



Good Jobs, Bad Jobs

Arne Kalleberg

Reviewed by Heather Hunt

Arne Kalleberg's *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* is a deft and concentrated dose of gloom. Kalleberg's central thesis - that the political, social and economic changes of the past 30 years have permanently altered the structure of the American labor system - is simple, but portends profound ramifications. Among these, according to Kalleberg, is that work has become both more polarized and more precarious.

In the first section, Kalleberg tersely but supplely outlines the story of work in the US since World War II. Starting with the "Great Compression" of the 1950s and 60s, he describes how a series of macroeconomic and sociological shocks - globalization, increasing price competition, the changing role of capital markets, the weakening of government regulation, the expansion of the service sector, and ideological shifts, among others - disrupted the prevailing employment relationships and led to a restructured workplace that stripped workers of influence and protection. Additionally, these larger trends interacted with demographic changes such as increasing rates of college attendance, growth in dual earner families and immigration. As Kalleberg tells it, the net result was a weakened middle class, a greater divide between good and bad jobs, and increased job insecurity.

Had the author unpacked this narrative a bit, it would have provided more than sufficient material for a full-length book. But in the second section, Kalleberg provides empirical evidence of the increasing polarization and precarity of work. While Kalleberg avoids scary math, the pace of the book slows. Some of his conclusions are stronger than others, but overall this section works well to drive home his earlier assertions. No one data point is crucial; it's the slow brick by brick accumulation of evidence that proves persuasive here. He closes with the mandatory policy section that suggests lovely but politically impractical solutions like flexicurity. Still, an author has to try, right?

The data chapters demonstrate some of *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the chapter on polarization is riveting. Kalleberg's discussion of polarization within occupations and between standard and nonstandard workers is fresh and eye-opening. The descriptions are short and punchy; the data analysis moves crisply; the explanations pull together themes introduced earlier and tie them up in a neat package.

On the other hand, the chapter on precarity is less persuasive. Kalleberg's description of the rise of insecurity seems anecdotal, a shortcoming compounded by the lack of longitudinal data. Perhaps recognizing this,

Kalleberg tries to ratchet up the drama. I appreciate a little purple in my prose, but rhetorical claims in the midst of modest data undermine the power of his argument at times.

Good Jobs, Bad Jobs sacrifices depth and nuance for the sake of brevity (and knows it). One can quibble with its conception of work as a series of black and white dichotomies - good/bad, secure/insecure, shared wealth/inequality, standard/nonstandard, etc. - that obscure important gray areas. Kalleberg's portrayal of work as the product of reinforcing and interlocking forces, while powerful, at times comes across as rigid or mechanistic. Additionally, because he doesn't stop to define terms, the book might be a little dense for the average reader.

However, these are small cavils. *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* packs a lot of punch. Kalleberg's writing is wonderfully clear, concise and accessible. Don't be deceived by the simple, Dr. Seuss-like title. At its heart, this book is about the nature and significance of work and the restoration of the social contract.

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