

Kevin Doogan. *New Capitalism? The Transformation of Work*. Malden: Polity Press, 2009, pp. 234;
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What the New Capitalism Is Not...

Kevin Doogan is Professor of Policy Studies at the University of Bristol. According to their website, he is the principal architect and the programme director of the Doctor of Social Science, and the MSc in European Policy Studies. He works within the broad area of institutional restructuring and labour market change in the UK, Europe and America. He was an expert witness to the Committee of Enquiry held by the House of Lords' Select on the European Union which looked at new European labour markets. He is currently working on a book entitled *The State of Labour*, and contributing to contemporary international debates on employee insecurity and labour market stability.

Kevin Doogan's *New Capitalism? The Transformation of Work* is published by the prestigious Polity Press. In a general sense, Doogan looks at contemporary social transformation through the lens of the labour market, examining major themes of the day such as globalisation, technological change and the new economy, pensions and demographic time-bombs, flexibility and traditional employment. In the first chapter of his newest book, Doogan discusses general evolutionary societal changes from Post-Industrial Society to New Capitalism. The second chapter focuses on technological change: autonomization and dematerialization. Chapter three describes mobility, trans-nationality and employment in view of the globalization debate. The fourth chapter is dedicated to theorizing on the Labour Market. In chapter five Doogan gives an overview of demographic change and social welfare.

The last three sections of the book consider the flexible and contingent labour market, long-term employment, job insecurity, precarious employment, and manufactured uncertainty issues.

In many articles, reports, and contemporary media debates, it is argued that the pace of technological change, the mobility of multinational capital and the privatization of the welfare state have combined to create a more precarious world. Companies

are outsourcing, jobs are migrating to other continents, and a life-long job is said to be a thing of the past. The so-called new capitalism seems to be the result of these profound changes. In *New Capitalism?*—an intelligent and stimulating book, Kevin Doogan fights the most popular stereotypes about the information society, such as decreasing of long-term jobs. He takes issue with these widely-accepted ideas and subjects the transformation of work to detailed examination through a comprehensive analysis of developments in particular European counties and North America. For example, based on unprejudiced statistics, he argues that precariousness is not a natural consequence of the fast-changing world. Rather, Doogan argues that current insecurities are manufactured, emanating from neo-liberal policy (in the American sense) and the greater exposure of the economy to market forces.

Basic topics on globalization, technological change, and the new economy are all subject to Doogan's critical scrutiny.

The abstract or ethereal world view is presented—all motion no matter—preoccupied with flows of capital and flows of communication, knowledge and technology (Doogan 2009, p. 208).

Doogan argues that scholars such as Bauman, Castells, Beck and other theoreticians accomplish *meta-narrative discourse*, missing empirical studies and avoiding critical confrontation with measurable reality. From the beginning of the book Doogan complains:

Whereas discussion of “old capitalism” might invite consideration of social classes as agencies and the distribution of income as outcomes, new capitalism is a confluence of narratives that captures and represents the world in terms of abstract, self-sustaining social processes. In the absence of strategic actors such as governments, corporations or classes, social processes appear disembodied, all motion no matter (Doogan 2009, p. 44).

At the end of the book Doogan concludes:

The challenge was to describe and explain the relationship between material reality and discursive reality (Doogan 2009, p. 207).

“It is difficult to assess future economic prospects unless we have an understanding of how we ended up in the current situation,” says Doogan.

In the early days of the economic crisis, the view was expressed that the housing market crash was an aberration. The ‘real economy’ had sustained unprecedented levels of growth based on technological innovation, globalisation and deregulated markets, and would weather the exuberance of the housing market and the price corrections necessary to restore the normal workings of the new economy. Trillions of dollars later, however, the problems seem much deeper rooted and intractable as economic recession tightens its grip on the advanced economies. What we have witnessed is not just the pricking of a housing bubble, but the bursting of the bubble economy,

Doogan said in an interview posted on the internet.

The book's other conclusion is that long-term employment and jobs have continued to grow or at least remained stable. Doogan is telling us a story that is different from the public's perception that jobs for life have disappeared so we must prepare for a labour market that is turbulent and unstable. His research shows something quite

remarkable and moving in the opposite direction. He says the world is actually seeing a dramatic increase in long-term workforce employment, especially among women.

In a media interview Kevin Doogan said:

Forty five per cent of the expansion of casual employment is based in the 15–19 and 19–23 groups, but by and large that group is temporary, engaged with the labour market, they're students, they're not people if you like looking for a long term commitment to the labour market at that point in their lives. There are concerns for the trade union movement I have no doubt, and the academic world, there's significant expansion in higher education, of using temporary lecturers on a longer term basis, does raise concerns for the unions, however the unions and labour negotiators would be well advised to think about the bigger picture and that is that employers need to recruit and retain labour. We who are advocating and who are, if you like, offering advice to labour negotiators need to bring home a message that the balance of bargaining power is not one sided.

As Doogan astutely, and accurately pointed out:

Every time mention is made of the new economy and the knowledge economy it is worth remembering that these were the buzz words the speculators used to justify massive investments in millions of miles of fibre optic cable that now lie largely underused in local networks and on the sea bed (Doogan 2009, p. 211).

This book is sure to stimulate academic debate. Kevin Doogan's account will appeal not just to scholars, but also to upper-level students across the social sciences, including in the sociology of work, industrial relations, social policy and business studies.

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