpretations in his review, I do not equate government-led Skills Revolutions with the movements I identify in the final chapter which contain autonomist notions of the multitude and emancipation via trans-individuality. As I explicitly state, these government-led ‘projects are not self-valorising and do not allow for the self-management as perceived and advocated by workerists, but these projects are evidence of *trasformismo* at work’ (Moore 2010, 14). In other words, the autonomist perception of self-management is *not* aligned with employability policy rhetoric: in fact it is quite the opposite. Change of policy to include promised emancipation and freedoms and related self-titled ‘revolutions’ are foundational to passive revolution at the point whereby the discourses of socialist movements become subsumed and adapted into policy, or redefined to eliminate revolutionary potential. These ideas are intended to become part of people’s work practice as well as subjectivities as I outline in detail in the monograph, which enforces their dominance, not hegemony, but dominance. The policies covered in this monograph are projects of social control.

The appeal to workers’ subjectivities included in the ‘promise’ for employability is framed in such a way as to appear to provide tools for workers’ survival in an increasingly uncertain world. Training programmes appear to offer worker empowerment or authority, such as limited self-management of worker associations, but are ultimately managed by pre-existing power structures or formal discussion platforms. These provisions have been designed to tackle the needs of workers to remain or to become newly employable through the cultivation of workers’ subjectivities, but do not meet fundamental needs, which include basic humane working conditions and involve the need for secure employment in the more recent years in every country of the world. (2010, 14)

In the final chapter of this book, I introduce observations of potentially revolutionary movements. The peer to peer production movement and various self-contained production arrangements are of course contentious for orthodox Marxists (see in particular Smith’s review for these a list of cautions). The movements I

identify run the risk of being written back into elite policy in a way that undermines their potential. My book however stands out in contrast to other Marxist texts in *International Political Economy* on related subjects, as I recognise potential for upheaval, and this upheaval comes about through production and shared subjectivities and a growing awareness of alienation. In recently published work (Moore 2011b), I begin to engage with authors such as Felix Guattari (2008) who points out that social relations, human subjectivity, and the environment are all contributing features of resistance movements which have the potential to become fully revolutionary and to initiate social change. If liberating concepts are not subsumed, or are not subjected to *trasformismo*, and even begin to fulfil the goals that are set, they can be perceived as potentially revolutionary toward autonomous, affective practices (see Colman 2010). However, I will not attempt to force the debate about uses of poststructuralism in Marxist analyses, because that debate is another monograph to be written in its own right. Two pieces providing insight into these possibilities are for example Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999) and Jason Read (2011). But for now, my book indicates that 'passive revolution creates an ambiguity between resistance and rule by merging ideologies of both in a manner less obviously coercive but coercive all the same, using the technique that Gramsci called *trasformismo*. Passive revolution is a transnational project and cannot be seen otherwise in the contemporary age' (Moore 2010, 4).

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