

Work, employment and society: Special Issue Call for Papers

In, Against and Beyond Precarity: The Struggles of Insecure Workers

Guest Editors: Gabriella Alberti, Ioulia Bessa, Kate Hardy,
Vera Trappmann and Charles Umney (University of Leeds)

The term 'precarity' has become somewhat commonplace in describing the growing insecurity of workers in contemporary capitalism. Yet, as a concept it is problematic. It has a wide definitional reach and the real extent of 'precarisation' is intensely debated.

This special issue of *Work, employment and society* follows the thematic focus of the 2016 WES conference: 'Work in Crisis'. Against a backdrop of ongoing transformations in the world of work, state-led austerity, welfare retrenchment and deepening inequalities, the call focuses on this crisis in terms of precarity experienced by people both in and out of work. Contributions are invited to think critically not only about 'precarity', but also about the agency of those within precarious conditions and about how to move beyond them. This Special Issue would therefore welcome papers that investigate or explore:

1. Theoretical contributions around the concept of precarity and its relation to class

We invite conceptual contributions that analyse the usefulness of the concept of precarity in understanding the increasing insecurity of work in capitalist economies. Papers may address questions such as: what advantages does the concept have compared to traditional theories of class? Where are the conceptual limitations of precarity as a concept to understanding contemporary development of work and employment? What historical developments in (in)security have taken place? How exceptional are current conditions?

2. Patterns of precarisation, and alternative ways of understanding questions of insecurity at work

We welcome empirical studies that examine patterns of precarity and insecurity. In which ways – precisely – has labour become more insecure and precarious? What is the role of phenomena such as migration or social categories including gender identity, race and (dis)ability? How are work and employment patterns changing, especially given current political and economic events (e.g. recession, austerity, economic and political crisis in Europe, Brexit)? How can precarity be understood in terms of developments such as informal labour, 'portfolio' work, the gig economy, freelance careers and 'self-entrepreneurialism'? What effect does the individualisation of work and employment have on the (in)security of workers?

3. The role of the state and other institutions (including unions and employers) in shaping (in)security for workers

The changing role of nation states in intervening in the labour market, as well as forms of social protection, have expanded and intensified the insecurity of workers and citizens in various respects. We invite papers that examine how governments, states and capital have undermined or buttressed workers' methods of self-representation. How have labour market migration and social security policies impacted on security?

How can we theorise the role of various state agents and institutions in regulating, creating and/or reproducing precarity?

4. Conflicts over precarious work, including new forms of labour organising

We welcome contributions that consider everyday practices of individual resistance and coping strategies, as well as more collective responses by precarious workers. What is the social composition of these movements, what are their objectives and demands and how can we understand their particular forms of protest? Contributions may look at imaginative and innovative tactics emerging from this section of the workforce and explain their successes and failures. We invite contributions that look at instances of social movements that have taken on the identity of 'the precariat' as an organising principle, or at those that have not, despite struggling against increasing insecurity (for example, protests against the Loi Travail in France).

5. A future beyond precarity: beyond exploitation, alternative forms of production and circulation beyond the capitalist wage relation

In invoking authors to think 'beyond precarity', we invite contributors to examine strategies and policies that move beyond insecure work. This may include, for example, critical reflections on universal basic income (UBI), worker co-operatives, care economies or the role of the state. While discussions about 'post-capitalism' or 'post-work' societies have gained increasing attraction amongst journalists, social commentators and others, sociologists and theorists of work and employment have been slower to consider the prospects for moving 'beyond precarity' in this way. As such, we invite papers that can examine alternative ways of organising work and employment that have the capacity to reduce insecurity.

Submission Details

Deadline for submissions (full papers): 01 March 2017

Submit: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/wes>

Original research articles and On the Front Line pieces are welcomed.

Word limits: 8000 words (research articles) and 5000 words (OtFL)

Full submission instructions for research and On the Front Line articles are available on the Manuscript Central site under 'Instructions and Forms'. Please read these in full before submitting your manuscript. All articles submitted will follow the standard WES review process. This will include, if considered suitable, double blind peer review by three referees.

Publication of the Special Issue expected: June 2018

We welcome informal conversations about potential submissions. For further information please contact Gabriella Alberti (g.alberti@leeds.ac.uk) or Charles Umney (C.R.Umney@leeds.ac.uk)