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Beyond NEET: Precariousness, ideology and social justice - the 99%
James Avis

Abstract

The paper addresses NEET as an ideological and discursive formation, lodging the discussion within its socio-economic context - one of increasing insecurity and precariousness. It argues that frequently quasi-political and ideological constructions of NEET can readily fold over into and articulate with discourses of the underclass, the broken society as well as, paradoxically, that of social recession. Consequently, such arguments divert attention from processes of 'othering', the secular changes facing society as well as the spectre of a return to a form of nineteenth century liberalism. Although the argument is located within the English context it has a relevance to other western societies in which we can discern similar tendencies.

> *Both those inside the policy discourse and those whose professional identities are established through antagonism towards the discourse benefit from the uncertainties and tragedies of reform. Critical researchers, apparently ensconced in the moral high ground, nonetheless make a livelihood trading in the artefacts of misery and broken dreams of practitioners. None of us remains untainted by the incentives and disciplines of the new moral economy. (Ball, 1997: 257)*

> *The Deviant Imagination assumes and sets out to establish that learning about deviance and social control is not simply a question of memorising the formulae, aetiologies and prognoses of certain kinds of deviant act. Rather it involves an imaginative enterprise as to how men [sic] construct and conceive of social order, reasonableness, familiarity and events which go bump in the order of things. It is part of what Paulo Freire calls 'a difficult apprenticeship in naming the world'. (Pearson, 1975: pxi)*

Introduction

The quotes above are salient to the forthcoming discussion. The first comments on how easy it is for academics and critical researchers to occupy the moral high ground, with all the tensions and contradictions that flow from this stance. The second reminds us that the concepts we marshal not only describe the social world but also construct it as a particular object of enquiry. In this paper I am going to use a battery of terms which necessarily carry

particular conceptualisations of the social world: NEET (not in employment, education or training), underclass, dangerous class, precariat, etc. Each of these terms carries particular, albeit messy and sometimes contradictory, constructions of the social order and the socio-economic context in which we are placed. These terms not only reflect and construct the social world but also carry a politics with them.

The term NEET specifically refers to young people who are not in employment, education or training. However the age span it addresses varies: initially in the UK it referred to those between the ages of 16-18, in Eurostat statistics it extends to 24, with Fumagalli and Morini (undated) considering it to be prevalent amongst Italian 25-29 year olds (Eurofound, 2012; Furlong, 2007). What I want to do in this paper is to examine NEET as an ideological and discursive formation. To do this I lodge the discussion within its socio-economic context, one framed by a labour market marked by increasing levels of insecurity and precariousness. I also want to examine the ideological and quasi-political constructions of NEET. To do this I need to historicise these arguments, as the interest and concern with NEET is an expression of longstanding anxieties of the British state and middle classes with unruly working class youth. In addition I want to assess the politics of these arguments and it is here that I draw on notions derived from Italian workerism (*operaismo)* (see for example, Berardi, 2009: ff33) and its current manifestation in discussions of cognitive capitalism. This will allow me to raise some questions about the way we understand the relationship between neo-liberalism and capitalism. Although the following argument is set within an English context it has a much broader relevance with similar debates and processes being analysed in other social formations in the West (Davidsson, 2013; Murray, 2013).

Recurrent themes
Those of us who were researching and writing in the 1970s and 80s, or indeed those revisiting these debates, cannot fail to notice similarities in the current responses to youth unemployment. Both then and now there are anxieties surrounding workless youth, and similar responses have been developed to draw young people into waged labour. We could however go back further to inter-war schemes that Horne (1983) examined which were orientated towards unemployed youth. Or indeed we could consider the work of Pearson (1975; 1983) who, along with others, examined recurrent moral panics about unruly working class male youth and the moral turpitude of working class girls, following the development of industrial capitalism (see Cohen, 1973).

In the *Deviant Imagination* Pearson (1975) very usefully draws upon a lexicon of terms that represented the anxieties of the emerging middle class, bourgeoisie and the State in the 19th Century at the moment when industrial capitalism was emerging. He points towards notions of the 'dangerous class' and the 'mob', as well as the metaphor of the sewer to describe not only the conditions faced by, but also the morality of sections of the working class and the resulting fears surrounding this. For the purpose of this paper I want to draw particularly on one of his insights, namely that these constructions from the 19th and 20th century provide a backdrop to the way in which understandings of deviance and, one might add, the working class were shaped. These constructions resonate not only with the 1970s when Pearson was writing but provide part of the *zeitgeist* of the our time. We need only think about terms such as underclass, or the still more abrasive *white trash* (Preston, 2003) or indeed Jones' (2012) recent work on the demonisation of the working class in order to illustrate this tendency. Notably these themes are represented in the response of the middle class to reality TV, alongside the 'othering' of particular sections of the working class (see Skeggs and Wood, 2012, chapter 7; Skeggs, 1997).

Importantly, notions of deviance as well as education and training cannot be thought of outside a consideration of the moral order and the politics of control. It is within this context that we can place both historical and current debates that address working class youth. For Pearson politics and deviance are intertwined, and we could add to this the state's education and training policies.

Marx once commented:

> Hegel remarked somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance
> in world history occur, as it were twice. He forgot to add: the first time as
> tragedy, the second as farce. (Marx and Engels, 1973, p96)

This somewhat overused quotation can be mobilised to point towards the reiteration of a lexicon of terms which address youth, both within and beyond industrial capitalism. It suggests not only an iterative process but one in which the lessons of the past are frequently overlooked. In the following I use a number of extracts to illustrate the way in which quasi-political and ideological constructions of NEET can readily fold over into and articulate with

discourses concerned with the underclass, the broken society as well as leftist analyses of social recession (Finlayson, 2010). I have cited these extracts at length so that readers can gain a better sense of their original location. These extracts could be construed as being arbitrary, having been drawn from any number of passages to be used promiscuously to secure a particular point. However, I want to use them to illustrate the reiteration of a number of thematic elements that continue to have a resonance in the twenty first century.

The first extract raises the issue of the educability of the working class and is drawn from the CCCS' *Unpopular Education's* citation of Vaizey.

Extract 1

The identification of delinquency with educational 'failure' and with the family and neighbourhood culture of working people is a typical sociological truism of the period [1960s]. More surprisingly is the completely explicit statement about the whole schooling enterprise that follows:

> ***This [improving the schooling of working-class children] would undoubtedly be the most effective way of eliminating the social problems of the so-called delinquent areas, a name that masks a much wider social problem – the failure to integrate the unskilled and semi skilled working class into a society which is becoming predominantly governed by the values and standards of the professional middle class***. [My emboldening] (Education Group CCCS, 1981, p 78-9, citing Vaizey, 1962, p24)

The above emphasises a notion of cultural deficit as well as signalling the need to take steps to integrate sections of the working class into wider society, in order to militate against the development of delinquent areas and the resulting social problems.

The next extract is from the Cabinet Office's S*ocial Exclusion Unit,* published in 1999 which could be read in two different ways.

Extract 2

The risk of non-participation [learning or work] is higher for young people if:
- Their parents are poor or unemployed

- They are members of certain minority ethnic groups
- They are in particular circumstances which create barriers to participation
    i. They are carers
    ii. They are teenage parents
    iii. They are homeless
    iv. They are or have been in care
    v. They have a learning difficulty
    vi. They have a disability
    vii. They have a mental illness
    viii. They misuses drugs or alcohol
    ix. They are involved in offending

(Social Exclusion Unit 1999, p48)

What is interesting about the above is that it points in two directions - to structural relations but also to social pathology. This is reminiscent of Merton's (1969) discussion of anomie and deviant adaptations which is similarly Janus-like. Merton argued that anomie occurred as a result of a disjunction between the commonly accepted cultural goals of wider society and the institutional means available to attain these. It was suggested that as a result of cultural deficit working class youth were less likely to attain the consensually held cultural goals of wider society through the accepted institutional means, such as working hard and gaining educational qualification and so on, resulting in anomie. This analysis points towards cultural deficit as well as structural inequality. Similarly the *Fryer Report* (1999), published in the same year as *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999), bemoaned the anti-educative culture that predominated in some sections of society.

Extract 3

In our country today, far too many people are still locked in a culture which regards lifelong learning as unnecessary, unappealing, uninteresting or unavailable… It follows that proposals to change this culture will require action on many fronts, over an extended period, winning people to new ways of working, new priorities and a new sense of what is seen as normal and largely unremarkable. (Fryer Report, 1999, p8)

A year before the *Fryer Report,* the New Labour Government[1] had published *The Learning Age: a Renaissance for a New Britain* that constructed a consensual image of society in which all would benefit from a culture of learning.

Extract 4

Our vision of the learning age is about more than employment. The development of a **culture of learning** will help to build a united society, assist in the creation of personal independence, and encourage our creativity and innovation…

For *individuals:*

- **learning** offers excitement and the opportunity for discovery… It helps all of us to **improve our chances of getting a job and getting on**…

For *businesses:*

- learning helps them to be more successful by adding value and keeping them up-to-date. Learning develops the intellectual capital which is now at the centre of a nation's competitive strength…

For *communities:*

- learning contributes to social cohesion and fosters a sense of belonging, responsibility and identity…

For *the nation:*

-learning is essential to a strong economy and an inclusive society. In offering a way out of dependency and low expectation, it lies at the heart of the Government's welfare reform programme… [my emphasis](DfEE, 1998, p10-11)

These themes were reprised in 2007 in *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*:

Extract 5

For adults, better skills and economically valuable qualifications are a route to achieving better jobs, career progression and higher incomes to support their families. Better skills are the key to greater social mobility, ensuring that individuals can get on because of their talent and hard work, and not just because of background.

For employers, a more highly-skilled workforce is a route to achieving higher productivity and, in the private sector, greater competitiveness and profitability.

For communities, better skills can create an escape route from generations of low ambition and low achievement. [my emphasis] (DIUS, 2007, p6)

The reason for drawing upon these particular extracts is that they signal recurring themes that, while accented differently remain in play to this day. One of these is a concern about the educability of the working class, and the need to interrupt its cultural orientations so as to foster a positive attitude towards learning. Vaizey is very clear on this point but it is also illustrated in The *Fryer Report* as well as New Labour's *The Learning Age: a Renaissance for a New Britain*. The *Fryer Report* calls for a recalibration of what we might describe as working class culture in order to persuade people that lifelong learning is normal, necessary and appealing. The interest in the educability of the working class is also manifested in state worries about the societal costs arising from the activities of marginalised youth and the resultant necessity to assimilate such groups into wider society. Thus, in *World Class Skills* it is suggested that "better skills and economically valuable qualifications are a route to achieving better jobs, career progression and higher incomes..." as well as being pivotal to social mobility. In addition better skills and economically valuable qualifications can also provide "an escape route from generations of low ambition and low achievement" (DIUS, 2007, p6). These notions are ideologically driven in as much as they not only suggest that working class youth should be 'readied' for employment and social mobility but also that this is a realistic possibility, which for most it is not (Dorling, 2011).

Consider for example the solutions to NEET drawn from the literature by Eurofound (2012):
- Preventing early school-leaving (p110)
- Reintegrating early school-leavers (p116)
- Supporting school-to-work transitions (p120)
- Fostering employability of young people (p128)
- Removing barriers and offering employer incentives (p134)

These solutions are not so different from those present in the broader literature, which in addition frequently refers to the negative effects of the socio-economic structure which is thought to limit opportunities in relation to class, race and gender (see for example, Simmons and Thompson, 2011, Chapter 7; Allen and Ainley, 2010). Such analyses lead to a concern to open-up opportunities and facilitate social mobility, which in turn becomes aligned to a call for policies marked by social justice. Notably, such concerns are not restricted to the 'academic' literature but are also taken up in policy discourse. These issues are apparent in the

attention given to social mobility by New Labour and currently Miliband's *One Nation*[2] Labour Party, and indeed by the Coalition[3] Government, albeit that these concerns are located within a neoliberal regime.

Policy frameworks

I have not delved into the definitional issues surrounding NEET, nor indeed notions of underclass (see Macdonald, 1997; Murray, 1996). Both are ideological constructs, which carry fluid and sometimes contradictory meanings that can be bent to serve a range of purposes. NEET can easily be viewed as a problem about which something should be done, opening itself up to a technicised solution rooted in policy science. On one level a concern with NEET aligns with an interest in social justice, the disadvantaged and excluded. At the same time, and on another level it can serve to pathologise sections of the working class. We could consider the implications of the earlier discussions of Fryer, Vaizey, New Labour policy, and so on. In this respect the notion of NEET serves a similar ideological role to that of the underclass - a term that has similarly been subject to robust critique. Roberts (1997) suggests that four features must be satisfied analytically for a group to constitute an underclass:

- they should be disadvantaged relative to the lowest class in gainful employment
- this situation should be persistent within and across generations
- they should constitute a socially separate and culturally distinct group
- their culture regardless of its origins becomes an impediment to engagement in wider society (derived from Roberts, 1997, p42-43)

Macdonald (1997) in his critique of conceptualisations of the underclass, in which members of this group are construed as feckless, draws our attention to what he describes as 'churning', that is the movement between low paid work and periods of unemployment (see Shildrick, et al, 2012: p18). He also alerts us to the longstanding commitment to waged labour amongst those he and his colleagues have interviewed in areas of high unemployment and who may have been described as members of the underclass or as NEET (Shildrick, et al, 2012). Macdonald is not alone in raising such a critique of conceptualisations of the underclass or NEET (see for example, Simmons and Thompson, 2011). The commitment to employment manifest in churning, whereby there is a willingness to labour in low waged and frequently

intermittent work, serves to problematise conceptions of the underclass which presumes fecklessness, dependency and worklessness.

However, the dichotomy between a critical engagement with NEET located in a discussion of the social structure, set against more conservative accounts that lean towards class pathology, can be overstated (see for example Eurofound, 2012, Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). This is because such accounts operate on a similar discursive terrain, accepting as they do capitalist relations, with critical analyses being at best ameliorative. This becomes readily apparent in the debates between leftist accounts of social recession and Conservative constructions of the Big Society and societal breakdown. Whereas writers to the left of the Labour party draw a clear distinction between their understandings of 'social recession' and Conservative conceptualisations of the 'broken/big society' (Finlayson, 2010; and see Jones, 2012). Whilst both accounts draw on similar evidence of social breakdown, in the case of the former a structural explanation is centre stage, whereas the latter folds back into a form of social and cultural pathology. Whilst reflecting 'othering', paradoxically both these arguments divert attention from processes in which NEET, the underclass and so on, are constituted as a 'race' apart. For example, some years ago an English television programme on the white working class as an embattled community, living in ghettos separated from the rest of society, depicted as a 'race' apart (see BBC, 2008). These arguments and characterisations are important ideologically, and reflect two themes. Firstly, they suggested a sense of 'there but for the grace of God go I', yet at the same time this group is construed as different, the 'other', not like us, whoever the 'us' is. I am reminded of Louis Althusser (1972) and his discussion of the ideological state apparatus, where such representations of socially excluded groups serve as a rhetorical warning lest we stray from the moral order, but also serve to confirm 'our' propriety. Importantly, such arguments also serve to deflect from a wider engagement with capitalist relations as discussed below.

The distinction between analyses rooted in notions of social recession and those that stress societal breakdown can be overemphasised. For example the structural and pathological models come together in the solutions they propose with this being a feature not only of the responses of politicians but also of relevant academic literature. Such accounts draw on a not dissimilar battery of policy interventions - improved advice and guidance, the valuing of vocational education, the promotion of social mobility, the opening-up of educational pathways, and so on. Such interventions are valuable in their own terms and can potentially

enhance individual life chances. However, in structural critiques which emphasise educational and social inequalities the object of critique can easily become the privileged and salaried middle class. That is to say those whose children are likely to have the cultural capital to enable them to gain positional advantage through success in the educational system. It is something of a sociological truism that the middle class have benefitted disproportionately from the expansion of educational opportunities. Whilst this critique is undoubtedly valid it does nonetheless serve to deflect from a robust engagement with capitalist relations. If we were to take seriously structural analyses, allied to a recognition of capitalist relations, it would become apparent that what is needed is a revolutionary transformation of society. Such a position would distance itself from an ameliorative or indeed social democratic strategy which gesturally attacks the polarities of income and wealth but leaves capitalism intact. Minimally such a stance would be marked by a revolutionary reformism, or in Fraser's (2003) terms, nonreformist reforms, which when successful 'change more than the specific institutional features that they target' and 'alter the terrain upon which later struggles will be waged' (p79) and have as their long term goal the transformation of society. In other words it is necessary to go much further than leftist critiques rooted in social democratic sensibilities and challenge the very basis of capitalist relations.

Capitalist Relations

It is also important to consider the elements of particular discussions of NEET, their relationship to capitalist relations, and secular changes in society, as well as the spectre of a return to nineteenth century liberalism, as this informs subsequent analysis. This paper began with a brief analysis of the 1970's and 80's and it would be easy to argue that there have been fundamental changes to the socio-economic structure and capitalist relations since that period. Such changes can be encapsulated in the decline of industrial capitalism or, if you like, the collapse of Fordism in the West. Another way of looking at these changes is to consider the period immediately following the second world war as exceptional, particularly with respect to the concessions won by the working class and the development of a progressive middle class employed in an expanding public sector.

We could consider current conditions as fostering a return to nineteenth century liberalism. However, it might be more useful to draw on a number of ideas concerned with current

conditions and the re-composition of class relations. This sits alongside notions that explore what lies beyond industrial capitalism. Callinicos, citing Bourdieu writes:

> 'the *deteritorialisation of the enterprise'* now freed from any specific attachment to region and nation – have ensured that 'insecurity is everywhere today'; '[o]bjective insecurity supports a generalized subjective insecurity which today affects, at the heart of an advanced economy, the majority of workers and even those who are not yet directly hit.' Indeed, this is part of 'a *mode of domination* of a new type, based on the institution of a generalised and permanent condition of insecurity aiming to compel the workers to submission, to the acceptance of exploitation'. (Callinicos, 1999, p89; and see Bourdieu, 1998a, 1998b)

Not dissimilarly Beck notes:

> 'Flexibility' is demanded everywhere – or, in other words, an 'employer' should be able to fire 'employees' more easily. 'Flexibility' also means a redistribution of risks from state and economy to individuals. (Beck, 1999, p12)

This notion of generalised insecurity is touched upon by Allen and Ainley (2007) in their ironic description of a pear shaped social structure together with a conceptualisation of the insecure working/middle class. Similarly, Standing's (2011) notion of the precariat in some respects echoes Bourdieu and Beck's discussion of insecurity. The point is that current conditions are increasingly marked by high levels of insecurity, or perhaps more importantly by a *mode of domination* that ideologically compels workers to accept exploitation and intensification of labour, whereby risk is redistributed to the individual. It is in this sense that we all face precariousness.

The subtitle of Standing's book is 'the new dangerous class', pointing towards the danger of 'othering' and constituting groups as existing on the margins of society - for example disaffected youth and the like. However, as with NEET and earlier discussions of the underclass, the precariat is a fragmented category. What is new, or at least significant about the current conjuncture, is a generalised insecurity in which more of us are facing the sort of 'churning' that MacDonald and colleagues have described in relation to the urban poor. In other words even if we are in apparently secure employment many of us are potential

members of the precariat - possibly following organisational restructuring and redundancy. In order to develop this argument further, I would like to comment on two closely related responses to the conjunctural conditions currently faced as this has the potential to open up a political space that could herald the development of cross class alliances in a struggle against precariousness. The first response concerns the neo-liberal subject, the 'dead man working' of Cederström and Fleming (2012), who discuss the manner in which work, that is to say waged labour, has permeated all aspects of our lives. This is in contrast to the Fordism of industrial capitalism which was marked by clearly identified working hours.

> What makes capitalism different today is that its influence reaches far beyond the office. Under Fordism, weekends and leisure time were still relatively untouched. Their aim was to indirectly support the world of work. Today, however, capital seeks to exploit our sociality in *all* spheres of life. When we all become 'human capital' we not only have a job, or perform a job. We *are* the job. (Cederström and Fleming, 2012, p7)

In contradistinction to the above whereby 'we become our job', the conditions in which we are placed also carry the potential for a rather different response - the refusal of work, that is to say of waged labour. This takes us back to the Italian Workerist movement or *operaismo* of the 1960s and 70s; what is important for the current discussion arises from two features of a Workerist analysis of capitalism and its development. Firstly, as opposed to arguments that emphasise the notion of the 'human made capital' (Rikowski, 1999) and the colonisation of our subjectivities by waged labour whereby we become 'the job', Workerism held out the prospect for the development of rather different responses. Berardi, commenting on the 1970's stated,

> In the car production cycle, labor had a mass depersonalized character: it is in these sectors that the refusal of work exploded ... In the 1970's the entire European car production cycle was stormed by waves of workers' fights, sabotage and absenteeism. (Beradi, 2009, p28)

This Fordist moment was set within industrial capitalism. Although this discussion might seem somewhat distanced from a discussion of NEET, it does however serve to raise two important questions that address contemporary capitalism: the significance of waged labour and the notion of surplus population, that is to say those marginalised and not required by

contemporary capitalism for waged labour (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2011; Davies, 2007). Importantly, as a consequence of capitalist development more and more members of the working population encounter precariousness and therefore the potential of finding themselves in an equivalent position to NEETs. The salience of Workerist analyses is that, rather than viewing the development of capitalism as a consequence of accumulation strategies or the pursuit of value, it is understood as capital's response to class struggle. I do not want to engage with the correctness or empirical veracity of Workerist accounts but rather seek to use them to raise important questions, or in Week's (2011) terms to act as a 'provocation'. This line of thought would suggests we re-evaluate arguments that emphasise the commitment of NEETs, as well as those in intermittent employment, to waged labour. Rather than necessarily celebrating this commitment to waged labour we should re-analyse this in relation to its salience for the reproduction of capitalist relations as well as its ideological role. There is an affinity between the ideological ramifications of this argument and Cederström and Fleming's (2012) discussion of waged labour whereby we *are* the job (p7). The commitment to waged labour of those without employment mirrors the exaggerated engagement of Cederström and Fleming's workers with work, both of which secure capitalist interests.

Workerist writers, commenting on the struggle against industrial capitalism in the 1960s and 70s in Italy, emphasised the refusal of work (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007). This argument suggests that subsequent developments in capital were a response to this and are thus linked to analyses concerned with the way in which capitalism developed in the West. Such analyses point towards the development of Post-fordism and the increasing importance attached to immaterial labour and cognitive capitalism, construing these developments as capital's response to class struggle. In this way these shifts in capitalist development could be seen as attempts to circumvent the refusal of work and undermine the solidarity of the working class. There is a continuity between Workerist analyses of the 1960s and 70s and those of cognitive capitalism (see Beradi, 2009). The latter theorisations argue that capitalism has entered a new stage of development, consequent upon the decline of Industrial capitalism (in the West), allied to the development of digital technologies and the increased stress placed upon knowledge, innovation and creativity - that is to say the increasing salience attached to immaterial labour. These developments represent a new social imaginary or an emergent hegemonic notion of capitalist relations, or what might be described as 'trajectories of

evolution' (Boutang, 2011, p 60). This account is not based straightforwardly upon empiricist data but rather on emergent tendencies.

Some writers loosely linked to Workerism discuss cognitive capitalism and the way in which work has not only colonised our lives but also that the production of surplus value has increasingly shifted to the private sphere which is reflected in precariousness and the position of NEETs. In part there is a resonance with feminist theory and the significance attached to domestic labour, the salience of work therein and its relationship to the production of value. On a slightly different note we could think about our engagement with digital technologies and allied notions of social production, mass customisation and co-configuration[4] and the manner in which activities taking place outside formal waged relations can create surplus value. Through processes of social production, mass customisation and co-configuration we participate in production outside of the workplace. The creation of free software would be a case in point, as would the manner in which we aid in the development of the software used on our computers, which through constant updating frequently requires new hardware. In addition, we may use social media such as Facebook to keep in touch with family and friends but this will also generate surplus value, or if you prefer, advertising revenue. In addition through the labour involved in constantly up-dating our pages we invite our contacts to re-visit the site and encounter the advertising therein. At the same time these pages may be used for networking, with all the contradictions and tensions that this generates. The point is that through such activity we may be involved in productive labour even though we are without waged labour. This is as much a feature of NEET as it is of others who face precariousness.

Historically capitalism increased the productive capacity of the social formation through its control and direction of production. In cognitive capitalism this is no longer the case and the appropriation of surplus value increasingly takes place outside the confines of the capitalist organisation. Vercellone (2009) suggests that within cognitive capitalism we need to explore the production of surplus value that arises externally to the capitalist enterprise:

> [the gratuitous appropriation of the surplus generated by the social cooperation of labour] is a crucial aspect of the analysis to follow, as it becomes important to rethink the concepts of wage, productive labour and exploitation in a framework where this cooperation is no longer confined within the factory but extended to the

whole of society, as it organises itself more autonomously from capital. (Vercellone, 2008, unnumbered)

The significance of this argument is that it prioritises the development of knowledge and views this as a collective and implicitly democratic accomplishment occurring outside the direct control of capital. Vercellone (2008) refers to the development of the welfare state after the second world war, and points to 'the constitution of a diffuse intellectuality generated by the development of mass education' (np). To reiterate, while Fordist capitalism increased productive capacity through its control and direction of production, in cognitive capitalism the appropriation of surplus value increasingly takes place outside the capitalist enterprise.

The significance of this argument is twofold.
Firstly, it prioritises the development of knowledge, and views this as a collective and implicitly democratic accomplishment outside the direct control of capital; the suggestion being that within cognitive capitalism surplus value is appropriated in a qualitatively different manner to that found within industrial capitalism, and as a result the labour theory of value is undermined. As Gorz points out, cognitive capitalism operates in a different manner to industrial capitalism, in that its

 main productive force, knowledge, is a product that is in large part, the outcome of an unpaid collective activity, of a 'self production' or 'production of subjectivity'. It is to a large extent, 'general intelligence', shared culture, living and lived practical knowledge' (Gorz, 2010, p52)

Such arguments emphasise Marx's (1973) *Grundrisse* and in particular the *Fragment on Machines* (p704-711) in which he emphasised the increasing importance of science as a productive force allied to the development of a general intellect external to work relations. The point is that even those without waged labour contribute towards the production of surplus value and in addition may not be required to labour directly for capital, being part of a surplus labour force. In this instance the concern with NEET is more about social control than directly addressing the labour requirements of capital.

Secondly, the above argument is significant as a result of the changes impacting upon the economy; the salience of immaterial labour as well as the importance of social production in

value creation means that increasing numbers of people such as NEET are placed outside a direct relationship with capital, becoming part of a surplus population (see Davies, 2007). In the past we might have referred to this group as a reserve army of labour. The churning that Macdonald and others describe would characterise this group's relationship to waged labour. To reiterate what is new is the way in which insecurity has spread throughout the working population, resulting in what could be described, after Allen and Ainley (2007), as the secure working/middle class facing increasing insecurity. It is here that Standing's conceptualisation of the precariat becomes significant, posing as it does the possibility of cross-class alliances.

Towards a conclusion

This brief exploration of Workerism and cognitive capitalism may appear somewhat removed from a discussion of NEET but it serves to raise important issues. Policy responses to NEET are predicated on models of social inclusion/cohesion in which waged labour is seen as pivotal to the assimilation of young people into wider society. Debates concerned with the precariat as well as the increasingly insecure position of those who sell their labour power raise a number of important issues. The commitment to work demonstrated by the poor and those in intermittent employment is drawn upon by a number of writers to argue against the assumed fecklessness of sections of the working class. But perhaps we should revaluate those arguments that address the refusal of waged labour and those that suggest that as a result of a diffuse intellectuality we are contributing towards the development of value external to capitalist relations. In other words the production of value is a democratic and collective accomplishment, drawing as it does upon a diffuse intellectuality, living labour and the development of knowledge in wider society, which capital seeks to appropriate.

If this line of argument were accepted it would undermine those authors who in a conventional sense celebrate waged labour, and would also justify the provision of a social wage or some form of guaranteed income (see Gorz, 2010; Weeks, 2011). The growth of insecurity and precariousness of waged labour could lead to increased individualisation. However, the material conditions facing many workers, whether defined as working or middle class, holds out the possibility of forms of solidarity arising out of the experience of precariousness - the 99%[5] (Flank, 2011). By the 99% I have in mind the rhetorical claim of the Occupy movement which sets the 99% against the 1% who have the wealth and power. As a slogan it suggests that in the current conditions faced by western economies there is the

possibility of alliances, the result of precariousness, that straddle class as well as divisions of gender and race.

The alternative would be at best a critique of neo-liberalism and its concerns with marketisation, consumerisation and privatisation, followed by a call for its replacement by a variant of social democracy. However, such a politics would be doomed to failure. Whilst it might offer some amelioration of the harsher elements of the current conditions, it would still be wedded to capitalism with all the tensions and contradictions involved. Perhaps the last word belongs to the political theorist Ralph Miliband (1973: 244), the father of the current leader of the Labour Party:

> Social-democratic parties, or rather social-democratic leaders, have long ceased to suggest to anyone but their most credulous followers (and the more stupid among their opponents) that they were concerned in any sense whatever with the business of bringing about a socialist society.

Notes

1. In 1997 New Labour under the leadership of Tony Blair won the UK general election. New Labour sought to reconcile neoliberalism with notions of social cohesion and inclusion (see Blair, 1998; Giddens, 1998). At the time of writing the Labour party is rebranding itself as One Nation Labour under the leadership of Ed Miliband.

2. For a discussion of One Nation Labour see Hunt (2013)

3. In May 2010 following the British general election and a hung-result, a Coalition government was formed between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. David Cameron (Conservative) became the prime minister with Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrat) his deputy.

4. See Avis (2013) for a discussion of co-configuration and social production related to the work of Engeström amongst others.

5. See for example the web site "we are the 99 present"

http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/

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