

Lecture Series on Governance and Politics in South Asia
Department of Political Science

Labour and Capital in India's Informal Economy

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Conventional economic thought portrayed the informal economy in developing countries like India as a 'sector', expecting that it would fade away with expansion of the formal economy. This, however, did not materialize and, subsequently, what initially had been perceived as a *problem*, was by the end of the 1980s projected as a *solution*. It implied doing away with formal employment and the body of labour legislation that had been formulated and implemented to regulate this mode of waged work on the pretext that it hampered economic growth. As a consequence, the informal workforce increased to over 90 per cent or more of all people engaged in waged work. Informalization did not only accelerate at a rapid pace but has also made inroads into the formal economy, to the extent that the formal-informal divide has lost much of its former rigidity. Informality, as discussed both in the realm of research and policy, is predominantly if not exclusively understood with reference to labour, work, and employment. For no good reason at all, as empirical investigations covering a period of close to five decades reveal. The definition is a reduction to absurdity since it singles out merely one factor of production – i.e. labour – completely overlooking how it pervades the working of capital and vice versa. The supposition that capital firmly belongs to the domain of formality can be questioned on many accounts.



Jan Breman is Emeritus Professor at Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, University of Amsterdam. He is a board member of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Anthropology and Languages (KITLV); the South Asia Committee of the American Social Science Research Council; and the Committee on Asian Studies of the European Science Foundation among many others. Breman's research interests are work, employment, and labour relations in contemporary Asia; history of colonialism; labour migration; and conditions of poverty and the social question in a global perspective. Some of his key works include: *On Pauperism in Present and Past* (OUP, 2016); *At Work in the Informal Economy of India* (OUP, 2013); *Outcast Labour in Asia* (OUP, 2010); and *The Making and Unmaking of an Industrial Working Class* (OUP, 2004) among many others.

Date: Monday, December 18, 2017

Time: 16:00 – 18:00

Venue: SAI, Room 317

All are cordially invited!