



V E R S O

Tel: +44 (0)20 7437 3546
Fax: +44 (0)20 7734 0059
www.versobooks.com

PRESS RELEASE

******EMBARGOED UNTIL 2 MAY 2011******

The first no-holds-barred exposé of the exploitative and divisive world of internships

INTERN NATION

How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little
in the Brave New Economy

By Ross Perlin



- ***Intern Nation* is available for extraction. Ross Perlin is available for interview and writing investigative and comment articles. He will be launching the book in London in June 2011.**
- Interns. They famously shuttle coffee in a thousand newsrooms, MP's offices, and film sets, walk pets and, if they're lucky, spend some quality time with the photocopier. The luckiest may even earn a presidential scandal to adorn their name – remember Monicagate? But they also deliver aid in Afghanistan, design high fashion, and build the human genome. Interns have become an indispensable part of the workforce, and are changing the face of work and education across the world.
- Ross Perlin's myth-busting exposé of the brave new world of unpaid work is a witty yet serious investigation of the well-trodden part of internships. Writer, multi-linguist and former intern, Perlin takes the reader inside the private and public sectors, journalism, boutique charities and megacorporations such as Disney. Furthermore, he inspects how many thrifty universities run lucrative study-abroad "destination internship" schemes and exchange student labour for cheap academic credit where little to no learning takes place.
- Internships are a legal grey area: interns enjoy no fair hiring practices, no workplace protections and no standing in courts of law, let alone luxuries as a living wage. Internships are now a fixture on the CVs of thousands of young people, and unpaid internships – illegal under minimum wage law – are growing at expense of the paid. A third of internships are unpaid, and this mass exploitation saves companies – and governments – more than millions each year. A survey conducted by Interns Anonymous found that 77% of parliamentary internships required working set hours, which could mean that the employers were in breach of minimum wage legislation.
- There is a growing backlash against exploitative internships – even Nick Clegg and Iain Duncan Smith are jumping on the bandwagon, launching a 'social mobility' strategy to end unpaid internships. They claim: *"for us, a fair society is an open society, one in which opportunities are not determined by background but by drive and ability... Our drive to open up internships is intended to prevent the lucky few grabbing all the best chances. This is mobility for the middle, not just the bottom."* The rhetoric of 'social mobility,' so focused on an individual's worth rather than social change, is now turning to making internships 'accessible' to people from poorer backgrounds – all very convenient as public sector cuts threaten projects serving the most disadvantaged: encouraging businesses to pay interns by warning of legal challenges under national minimum wage legislation costs the government, of course, very little.
- In an increasingly bleak economic landscape for young people, unpaid internships can only lead to a more divided and unequal society. With the constant availability of unregulated, cheap or free labour replacing paid work, the internship phenomenon continuing as it is unchecked will prove an explosive force behind the predicted 'generational timebomb.' The UK has a record number of university

graduates who now face a tough labour market – according to ONS figures from January 2011, graduate unemployment rate is at its highest since 1995 at 20%. Youth unemployment hit a record high at 20.5% in February 2011; the number of under-25s out of work worldwide is estimated at 81 million.

- Referring to historians about what unleashed this phenomenon, Perlin unravels the cultural and professional rhetoric surrounding internships, from its beginnings in the 19th century hospital to its next base in the political realm, on Capitol Hill. He pursues the internship's export to Westminster, Europe and the rest of the world – to the explosion “when internships made a perfect fit with the go-go rhetoric of the dotcom bubble and the “New Economy.”
- What happened to the “revolt against work” on assembly lines and alienating offices? Perlin examines the exploitation of the “casualization” of the workforce and the shifting cultural and social attitudes towards work in “post-industrial, networked capitalism... a permissive period, ill disposed to regulation and blind to labo[u]r issues” that have enabled the flight of internships – only one of many forms of precarious, non-standard or “contingent” labour that have mushroomed since the 1970s.
- Against the rise of the internship from America to beyond, Perlin charts the history of the decline of apprenticeships, a tradition of regulated, solid training stemming from the guild system of medieval Gothic Europe spreading to the British Isles. Apprenticeships enable the trainee to ‘earn while you learn’ and enter stable, skilled and paid employment – but “they have been stymied in the white-collar world, pre-empted by the short-term, unpaid, employer-dominated internship model.”
- ‘The Rise and Rebellion of the Global Intern’ explores the transmission and on-the-ground effects of internships over the world with a special focus on China’s enormous workforce. And as the world’s young start to rebel, Perlin takes us through some of the highlights, including San Precario, or Saint Precarious – the patron saint of precarious workers and interns. With ‘Nothing to Lose But Your Cubicles,’ Perlin ends with a call to all interns to tear down the half-built glass ceiling of internships, for “when working for free becomes the norm, everyone loses, except at the top.” He outlines what organisations can do to improve intern practices, and asserts “legal protection for interns is not a pipe dream – it’s a reality within reach, a set of rights waiting to be claimed.”
- Events:
 - 1 June Pages of Hackney bookshop
 - 7 June Trades Union Congress with Jeremy Dear, General Secretary of the NUJ, Frances O’Grady, TUC Deputy General Secretary and Lisa Nandy, Labour MP for Wigan
 - 8 June Frontline Club

NOTES TO EDITORS

ROSS PERLIN is a graduate of Stanford, SOAS and Cambridge, and has written for the *Guardian*, *Mail on Sunday*, *Time*, *Lapham’s Quarterly*, and *Open Democracy*. A former unpaid intern himself, he is now gainfully employed researching obsolescing languages in China.

Author: Ross Perlin

ISBN: 978 1 84467 686 6

Title: Intern Nation

Binding: Hardback

Publication: 30 May 2011

Price: £14.99 **Extent:** 272 pages

Verso - Books with a Critical Edge 40 Years of Radical Publishing 1970 – 2010

VERSO is the most influential radical publisher in the UK and US, and celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2010. It grew out of the celebrated journal New Left Review and has published many of the major figures on the left, including Tariq Ali, Eric Hobsbawm, John Pilger, Benedict Anderson, Terry Eagleton and Jacques Derrida.