

collective bargaining, equal opportunities, and forced or child labour.

The overall value of this book is that it interrupts the "grand narrative" of economic reform and liberalization by displaying the terror and abuse that lies just beneath the surface. Progress begins when such groups as Amnesty International direct attention to this side of the story, as they have done in a series of books, including *Torture Worldwide: An Affront to Human Dignity* (2000), *Hidden Scandal, Secret Shame: Torture and Ill-Treatment of Children* (2000), *Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds: Torture and Ill-Treatment of Women* (2001), *Human Rights: Is it Any of Your Business?* (2001), and *Business and Human Rights in a Time of Change* (2000). For this reason, their publications should be promoted in universities and colleges around the world where corporate and government leaders of tomorrow are being trained. As well, they should be read by NGO's and activist groups, and concerned individuals everywhere.

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Sharon Beder, *Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR* (London: Zed Books, 2000)

SHARON BEDER, an engineer at the University of Wollongong, is best known for her book *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism* (1997). In *Selling the Work Ethic*, she turns her attention to how work has been vested with a moral quality in order to evoke greater labour productivity, legitimate wealth accumulation, and justify inequality.

This is an ambitious undertaking. Much of the history of political economy is interpreted in terms of the social construction of the work ethic. If manual labour was seen as "degrading" and "vulgar" to the Greeks and Romans, the rise of the Protestant work ethic in the 16th cen-

tury "imbued work with a moral value through an emphasis on responsibility and contribution." (188) When exported to the US a century later, it was transformed from a religious/ individual to a secular/national ethos with work as an indication of good character rather than a sign of God's blessing. (24) Later Adam Smith elevated greed from a private vice to a social virtue; Social Darwinism legitimated a *laissez-faire* economy with its accompanying rewards for the industrious and strong and punishments for the idle and weak; and Taylorism elevated the manipulation of workers to a high art.

Many of our current social institutions were structured to meet and legitimate the cultural imperative of work. The education system was designed to instill good work habits while reinforcing the myth of equality of opportunity and social mobility. The concept of human capital, if nothing else, justifies income inequality. Hierarchical wage structures and career ladders reward the "organization man" for his loyalty to the corporation. Social welfare programs, on the other hand, had to ensure that there is a sufficient stigma attached to the receipt of social assistance to discourage idleness.

The contradiction faced by modern capitalism is that the primary objective of the work ethic has been undermined by stagnant real wages, rising income inequality, reduced social mobility, and transformations in the labour process. Downsizing erodes the worker's loyalty to the company, falling living standards call into question the edict of an honest day's work, and the post-industrial "mop and slop" economy holds out little promise of climbing the occupational ladder. On a different level, environmental concerns have challenged the benefits of ever increasing material production. These failures have led to the gospel of the "new Social Darwinism" (evident in workfare schemes), with the primary objective "to convince the middle class that its enemy is the poor." (67)

This is a challenging thesis and there is no doubt that we often exhibit a "pathological compulsion to work" and too readily identify ourselves in terms of our occupation or, more insidiously, with loyalty to our employer. Beder forces us to reflect on the premise that work is valuable for reasons other than pay.

There are, however, two aspects of the argument that leave one with a measure of unease. First, the difference between the pursuit of profit on the one hand, and the virtue of work on the other, is often obscured. Marx, for instance, would share the canon that work is a potentially creative activity — despite its debasement under capitalist social relations — while obviously disparaging of the drive to accumulation of capital. This distinction is an important one especially in light of the recent financial "bubble" of the casino economy of the 1990s. How does one convince workers of the virtue of hard work at a time when entrepreneurial "get-rich-quick" schemes and financial markets offered windfall gains that make a mockery of diligent savings out of an honest day's work? How does capitalism celebrate the accumulations of capitalists and rentiers through unproductive activity while seeking to convince workers that their future is best achieved through a lifetime of labour?

Second, given the scope of the argument, it often overreaches in the effort to subsume all social phenomena within a single framework. Statements to the effect that "social mobility between generations has become a thing of the past" (74) require, at the very least, some empirical support. Or consider the discussion of income inequality: it seems implausible that "the middle third of [the population in the United States] used to be able to save but since 1980 this is no longer the case." (73) Despite rising levels of household debt, this ignores the substantial savings that workers have amassed in their pension plans and, more importantly, the social definition of subsistence that draws

more heavily on the imperatives of consumption rather than production.

The important contribution of the book is to redress the imbalance in the recent literature on the new consumerism. Both post-modern interpretations of consumer culture as an outlet for self-creation and the classic "status-seeking" view (most recently articulated by Juliet Schor, in *The Overspent American*) tend to disregard that capitalism is still, first and foremost, about work. The glorification of consumption, particularly after World War II, accompanied the further degradation of labour: industrial workers could expect no gratification from their role in the production process and consumption was elevated to the primary objective. Beder reminds us that capitalism is still the need to extract work effort and consumerism alone will not accomplish this end.

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Otto Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, edited by Ephraim J. Nimni, translated by Joseph O'Donnell (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

THAT ONE of the greatest failures of Marxist theory was its inability to understand "the national question" has been a pervasive truism for decades. The fact that this claim has been repeated many times in one form or another indicates that those who hold it are most likely unfamiliar with Otto Bauer's Marxist classic *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*. And one cannot blame them (at least if they only read in English): Bauer's long, complex, and very sophisticated analysis of the nation from a historical materialist perspective has been unavailable in English until now, and in order to read it in the German original much more than a basic command of that language would have been necessary. (A French