What's Worth Reading, September 2020

William I. Robinson, *The Global Police State*, Pluto Press, 2020.

Rating: 86 *Buy this book?* Yes

William Robinson is a force for good in radical global sociology. In this timely book he argues that the inequality generated by financialization and the displacement of labour produced by digitalization are combining to create an ever-increasing mass of 'surplus humanity', not required by capital, and that in response the leaders and representatives of the transnational capitalist class (TCC) are constructing a global police state to discipline and control it. He has set out to present 'a "big picture" of the emerging global police state in a short book that is eminently readable' (6), supplementing the 140-odd pages of the main text with 35 pages of endnotes 'for those who wish to delve deeper'. This works well: the text *is* very readable, and packed with arresting detail, and the book is well worth reading. At the same time, it must be read on two levels: sympathetically, in accordance with the crucial importance of the issues he addresses, and his choice, driven by a sense of urgency, to risk generalisations and put nuances aside in order to get the core message across to a broad readership; and critically, as a check on the strength of the argument and the empirical material used to defend it.

His opening pitch sets the tone: 'The unprecedented concentration of capital at the global level has cemented the financial power of a transnational corporate elite that uses its economic power to wield political influence and control states', and the new technologies that might free us from want and toil 'are being applied at this time by the agents of this system to bring about a global police state' (1-2). By 'global police state', he means not only police and military repression, authoritarian government, and the suppression of civil liberties and human rights, but more broadly 'the emerging character of the global economy and society as a repressive totality whose logic is as much economic and cultural as it is political'; and he associates its emergence with three interrelated developments: first, the 'ever more omnipresent systems of mass social control, repression, and warfare promoted by the ruling groups to contain the real and the potential rebellion of the global working class and surplus humanity'; second, 'how the global economy is itself based more and more on the development and deployment of these systems of warfare, social control, and repression simply as a means of making profit and continuing to accumulate capital in the face of stagnation - what I term *militarized accumulation*, or *accumulation by repression*'; and third 'the increasing move towards political systems that can be characterized as twenty-first century fascism, or even in a broader sense, as totalitarian' (3-4). Completing the opening overview, this global police state 'is emerging at a time when world capitalism descends into a crisis that is unprecedented, given its magnitude, its global reach, the extent of ecological degradation and social deterioration, and the sheer scale of the means of violence that is now deployed around the world' (4). The argument unfolds in four chapters: 'Global Capitalism and its Crisis', 'Savage Inequalities: The Imperative of Social Control'; 'Militarized Accumulation and Accumulation by Repression'; and 'The Battle for the Future', and is summarised below.

The 1970s saw a shift, in the context of world crisis, from national corporate or monopoly capitalism to *global capitalism*, 'marked by a number of qualitative shifts in the system and by novel articulations of social power worldwide. The hallmark of the new epoch is the rise of truly *transnational capital* and a new globally integrated

production and financial system into which all nations and much of humanity have been integrated' (9). There is a crucial distinction here: 'This new transitional phase entails a shift from a *world economy* to a *global economy*. In the world economy, countries and regions were linked to each other via trade and financial flows in an integrated international market. In the new global economy, nations are linked to each [other] more organically through the transnationalization of the production process, of finance, and of the circuits of capital accumulation' (10). The 'manifest agent' of global capitalism is the TCC, the hegemonic fraction of capital on a world scale: 'Its interests lie in promoting global rather than national markets and circuits of accumulation, in competition with local and national capitalist groups whose fate is more bound up with their particular nation-states' (11). This TCC is now a 'truly global ruling class'. It 'directly instrumentalizes states around the world, and at the same time every country and the whole global economy is structurally dependent on transnational capital' (12). As for the way in which it rules, it 'has attempted to convert the structural power of the global economy into supranational political authority and to exercise its class power around the world through transnational state (TNS) apparatuses': as further clarified,

TNS apparatuses should not be confused with a global government, which does not and may never exist. Methodologically speaking, the TNS is not a thing; it is an analytical abstraction that helps us make sense of contemporary developments. This TNS is constituted as a loose network made up of trans- and supranational organizations together with national states that have been captured by transnationally oriented policy makers and state managers. TNS apparatuses function to organize the conditions around the world for transnational accumulation - that is, to open up resources and labor around the world to transnational corporate plunder'. At the same time, the nation state does not disappear, but finds itself with a contradictory mandate: national governments 'must promote the conditions for global capital accumulation in their territories and at the same time they must secure their legitimation through "the nation"' (13, 19).

A decade ago, around 150 transnational corporations (TNCs), dominated by finance capital, formed a tightly interlocked 'super entity' controlling a third of global revenues, and around 1,300 controlled 80 per cent. According to Peter Phillips (2018), a source that recurs frequently, 'an inner core of 389 individuals ... stand at the very apex of the global power structure' (14). Here Robinson is emphatically in 'big picture' mode. Drawing further on Phillips, he suggests that this 'enormous concentration of economic power translates into the centralization of worldwide policy-making influence in the TCC': the top echelons of the TCC and the global power elite 'serve as advisors to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade organization, the International Bank of Settlements, the Group of 7 and the Group of 20 ... they take up key positions in national governments ... The global power elite also works out policies to manage and protect global capital and enforce debt collection worldwide in many private policy-making forums [such as the World Economic Forum and the Group of 30] ...; members of the TCC and their political agents impose these policies through the placement of their individuals within individual states and TNS institutions. This relationship of economic (class) power is one in which the TCC issues commands to government officials. As one member of the global elite put it, these officials are "pilots flying our airplane"' (14-15, emphasis mine). This suggests that global corporate interests rule, in what is 'acquiring the character of a planned oligopoly, with centralized planning taking place within the inner network of TNC nodes, TNS apparatuses, and the global elite forums that Phillips and others have documented' (15-16). Elsewhere,

though, the argument is more nuanced. Noting that in response to the current crisis transnational elites have been clamouring for more effective TNS institutions, Robinson comments that 'the fragmentary and highly emergent nature of TNS apparatuses makes the effort problematic', and recognises that there are different perspectives *within* the TCC: 'The more "enlightened" elite representatives of the TCC [e.g. in the WEF] are now searching for ways to develop a more powerful TNS, one that could impose regulation on the global market and certain controls on unbridled global regulation' (21). Further: 'The politicized strata of the TCC and transnationally oriented elites and organic intellectuals, including those who staff TNS institutions, attempt to define the long-term interests of the system and to develop policies, projects, and ideologies to secure these interests'; but the efforts of the TNS in this regard are hampered by 'the vulnerability of the TCC as a class group in terms of its own internal disunity and fractionation, and its blind pursuit of immediate accumulation - that is, of its immediate and particular profit-seeking interests over the long-term or general interests of the class' (22).

So far, these are familiar arguments (notably, Robinson, 2004). What follows draws on subsequent work on crisis and response, and leads to the striking argument that the emergence of the global police state reflects a crucial turn *away from* expansive 'globalisation': faced with a crisis of accumulation of unprecedented character, the TCC has opted not only to control, criminalise and exclude 'surplus humanity' in the leading states and across the developing world, but also to make this strategy of *exclusion* the means to further accumulation. In other words, it seeks to overcome the crisis of over-accumulation by stripping the developing world of its resources, and investing in private and highly profitable exclusionary and repressive apparatuses that compose the global police state. So, the globalisation boom was short-lived, and halted by a new structural crisis of over-accumulation in 2008 (also 'a political turning point in the breakdown of capitalist hegemony', 41), which coincided with an existential crisis posed by the ecological limits to the reproduction of the system (17, 27). "New spaces have to be violently cracked open and the peoples in these spaces must be repressed by a global police state' (18) - but spaces for expansion are now exhausted. The response has been a turn to financial speculation (asset-backed securitisation), the plunder of public finances (bailouts, subsidies and bonds) , debt-driven growth, and state-organised militarised accumulation (28). Crucially, transnational finance capital is wedded to the global police state:

The structural violence of transnational finance capital is at the core of massive new rounds of dispossession worldwide, while the actual dispossession is then enforced by the direct violence of the courts, state and private military, police and paramilitary repression. ... At the same time, financial control becomes crucial to the story of heightened disciplinary pressure over these classes, who are subject to new and often draconian forms of coercion by creditors and states. *Financialization is a key lever in the transition from social welfare to social control states*' (31-2, emphasis mine).

However, this strategy of financial speculation, pillaging the state, and debt-driven growth runs up in turn against 'the limits of financial fixes' (33). At the same time, successive technological revolutions around digitalisation, the proliferation of digital platforms, and 'big data' are ushering in a Fourth Industrial Revolution. But even if this were to unleash a new round of capitalist expansion, it must eventually succumb to the twin limits of replacement of labour by capital - the declining rate of profit and the problem of realisation. So the chapter concludes: 'Hence the emerging digital economy is unlikely to resolve the problem of overaccumulation. Where can the TCC turn to

continue to unload ever-rising amounts of surplus accumulated capital? Can war and a global police state resolve the system's dilemma?'

The argument is that the need to control 'surplus humanity' and the current form of the problem of over-accumulation are rooted in a pattern of growth that breeds extreme inequality, so that the two are mutually reinforcing: 'Extreme inequality requires extreme violence and repression, that lend themselves to a global police state and projects of twenty-first century fascism. ... The more global inequalities expand, the more constricted is the world market and the more the system faces a structural crisis of overaccumulation. Yet such extreme levels of social polarization also present to dominant groups an escalating challenge of social control. It is this imperative of social control that in the first instance brings forth a global police state' (41). Globalisation has brought about a 'new capital-labour relation' (41-2): *flexible accumulation* involves 'the fragmentation and cheapening of labour through widespread casualization or informalization of work. These arrangements involve alternative systems of labour control and diverse contingent categories of labour, captured in the term now most often used, *precarious labour*' (42-3). Workers who lose employment stability and social protection become part of a global precariat, a condition 'imposed on increasing numbers of the global working class in the face of capitalist globalization and the transition under way for several decades now from Fordist to flexible accumulation' (43) - and it extends to white-collar, service, professional and managerial work. At the same time, the global working class has expanded massively through new waves of primitive accumulation, doubling and more since 1980, and giving rise to mega-cities where the migrant poor congregate in slums, *favelas*, and shanty-towns: according to the ILO, in 2018 a majority of the 3.5 billion workers in the world 'experienced a lack of material well-being, economic security, equality opportunities or scope for human development' (2019: 1, cited p. 46; the source actually says 3.3 billion). With digitalisation set to expel millions more workers from the labour force, and the growing surplus acting to force down the wages of those still employed, the prospect is for a 'reserve army of labour' well beyond the needs of capital, as a perpetual structural feature of global capitalism (49): 'surplus humanity appears to be a structural category thrown up by an accelerated restructuring and a more advanced stage of global capital accumulation' (50). This leads into a key section whose title, 'Sadistic Capitalism: Turning Poverty and Exclusion into Sources of Accumulation' (51-5) is self-explanatory: while two billion people in the informal sector subsidise capital through key roles in labour intensive work and social reproduction, the poverty industry preys upon the poor, notably through extending microfinance to would-be 'entrepreneurs', or consumer credit in what Susan Soederberg calls 'debtfare' regimes (Soederberg, 2014): 'The commodification of debt has generated new modalities of exploiting precarious labour and surplus humanity while at the same time it has become a powerful tool for disciplining the global working class' (54). What is more, these conditions now extend to 'knowledge workers' or 'cognitive labour', increasingly thrown into the category of precarious workers as digitalisation advances, and becoming a 'digital proletariat' (56). Adding in the implications of artificial intelligence for spiralling job losses (58-62), the future looks bleak. While 'violent forms of containment' are imposed upon the marginalised and excluded, 'through border and other containment walls, deportation regimes, systems of mass incarceration and spatial apartheid' (63), and new technologies are applied to surveillance and control, the rich opt for 'gentrification, gated communities, surveillance systems, and state and private violence in a process of 'global green zoning' (the reference is to the Green Zone set up to protect the occupying forces in Baghdad in 2003): 'Inside the world's green zones, elites and privileged middle

and professional strata avail themselves of privatized social services, consumption, and entertainment. They can work and communicate through the Internet and satellite, sealed off under the protection of armies of soldiers, police, and private security forces' (64). In the 'grey zones' in which most of humanity reside, meanwhile, imperialist military and domestic police practices merge, as police forces upgrade their weaponry to military standards, and conduct 'low-intensity warfare' in the communities they 'serve'.

Against this background, the ideas of 'militarized accumulation' and 'accumulation by repression', developed in Chapter Three, tie together the different strands of analysis - overaccumulation, increased inequality, and surplus population - and identify the logic of the global police state. While 'the concept of militarized accumulation points to the more expansive role that generating war, repression and systems of transnational social control now play as they move to the very centre of the global economy', that of accumulation by repression 'refers more specifically to profit making through direct repression of, for instance, migrants or social movements'. So: 'A global police state spans systems of mass incarceration, immigrant detention and deportation, refugee control systems, the construction of border and containment walls, mass surveillance, urban policing, the deployment of paramilitary and private mercenary armies and security forces, and so on': 'As uninvested capital accumulates, enormous pressures build up to find outlets for unloading surplus. A convergence comes about around global capitalism's political need for social control and repression and its economic need to perpetuate accumulation in the face of stagnation' (72), in which

'the TCC and its political and state agents must commodify more and more spheres of global society, including war, social conflict, and repression, in the face of overaccumulation and stagnation, and they must also develop systems of social control that can contain the real and potential rebellion of the global working and popular classes. The circuits of militarized accumulation coercively open up opportunities for capital accumulation worldwide, either on the heels of military force or through states' contracting out to transnational corporate capital the production and execution of social control and welfare. Hence the generation of conflicts and the repression of social movements and vulnerable populations around the world becomes an accumulation strategy that conjoins with political objectives and may even trump those objectives' (74).

While the US is the dominant force here, Robinson insists that it is not acting in US interests alone. Rather, its preponderant role in the global police state must be understood less as a bid for a new U.S. "hegemony" conceived of (sic) domination over other states than as the most powerful instrument in the arsenal of global capitalism through which the mass of the world's poor and working peoples are contained and controlled and the world is further opened up to the TCC plunder': 'In theoretical terms, the U.S. state becomes the *point of condensation* for pressures from dominant groups around the world to resolve the intractable problems for global capitalism' (75). China is building its own private-capital-led military industrial complex, and although it 'may compete geo-politically with other states ... Chinese transnational capitalists and the state-party elite are deeply integrated into global financial circuits and invested in global banking conglomerates that in turn are interlocked with the U.S.-led military-industrial-security complex' (75). This 'is not to say that geo-political tensions are absent - indeed, *they are reaching explosive levels* - but rather, we need to come up with alternative ways of explaining these tensions, such as crises of state legitimacy and the

drive to generate conflict in order to realize militarized accumulation' (76). Robinson documents the privatisation of war and repression through the dependence of the US military on outsourcing, in fighting wars abroad and in its global surveillance/spying operations, and the proliferation of private security companies (78-84); the deep involvement of Silicon Valley giants in surveillance (84-7, 99), the weaponization of Hollywood, the entertainment industry and the corporate media (87-90); the huge profits made by private prisons and proliferating half-way houses and post-prison monitoring in the regime of mass incarceration, primarily but not only in the United States, the use of prisoners as cheap labour, and the bail-bond industry (90-94); and the opportunities for profit-making that arise from the 'war on migrants and refugees' (94-101), notably along the US-Mexico border region, which has become 'a single integrated site of intensive militarized accumulation that is in turn integrated into the larger worldwide circuits of global capitalism' (97), but also in the European Union (100-101, citing Akkerman, 2016). The chapter then concludes with a section on 'social cleansing and militarized accumulation around the world', touching on the use of repressive force to clear or protect land for extractive, natural resource, and agribusiness projects, notably in the 'war on drugs' and at Standing Rock in 2016, the use by Israeli companies of the Occupied Palestine Territory as a testing ground for weapons and security and intelligence systems and technologies that are then marketed as combat tested, and the development of facial recognition technology in China, concluding that: 'The more the global economy comes to depend on this militarization and conflict, the greater the drive to war and the higher the stakes for humanity' (110-111).

Having developed at length the connection between systems of mass control and repression and militarised accumulation as a strategy for unloading surplus accumulated capital, Robinson turns in the final chapter to a third related theme: 'the increasing move towards political systems that can be characterized as twenty-first century fascism, or even in a broader sense, as totalitarian' (112). The underlying idea here is that of a 'general crisis of capitalist rule', understood in Gramscian terms, but the perspective is open-ended, identifying 'a fluid period of great uncertainty that opens up the dangers of neo-fascism, war, and ecological collapse, but also new possibilities for emancipatory projects' (113). Its roots lie in the failure of transnational elites to establish an hegemonic bloc in the 1990s on the basis of consensual incorporation into newly global capitalism. But whereas twentieth-century fascism involved 'the fusion of reactionary political power with *national* capital', 'twenty-first century capital involves the fusion of *transnational capital* with reactionary and repressive political power - an expression of the dictatorship of the TCC'; and whereas fascism a century ago sought to crush powerful working-class and socialist movements, the current project confronts much weaker forces, and appears to be 'a *preemptive* strike at working classes and at the spread of mass resistance through the expansion of as global police state' (116):

'The Fourth Industrial Revolution promises to increase the ranks of surplus humanity and also impose greater competitive pressures on the TCC, ... thus heightening its need to impose more oppressive and authoritarian forms of labour discipline on the global working class. Equally as important, dominant groups face the challenge of how to contain both the real and potential rebellion of surplus humanity. In the face of this challenge, capitalist states have appeared to abandon efforts to secure legitimacy among this surplus population and instead have turned to criminalizing the poor and the dispossessed, with tendencies towards genocide in some cases' (116-7). Robinson suggests that the potential social base for a fascist project is found in 'historically privileged sectors of the working class, such as white workers in the Global North and

urban middle layers in the Global South, that are experiencing heightened insecurity and the spectre of downward mobility and socioeconomic destabilization', and that it 'hinges on the psychological mechanism of displacing mass fear and anxiety at a time of acute capitalist crisis towards scapegoated communities ...' (117-8). However, 'the discourse of national regeneration is in sharp contradiction with the transnational integration of capital and a globally integrated production and financial system upon which hinge the class and status interests of the major capitalist groups and state elites' (119): 'In this age of globalized capitalism, there is little possibility in the United States or elsewhere of providing [material] benefits [such as employment and social wages], so that the "wages of fascism" now appear to be entirely psychological. In this regard, the ideology of twenty-first-century fascism rests on irrationality - a promise to deliver security and restore stability that is emotive, not rational. It is a project that does not and need not distinguish between the truth and the lie' (120).

Although Robinson briefly references numerous examples, the principal focus is on 'Trumpism': 'the Trump regime's public discourse of populism and nationalism bore (sic; and let's hope) no relation to its actual policies', which involved 'deregulation - the virtual smashing of the regulating state - slashing social spending, dismantling what remained of the welfare state, privatizations, tax breaks to corporations and the rich, and an expansion of state subsidies to capital, in short, neo-liberalism on steroids. ... The Trump White House called for transnational investors from around the world to invest in the United States, enticed by a regressive tax reform, unprecedented deregulation, and some limited tariff walls that benefit groups from anywhere in the world that establish operations behind them' (120). More generally, unlike the right-wing authoritarianism that is proliferating in Latin America, twenty-first-century fascism and a global police state in the United States, Europe, Israel and India involve *a triangulation of far-right, authoritarian, and neo-fascist forces in civil society with reactionary political power in the state and transnational corporate capital*' (122). Posed against such a form of politics is a 'global reformism' aimed at 'saving capital from itself' (127-32), and a possible revitalised left and a new international (132-41). The first, advocated by 'a rising number of transnational elites and intelligentsia, 'calls for imposing some restraint on the immediate goal of profit-making in the interests of securing the overall stability of capitalist rule', with limited re-regulation and mild redistributive measures (127): Sachs, Soros, Stiglitz and Summers are identified as fundamentalists turned reformers who have 'helped to establish the hegemony of a mildly reformist discourse within this agenda that actually embraces the continuation of a campaign to open up the world to transnational capital within a new framework of transnational regulation and mild redistribution through taxation and limited social safety nets' (129).

There remains the possibility of a left alternative, and here Robinson first acknowledges the absence of a 'concrete, viable socialist-oriented programme and of political organizations that could push such a programme' (134), highlighting the capitulation of the 'Pink Tide' in Latin America to transnational capital and global financial markets, and the dead end of identitarian politics divorced from a critical analysis of capitalism. The need is to 'link a politics of everyday life to projects of collective emancipation beyond the local, keeping in mind the fragmentation of struggles, whether at the local or world level, that are always specific and conducted in particular places and subject-matters, such as ecology, women's rights, social services, and community demands'; and it is essential to 'challenge exclusion and struggle against precarious work arrangements alongside the more traditional struggles of those who may be formally employed' (137). 'We need a global organizational framework that can help close the disjuncture between

the resurgence of mass social movements and the institutional or party Left', challenging though that may be; its programme must be eco-socialist, and its aim to force states to 'undertake transformations that challenge the prerogatives of transnational capital; and at the same time an essential part of this is to arrive at a 'theoretical understanding of the system of global capitalism and the processes of transformation that this system is currently experiencing', and in so doing to 'provide a guide to an emancipatory working-class politics that can win over the would-be social bases of twenty-first-century fascism and establish a working-class hegemony in the revolt' (140). The latter, clearly, is what Robinson has set out to provide.

So, how far does he succeed in this goal? The great strength of the book is his willingness to take on the task of pulling together the elements of a potential global police state, and spelling out so clearly the logic he sees as informing it, and the danger it poses. The tone he adopts is urgent, and rightly so - if anything, the tensions are greater and the threats more serious than at the time of going to press, barely a year ago. And although he makes his case primarily with relation to the United States, at the same time he gives pointers to the broader global situation. The short documentary made by Brave New Films, *Immigrants for Sale* (cited here p. 97), is essential viewing; you should also watch the highly topical recent release from the same organisation, *Suppressed: The Right to Vote*, and *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook* (American Issues Initiative). Both are available on Youtube. The mounting evidence of planning for organised intimidation at the ballot box and outright cancellation of voting rights surrounding the US presidential election underline the urgency of these issues. The project identified by Robinson is real, and menacing. Equally, while he says relatively little about the European Union, the TNI Report *Border Wars* (Akkerman, 2016) he cites has been followed by *The Business of Building Walls* (Akkerman, 2019). Along with Ruiz Benedicto and Brunal (2018), these sources confirm the existence of at least a *border* police state where repression and private profit-making are conjoined, and Stachowitsch and Sachseder (2019) enlarge further on the nasty politics of Frontex. It is entirely reasonable to see the border as a proving ground for techniques to be rolled out on a broader scale, as is already under way; and if by chance you think it is not happening in the heart of Europe, think again.

At the same time, I don't share Robinson's analysis of the 'big picture'. Accepting that he sees the global police state as a threat rather than an unavoidable future, and that he recognises divisions in the 'TCC' and a difference between the pursuit of short-term interests by members of the class and the attempts of some 'more enlightened' members of the 'TNS' to impose some regulation and control, I still think that he is wrong about the perspective of the leading agencies of global governance, and as a consequence about where Trump in particular stands in relation to the 'transnational state'. Trump's domestic economic policies are indeed 'neoliberal', in their commitment to tax-cutting, deregulation, and rollback of welfare. So far, so Bill Clinton. But it's too much of a stretch to equate confrontation with China, pressures on US corporations to bring jobs back home, and invitations to foreign corporations to invest behind tariff walls to 'make America great again' as a strategy that reflects the character of the US state as 'the *point of condensation* for pressures from dominant groups around the world to resolve the intractable problems for global capitalism' (75, cited above). Come to that, as much of the gallows humour circulating on the internet points up, Trump is more in the mould of the 'personal dictator' than that of the disciplined Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, committed to making the world safe for transnational capital whatever its national origin; and there is no evidence that his cultivation of a personal political base along recognisably fascist lines is endorsed or supported by transnational US capital, let

alone that he is trusted by the transnational liberal elite worldwide as a reliable representative of the interests of global capital. The *Financial Times* cannot be alone in regarding him as 'profoundly irresponsible' ('Donald Trump's irresponsible words put others at risk', The FT View, 6 October 2020).

Of course, the project Robinson describes predates Trump. But its logic depends crucially upon the assumption that the global economy is mired in a crisis of over-accumulation that is all but terminal, that the last temporary fix is to pillage available resources from the 'developing world', and that to do so it is necessary to contain and repress surplus humanity from whom no more value can be squeezed. In contrast, I see episodes of over-accumulation as temporary moments or episodes in the contradictory but still dynamic development of capitalism, as has been the case with every single instance in the past. That is by the way. More to the point, though, so do all the leading 'representatives' of transnational or global capital, and agents involved in the global governance of the world market. As a consequence, their attitude to their own marginalised populations and to 'surplus humanity' in the developing world is the polar opposite to that depicted by Robinson. So for example, the focus in the European Union on the 'low work intensity' in a substantial minority of households that Robinson notes (p. 62 and ft. 84, pp. 155-6) has not led to a strategy of surveillance, *exclusion*, and *repression*. Rather, intensified surveillance and targeted welfare 'reform' is aimed at forcing various sub-sectors of the population in such households identified as 'under-employed' (youth, early retirees, 'stay-at-home housewives', mothers with young children, the disabled) into paid work in what is an aggressive strategy aimed at increasing the extent to which the population as a whole is directly exploitable by capital. Such strategies are central to 'global reformism', and are presented precisely as means of redressing inequality. Similarly, the OECD (which is an active partner, along with the World Bank, in the European Commission's offensive on worklessness and under-employment) did not develop a concern for inequality only in 2015 (as Robinson notes, p. 128). He is absolutely right to note that the policies of these bodies (as of Sachs, Soros, Stiglitz and Summers) represent 'the continuation of a campaign to open up the world to transnational capital within a new framework of transnational regulation and mild redistribution through taxation and limited safety nets' (129). But this does not reflect the view that the majority of the 3.3 billion workers in the world are surplus to requirements. Rather, they are *insufficiently exploited by capital*. The primary 'commodity' that these representatives of global capital wish to seize for capital is still the labour power of the poor, and the purpose of ongoing 'primary accumulation' is still as much to proletarianise the poor as it is to gain access to land and natural resources. Again, Robinson is right to argue, along classical Marxist lines, that global capital will continue to create and recreate a surplus population - but, if these agencies have their way, it will do so, as always, as a necessary counterpart to further proletarianisation, and accumulation. So in recent policy statements, both the OECD (2019) and the World Bank (2018) advocate the intensification of direct exploitation of labour by capital, equally in the 'advanced' and the 'developing' world. Hence their unremitting focus not only on the need to make workers more *flexible*, but also to endow them with *skills*. Of course, this is also a bleak picture. Central to the *global* reform of social protection are not only 'limited safety nets' to induce increased entry to the labour market, but also the reshaping of labour contracts to introduce minimum sickness and holiday entitlements for current informal sector, casual or 'zero hours' workers, while *at the same time* removing both job security and pension rights. The welcome success of Uber drivers in winning recognition as workers (137-8) is one side of this logic, but the virtual disappearance of what used to be call the 'standard labour contract' is the other.

The 'bigger picture' that I see, then, is rather different, as I see more substance in the attempts of the 'politicized strata of the TCC and transnationally oriented elites and organic intellectuals, including those who staff TNS institutions ... to define the long-term interests of the system and to develop policies, projects, and ideologies to secure these interests' (22) than does Robinson. But even if this liberal project were to prevail, which is by no means certain, it would still bring freedom only for capital, and with it the complete entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and the threat to the viability of life on this planet would remain. So this is a book to be reflected upon, and wholeheartedly welcomed.

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