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

Review by Owen Worth

Phoebe Moore's book 'The International Political Economy of Work and Employability' draws our attention to a much neglected area of study within the discipline of International Political Economy (IPE). The main contribution of the book is to show how education and skills have been restructured in order to become more employable to the wider global political economy. Much has been made of the notion and the idea of the 'knowledge economy' and indeed as a concept it is much used but little explained, yet here we see a real effort to understand its foundations. As a result the book provides a very useful study to how human development has been shaped and reshaped in order to follow the demands of the global economy.

In terms of its main message, Moore's argument is that a passive revolution has occurred at a global level, whereby states have responded to the globalisation of the knowledge economy and have 'internationalised' their respective economic strategies so that they are fully integrated into the global economy. She understands passive revolution through Gramsci's utilisation of the term. Gramsci argued that a passive revolution occurs when elite classes capture 'hegemonic power', through the gaining of ideological consent from subaltern/subordinate classes in order to pursue a specific form of production (Moore, pp. 12-13). Key to this process is his twin concept of *trasformismo*, where 'an ambiguity of between rule and resistance' occurs through the consolidation of 'ideologies from contrasting perspectives' and a hegemonic order is formed (pp. 12-13). The premise of the book looks at to what extent the knowledge economy can be seen as a passive revolution at a global level, by assessing the change in work and education in three specific case-studies: the United Kingdom, South Korea and Singapore. Whilst this selection could be seen by some to attract a number of problems and shortcomings, here it fits nicely into the overall arguments and purpose of the book.

In the first chapters, Moore sets out the main premise of the book by arguing that the notion and transformation of work has strangely been relatively silent in critical studies of IPE. Rather than criticising the premise of 'critical' IPE or the nature of the 'British' school of IPE, as recent accounts have done (Shields, Bruff and MacCartney, 2011), she argues that the study of work needs to emerge from this tradition, and reminds us that indeed both earlier works in IPE (such as from Jeffrey Harrod) and classical texts in political economy (from Smith and Marx) were in fact studies of work. (pp.6-7). Thus, the second chapter is geared towards introducing the notion of 'work' and its relationship to the processes of 'employability' and 'skills'. In doing this Moore sets up the empirical chapters well by demonstrating the different components used during the wider process of work. She also brings back the study of *Industrial Relations* back into IPE. As it presumes the importance of post-Fordist work relations in order to look at the wider passive revolution of labour, the book makes an invitation for greater integration between the two disciplines (IPE and *Industrial Relations*) which, she believes are interrelated.

The subsequent chapters explore how the hegemonic changes in the nature of work have been transformed through her case-studies. Again, this transformation is outlined in the previous chapter, where the scientific, psychological and creative aspects of the knowledge economy are discussed. This allows us to have a basis of how each of the states covered have strategically adapted their workforce to the challenges of the knowledge economy. In the case of the UK, this was largely down to the policies of new labour and in the pursuit of public-private initiatives in order that it would create one homogeneous workforce geared towards the challenges of the contemporary world. Interestingly, despite the New Labour project was geared towards the rhetoric of the knowledge economy (the emphasis on flexibility, creativity, information technology etc), the drive towards the restructuring of the nature of work largely occurred with the Brown government and with the 2007 Budget that occurred just before he took the leadership in the UK. This was aided by the Leitch report that argued for drastic change in the UK's workforce in order to maximize its employability at the global level. Moore argues that these new initiatives provide the latest move in the long process of neoliberal passive revolution that began with the wholesale reforms in the 1980s and has filtered through towards wider society whereby the practices work have been restructured accordingly.

In turning her attention to the 'East', Moore outlines how, in the aftermath of the East Asian crisis and the faltering of the 'Tiger' economies a revolution in employability was to occur that drew many comparisons with those in the west. Here, education and training systems were both promoted in order to create a culture that would stabilise the economy and make it open for further restructuring (pp.73-82). The main focus here is on South Korea, where IMF loans provided the basis for change. The drive towards greater skill flexibility, towards greater employability and the training programmes for this to be achieved occurred as South Korea looked to gain a competitive advantage in the knowledge-based global economy. From here, the final case-study looks at a third different type of economy – that of Singapore and of the city state. Here, the combination of an authoritarian regime and the reliance upon FDI has prompted an extensive move towards the pursuit of training policies for compliance in the competing global economy.

One in all this is a very useful book that allows us to develop many insights into aspects on the functioning of the global economy. The manner in which passive revolution is understood through the state/global dichotomy is more convincing than many neo-Gramscian accounts. Through these empirical studies, this successfully provides us with one way in which we might understand the formation of international hegemony (although not really 'global' as the book suggests). Although the term is not used per se, what is demonstrated well is how the process of the 'internationalism of the state' has taken place, and the change in the labour process has been a key condition of this. What might have strengthened the analysis further is a greater focus on Gramsci's own writing on education and work and the many notes he made upon the culture(s) and complexities that are formulated within them. Throughout the many reproductions of the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci's made a vast array of comments on how cultural, linguistical and educational practices articulated both inside and outside the workplace that contribute towards the bottom-up process involved in the construction of hegemony. Whilst the book does well to utilise traditional Gramscian theory, in order to pursue this work further it might be useful to look at these more explicit writings that return to the (often general) narratives supplied by the neo-Gramscians. The cultural processes involved in the training schemes mentioned could

certainly be developed more alongside this and this could greater even greater potential for the ongoing interest and application of Gramsci within the social sciences.

Returning to the well drawn out case-studies in the book, the content here has again much to offer future, similar studies that might be pursued in other states. At the same time, the book is also extremely timely, especially in the current condition of the global economy. Whilst certain states are pursuing austerity measures in order to reduce debt and pledges to maintain a flexible workforce to prompt recovery, one of the first states that adopted an educational strategy to gain a competitive advantage in the global economy is in turmoil. The ‘economic miracle’ that occurred in Ireland in the guise of the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ rested upon a highly educated, highly flexible workforce capable of providing transferable skills that would attract investment. Indeed, such was Ireland’s economic success that states began to initiate schemes of the sort that are mentioned in this book. The collapse of the Irish model provides a warning to those who believe that these forms of restructuring will ultimately lead to sustained success. More importantly for reasons of humanity, the pursuit of employability shows just how far the modern workforce is being understood as commodity entities in a globalised world.

To summarise Moore’s book is a higher useful contribution to studies within IPE. More importantly there is much to develop from the piece which should lead to subsequent research from both the authors and others to follow. There are parts to the book that need greater develop – the last chapter on forms of alternative forms of production is highly interesting, but I personally remain sceptical to viability of these as sustainable alternatives. However these are debates that can be pursued as a result of the work. For, in my opinion the real achievements of this book is that it opens up a large number of enquiries – both theoretical and empirical – that have either been understated or ignored when looking at wider questions on issues such as globalisation and the global political economy.

References

Shields, S. Bruff, I. and Macartney, H. (eds.) (2011) *Critical International Political Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave)