

Social Exclusion, Education and Precarity: neoliberalism, neoconservatism and class war from above

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Abstract

In this article we analyze neoliberalism and neoconservatism, their intentions and characteristics, and the relationship between them. We locate these ideologies and associated policies and discourses as part of the 'class war from above' (Harvey, 2005). We critically interrogate the impact of their policies and discourses on the social production and hierarchicalisation of labour power, firstly, with respect to education, and, secondly, to employment.

Keywords: precarity, jobs, education, class, neoliberalism, neoconservatism, discourse, policy

Capitalism and Class War from Above

Commentators from across the political spectrum are in general agreement that in a vigorous 'class war from above' (Harvey, 2005; Hill, 2012a, 2013a; Malott, Hill and Banfield, 2013) since the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, ('the oil crisis'), and, more spectacularly, since 'the bankers' crisis' of 2008, the capitalist class has been remarkably successful in wresting back from the working class a

greater and greater share of public wealth, of the share of national income and wealth, across much of the capitalist world (Picketty, 2014). Neoliberal and neoconservative policies aimed at intensifying the rate of capital accumulation and extraction of surplus value comprise an intensification of ‘class war from above’ by the capitalist class against the working class. One major aspect of this is the fiscal policy of increasing taxes on workers and decreasing taxes on business/ corporations and on the rich. A second is to cut public spending and welfare benefits. A third is to gear state schooling and education more openly and more closely to the needs of Capital. A fourth is to discipline and control and reduce the costs of labour, to have a more ‘flexible’, cheaper, labour force and market.

In the words of US billionaire, Warren Buffet, ‘there's class war alright, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning' (cited in Tsianos et al., 2012).

Neoliberal economics, the Chicago school of monetarists, and neoliberal governments, initially pre-eminently those of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and of Ronald Reagan in the USA, proved to be simply the first neoliberal governments, ‘smashing’ trade unions, cutting welfare benefits, privatizing public services. Under neoliberal governments, the rich have become immensely richer, the poor poorer, and what in the USA are called ‘hard-working middle class families’ have suffered ‘absolute immiseration’, absolute pauperization, absolute sinking into poverty. They have been hard hit, with worsened and worsening pay, working conditions, trade union rights and protections, a degraded public sector/ services provision, and withdrawal and limitation of social and welfare benefits.

In Britain, to take one example, under the 2010- 2015 Conservative led coalition government, and since 2015 under the Conservative majority governments, this system is clearly visible with the very top 1% of society increasing its share of gross domestic product at the expense of the rest of the population: the 100 richest people in the UK are worth around £257 billion. That is about the same as the poorest 19 million, roughly 30% of the population, combined (Inequality Foundation, nd). To take another example, The Equality Trust found that in 2014

the richest 1000 people have more wealth than the poorest 40% of households, and that the richest 100 have over £100bn more wealth than the poorest 30% of households. The 100 richest saw their wealth increase by a staggering £40.1 billion last year, the equivalent of £109.95 million a day, or £1,272 a second. (Equality Trust, 2014)

Dorling (2014a) adds that 'the UK is the only G7 country to record rising wealth inequality in 2000-14.' He points out that 'wealth inequality has risen four times faster in the seven years after the crash (of 2008) compared with the seven years before. The rich in the UK are becoming richer faster than ever. Wealth inequality rose under Labour; it rose faster under the coalition' (see also Dorling, 2014b).

One of us, Dave Hill, in his interview with a socialist Turkish newspaper further discusses how a 'widening inequality in wealth, income and power, workers, single mothers, youth, immigrants and poor people of colour are being plunged into either low-paying jobs or a future without decent employment' (Unlu, 2012).

The class war from above has a neoliberal, economic element. It has also embraced a neoconservative political element to impose it, to secure it, to

control resistance to it. In Andrew Gamble's words, it is *The Free Economy and the Strong State* (1999), a state strong on controlling education, strong on controlling dissent, surveilling and controlling teachers, strong on marginalizing oppositional democratic forces such as local elected democratic councils/municipalities, trade unions, critical educators and critical students.

Neoconservatism aids neoliberalism by *enforcing* the neoliberalization of schools and society (Hill, 2006a), and in the labour market, in both forcing people to work and moreover, forcing people to work in low paid, insecure jobs.

Neoliberalism

The spread of neoliberal policy, discourse and ideology have influenced political thought, becoming hegemonic internationally. In terms of discourse, this has contributed to a neoliberal 'common sense', impacting on discursive institutions and practices (Roper *et al.*, 2010). In the UK, this has translated into the extension of the free markets, outsourcing, deregulation and privatisation feted under the banner of choice, efficiency, entrepreneurialism, promoting individualism, (Larner, 2000; Brown, 2015:124). The aim, to reduce the role of the state, and strengthen and stimulate independence and self-reliance (Hill, 1990:55), has been evident in welfare policy, where welfare rights have been replaced by increased conditionality, duties to demonstrate work searches, or take any available work (Deeming, 2014:2). This is a neoliberal state that is more laissez faire at the top – enabling the wealthier to amass more wealth without restraints, but is interventionist towards the poor and marginalised (e.g. see Wacquant, 2010).

This 'epistemological shift' of the economy has conceived of citizens as consumers and entrepreneurs, with self-determination, individual responsibility, adaptiveness and flexibility (Lemke, 2001:197; Cromby and Willis, 2013:2). To take one example, British Prime Minister (2010-2015) David Cameron

emphasised that '[E]very child must learn how money is made' and "how to turn a profit" (Dominiczak and Swinford, 2015). 'Collectivism and solidarity' and 'the public weal' are replaced by competitive ultra-individualism within society and the economy at large, and within education and labour market structures. Slater (2014:249) notes how 'the neoliberal subject is an entrepreneurial individual, the active agent of their own self-interest within a competitive world'.

In terms of policy, neoliberalism is marked, *inter alia*, by the marketization, commodification, degradation, managerialisation and privatization or pre-privatisation of public services (Giroux, 2004, 2008, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Hill, 2013a, b, 2017; Hill and Kumar, 2009; Hill and Roskam, 2009; Saad-Filho, 2011). As Saad-Filho puts it,

In essence, neoliberalism is based on the systematic use of state power, under the ideological guise of 'non-intervention', to impose a hegemonic project of recomposition of the rule of capital at five levels: domestic resource allocation, international economic integration, the reproduction of the state, ideology, and the reproduction of the working class. (Saad-Filho, 2011).

Neoliberalism is identified with minimal state intervention and minimal public expenditure in services such as the National Health Service, social services and education. This has impacts. Generally poor people and those with ill health who cannot work and rely on state intervention are frowned upon and derided and vilified within the media. A recent surge (in the UK) in what has been dubbed as 'poverty porn'- television programmes highlighting and scorning the lives of poor communities, programmes such as *Benefits Street* (Channel 4, 2014) creates divisions between different strata of the working class (that class of people who sell their labour power), excoriating the poorer sections of the

working class classes, promoting intra-class hostility and distrust. Programs like *Benefits Britain* (Channel 5, 2015) vilify and mock those whose life is 'on the dole' (i.e. in receipt of state unemployment benefits). Such programmes are regularly shown on television station in Britain. Sections of the low paid service and manual sector working class, who struggle to make a living from low-pay work, are often appalled by those on benefits, and, encouraged by the right wing Press in Britain to reject any group solidarity and any form of compassion for those they are encouraged to view as 'feckless', as 'welfare scroungers'.

Communities are broken down as the level of solidarity and trust diminishes. As Giroux (2015) points out, quoting Silva (2013:25), 'austerity produces a world without safety nets or the social and political formations that embrace democratic forms of solidarity'. Neoliberalism not only causes the majority of our society's young people to seize a narcissistic attitude but many 'develop a deep distrust, if not resentment, of any notion of the social and shun obligations to others' (Giroux, 2015 quoting Silva, 2013:25).

Neoliberalism, Education and the Labour Market

For capitalism, education is a market from which profits can be made. It is a particularly important market that is being increasingly marketised. For the transnational and national capitalist class and their corporations and governments, nothing must get in the way of the reproduction of capitalist social relationships and capitalist economic relationships. And that includes resistant and alternative models and practices in public education. Hence, not only is education being marketised, privatised and softened up for privatization- in some countries actually privatised, such as with 'For Profit' Charter Schools in the USA-, and commodified, but the very curriculum and pedagogy themselves within schools and universities are being controlled, constrained and sanitized (Rikowski, 2008) to make a world safe for capitalism. Social class

based hierarchicalisation- of provision, of status, of outcome- jobs, life-chances, rewards or lack of them- are developed and reproduced, through the schooling and education systems. They, in turn, feed a hierarchically segmented labour market- jobs (or lack of them).

Neoliberalism and Education

The State, Education and Schooling

Marketization of education in England developed significantly with the 1988 Education Reform Act of the Thatcher era (1979-91) when neo-liberal policies were central for the delivery of public policy. Markets became deliberately stimulated with the introduction of new types of school (such as Grant Maintained Schools) and the introduction of 'Local Financial Management', whereby each school became semi-autonomous in its spending policies, and characteristics, and the regulatory powers of the directly elected local education authorities (municipalities, county councils) were substantially diminished. In Conservative rhetoric, this 'increased parental choice' (Rikowski, 1996). New Labour, the post-social democratic, neoliberalised version of the Labour Party, while in power 1997-2010, accepted and extended these neo-liberal policies, which very effectively tore up the social democratic post-war educational consensus established by the 1944 Education Act. After becoming Prime Minister in 1997, Tony Blair continued with 'competitive market policies in education' (Chitty, 2004). The publication of the league tables was a bid to 'drive up standards' and to provide visible evidence of how schools perform to give parents greater choice in where they wanted to send their child to school. The UK government invested heavily in education in order to produce a skilled and motivated workforce for a profitable economy and to produce a workforce which was to be internationally competitive. Such sentiments and discourse are typical with respect to the education policies and the labour market policies of neoliberalised economies globally.

This focus on the social production of human capital, this focus on the vocational and economic aims of education became more and more predominant over social and civic aims. In this global and local environment, the stress on competition increasingly penalised those who could not compete very well. To quote Tomlinson (2005),

disadvantaged groups found raised hurdles and moved goalposts in the struggle to acquire qualifications. The increasingly competitive nature of education meant further control of the reluctant, the disaffected and those 'special needs' groups who were unlikely to join the economy at anything but the lowest levels.

Liasidou points out how the very best students will be lined up for the very best jobs whilst those students who add 'negative value...are avoided where possible in this economy' (2002:175).

It has long been apparent that the league tables exacerbate inequalities between schools (Whitty et al., 1998) and that the promotion of competition within the education system, between schools, which sees middle class parents choosing the academically (and socially) 'better schools' (Burton, Bartlett, & Anderson de Cuevas, 2009). Ball (2003) has demonstrated how 'middle class' parents have the cultural and economic capital to use their choice 'wisely' whilst Laureau (1987) argued how parents from the lower classes do not have the cultural or economic capital to get beyond their belief that schooling is the responsibility of the teacher and therefore will not use their choice 'wisely'. Although this might not typify all parents with low socio-economic status, school choice accentuates the uneven social class related impacts of 'school choice'.

Marxist theoreticians analyse state education as being shaped by capitalism in order to prepare children and young people for their places in a hierarchicalised

workforce where ‘education has a role in conditioning and institutionalizing children not only for exploitation at work but toward an acceptance of their future life conditions and expectations’ (Greaves, Hill & Maisuria, 2002). Of course, schools can offer much more than gaining qualifications. They are institutions where many other personality characteristics and skills can be developed- or inhibited. But the skills that children and young people are equipped with depend on the restrictions on what teachers can teach and how. Malott et al (2013) are among many Marxist theorists who argue ‘the capitalist state will seek to destroy any forms of pedagogy that attempt to educate students regarding their real predicament.’ How the curriculum in state schools in England is taught is also under constant surveillance from the schools inspection and monitoring organisation, Ofsted- a major (incidentally, privatised) mechanism, state apparatus, for controlling schools, teachers- and thereby students.

Elsewhere (Hill, 2003, 2006 for example) Marxist critics/ theoreticians have detailed the major characteristics of neoliberalism as follows, as applied, below, to education:

1. Privatisation/ Pre-Privatisation of public services such as schooling and universities
2. Cuts in public spending/ salaries/ pensions/ benefits
3. Marketisation, Competition between schools and between universities
4. Vocational education for human capital (except for the ruling class, who, in their elite private schools, are encouraged into a wider and less ‘basics’ driven education)
5. Management of the workforce: ‘New Public Managerialism’ in schools and colleges, with hugely increasing differentials in pay and power between managers and workforce

6. Encouragement of competition between workers, through performance related pay and the 'busting' of trade union agreed of national pay scales
7. Casualization/ 'Precariatization' of public and private sector workers, with a decline in tenured and in full-time 'secure' jobs for teachers and university faculty
8. Attacks on trade unions, on workers' rights, on centralised pay-bargaining
9. 'Management speak' e.g. students as 'customers', 'delivering' the curriculum, discourse of the market replacing that of social responsibility
10. Denigration / Ideological attacks of public sector workforce

Neoconservatism

Neoliberalism does not come unaccompanied. It usually has a twin, neoconservatism, albeit, a twin with which it has an often fractured relationship.

Gamble (1988) talked of *The Free Society and the Strong State*.

Neoconservatism here, refers firstly to 'hierarchy, order and control' and secondly to 'traditional morality'.

'The systematic use of state power' referred to by Saad-Filho above, is the use by governments of the repressive state apparatuses such as law, the police, the judiciary, the security services, the armed forces, and the surveillance intimidatory forms of management control within institutions and places of work. In addition to their overtly intimidatory, law enforcement, repressive function, the repressive state apparatuses have ideological functions and impacts (Althusser, 1971). These repressive state apparatuses currently reinforce the individualistic, competitive, 'common-sense' pro-capitalist hegemonic ideology (Gramsci, 1971) and serve to 'naturalise' capital, rendering capitalist economic relations and capitalist social relations, what Marxists term 'the Capital- Labour relation' seem 'only natural'. They punish deep dissent, 'deep critique'.

Concerning the 'traditional morality' aspect of neoconservatism, this varies in space and time, from country to country and at different periods. It generally, but not always, includes a veneration of the family and, heterosexual and married relationships. Conservative politicians and theorists vary over such matters as 'conservative social morality'. Thus, for example, David Cameron, the British prime minister 2010-2015 was socially liberal, not socially conservative. This is in contrast to his 'Victorian morality' enthusiast predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, and in, in other countries, for example in Turkey, also in contrast to Reycep Erdogan, the conservatising prime minister of Turkey, with his 'soft-Islamicisation' of Turkey by banning kissing on the Metro, limiting birth control and alcohol availability, and bringing back and encouraging more conservative forms of dress for women, in particular the *hijab* (veil that covers the hair). As with Thatcher in the 1980s, Erdogan is marrying this neoconservatising policy with intense neoliberalism, through schools and universities and in the wider society and economy (Inal and Akkamayak, 2013).

However, a second aspect of conservatism and neo-conservatism is that, universally, it involves and seeks to enforce an acceptance of elitism and hierarchy- and of accepting one's place in that hierarchy. That hierarchy is 'raced' and gendered, a racial hierarchy, and a gender hierarchy as well as a social class hierarchy. It is, as with the Tea Party and social conservatives in the USA, such as many who voted for Trump in the 2016 USA Presidential Election, as with Erdogan's governments in Turkey, also based on appeals to religion. In other cases, as with Trump and many of his supporters it is based on overt sexism and racism.

In the USA, the prime exponents of neoconservative values in recent years have been the Tea Party, within the Republicans, with their ultra- patriotism, ultra-

nationalism, and their proclaimed adherence to strict forms of personal and religious morality (see Martin, 2013; Robin, 2013), precursors and forerunners of many of the right and 'alt-right' and neo-Nazi supporters of Trump.

Neoconservatism and Education

The main aspects of neoconservatism as they relate to education can be seen as:

1. Control of Curricula of schools, of teacher education and universities, with the removal of 'dangerous' content
2. Control of Pedagogy teaching methods, pedagogic relations between teacher and students
3. Control of Students, through debt, and through actual or fear of unemployment
4. Control of Teachers and Professors, through surveillance, a culture of having to meet targets, punishment of dissidents and union activists, dismissals and closures of schools, closures of university departments
5. Brute force and 'the Security State' within schools and the wider society- the use of tear gas, sound grenades, stun grenades, beatings, prosecutions, draconian sentencing, and in some countries, imprisonment, killings (e.g. murders of trade union activists in Colombia).

Obama's National Defence Authorization Act gave powers to the state to imprison, deny legal representation to, deny family access, on an unprecedented level, for those it deems suspected of terrorism (Socialist Worker Org, 2012). And of course, there are the extra-judicial drone assassinations by US forces (with 'collateral damage') in a number of countries across the globe.

The Relationship between Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism

The strength of the neoliberal alliance with (neo)-conservatism, with conservative forces, is particularly strong in the USA and in Turkey. In the

USA, the nexus, the alliance, between social conservatives and economic conservatives is pronounced, and has been intensively analysed by writers such as Michael W. Apple, for example in his *Educating the Right Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (2006) where he charts and analyses ‘the conservative restoration’. This ‘conservative restoration’, is characterized by millions of United States citizens who actually vote, habitually, against their own objective economic self-interest- such as support for state funded medicare, for more protection of benefits and economic rights than offered by the Republicans under the Bushes and under Trump. They do this because they believe that, or are persuaded to believe that, what people do in bed and with whom, is more important an issue than improving the material conditions of people’s lives. Such social conservatives believe that anti-gay, anti-liberal, anti-secular, anti-abortion, anti-gun control social morality is more important than their own economic self-interest. (Of course, many also believe that ‘rolling back the state’ or having a flat rate tax, the same rate for the richest as for the middle and working classes, and cutting welfare budgets is also in their self-interest).

The anti-liberal, ‘exceptionalist’ (the USA as the ‘beacon of liberty’ and the ‘chosen’ nation) neoconservative is summed up as follows by Bill Reynolds:

We now have political parties (most notably the Tea Party) who applaud at high rates of capital punishment, cheer at the concept of people left to die without health care, and, because of their homophobia, boo a gay serviceman risking his life for his or her country. This cruelty is accompanied by an avid anti-intellectualism as these same Tea Party pundits and their candidates propose deep cuts in education and criticize teachers and their unions. And most recently there has been a legislative attack on women’s health care rights. (Reynolds, 2013:207).

Bill Reynolds wrote this before Trump was elected, before Trump and many of his supporters excelled themselves in pursuing, or attempting to pursue, policies widely criticised as 'cruel' – policies such as the ban on Muslims from various countries entering the USA, and the attempt to rescind the DACA provisions that allow children of illegal immigrants who have been brought up in the USA to remain in the USA after the age of 18 (subject to various conditions).

In Turkey the Erdogan government is very nakedly pushing forward with Islamicisation of society and the education system, and with brute use of the repressive apparatuses of the state- as seen in the summer 2013 national police brutality against the Gezi Park resistance movement, resulting in eight deaths at the hands of the police. Thus, in Turkey, neoliberalism is accompanied by traditionalist, Islamic conservatism in and through the ideological state apparatuses of the media, the mosque and the education system, accompanied by the naked use of the repressive state apparatuses- such as the bullets, tear gas and chemically treated water cannon used across Turkey through summer 2013. (Gezgin et al., 2014; Hill, 2013c).

And in Britain in 2014, the centenary of the start of the First World War, the neoconservative (and neoliberal) then Secretary of State for Education 2010-2014, Michael Gove, attempted to insist that schoolchildren be taught that the first world war (1914-18) was a 'grand patriotic war' fought to 'protect little Belgium' from German aggression. He decried the anti-war sentiments of British comedy television programmes such as '*Blackadder*' and films such as '*Oh What a Lovely War*' that showed the war as 'senseless slaughter' resulting from a quarrel between the ruling families of Europe, tied in with a clash of imperialisms and imperialist expansionism, particularly in Africa.

In this century we have been experiencing both neoliberalisation and neoconservatisation in the USA, in the UK, in Europe generally, in Turkey, and

globally. There are, of course, resistances within neoliberalised states. There are also isolated states resisting neoliberalism, such as the governments and states of Cuba and Venezuela, and, within the Anglo-Saxon neoliberal capitalist countries, and pro-capitalist countries in general, millions of liberal-left, socialist and Marxist educators and cultural workers, and (often the same people) anti-racist and anti-sexist activists, LGBTQ activists, and pro-indigenous and eco-activists, resisting both neoconservative and neoliberal schooling, university education, and control.

Tensions Between Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism

Neoliberalism is not everywhere accompanied by neoconservatism. In the UK, sections of the Conservative Party and government are in support of neoconservative return to 'Victorian Values', are strongly pro-monarchy and royal family, want schools to teach classic pro-imperial and pro-British versions of history in schools, oppose women and gay priests in the Church, oppose homosexuality, and support 'law and order', hierarchy, and a respect for elites, anti-immigration,

However, this neoconservatism is sometimes in tension with neoliberalism. For example, with respect to schools, neoconservatives want government control of the schools' curriculum (to shut out contrarian liberal and socialist and anarchist versions of history, civics, literature, for example). However, neoliberals would prefer there to be a complete competitive market in schools, with each school having and developing its own 'brand' of curriculum.

Another area of disagreement between neoconservatism and neoliberalism is that, for neoliberals, profit is the overriding goal. This there is less respect for traditional elites, more an attitude of 'we don't care if a prospective employee is black or white, straight or gay, male or female, as long as they can do the job'.

UK Prime Minister 1979-91 Margaret Thatcher, broke or substantially reduced the power not only of trade unions but also of traditional elites controlling access to the higher professions. For her, the importance of competition overrode the importance of the elitist status quo.

Neoliberalism and the Labour Market

Following the 'crisis of capital' in the mid-1970s, the Callaghan Labour government in the UK in the mid-1970s started cutting public services and seeking 'wage restraint', adopting monetarist policies that ditched a political commitment to full employment. Full employment was no longer a policy priority. The flexibilization of the labour market, outsourcing, the use of legislation and decline in collective activities all intensified dramatically under the successive Thatcher governments of 1979-91. These gave rise in the UK, and in the USA where similar monetarist 'class war from above' resulted in visibly rising poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. Tony Blair's New Labour governments (1997-2007) and that of Gordon Brown (2007-2010) adopted the policies and rhetoric of 'fiscal responsibility', of privatisation, marketisation, and institutionalised low pay so that it should not 'create a burden to business' (Patterson,2007:95).

In terms of work, the ideal of a job for life has been replaced, in this policy and in this discourse, by the need for a 'flexible' workforce, in order to compete in the global economy (Peck and Tickell, 2000; Standing, 2014:43). The labour market 'hollowed out', replaced with a two tier polarized work force, characterised by 'lovely and lousy jobs', those that are secure and well paid, and those that are not (Goos and Manning, 2007; Bonoli, 2012; Sissons, 2011; Whittaker and Hurrell, 2013). This has been reflected in the UK labour market, constituted by employment that is temporary, insecure (for example, 'zero-hours contracts' and/or involuntarily part time). These are dimensions of

precarious work, a grey area of unemployment and employment that is characterised by the exclusion of rights (social, welfare and employment), as well as a lack of collective bargaining, such as union representation (McKay et al., 2012); as did the introduced charges for workers to take cases (e.g. of unfair dismissal and redundancy in 2013, before these were eventually ruled as unlawful by the Supreme Court in July 2017. Where insecure workers vie for more hours and are in competition with their colleagues, this inhibits action to improve wages and conditions.

Unemployment policy

Throughout the UK, alongside falling unemployment, there have been increases in part time, insecure, low paid employment, and rising self-employment and underemployment: notable amongst the young and unqualified. The binary concepts of un/employment have become blurred, due to the emergence of precarious employment and increasing conditionality to claiming unemployment benefits.

Neoliberal modes of rationality have underpinned policy, articulating political knowledge: stressing the self-regulating free market, and a reduced role of the government and a focus on individualism - central to everyday thinking as political and moral beliefs. Since the 1980s social policy such as employment policy and education policy has followed a neoliberal objective of choice, efficiency and competition, alongside neo-conservative influences of order and control. Discourses of morality, the family and work within policy have accompanied rationales of responsibility, empowerment, and the need to work on the self (Muncie, 2008:233) in order to succeed. Freedom of choice is feted, individuals are responsible for risks, such as unemployment and health as these are domains of 'self-care', and are 'invited' through practices to cooperate, admit guilt, take responsibility with tests to assess the 'attitudes, behavioural

norms and levels of self-belief, and ask about the individuals work values, their background, and their spouse (Cromby and Willis, 2013). Problematizing the supply side of labour, and focusing on individual deficits legitimises interventions aimed at instigating behavioural changes and access to out of work benefits, marked by conditionality.

New Labour's 'no rights without responsibilities' mantra deployed claims which underpinned welfare reforms. These include: 1. That the individual is responsible for their own worklessness and needs motivating; 2. That the state must no longer be passive and the right of a benefit is conditional on the duty of the individual to demonstrate they are looking for work, and 3. That there are opportunities provided by the government and everyone has the opportunity to work (Crisp, 2008).

The welfare to work programmes developed in the UK under Blair's New Labour in 1998, emulated US welfare reforms of 1996: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. In the UK, this expansion focussed on concepts of employability, aimed at the long term and young unemployed (Cooper, 2012, 647-648). Under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, policies included mandatory work programmes and increases in benefit sanctions for non-compliance. The reach of groups extended to single parents, who were moved from Income Support, (which recognised child caring responsibilities), onto Job Seekers Allowance with stringent conditionality, when the youngest child reaches 5 years of age. The effect of this policy has been a sharp increase in single parents pressured into taking unsustainable, unsuitable jobs, and being wrongly sanctioned. This has resulted in negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of the parents and children (Gingerbread, 2014).

Work as the best way out of poverty ignores structural barriers to employment, such as transport, childcare and remuneration. Through welfare to work schemes, such as the Mandatory Work Activity Programme (GOV.UK, 2011) individuals were encouraged or mandated into any employment and rewarded with minimal income Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). Remuneration other than the JSA payment was regarded by government as not needed, because 'work' albeit, unpaid work, was regarded as morally 'good for you'.

The welfare state as an Ideological State apparatus (ISA), functions through ideology first: of the work ethic and neoliberal precepts, and secondarily, by repression: in the form of punishment of benefit sanctions. In order for the individual to be successfully hailed or 'interpellated' (Althusser, 1971), they must be 'steeped' in the neoliberal ideology. Thus neoliberal policies lead to practices which constitute the subject –as a worker or shirker, aided by the ISA of the media, with headlines of scrounger/shirker and programmes such as *Benefits Britain*, echoed and fed by the headlines and front page stories in the right-wing print media. Employment as providing benefits to the individual and as a moral discourse has remained implicit within unemployment policy (Cole, 2008) whilst the development of the active labour market policies, have complemented unregulated flexible labour markets. They provide a stream of unpaid labour necessary for the capitalist mode of production, and are concentrated in the lower end of the labour market, such as service industries – undercutting already low wages and union activity (Cooper, 2012; Peck and Theodore, 2000).

Neoliberal welfare reform has been accompanied by the marketised provision of unemployment services. Outsourcing is considered efficient, innovative and providing value for money for the tax payer, in comparison to inefficient public sector provision of services (Rees et al 2014). The Work Programme (WP), a

‘work-first’ welfare to work programme introduced in England, Scotland and Wales in 2011 gave responsibility for employment support from public employment services to contracted providers. The providers must provide value for money, based on payment by results (GOV.UK, 2013), a model used to incentivise work providers to move participants into sustained employment. However, there is evidence of WP interventions providing little success in achieving these aims, and they have provided little in terms of ‘employability’ (Fothergill, 2013). Furthermore the provision based on payment by results has resulted in practices of ‘parking and creaming’- job ready claimants prioritised and claimants perceived to be furthest away from the jobs market, ‘parked’, as they are unable generate a payment for the provider (Rees et al., 2014).

Vilification, Surveillance and Control

The Welfare Reform Act (2012) heralded a decrease in benefits, the need to provide evidence of work searches, with this conditionality requirement backed up with benefit sanctions. Whereas access to benefits had been conditional on meeting work search requirements, (e.g. with the introduction of the Jobseekers Allowance in 1996), benefit conditionality intensified under the Coalition government. The 2012 sanctioning regime included a complete withdrawal of benefits for non-compliance. The expected requirement for claimants is to look for work ‘full time’. Benefit conditionality includes the requirement to set up an email address, produce CVs and register on the Universal Job Match website (Watts et al 2014). A conditionality threshold existing for those in work, but not working enough: i.e. not meeting a level of income of 35 hours per week, at minimum wage under Universal Credit. Such obligatory work activity is prescribed or mandated to break habits of worklessness and prevent benefit dependency (Deeming, 2014; Standing, 2014:247). The implicit suggestion is that the welfare system encourages a (morally inappropriate) dependency on benefits. In the words of the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the

Minister of Labour, Iain Duncan-Smith, 'Too much of our current system is geared towards maintaining people on benefits rather than helping them flourish in work; we need reforms that tackle the underlying problem of welfare dependency' (Ian Duncan Smith, 2010, quoted in Hills, 2015:3).

The unemployed person is positioned as at risk of being welfare dependent, indicative of poor character (Pykett, 2014). This notion of pathologized deviance is relatively new, following a post- industrial depiction of dependence as inferiority, applicable to serfs, servant and wives dependent on the male bread winner (Fraser and Gordon, 1994). Dependence on waged labour is regarded by the government as acceptable, as work is regarded as both a moral and economic obligation, and welfare is an act of 'grace or charity' (Cooper, 2012:654).

The implementation of these measures is class based. Surveillance, and prosecutions for non-compliance, for 'fiddling' (illegally taking welfare benefits or tax evasion) have been disproportionately higher for lower income groups with less scrutiny over higher income groups and over tax issues despite a greater return for fraudulent cases (Henman and Marston, 2008). Recent surveillance activities include the job adviser's ability to track the job searching undertaken by claimants via the Universal Jobmatch website, which all jobseekers are mandated to use. Sanctions can be incurred with the underlying rationale explained as: "If you choose not to take a job that matches you, then the adviser will look at your reasons, and if the adviser thinks 'actually, these are pretty specious reasons', he may call you in and say 'I think you really need to be applying for these jobs' (Iain Duncan Smith in Mason, 2012). Benefit fraud campaigns from the time of New Labour (Conner, 2007), to more recent 'Shop a Scrounger' newspaper campaign (The Sun, 2010) urge members of the public to 'do the right thing', alongside poster campaigns (BBC, 2014) and

public perceptions of benefit fraud as widespread have not reflected reality (Ipsos MORI, 2013).

The Coalition government spending review 2013 identified two groups: the tax payer and welfare recipient (Hills, 2015), and policy briefings, reports and ministers' speeches highlight individual failings alongside an ineffective expensive welfare state (Wiggan, 2012). This discourse of fairness: the tax payer, the hard worker subsidising people that will not work, underpins policies of targeted punitive actions - to make it harder to receive out of work benefits (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013).

Cycles of benefit dependency, with generations of worklessness when presented as facts, allow for government interventions, even despite contrary evidence (Shildrick *et al.*, 2012a.) Images used in political discourse, policy speeches, and the media; of the (negative) welfare dependency, of poverty and 'scroungers' underclass' are emotive condemnations of benefit recipients, stereotypes have emerged within popular culture (Pykett, 2014), giving rise to terms such as 'chav' as a denigration of the white working class (Jones, 2012).

Teenage mothers have been depicted as leading chaotic lives, in order to shape public policy and to legitimate interventionist strategies. Alternative discourses of young women making decisions based on their economic circumstance and community expectations are, ignored in government discourse, (Pykett, 2014). To return to the genre of television termed 'poverty porn', in 2013 this included documentary programmes such as '*Benefits Street*' and '*On Benefits and Proud*'. Televised debates on '*Benefits Britain*', itself an assumptive title, have actually excluded input from social scientists, with the televisual representations discussed as if they were real and established (Jensen, 2014).

Such representations alongside public opinion and political diagnoses of welfare reform are constitutive of each other.

Any Work is Good Work?

Discourses assuming that work is a panacea to individual and social ills, that work promotes wealth and mobility, sit uncomfortably with inconvenient truths. Actual experiences of the working class environment in the 1980s have been typified by ‘shit’ jobs (Coffield *et al.*, 1986 in Cole, 2008: 33). Poor quality jobs characterised by job insecurity, low marketability, and low wage can be as detrimental to well-being as being in unemployment (Gallie *et al.*, 2012, Broom *et al.*, 2006, Butterworth *et al.*, 2011).

The presumptions that any work is a positive outcome for the individual does not take into account the experiences of precarious employment. Labour market experiences indicate a churning between low paid jobs, training schemes of poor quality and unemployment with little progress to employment mobility: secure and rewarding employment (Shildrick *et al.*, 2012b). Low paid work has been associated with stagnation and in work poverty as progress into better paid and secure employment has remained difficult, with an increasing proportion of workers starting off and remaining in low pay (Hurrell, 2013). The persistence of immobility (Hurrell, 2013:5) evident with over 1 in 8 UK workers remaining in low pay (defined here as £7.62 threshold hourly wages; 2/3 below national median wage) for at least 12 months, a rise from 58% to nearly 75% (2005-2013) (Keohane and Hupkau, 2014).

Unite (2014) found that one in five young workers ‘are now so poor they have had to resort to using food banks’. In the first ever poll of minimum wage workers, their poverty is strikingly confirmed: more than one in three cannot afford to shop where they work, nearly 60% say believe they are in trapped low

pay, over half do not know what they will earn from one week to the next, and 20% of young minimum wage earners stated they had visited a food bank in the past year. Low wage work may not be the initial rung of the employment ladder but a step into the poverty trap, a denial of the claim that, for all, always hard work does pay.

Young People

As young people exit their schools and colleges and universities, they are more economically vulnerable now in comparison to their counterparts of the 1980s due to the hollowing out of the labour market, and the hour glass economy (Roberts, 2013). The labour market experiences of young people are often constituted by precarious employment: underemployment (involuntarily part time) insecure and low paid– i.e. not providing a living wage. Young people must compete for jobs, and if unemployed, are required or encouraged to participate in schemes - to increase their employability: unpaid work placements, work experiences and internships. A ‘stepping stone thesis’ is assumed in un/employment policy for young people, subscribing to the idea that any employment is desirable and will lead to employment mobility, particularly for young adults (18-24).

At a time of rising youth unemployment the Conservative Government removed income support for 16-17 year olds for all with exemptions for severe hardship in 1988. At the same time restrictions were removed from regulations on rates of pay for young people (with the Wages Council protection removal in 1986), beginning the phenomenon of low paid and insecure jobs for young people. During this period, Standing (2014) suggests the rise of flexible wages and precarious jobs, coupled with high unemployment led to the youth in particular to ‘embrace the dole’ in recognition of the calibre of the jobs offered to them, reflected in popular culture such as the band UB40, whose the name derived

from the 1980s unemployment benefit form. Young people demonstrated resistance and ambivalence to schemes, regarded as ‘slave labour’ and work defined as ‘dead-end’ by leaving training schemes (Mizen, 2004, 72-73). As a political issue youth unemployment continues to be tackled by policy initiatives focussing on the supply side of labour: assumptions that young people do not have the skills for the economy, or that education was not supplying correct skills. Or that they should work for free.

The Reserve Army of Labour

Precarious work is at the interface between the welfare state and the economy, and welfare reforms have created a site for labour exploitation, indeed, for the intensification of labour exploitation. Labour markets have a ‘laboratory of contingent labour practice in the low-level service sector’ (Cooper, 2012). The oversupply of labour is necessary for capitalism and where there is a recession, then workers are no longer required: workers are disposable, and can be brought in when required. These constitute a reserve army (Engels, 1844; Marx, 1867) according to Magdoff and Magdoff (2004), a category which also includes the unemployed, officially and unofficially, part time workers wanting full time work, those making money from independent means, for example the self-employed, or getting odd jobs; workers in insecure employment with the threat of redundancy, in precarious situations. This reserve army suppresses costs and labour is therefore disposable, and replaceable. Profits are enhanced because of the flexibility of the work force, which includes their hiring and firing, low wages, decreased benefits for the worker and citizen. Under ‘non-standard work arrangements’ capital is increased as any obligations to the worker are decreased further. The flexibility of the workforce, and low cost labour, with decreased benefits to the citizen and worker is also a ‘weapon’ against workers, as precarious employment constituting a reserve army of labour keeps labour costs down, and provides a ‘constant and effective weapon against workers’

(Magdoff and Magdoff, 2004). However, management practices of flexible scheduling of hours, inherent within many low level service sector jobs, contribute, to maintaining worker consent. The worker, needing to secure more hours, experiences ‘temporal flexibility’ (Wood, 2017, 2). As well as obscuring and securing the control of power, through these practices, the worker strives to receive more hours, often in competition with other workers, and needing to gain favour of the managers through displaying extra effort. Consequently, additional hours, negotiated through the manager, are perceived as a ‘gift’. Where workfare replaced welfare, it has made participation into paid employment necessary, and ‘forces’ people into low paid jobs. Welfare maintains and regulates the reserve army of labour: achieved through lowering welfare benefits, mandating those unemployed to join the labour force by accepting any job, however unpleasant or low paid. The reserve army not only needs to expand, to increase competition for jobs and decrease wages, it also needs to retain its closeness to the labour market, to maintain the right attitudes and skills (Grover, 2003). The development of a ‘workfare’ state mandates the unemployed to participate in unpaid labour, in order to receive unemployment benefits, but also maintain their employability. There is the responsibility to ‘work’ in order to earn the ‘right’ of a basic income’ with any contestation resulting in sanctions. Being unemployed in Britain has become a full time occupation, and the necessity to demonstrate active and repetitive work searches, as well as mandatory participation in welfare to work schemes, constituting ‘work for labour’ (Standing, 2014).

Capitalism Education, the Labour Market, and Labour Power

Wage workers are ‘inherently alienated, requiring discipline, subordination and a mix of incentives and sanctions’ (Standing, 2014:13). Precarious work is situated between the economy and the welfare state and constituted by lack of labour market security and income security and a lack of collective voice,

protection in employment and opportunities for upward mobility in status and income; to gain skills and employment training for example (Standing, 2014:13). Making work pay involves moving people into any available work by lowering out of work benefits and increasing conditionality, mobilizing regimes of low paid and precarious work (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Employment as the means to escape welfare dependency and exclusion relates to a competition for precarious low waged work and the preparation of a flexible and compliant workforce. From the individual working to survive, labour, indeed, labour power, schooled in the education system and developed in the labour market, is the traded commodity bought by and received by the capitalist. Policies, and discourses such as welfare to work and its programmes are critiqued only within the narrow focus of their success in getting people back to work and staying in work, and defined as a rational economic individual rather than focusing on poverty, on economic inequalities and on social immobility. Such a focus has become embedded within discourses of employment and unemployment-through policy, practice, media and rhetoric (Clarke and Newman, 2012) in the relative absence of other critical or opposing views.

Hegemonic economic exploitation and domination may be achieved more easily where there is a decline in ‘solidaristic forms of working class life’ (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). However, the suggestion of choice is inherent within discourses of meritocracy and hard work. The work ethic discourse rationalises exploitation and inequality: that all work is good work acting as a “*convenient belief to those who live on the labour of others*” (William Morris, cited in Weeks, 2011:53). It constructs docile bodies; exploiting and making exploitable subjects (*ibid*). Workfare has turned the welfare benefit into the ‘*de facto minimum wage and transformed welfare recipients themselves into an underclass of unfree service laborers*’ (Cooper, 2012:651). Significantly, the individuals must not have wage demands or job expectations and must act in

specific ways consonant with the ruling ideology (Standing, 2014). This means adopting subjectivities relating to neoliberalism: the deserving benefit recipient, the diligent jobseeker, the good employee – all equating with a worthwhile citizen, all so banal that they exemplify taken for granted, common sense neoliberal precepts. Furthermore, neoliberal discourses of competition, free market efficiency and the ‘responsibilised’ individual may be so normalised throughout the social processes in everyday life; social interactions and policy. However, Standing (2014:33) identifies anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation – which he believes the ‘precariat’ experience. Passively anger from a frustration at the reality of a future of ‘flexi-jobs’ and no prospect of mobility, anomie, ‘passivity borne of despair’ (*ibid*) – associated with Durkheim and aided by politicians and middle class commentaries that identify the precariat as undeserving/lazy. Anxiety – due to the insecurity of employment and financial implications and alienation – following from messages that they should remain positive and should be grateful to have employment. With no self-esteem and social worth derived from their employment, Standing suggests they turn elsewhere. Therefore, this calls for research that explores experiences of precariousness both in and out of employment, particularly amongst young people, to understand if there is congruence with neoliberal ideology (Cromby and Willis, 2013), or whether there is contestation that challenges neoliberal hegemonic status within the context of punitive stigmatising welfare systems and the precarious labour markets. Additionally, such research ‘downstream’ needs to be complemented with an ‘upstream’ focus. This is would entail research on powerful groups in society, making the subject of scrutiny the vested interests that benefit from policies of welfare, poverty and precariousness, and to understand as Crossley states, the ‘policy `choices’ (2017:124).

Contestation and Resistance

It is in such contestation that critical and radical educators, constrained as they are within prescriptive curricula and pedagogies, within regimes of individualised pay-bargaining, within both material and discursive regimes of surveillance and conformity, have such a role to play. Critical educators and cultural workers can, and should, become critical, active, public intellectuals, challenging and illuminating and exposing neoliberal and neoconservative 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971) and advancing what Gramsci termed 'good sense'. Their/ our role can and should be as counter-hegemonic transformative intellectuals, as organic intellectuals, working for an egalitarian, fulfilling, inclusive society a society where the future for the young is not 'shit education for shit jobs'.

As Giroux (2015) coruscatingly observes, about current neoliberal and neoconservative capitalist discourse, power and policy,

Neoliberal austerity policies embody an ideology that produces both zones of abandonment and forms of social and civil death while also infusing society with a culture of increasing hardship. It also makes clear that the weapons of class warfare do not reside only in oppressive modes of state terrorism such as the militarization of the police, but also in policies that inflict misery, immiseration and suffering on the vast majority of the population.

Through analysis, but, importantly, through individual and collective action, we can contest these forms of social and civil death, fostered through education and social policy and the wider economic and fiscal policies that constitute key aspects of the capitalist class 'class war from above', and work to develop and transform schooling, work and life.

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