

The Song of Experience, the March of Industry: History and Industry in the Formulation of British Social Policy

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Abstract Over the last quarter of the twentieth century international shifts in production had devastating effects on the labor market in Great Britain. The social consequences have been severe. Values and aspirations, particularly in the young, are greatly altered as a result of economic strain on community, family and school, long regarded as the pillars of consensus in industrial society. Economic policy is derived from experience, and change and response in a nation can only be fully understood through its cultural history. In Britain, three critical factors have a bearing on current issues. The first is attitudes to poverty and the stigmatization of idleness, relevant as the spectre of mass unemployment returns: the hegemony of industrial interests in social security and education policy is the second and the third is the narrowly utilitarian, class divided nature of English education, and its record of failure. Combined, they shape the context in which a new generation confronts the labor market, no longer with the past spirit of deference and cooperation, sometimes with apathy or hostility. Recent studies show British youth is not convinced by the government's rediscovery of vocational education nor by its malfunctioning training schemes, formulated on an anachronistic notion of industrial needs and reaffirming damaging social divisions. Meanwhile, the return to selectivism in social security benefit legislation is ethically unsound and offers negligible financial saving. The assumptions underlying policy on education and the transition to the workplace require serious reexamination before the difficulties of integrating a new generation into the economy become insurmountable.

The historian should refrain from calling the history he does not know 'traditional society' - Gareth Stedman Jones.

We are not concerned with the poor. They are unthinkable, only to be approached by the statistician or poet - E. M. Forster, *Howard's End*.

The changing forces determining world production in recent decades have by now created traumatic dislocation in industrialized nations. Shared certainties and common goals have been lost and we are

witnessing what Eric Hobsbawm calls 'the fraying and snapping of the old social textures and value systems' (Hobsbawm 1994: 343).

Analysts and policy makers of the advanced economies, in their consternation, have sensed the need to move beyond the empirical in exploring the implications. Japan's Institute of Statistical Mathematics carries out extensive quinquennial surveys on value shifts in the population emphasizing the place and nature of materialism (Sawa: 2000) while Britain's National Institute of Economic and Social Research, in its Foreword to 'The Goal of Full Employment' stresses the need to 'trespass a little on the territory of other social sciences' (Britton 1993: 3). However, bolder steps must be taken in that direction. The significance of change is clearer when the power of historical experience to govern a society's response to social crisis is understood. This is true both in examining one's own economy and in drawing comparisons with those of other nations. In doing so, cultural history, contemporary literature and interactive cultural sociology offer a wealth of information that can inform decision making. The first aim of this short essay is to point out the enduring strength of the oppositional binaries directing current thinking on poverty and labour as the spectre of mass unemployment returns. Questions are then raised on certain priorities in social policy, tracing the origins of the long established hegemony of industrial interests in education and social security provision that has left the majority of Britain's young poorly educated and less supported by their social services than their counterparts in other north European nations. Thirdly, it emphasizes the past limitations of vocational strategies in British schooling, shifting the focus to youth as a key point of economic, political and social anxiety. Reference is made to recent British studies in interactive cultural sociology portraying a new, divided generation on the threshold of employment, bringing markedly different attitudes to the world of labour.

Industry and Idleness: historical attitudes to poverty

Throughout Britain's industrialized past, family, school and community have been regarded as the foundation stones of consensus, instilling the principles of deference and deferred gratification that were essential to the preservation of a functional equilibrium in society.

In what evolved as the industrial order, employers, including the set of interests spoken of as 'industry', offered guarantees and certainties at a local level in the form of work; under conditions often the subject of debate. Yet, the terrain of class struggle was clearly delineated and represented a shared reality. In times of economic stress, the hierarchy within the community, in the absence of the state, was seen to play its part in the relief of distress through philanthropy. However, as elsewhere, in times of dislocation and strife the needs of the impoverished could no longer be matched by the resources apportioned by the community and deemed reasonably affordable by those charitable, settled elements in society. The latter, in order to justify the manifest inequality in their favor, sought to define themselves as diligent, industrious, honest

and morally worthy by delineating a class of others without those qualities, which could then be excluded and stigmatized as 'idle' and 'undeserving' and sometimes as 'wandering' and 'unstable'.

As evidence of a new poverty in the midst of prosperity hardens in contemporary Britain there are disturbing signs of a resurfacing of the old phobias and associations described so vividly by Michel Foucault in what he terms 'The War on Idleness' (Foucault 1977: 121). This has seen the poor, like Europe's lepers before them, debarred from entering certain areas, hunted down and branded (Foucault 1988: 39-40). In modern Europe poverty in itself no longer incurs threat to life, physical punishment or imprisonment but certain principles legitimated in earlier centuries retain a power to influence the way the poor are regarded and treated in Great Britain. Some historians believe that the ghost of the Poor Law is still with us (Bagley 1968: 72). Comparing the thoughts of its architects with the language of modern policymakers, it has not yet departed. A brief recollection of the principles it established in British social policy and engraved on the nation's collective consciousness has some relevance.

The association of poverty with idleness was expressed in legislation as early as 1495 in an act against vagabonds and beggars which called on all local authorities to 'make due search and take or cause to be taken all such vagabonds, idle, and suspect persons living suspicious'. They were to be placed in the stocks and to remain there on bread and water, for three days and nights. Anyone who gave other nourishment to them would be fined. The 'misdoers' were to be warned away from the town on release (Bagley 1968: 5). A Beggar's Act of 1531 proclaimed that 'throughout the realm of England vagabonds and beggars have of long time increased and daily do increase in great and excessive number, by the occasion of idleness, mother and root of all vices' (Bagley 1968: 6). 'Sturdy vagabonds and valiant beggars' were the target of an act of 1536 requiring them to 'get their own living with the continual labour of their own hands'. A short lived act on vagrancy of 1547 decreed that first offenders were to be branded on the chest and to enter slavery for two years, a second offence meant branding on the forehead and slavery for life (Bagley 1968: 75).

The idea of confining the poor can be traced to the Poor Relief Act of 1576, which obliged local Justices to 'purchase, lease or build' new Houses of Correction and to keep stocks of raw materials such as wool, flax or iron so that new officers called 'collectors and governors of the poor' could set them to work, and subsequently sell the product of their labour (*ibid*). This solution of confinement was applied in France with a Royal Edict of 1656 creating the Hôpital Général to prevent 'mendicancy and idleness as the source of all disorders.' Earlier, in 1532, the poor of Paris had been forced to work, chained in pairs, in the sewers of the city and in 1606 were whipped in the public square, branded on the shoulder, shorn and driven from the city. But confinement had administrative and other advantages. Not only were those out of work confined but also they were forced to work and contribute to the prosperity of all. They represented cheap labour in times of full employment and high salaries in phases of unemployment while such

institutions absorbed the potential social danger of the idle (Foucault 1988: 46-51).

In France different social forces at work meant a swifter renunciation of the idea and so, as Foucault wrote, the nineteenth century reserved for the mad those spaces where, '...a hundred and fifty years before, men had sought to pen the poor, the vagabond, the unemployed' (Foucault 1988: 57). In Britain the latter were to experience confinement for far longer. Even the blind were to be subjected to the experience of incarceration and enforced useful labour. The records of Liverpool's School for the Blind show that in 1793 one James Boucher, 'an Irishman, a strolling fiddler' was dismissed for idleness along with John Keen, 'an Irishman, an idle ballad singer who was soon tired of Industry and returned to his former occupation' (Liverpool School 1793).

Urbanization, and the new agriculture had from the middle of the eighteenth century led to a greater presence of poverty in both the country and the city and parishes and counties were called on to make more use of the workhouse. Malthusian forebodings regarding the link between population and poverty appeared justified as expenditure on poor relief increased fourfold from 1784 to 1818 when it reached £8m. Outdoor relief on the lines of the Speenhamland system became ever more evidently inadequate. Britain stood braced to accept the measures that ushered in the age of the workhouse. When the Poor Law is spoken of, it is most often in reference to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which withdrew outdoor relief from the able bodied, establishing the principle of 'less eligibility' (MacDonagh 1977: 96ff.). It followed the recommendations of the appointed commissioners, who had declared that 'Every penny bestowed that tends to render the condition of the pauper more eligible than that of the independent laborer is a bounty on indolence and vice' (Bagley 1968: 53).

The Legislation of 1834 obliged those seeking relief to enter the workhouse, there to be 'subjected to such courses of labour and discipline as will repel the indolent and vicious' (Morton 1968: 134). The pattern of society's response remained set as the turbulent trade cycles of the nineteenth century ran their course and unemployment fluctuated. The eligible/less eligible dichotomy became that of the deserving/improvident distinction applied in outdoor relief to the poor given by the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity and C. S. Loch's Charity Organisation Society, founded in 1869. The latter was created as part of the response of the propertied classes to one of the waves of anxiety about working class behaviour that swept Victorian England, coinciding with a dramatic rise in the number of paupers in London. Philanthropic housing projects, Dr. Barnado's East End Juvenile Mission and Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* derived from the same preoccupations (Jones 1983: 189-191). The enduring contribution of the C.O.S. was its concept of sociological casework and rigorous means testing. The Society had as its aim the scientific study of the causes of poverty and their removal and its sometimes ruthless emphasis on efficiency as a priority in the distribution of relief has ensured it a mixed reception from historians.

At the dawn of the Twentieth century the workhouse still stood as a symbol of the continuing struggle against poverty, accommodating the most wretched, including an estimated 11,000 of the deranged and

feeble-minded who had drifted in from county asylums. The 1905 Poor Law commissioners spoke of their howling by day and night and of 'half witted women nursing the sick' (Bagley 1968: 55). Their Report indicated a greater sensitivity to the problems of the large body of seasonal labourers, such as those working in jam or aerated water manufacture and to the changing, more artificial character of industry which had created a new class of 'unemployables' (Hay 1978: 34). Meanwhile the war against idleness had by no means abated and one Docks manager called for 'laboratories for the study of criminal paupers and the defective classes' in 1906 (Hay 1978: 42).

Social Darwinism began to tinge the statements of the intolerant. The pauper was described by one writer as '...not an ordinary person, but one who is constitutionally a pauper, a pauper in his blood and bones' (Hay 1978: 62). The struggle against perceived abuses was being carried with great vigour into the field of outdoor relief. Alfred Marshall the outspoken economist, suggested that working men be involved directly in the administration of the Poor Law maintaining, 'probably the professional tramp is even more odious to large classes of the working men than he is to the rest of society' (Hay 1978: 55). The sentiment underlying this astute observation is appealed to today in the campaigns against those defrauding the social security system. Yet, despite massive expenditures in philanthropy and the drive for efficient elimination of idleness, the pioneering sociological studies of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree showed a nation living under the heavy shadow of poverty (Booth 1902, Rowntree 1901). Debate preceding the welfare reforms of the Liberal government from 1906 to 1911 indicated how serious the problems had become. Evidence on the physical condition of children had much effect on public opinion. They were so clearly ill nourished that opposition to the provision of school meals in 1906 was negligible, while medical inspection of schoolchildren revealed 'such a mass of disease and defect that no government subsequently would be able to resist the demand of the local education authorities to provide treatment.' (Hay 1978: 60).

The story of the gradual dissembling of the Poor Law need not be told here but in some quarters it was defended to the last. The focus then shifted from the particular as the rhetoric of Lloyd George gave a new impetus to the crusade against poverty. In 1909, George declared his belief that, within a generation it would be 'as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests' (Bagley 1968: 61). A year later, he was careful to distinguish between cases 'where poverty is the result of a man's own misconduct or misfortune' and where it arises from 'uncontrollable circumstances', disowning the state's responsibility in the first case (Hay 1978: 73). This was perfectly in harmony with the established code of British beneficence, whereby any assistance must perforce be accompanied by a condemnation of idleness. Nor were the idle to be tolerated in the 'New Jerusalem' to be built in Britain after the Second World War. Sir William Beveridge's Report, the starting point of the modern Welfare State, was similarly anxious to deter any 'habituation to idleness'; indeed, the 'freedom from Idleness' was one of its fundamental aims.

As reform approached, predictably, the British Employers Confederation feared the consequences of

improved benefits that might, 'weaken the incentive of the population to play their full part in maintaining the productivity and exporting ability of the country' (Hay 1978:48). However, the Welfare State, to use the term coined by an Archbishop of York in 1941 and reputedly detested by Beveridge himself, came into being. The Poor Law met its technical end with the National Assistance Act of 1948 that took all cash relief out of the hands of local authorities, returning responsibilities for subsidies to the poor to a centralized administration. But, half a century later, with the economy moving towards an ever less certain future, there is a clear danger of old rifts reopening and inherited principles of exclusion being reasserted. Nicholas Timmins relates how he was inspired to undertake his extensive history of the welfare state by the evidence of social retrogression in London in the late 1980s. Recalling the Britain of his youth he noted 'there were the spikes, the left over remnants of the Poor Law workhouse which housed alcoholics and schizophrenics who avoided all the ropes in the safety net. However, there were no young people, their lives blighted, sleeping in doorways in the Strand' (Timmins 1995: 4). The rhetoric of old debates may have been recast during the years of the most recent Conservative government, but it still runs on the old binaries.

Poverty, then, has been a constant feature of British society. Even at times of international supremacy in commerce its presence has been felt. Waves of anxiety at different moments have produced varied responses, which have ranged from physical brutality to incarceration with forced labour to the more recent humiliations of means testing, deprivation and psychological exclusion. In the present climate of uncertainty and retrenchment, the struggle to deny ill deserved rewards from the state has intensified and the principle of less eligibility has returned in a new distinction between a sharply categorized 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' unemployment, which has disturbing implications at many levels. A deepening hostility is surfacing very clearly in new methods planned and implemented against those who 'cheat', 'defraud' and 'steal' social security benefit. In a recent article, the Social Affairs correspondent of *The Times* of London traces the history of such methods under the current Labour government. The Public Accounts Committee claims that the four billion pounds a year misappropriated justifies the appointment of a former M15 Deputy-General to supervise 'intelligence gathering' while an open telephone line for citizens to betray erring neighbours stands available and considerable funds are devoted to a campaign to 'harden attitudes' to fraud within communities. The latter proposal has few precedents in peacetime (*The Times*: 9.8.2000). These as yet small indicators of a returning social tension suggest that the war on idleness has left its traces. The corresponding force of its conceptual complement in the binary, 'industry', requires similar examination.

The ennoblement of Industry

The Oxford English Dictionary points out that the word 'industry' has been used since the fifteenth century in contrast to idleness. Derived from the Latin 'industria', diligence, its principal meaning is given as 'the human quality of sustained application or effort.' Only later was it extended to include, in the eighteenth century sense, a set of institutions involved in production (O.E.D. 1961). The power of that contrast is expressed in an eighteenth century poem that evokes images deep set in the British psyche.

In James Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence*, the first Canto describes a land where 'that soul enfeebling wizard,' 'the false enchanter,' 'the demon Indolence reigns' (Thomson 1965). In the second Canto, Thomson introduces the noble 'Knight of Arts and Industry' born to a hunter and 'Dame Poverty' Sir Industry strides out to storm the Castle of Indolence 'a barbarous world to civilize, then spread the swelling sail and made for Britain 's coast'.

Writing in a similar vein, the better-known heralds of the glorious new age struck a chord in the minds of the emerging middle classes. Samuel Smiles marveled at how 'a number of ingenious men' had brought 'a harvest of prosperity to the nation' and Andrew Ure, Harriet Martineau and Herbert Spencer, in the same spirit, found willing ears (see Wiener 1985: 81-82). Interestingly, the more eloquent criticisms of industrialism and the values it extolled, from the works of Carlyle and Dickens onwards, considerably weakened the entrepreneurial impulse of a socially ambitious commercial elite, as Martin Wiener convincingly demonstrated (Wiener). However, in social legislation, especially on employment and education, faith in industry and unquestioned dedication to serving its needs has remained a touchstone in British social thought.

Donald Horne's contrasting metaphors for the nation are useful in defining the polarities in British culture that the industrial revolution created. Inspired by Mrs. Gaskell, he introduces a Northern Metaphor where Britain is pragmatic, calculating, enterprising, rational, fond of struggle and economically self satisfied (Horne 1969: 27). Thornton, the factory owner in *North and South* asserts that the beauty of the system is that 'a working man by his own exertions and dedication to decency and sobriety can come over to our ranks... if not as a master then as an overlooker, a cashier, a bookkeeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order' (Gaskell 1906: 97-95). Instead, the Britain of the Southern metaphor is illogical, romantic, traditional and easy going: in Thornton's words, 'clogged with honey'.

The beauty of the system, was less apparent to the Chartist poet Ernest Jones

The factories gave forth lurid fires
From pent up hells within their breast...

Here are men and engines yonder,
 I see nothing but machines
 While the rich power unstable
 Crushed the pauper's heart in vain
 As though the rich were heirs of Abel
 And the poor were heirs of Cain

While the bloated trader passes,
 Lord of loom and lord of mill
 On his pathway rush the masses,
 Crushed beneath his stubborn will.

Ernest Jones *The Factory Town*

In modern fiction, the northern industrial town has been a favoured site for exponents of post war social realism. John Braine's 1957 *Room at The Top* appeared in 1957, recounting the rise of the lad of humble origins who marries the factory owner's daughter, against the background of aspirations, hierarchies and class founded values in an industrial community. In the sequel *Life at the Top*, Lampton explains the way of the world to his child:

And then Grandad took charge of one of the arc furnaces. And he worked hard and he went to night school and he got to be a foreman and he went on learning all the time. And, whatever they say, sonny, people were glad to help him. Everyone respects a man who's come up the hard way (Braine1971: 27).

The qualities of humility, effort and perseverance permeate almost all explications of the Northern formulation of its identity. Thrift and a propensity to save were established early as a complement to those qualities in political economy. Their virtues were elaborated in Thornton 's discourse on the essential:

Week by week our income came to fifteen shillings out of which three had to be kept. My mother managed so that I put by three out of those fifteen shillings regularly. This made the beginning: this taught me self denial (Gaskell1906: 97).

As the moment came when the state education of the lower classes could no longer be postponed, the advance of Benthamite utilitarianism in social administration from the 1830s, along with the deep rooted pragmatism of the individuals involved ensured that the nascent system would be a child of the North. The consequences for the cultural development of the nation are still insufficiently appreciated

'The Murder of the Innocents': industry and schooling

The first paltry state grant to education came only in 1830 with the new spirit of Whig reform. Prior to this, the schooling of the poor had been left to the Church or took place in a miscellany of dubious enterprises, Dame schools and the like, manned by those whom The Duke of Wellington disparaged as 'the refuse of every profession.' Middle and upper class concern at the constant shadow of discontent in the lower orders prompted an increasing conviction that religion and education had a greater role to play in preserving some semblance of harmony. (Morris1979;59) It must be remembered that a quite separate system existed for the education of the elite. This has been chronicled and discussed in an extensive literature and has no direct bearing on the observations that follow on the education of the poorer classes(De Honey1977).

The revival of the evangelical spirit had, from the 1790s, brought Sunday Schools to prominence and their value in instilling notions of law, order and duty in the future labour force was widely acknowledged, and popular education became a terrain for ideological preaching. James Kay Shuttleworth in his ten years running the Committee of the Privy Council on Education was to have a critical influence on the cultural life of Britain's working classes. The Teacher Training minutes of 1846 were thrust on the nation, brushing aside a far more humanistic and far sighted Anglican alternative proposal (Alexander1978).

Charles Dickens's portrayal of teaching in the school in Coketown in *Hard Times* shows Kay's prodigies at work. Victorian pragmatism reigns in the classrooms of Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. McChoakumchild, soldiers in an army of instructors 'turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many piano legs' (Dickens1848).

The pattern was set and, in 1862 the Revised Code introduced Standards on which pupils would be examined. In addition, a system of payment of teachers by results effectively restricted teaching to the rudimentary skills needed for shop accounting and ledger work. Later in the decade, concerns over foreign challenges to British industrial supremacy glimpsed at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, and particularly the military and industrial rise of Prussia, based squarely on an extensive system of state education, created pressure to extend a newly compulsory primary education to all. The outcome was the 1870 Education Act introduced to parliament by W. E. Forster:

Upon this speedy provision of education depends also our national power ...if we are to

hold our position among men of our own race or among the nations of the world We must make up the smallness of our size by increasing the intellectual force of the individual (Simon 1960: 213).

There followed one of the rare moments of optimism in English educational history. Newly empowered School Boards erected splendid new buildings and involved communities, in London especially, contributed to their success. But it was short lived. The Conservative Education Act of 1902 established a tripartite academic/vocational divide that characterizes the system as a whole to this day (Gleeson1999: 136-138). By the end of the nineteenth century the demarcations were clear. The expansion of the public schools, modelled on the nine 'great 'schools visited by the Clarendon Commission in 1864 made ample provision for both the sons of the aristocracy and those of the commercial elite. Classics dominated the curriculum; leadership training and team sports formed an ethos. Thornton had found Latin no use at all in the making of an industrialist: 'I was too busy to think about any dead people with the living pressing alongside of me, neck to neck, in the struggle for bread' (Gaskell1906: 97).

For the existing elite and those aspiring to it, the dead tongues provided a frame of reference for future experience as leaders and resembled a Renaissance puberty rite (Ong1959). The narrow ladder to secondary education offered to the lower middle classes by the 1902 Act shaped the grammar school curriculum on the lines of that of the public schools. Latin took preference over the sciences and 'useful education' became associated with the inferior curriculum of the lower ranks in society (Simon 1960: 130).

When, in 1944, the Butler Act opened free secondary education to all, it was on a brutally class divided basis. The private, fee-paying system remained untouched, although recognized as socially divisive, offering clear stages from preparatory to 'public' school with a greatly favoured subsequent path to career or university. Those in the ill funded state system were soon to undergo selection based on an exam taken at eleven years old. A chosen twenty per cent proceeded to Grammar school and the remainder to Secondary Modern schools. The curricula differed radically and there was no route to transfer between the two. The former offered courses parallel to those in public schools and competition for university places was between them. The majority of Britain's children had their future social experience determined in institutions conceived and administered as inferior (Gleeson1999).

The term 'tripartite' is ever more frequently used to describe the assumptions on which education is envisioned and has evolved. Fundamentally, people were believed, as in *Plato's Republic* to be men of gold, silver or bronze, and to fall socially and genetically into three types: academic, technical and practical, needing three distinct types of provision. In practice, British educators have left the elite schools to take care of the teaching of the first, while confusing the nature of the second and third. Specialized Technical schools spoken of at the time of the 1944 Act were never created and vocational education came

to mean a rudimentary preparation, divided on unashamedly sexist lines, for the office or factory floor, where jobs were readily available until the first rumblings of change in the international industrial balance came with the oil crisis of 1974.

The increasing evidence of middle class domination of the grammar school was a critical factor in the move to redress inequality of opportunity and provide a comprehensive system for the education of children of every social class and ability, where what R. H. Tawney once famously denounced as 'the vulgarities of class and income' would be irrelevant.

Disregarding charges of social engineering, the Labour governments of the 1970s exerted financial pressure on local education authorities to ensure the participation of the middle classes, considered vital to the scheme. With the example of successful models of state schooling in continental Europe before them, the system's advocates hoped it would promote greater social justice and the civil equality Lloyd George once said would never be established, 'until the child of the poorest parent shall have the same opportunity for receiving the best education as the child of the richest' (Hay 1978: 72). From 1979 The long years of Conservative administration hostile to the very concept of the comprehensive school saw a defection of the middle classes to the private sector, often facilitated by state funded scholarships under an Assisted Places scheme. The effects on teacher morale and the image of the school in the community have restored a sense of mediocrity that has damaging implications for its users. The comprehensive school in many instances has acquired the characteristics of the earlier secondary modern so long accused of providing 'factory fodder'. As the factory recedes from its earlier prominence in the economy and the community the sense of dislocation grows in the young with consequences that are as yet unclear.

Industry, youth and state

Ill served by education and cynically suspicious of the increasingly selectivist social service system pressing for their ever more abrupt entry into work of any description, British youth stands on unstable terrain. Angela McRobbie (1996) recently called for a new sociology of youth, lamenting the lack of research on how the young now position themselves towards the world of labour. Gangs, style, sex and music have attracted more research interest in Cultural Studies than the prosaic world of work. In the last such extensive study, Paul Willis observed white adolescent boys in the West Midlands bound for a more certain destination (Willis 1977). The degree of deference exhibited in his respondents today seems distant and in stark contrast to the attitudes expressed in the utterances of the disaffected reproduced in recent research.

Employment policy is a subject too often plagued by ambiguity, rhetorical accusation and the compilation of spurious moral balance sheets. The essential simplicity of the issue is often obscured. Few dispute the findings of Argyle (1989) on unemployment's links with apathy, lower self esteem, poor

health and possibly depression, alcoholism and suicide which suggest the logic of pursuing a goal of full employment for all (see Britton 1996). However, establishing such a goal as a policy should entail the provision of certain qualifications and safeguards. The thrust of social policy is to be a shift from 'welfare', a term rapidly acquiring the pejorative North American associations, to work and this calls for a scrutiny of the rights and responsibilities of the employer also. A year from the end of the twentieth century Britain had no national minimum wage and current calls to raise the recently introduced rate to half the median figure for male workers are unheeded (Unison 2000).

By withdrawing the right of school leavers to income support in 1988, the principle was established that all should be in work, education or training. Extending education beyond the essential is an unfamiliar notion to the British working class. In families on low incomes, education has more often than not been curtailed at the school leaving age, which at present is sixteen. In 1995 Britain had fewer students remaining in post compulsory education than any other OECD country except Turkey. Every major industrial nation has more citizens than Britain in fulltime education beyond sixteen. (Allard 1996: 18).

If the option to continue school has been rejected by so many, 41% in 1995, it must not be assumed that the alternatives held greater appeal (*ibid*). In recent years, the most widely accepted diagnosis for the British economy is that it suffers from 'sclerosis'. Flexibility is regarded as the sole cure and a number of features have been identified as detrimental to its development. These are exemplified by strong unions, increased regulation of employment conditions, and the statutory enforcement of minimum wages, commonly introduced in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s.

An influential research body in Britain regards the flexible, more competitive North American model for the labour market as more suited for imitation, noting its implicit shift from group loyalty to individual autonomy (Britton 1995 :42). This historical tendency to respect the flows of the market and the 'unseen hand' rather than to actively intervene on behalf of the worker has made the experience of work hazardous for the young. There has been a rise in youth unemployment, from 5% in 1972 to 16.5% in 1995, with graduate unemployment at an unprecedented 11% that year in London (Allard: 1996: 8). The implications for the inexperienced, unqualified jobseeker are ominous.

The Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit has ample documentation of the exploitation of young workers. A 17 year old worked in a bakery through the night for £1 an hour. A young woman earning £75 a week was fined £25 (op.cit.,8) for arriving at work three minutes late. In an example from the service sector, regarded as the most probable future provider of employment to the unskilled, the Burger King restaurant chain carries the logic behind flexibility to its extreme in its policy of 'clocking off'. Workers are not considered employed when the restaurant is quiet and so not paid. One young worker took home £1 from a five hour shift (op.cit., 24). Although deregulation has operated in Britain since the 1980s and the current mood in the City is optimistic, most jobs available to the lower age range remain low paid with little prospect of improvement. In the Manchester area 46.5% paid less than £1.50 an hour in 1996

compared with 28.5% in 1990 (*ibid.*)

Unwilling to intervene on low pay for so long, the governments of both major parties have focused attention on training programmes for school leavers designed to ease the transition to work. The names have changed, from the Youth Opportunity Programme to the Youth Training Scheme to Training for Work and so on, but all have revolved around the concept of apprenticeship. Negligible subsidies are provided and the quality of training has been a critical factor in their lack of success. It is in this casual acceptance of the lack of commitment from employers that the government has most evidently failed in its responsibilities to youth. A Department for Education and Employment survey in 1994 showed 57% of trainees abandoned courses, 32% of these citing the poverty of the training received (*op cit.*,16)

The Children's Society, founded in 1881 to care for destitute children, was prompted to issue a publication in 1996 on social distress among the young. It pointed out how alternative values are developing and crime appears an increasingly rational choice. A sixteen year old car thief in Glamorgan recounted:

Yeah, I done Y.T. for one day! I filled out a load of forms and then I realized it was shit, stupid. Slaving your bollocks off for £30... I can nick that in ten minutes. What's the point? (Allard 1996: 16).

Rejection, exclusion and frustration are the themes of Cedric Cullingford's recent study on young criminals (Cullingford 1999). In his chapter on 'The experience of home' he stresses the dislocation caused by absence, divorce and the lack or poor quality of parental interaction. The school in many communities is described as 'an opportunity for collective disturbance' where a culture of disruption flourishes as an alternative to the failure and humiliation offered by academic challenge. School is rejected and, on leaving, the same rejection is directed towards employment (Cullingford.1999: 144). Walking out of the school gates for the last time, a choice lies between the dull, safe, correct but not lucrative world of labor and crime. Cullingford's conclusion, having listed those solutions from 'restorative justice' to imprisonment that the Home Office now admits do not work, is that 'schools must now reach far beyond the skills of employability (*op.cit.*, 210). A climate must be created in the community where the intrinsic value of education is perceived. Investment on a massive scale is needed for schools to redress a deep historical injustice, but alone it will not suffice.

This, then, is the context in which social intervention must be decided on and implemented. Perhaps the cruelest legacy of the experience of industrialization has been the legitimization of the practice of viewing people as economic units. Yet the science of economics did not develop in a vacuum. It evolved in response to human conditions, fears and needs and, in common with other sciences, it calls for respect for evidence. The evidence emerging in contemporary Britain is that great courage is needed to move beyond

the rhetoric and the weary solutions imposed by history and begin to restore a minimal equality of opportunity. For too long, the nation has moved in step to the march of industry and proved deaf to the song of experience.

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