



Degraded Work: The Struggle at the Bottom of the Labor Market

Marc Doussard

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Critics on the left and the right typically agree that globalization, the loss of manufacturing jobs, and the expansion of the service sector have led to income inequality and rising numbers of low-paying jobs with poor working conditions.

In *Degraded Work*, Marc Doussard demonstrates that this decline in wages and working conditions is anything but the unavoidable result of competitive economic forces. Rather, he makes the case that service sector and other local-serving employers have boosted profit with innovative practices to exploit workers, demeaning their jobs in new ways—denying safety equipment, fining workers for taking scheduled breaks, requiring unpaid overtime—that go far beyond wage cuts. Doussard asserts that the degradation of service work is a choice rather than an inevitability, and he outlines concrete steps that can be taken to help establish a fairer postindustrial labor market.

Drawing on fieldwork in Chicago, *Degraded Work* examines changes in two industries in which inferior job quality is assumed to be intrinsic: residential construction and food retail. In both cases, Doussard shows how employers degraded working conditions as part of a successful and intricate strategy to increase profits. Arguing that a growing service sector does not have to mean growing inequality, Doussard proposes creative policy and organizing opportunities that workers and advocates can use to improve job quality despite the overwhelming barriers to national political action.

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