

Review: The Changing Nature of Work

Edited by F. Ackerman, N.R. Goodwin, L. Dougherty, and K. Gallagher.

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F. Ackerman, N.R. Goodwin, L. Dougherty, K. Gallagher Editors. *The Changing Nature of Work*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998. 432 pp. US\$35.00 paper ISBN: 1-55963-666-1. Recycled, acid-free paper.

With the next millennium less than 6 months ahead, several conflicts threatening world peace and economy and reshaping frontiers, with the rise of environmental concerns and efforts to seek new energy sources, global sociological and economical changes are foreseen. There is little doubt that these changes will affect our working conditions. Thus, the publication of *The Changing Nature of Work* that examines transformations at work is well scheduled.

This book concentrates on the aspect of "work as a topic of theoretical interest to economists" but also focuses on new directions at work, and their impact on globalization and labor economics. The book is divided into nine parts; each part (except part one that provides a brief exploration of the history of work) is composed of a collection of around 10 articles (or more precisely summaries of articles) that is preceded by a useful overview essay. Although the foreword by Robert Reich is explicitly North America oriented, the editors have the merit to offer a less egocentric publication. Indeed, they selected works that provide a relatively comprehensive economical account of work changes. Also, it is very unlikely that one will not find something of interest among the 95 articles from recognized theoreticians that are summarized in this publication.

In its whole, the book is written in a clear and concise style, and is relatively easy to understand, even to the layman. However, it would have been more complete if major issues, such as telecommuting, part-time work, reduction of working time, and increase of social security benefits, that nowadays characterize changes in work attitudes were analyzed less superficially. In addition, the aspects of slave labor, violence and abuses at work, unfortunately still present in third world countries but also in developed countries, are entirely omitted. One would also have welcomed sociological studies related to the working

conditions of artists, for whom accomplishment of a piece of art may sometimes prevail over financial reward.

It is true, as stated in both the publisher's press release and the foreword, the book explores some of the questions related to work, but one of its weakness is that it fails to provide an answer to these questions or even to offer a solution to the problems described. Too often does the reader come across sentences stating that "it is difficult to come to a decisive yes-or-no resolution." Even the author agrees, "the essays summarized in this volume do not answer that question..."

The opinions and essays presented concentrate too much on economical issues and a lack of sociological, historical and anthropological materials was noted. Still, it remains a good introductory book on the topic and would certainly reveal the causes of *The Changing Nature of Work* to students, economists and personnel managers. It may also act as an incentive to identify solutions to current problems and help generate further changes in the nature of work.

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