SARU WORKING PAPERS

THE CONTINGENT ECONOMY: MANUFACTURING McJOBS?

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Abstract

Two decades ago people readily spoke of work and leisure in one breath. Shorter working hours and flexible work schedules were to be part of the post-industrial society theorized by Daniel Bell and others. Meanwhile, Harry Braverman and his followers forecast continuing degradation of labour and a shift from primary to "second" jobs. The Bell-Braverman debate continues in literature on the sociology of work, and translates into the "good job" versus "bad job" debate in government research. This essay provides an overview of the shift to more casual forms of labour. The growth of McJobs, as the labour movement calls them, is situated within the context of the ongoing debate over the future of work in Canada. Recommendations for improved labour legislation are suggested as a means to better working conditions and social welfare.

Introduction

Capitalism is full of interesting contradictions. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution workers fought for shorter working hours. In various countries, labour struggles which brought the eight or nine hour day were seen as great triumphs. "Working hours in the developed capitalist nations dropped by almost half from 1850 to 1950, largely as a result of labor's recurrent struggles for shorter work time" (Moody, 1992: 51). And in many of these nations one in five workers is now classified as part-time. Yet, at the same time, official statistics in the United States show an increase in working hours for the average full-time worker over the last couple of decades (Moody, 1992). In Canada, the average work week has dropped to 37 hours. But this average masks the fact that average hours for full-time jobs have remained at 42 hours per week since 1975.[1] And, of course, the 42 hour average for all full-timers masks a range of schedules. "Between 1981 and 1993, the percentage of individuals working standard workweeks fell and the proportion of individuals working either short or long hours increased for both sexes" (Morissette and Sunter, 1994: ii).[2]

There is an underlying process of structural transformation which produces these outcomes. They are part of attempts by global capital to renew capital accumulation by reasserting control over labour markets and labour processes -- control which had been weakened through a history of trade union and labour-party led class struggles, which gave Western workers more power in both the economic and political realms (Abendroth, 1972; Arrighi, 1990; Palmer, 1992). To regain control over labour-power, capital has undertaken a number of initiatives, including globalization of production, technological changes, degradation of labour, (re)casualization of labour,[3] feminization of labour, informalization of production, and promotion of neo-liberal state policies designed to weaken the labour movement (Broad, 1991; 1993). One U.S. statesman referred to the "zapping" of labour (Ackerman, 1982; Harrison & Bluestone, 1988). But these initiatives are usually dressed in more palatable guise. In the workplace we have heard much about "quality of working life" (QWL) and "teamwork" programs (Parker, 1985; Parker & Slaughter, 1988; Wells, 1986; 1987). At the level of government, neo-liberals[4] preach about getting the nanny state off our backs and promoting various freedoms -- free enterprise, free markets, free trade and, to make the whole package acceptable to a citizenry who has been acclimatized to two centuries of liberal ideology, individual freedom. But, as we will see, in capitalist societies some individuals have more freedom to take advantage of opportunities than others.

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[1] Statistics Canada, *Historical Labour Force Statistics 1992*, Catalogue 71-201. Moody (1992: 51) contends that "the increase in overtime, double or multiple job holding, and super-long hours of some professional workers off-set the impact of the 'contingent' [casual] workforce" on working hours. Statistics Canada defines part-time work as paid employment of less than 30 hours per week. This is the definition used in this essay.

[2] In general, women and youth tend towards more part-time work, while men tend towards more overtime.

[3] Observing the increase in part-time, short-term, contract, et cetera employment in the formal economy, some British sociologists refer to a "casualization of labour" (Mitter, 1986; Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987). Looking back in history, I would call the current trend a "(re)casualization of labour" (Broad, 1991; 1993).

[4] I use the term "neo-liberal" here to refer to current political-economic practices based on the notion of free-market capitalism **a la** Adam Smith's (1776) "invisible hand" of the market. These practices are sometimes referred to as "neo-conservative", given that they have been pushed by Tory governments in Britain, Canada and the United States, but the affinity with classical liberalism makes neo-liberal the more apt term.

The Contingent Economy

In recent years, students of the labour market have noted the growth of what is referred to as "contingent" or "non-standard" labour. *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1970) defines "contingent" as "happening by chance; accidental; fortuitous ...; dependent (**on** or **upon** something uncertain); conditional". The term is therefore appropriate for what might better be termed "casual" labour, because it signals the uncertainty of the forms of work in question. The term "non-standard" is derived from the assumption that full-time waged labour is the standard form of work.

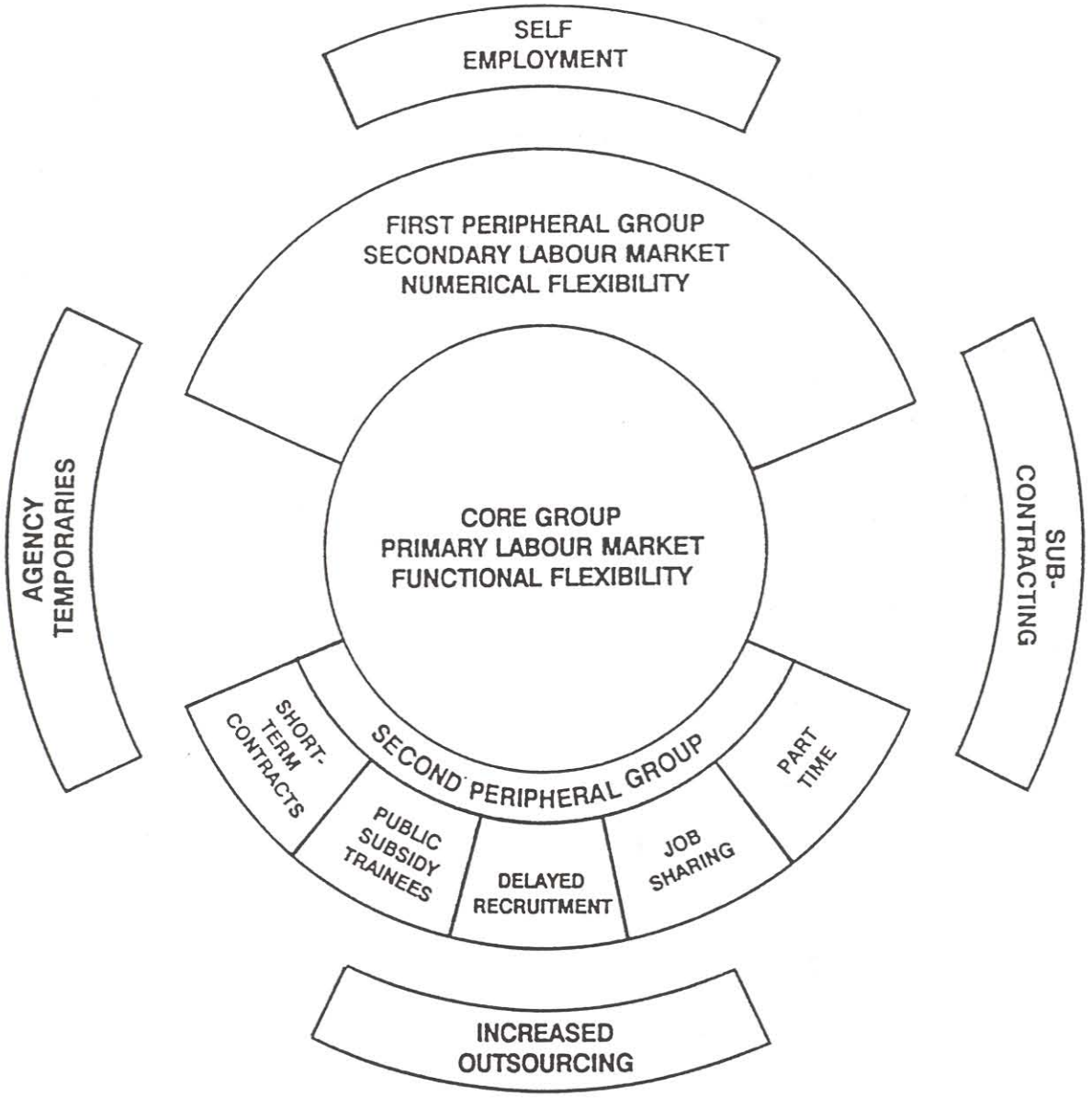
The growth of the contingent labour force is intimately tied to the process of global restructuring. Corporations are trying to cut costs by downsizing, which is often a euphemism for laying off workers. This is one part of the shift to flexible production. The structure of the flexible labour market is one which shifts more and more components of production from the individual firm to series of suppliers. This is occurring in both goods and services production. In the drive to lower overhead costs many companies, especially large ones, are now contracting out much work that was previously done "in-house". As a result of downsizing by large "core" companies there has been a rapid growth of "peripheral" workers employed by contractors, or hired on a temporary basis by core firms (Broad, 1991; 1993).

The structure of the emerging labour market is depicted in Figure 1. At the core we find the most highly skilled workers, especially those involved in research and design, who are noted for their functional flexibility. The first peripheral tier incorporates full-time workers, who are numerically flexible due to higher turnover than the core group. The second peripheral group provides even greater numerical flexibility, because it is made up of part-timers and other casual workers. "All evidence points to a very significant growth in this category of employees in the last few years" (Harvey, 1989: 150-1). On the outer tier, not directly employed by core firms, one finds the temporary help agencies, sub-contractors, self-employed, and increased outsourcing to the geographical periphery -- the Third World. And in both the periphery and core states of the world-economy one now finds a growing "informal economy", providing both goods and services to the "formal economy" (Portes and Sassen, 1987).

Contingent jobs have been the fastest growing types of jobs across Canada in recent years. Research by the Economic Council of Canada (ECC, 1990; 1991) identifies four types of contingent work in particular: part-time employment; short-term work; own-account self-employment; and temporary-help agency work. "Between 1981 and 1986, these four forms of non-standard employment accounted for about half of all new jobs; they now represent nearly 30 percent of total employment" (ECC, 1990: 12). The authors of the report add that their "analysis indicates a long-term trend towards more non-standard employment" (1990: 13).

Perhaps the most obvious growth of the contingent labour force in Canada is in part-time work. Statistics Canada first began to measure part-time employment through the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 1953. At that time part-time work was employment of "less than 35 hours per week", and 197,000 people, or less than four percent of the Canadian labour force was found to be working part time (see Table 1). At present, despite the fact that the measure for part-time employment to "less

FIGURE 1. Labour Market Structures Under Conditions of Flexible Accumulation.



SOURCE: C. Curson (ed.), *Flexible Patterns of Work*. London: Institute of Personnel Management, 1986.

than 30 hours per week" in 1975, LFS data show that 2,254,000 people, or 17 percent of Canadian workers are part-timers. Three-quarters of these part-timers are women working less than 20 hours per week. And use of the old (35 hour) measure would put those working part time over 20 percent of the labour force (see Graph 1).

The official LFS count of 17 percent part-time workers in the Canadian labour force is based on reference point figures. Statistics Canada also releases annual average figures, which have shown over 20 percent of the labour force to be working part time, using the 30-hour mark (Gower, 1988: 17). According to the Canadian Census, over 20 per cent of employed workers in Canada are part-timers (Broad, 1993). And those part-timers who are "self-employed" are categorized as self-employed by the LFS, not as part-time. Moreover, the number of part-timers, and all casuals, would increase yet more if we included members of the informal labour force. Suffice to say that at least one in five members of the Canadian labour force is now working part-time.

The important thing to note from Table 1 is the steady growth in part-time work over the post-war period. The figures show that the rate of increase has been subject to cyclical swings, but the whole period has witnessed a steady growth of part-time work overall (see Graph 1). As well, Pold (1990: 6) notes: "The increase in part-time employment may moreover be somewhat understated because of the large growth of multiple job holders (from 212,000 in 1975 to 626,000 in June of [1990])".

Significant to note, then, is the continued growth of part-time work over two decades of economic boom *and* two decades of economic crisis -- i.e., the increase in part-time work is more than a cyclical phenomenon. For the 1950s and 1960s much of the growth of part-time employment in western countries resulted from the push and pull factors that have brought more women into formal employment (Beechey and Perkins, 1987). Many of these women continue to work part time because they have to balance paid work and family responsibilities. But the continued growth of part time employment from the 1970s on can be explained more as a product of a general casualization of labour tied to corporate restructuring to cut production costs and weaken organized labour (Broad, 1991; Duffy and Pupo, 1992). Looking at Table 1, we do see an important trend related to economic cycles. With the recession of 1981-82 there was a decrease in full-time employment and an increase in part-time employment. From 1984 to 1989 there was an increase in full-time employment, but gains in part-time employment continued. With the most recent (1990-92) recession, full-time employment declined, but part-time employment increased again. This is an increase that we should expect to remain, as the labour market overall is subject to more casualization, and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) continues to erode the basis for full-time manufacturing employment as Canadian workers are restructured to fit the global economy (Campbell, 1992).

Part-time work and self-employment are the two forms of casual employment with the highest growth rates, but the Economic Council of Canada also singles out short-term work and temporary employment. The Council tells us that "the proportion of the employed labour force in **short-term work** (jobs of less than six months duration) rose by nearly two percentage points between 1978 and 1988" (ECC, 1990: 12). The Council report states that "the largest numbers of short-term jobs are

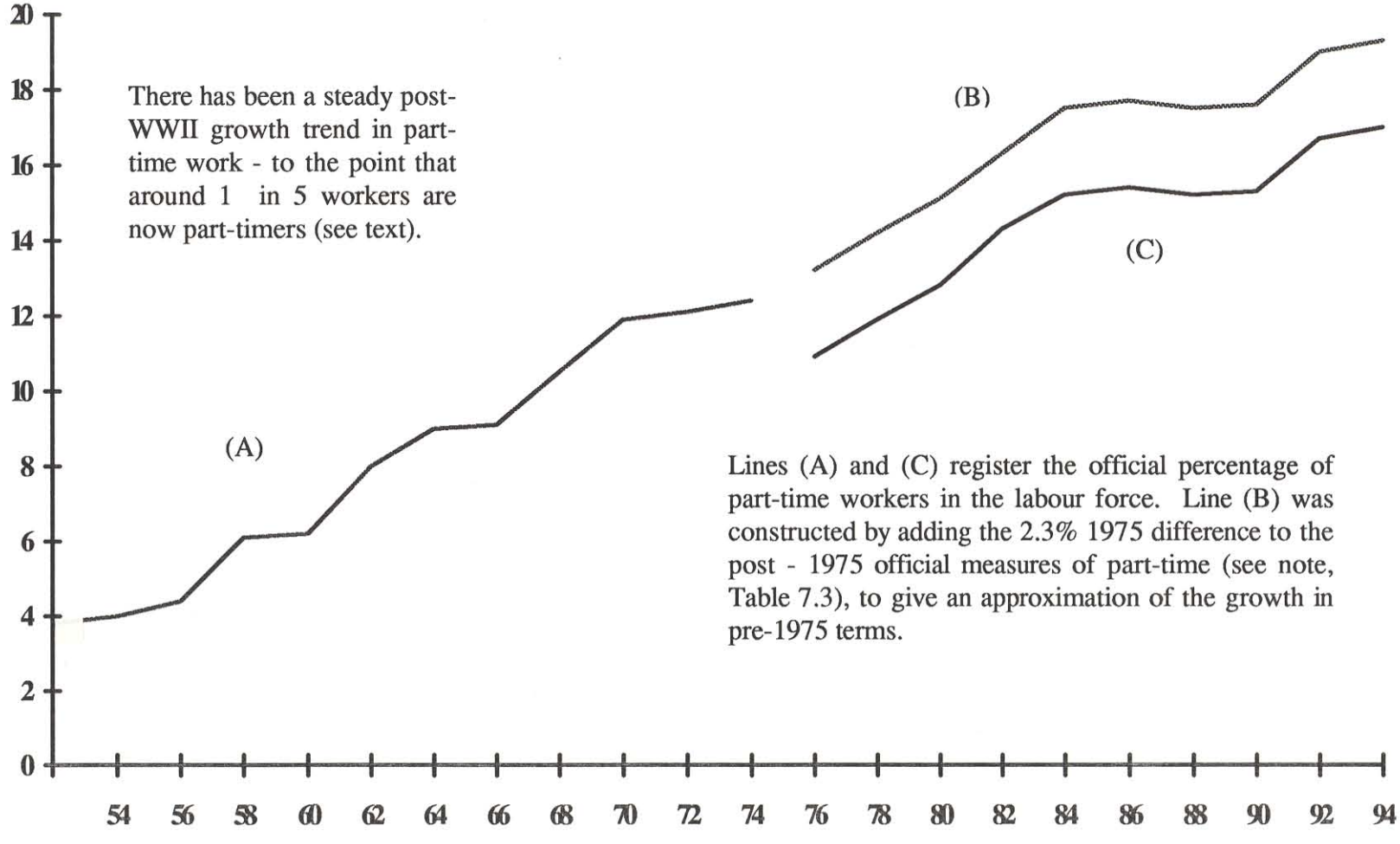
TABLE 1
Part-time and Full-time Employment in Canada, 1953-1994.

	Part-time Employment			Full-time Employment		
Year	Actual ('000)	As a % of Total Employment	Average Annual Percentage Change	Actual ('000)	As a % of Total Employment	Average Annual Percentage Change
1953	197	3.8	—	5,039	96.2	—
1954	208	4.0	5.6	5,035	96.0	-0.1
1955	230	4.3	10.6	5,136	95.7	2.0
1956	243	4.4	5.7	5,342	95.6	4.0
1957	288	5.0	18.5	5,441	95.0	1.9
1958	349	6.1	21.2	5,356	93.9	-1.6
1959	367	6.3	5.2	5,502	93.7	2.7
1960	366	6.2	-0.3	5,565	93.8	1.1
1961	441	7.3	20.5	5,578	92.7	0.2
1962	497	8.0	12.7	5,728	92.0	2.7
1963	532	8.3	7.0	5,843	91.7	2.0
1964	597	9.0	12.2	6,013	91.0	2.9
1965	657	9.6	10.0	6,205	90.4	3.2
1966	647	9.1	-1.5	6,474	90.9	4.3
1967	706	9.6	9.1	6,618	90.4	2.2
1968	785	10.5	11.2	6,675	89.5	0.9
1969	854	11.1	8.8	6,839	88.9	2.5
1970	922	11.9	8.0	6,856	88.1	0.2
1971	960	12.1	4.1	6,996	87.9	2.0
1972	988	12.1	2.9	7,204	87.9	3.0
1973	1,031	12.0	4.4	7,567	88.0	5.0
1974	1,106	12.4	7.3	7,845	87.6	3.7
1975*	1,175	12.9	6.2	7,919	87.1	0.9
1975	988	10.6	—	8,296	89.4	—
1976	1,067	10.9	8.0	8,710	89.1	5.0
1977	1,153	11.6	8.1	8,826	88.4	1.3
1978	1,232	11.9	6.9	9,088	88.1	3.0
1979	1,330	12.4	8.0	9,430	87.6	3.8
1980	1,424	12.8	7.1	9,658	87.2	2.4
1981	1,523	13.4	7.0	9,875	86.6	2.2
1982	1,573	14.3	3.3	9,462	85.7	-4.2
1983	1,694	15.3	7.7	9,412	84.7	-0.5
1984	1,732	15.2	2.2	9,671	84.8	2.8
1985	1,810	15.4	4.5	9,932	84.6	2.7
1986	1,864	15.4	3.0	10,230	84.6	3.0
1987	1,869	15.0	0.3	10,553	85.0	3.2
1988	1,949	15.2	4.3	10,870	84.8	3.0
1989	1,961	15.0	0.6	11,125	85.0	2.3
1990	2,009	15.3	2.4	11,156	84.7	0.3
1991	2,108	16.3	4.9	10,808	83.7	-3.1
1992	2,149	16.7	1.9	10,693	83.3	-1.1
1993	2,243	17.2	4.4	10,772	82.8	0.7
1994	2,254	17.0	0.5	11,038	83.0	2.5

Source: Statistics Canada, *Historical Labour Force Statistics 1994* (Catalogue 71-201); and Mary Lou Coates, *Part-time Employment: Labour Market Flexibility and Equity Issues.* Kingston: Queen's University, Industrial Relations Centre, 1988.

* The Labour Force Survey was revised in 1975. The first figure is based on the old Labour Force Survey; part-time employment between 1953 and 1975 consisted of persons who usually worked less than 35 hours per week. The second figure is based on the revised Survey and since 1975 part-time employment consists of persons who usually work less than 30 hours per week.

GRAPH 1. Percentage of Part-time Workers in the Canadian Labour Fource, 1953 - 1994.



Source: Table 1.

found in traditional services" (ECC, 1990: 12). And these "jobs are more likely than longer-term ones to be part-time and to be situated in small firms; they are less likely to be unionized or to be covered by a pension plan" (ECC, 1990: 12).

Research based on Statistics Canada's 1989 General Social Survey (GSS) also identifies the importance of the growth in non-standard employment, especially in the service sector (Krahn, 1992). According to the GSS, in 1989 one-third of Canadian workers could be identified as non-standard. "The lower-tier service industries (retail trade and other consumer services) exhibited the highest rates of non-standard employment. Over one-third of people working in these sectors were in non-standard (part-time, part-year and/or temporary) jobs. However, the upper-tier education, health and welfare industries also had almost 30% of their employees in non-standard jobs" (Krahn, 1992: 53). Most non-standard employees identified through the GSS were young and female, and many fared low in terms of both extrinsic (pay and benefits) and intrinsic (quality of work) employment rewards.

In summarizing, Heather Menzies (1989: 200-12) notes ten recent trends related to technological change and application of flexible production in Canada:

(1) **job loss**, due mainly to automation;
(2) **mobility of work**, from skilled workers into computers, on to professionals, then back through computers to skilled clerical staff;
(3) **jobless economic growth**, with new technology increasing output per worker;
(4) **jobless employment growth**, with individual workers expected to do more tasks and increase their output per hour;
(5) **deskilling/reskilling**, with some jobs being downgraded and others upgraded, but the latter generally requiring technical and procedural skills, not conceptual skills;
(6) **polarization**, of the workforce and society at large;
(7) **prevalence of part-time work**, exacerbating the polarization trend;
(8) **training and qualifications**, which are unevenly divided and make their own contribution to polarization;
(9) **alienation and the 'new work model'**, with computer monitoring and the reorganization of work contributing to the polarization of work by closing workers inside a "systems-defined ghetto";
(10) **loss of control**, where we find control continuing to seep out of workers' hands and into the hands of management.

So we find double polarization of jobs in terms of both wages and skills. These trends do not fit the common portrayal of computers and robotics combining with new forms of workplace organization based on quality of working life and teamwork schemes to promise a more co-operative, worker-friendly environment. In some new work settings, as opposed to the old mass-production assembly-line work, workers are asked to apply their conceptual skills, not simply execute supervisors' instructions. But some analysts and a number of trade unions argue that these schemes do not incorporate the workers as equal partners, because it is management that sets the overall agenda, with a primary concern for cutting costs and increasing productivity (Parker, 1985; Parker & Slaughter, 1988; Wells, 1986; 1987).

Overall, there has been a casualization of the labour market tied to the current economic restructuring. Contrary to the best scenarios of theorists of a post-industrial society, the Economic Council finds more "bad" than "good" jobs being created, both in terms of skill content and wages. The prospects, for most workers, appear to be for deskilling and declining standards of living. The Council reports a declining proportion of Canadian families with middle-level incomes (ECC, 1990: 15). In the following section these transformations are situated in the context of the sociological debate over the future of work.

Post-Industrial Utopia or Hollow Society?

The dominant labour market trends in recent years have been a (re)casualization and informalization of work for some, who must scrounge to get by, and increased working hours and overtime work for others. Nevertheless, it is still possible to find introductory sociology texts with chapters combining discussions of work and leisure, as if the two go hand in hand. Such treatments of work are based on the thesis of post-industrial society (Bell, 1973) which, in the heyday of the post-World War II economic boom, postulated shorter working hours, higher wages, and expanded leisure time as the norm.

Given the (re)casualization of labour for some, and lengthened working days for others, the post-industrial society thesis would seem to be somewhat incongruous with present facts. In this section, I re-evaluate the utility of this thesis as an explanation for current trends affecting labour and society, by counterpoising it to the thesis of degradation of labour (Braverman, 1974). Is the future of the western capitalist world a post-industrial utopia, or a hollow society?

There are two classic texts which represent the two sides of the debate on the future of work and the working class: Daniel Bell's (1973) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*; and Harry Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital.* The central theses of these texts are representative of two main theories of industrialization: (1) the theory of "social differentiation, based on classical liberalism and Durkheimian sociology, and [(2) the theory of] uneven development, derived from the critical work of Marx and Weber" (Walton, 1987: 89).

Some sociologists are now wont to dismiss the notion of post-industrial society as old hat. But Walton (1987: 93) notes: "Although the theory of social differentiation has recently come under attack, it is far from moribund. Much research is still animated by its claims, and it continues to be accepted as textbook sociology". Bell's (1989) own thoughts on the "third industrial revolution" were published in the Spring 1989 issue of *Dissent.* And *The Globe and Mail* (22/05/93) recently published a full-page excerpt from management guru Peter Drucker's new book *Post-Capitalist Society* which, in essence, dresses Bell's discussion up in the current terminology of flexibility and teamwork.

While Bell's is the first name that springs to mind when sociologists think about post-industrial society, more popular writers in this genre are John Naisbett (1982) and Alvin Toffler (1981). Still,

Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* is the key text. Therein, using the notion of "industrial society" rather than "capitalism",[5] Bell makes the following distinction:

> The concept 'post-industrial' is counterposed to that of 'pre-industrial' and 'industrial'. A pre-industrial sector is primarily **extractive**, its economy based on agriculture, mining, fishing, timber, and other resources such as natural gas or oil. An industrial sector is primarily **fabricating,** using energy and machine technology, for the manufacture of goods. A post-industrial sector is one of **processing** in which telecommunications and computers are strategic for the exchange of information and knowledge (1976: xii).

We should note that Bell's future is based on a view of a particular technological advance -- information technology -- and a massive shift from production of goods to production of services. It is common knowledge that most Western economies employ primarily service workers (over two-thirds of their labour forces). And all aspects of our lives are now being inundated with computer technology. Some authors call this the "third industrial revolution" (Valaskakis and Sendell, 1980). In the first two industrial revolutions machines came to replace human labour-power. In the third, machines have come increasingly to replace mental as well as physical labour. For Bell (1976: xiii): "Broadly speaking, if industrial society is based on machine technology, post-industrial society is shaped by an intellectual technology. And if capital and labour are the major structural features of industrial society, information and knowledge are those of the post-industrial society." He even asserts that "a post-industrial society is characterized not by a labour theory but by a knowledge theory of value" (1976: xiv). So, what does all this imply for the future of work and class relations of exploitation?

In the forward to the second edition of his book Bell discusses the main "dimensions" of his post-industrial society, including the centrality of theoretical knowledge; the creation of a new intellectual technology; the spread of a knowledge class; the change from goods to services; a change in the character of work; the role of women; meritocracy; the end of scarcity; and the economics of information (1976: xvi-iii). Bell's treatment of these dimensions deserves critical comment.

The effect of the change from goods to services has been obvious. Machines have come to replace workers, and many of the old blue-collar jobs have shrunk, in both content (segmentation and deskilling) and number. In Canada, for example, the absolute number of jobs in goods production has recently declined, while the number of service jobs has increased. And the absolute and relative expansion of the service sector is intimately tied to the role of women in the formal labour force. Bell comments:

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[5] See Giddens (1987) on the politics which favour the use of the term "industrial society" over "capitalism" in most bourgeois sociology. Bell, in fact, launches into a diatribe against the use of the concept "capitalism", especially by marxists (1976: xx). He contends: "On a theoretical level, my discussion denies the idea that one can use monolithic concepts such as capitalism or socialism to explain the complex structure of modern societies". Yet, he then proceeds to argue that his own monolithic concept of post-industrial society applies to all societies -- East, West, North and South!

> Work in the industrial sector (e.g., the factory) has largely been men's work, from which women have been usually excluded. Work in the post-industrial sector (e.g., human services) provides expanded employment opportunities for women. For the first time, one can say that women have a secure base for economic independence. One sees this in the steadily rising curve of women's participation in the labor force, in the number of families (now 60 percent of the total) that have more than one regular wage earner, and in the rising incidence of divorce as women increasingly feel less dependent, economically, on men (1976: xvii).

This glowing portrait of women's new independence and freedom in "post-industrial society" reveals that Bell's scenario does not accord with the reality of the majority. The reality is that most women remain in low-wage job ghettos, where the marvellous new information technology has been used by capital to further degrade and deskill "women's work" -- new and old (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994; Kemp, 1994).

But Bell's notions about the change in the character of work in general are also delusory. He argues:

> In a pre-industrial world, life is a game against nature in which men wrest their living from the soil, the waters, or the forests, working usually in small groups, subject to the vicissitudes of nature. In an industrial society, work is a game against fabricated nature, in which men become dwarfed by machines as they turn out goods and things. But in a post-industrial world, work is primarily a "game between persons" (between bureaucrat and client, doctor and patient, teacher and student, or within research groups, office groups, service groups). Thus in the experience of work and the daily routine, nature is excluded, artifacts are excluded, and persons have to learn how to live with one another. In the history of human society, this is a completely new and unparalleled state of affairs (1976: xvi-ii).

He goes on to say that "for the optimal social investment in knowledge, we have to follow a 'co-operative' strategy in order to increase the spread and use of knowledge in society" (1976: xviii). But Bell's abstraction from the reality of capitalist social relations prevents us from discerning how such co-operation might be constructed. And his liberal treatment of social relations as a "game between persons" rather than a sometimes intense, often subdued *conflict* between classes, obscures the fact that control and application of knowledge, just like all means of production, is something that will be determined by class struggle in its manifold dimensions.

Bell does suggest that there may be tension created by new forms of scarcity in post-industrial society -- "scarcities of information and of time". But in refusing to deal with the reality of capitalist society, he portrays these scarcities as both new and intangible. They are neither. The use of "scientific management" to control labour processes and workers has for decades entailed a separation of conception from execution in work. Thus, increasingly deskilled workers have experienced a scarcity of knowledge since the beginning of the *capitalist* Industrial Revolution. And knowledge, like all else

under capitalism, has become commoditized (Wallerstein, 1983). There is not scarcity, but unequal distribution of knowledge (Davis and Stack, 1993). But this Bell cannot, or refuses, to see, otherwise it would force his vision of post-industrial society to confront a grubby capitalist reality.

As for scarcities of time, the sad truth for increasing numbers of unemployed and underemployed (casual) workers is that they have all too much "free" time. On the other hand, Bell's "knowledge class" of professionals and technicians may suffer from a scarcity of time due to capitalist intensification of work and "de-layering" -- the sacking of whole middle layers of employment. The producers of the television program "Venture" (CBC: 01/04/90) ran a feature on this phenomenon, discussing how economic pressures, technological change and globalization of production are pushing the middle-layers to work longer hours throughout the capitalist world. They concluded by asking: "Remember the old dream of a life of leisure?"; and replied: "Forget it!" Unemployment and underemployment for some, increasing intensity of work and burn-out for others. The reality for many, especially women, is harsh and hectic -- simply a new version of industrial homework and sweating.

Drucker's "post-capitalist society" is essentially the same as Bell's post-industrial society. It is the society of the service economy, whose prime actors are the knowledge workers. But Drucker's appraisal of this society is presented in the vein of the current neo-liberal praise for privatization and deregulation. The main problem we confront in Drucker's post-capitalist society is the need to improve the productivity of service workers. This, according to Drucker, can best be done through contracting-out, de-layering and teamwork.

Drucker (1993: 94) states: "One driving force behind outsourcing is the need to make service workers productive". He then proceeds to laud the performance of private contractors. For example, he notes that, with private contractors, the time needed to make a hospital bed has been cut by two-thirds. Drucker argues that this is so because private contractors have an interest in capital investment, such as better-fitted sheets that allow for improved efficiency. He does not mention that contract workers, in hospitals and elsewhere, are paid less but expected to work faster than the in-house workers they replace.[6] In fact, he states: "Outsourcing is necessary not just because of the economics involved. It is necessary because it provides opportunities, income, and dignity for service workers" (Drucker, 1993: 95). This statement would surely be contested by the many contract workers in low-waged casual employ.

As for de-layering and teamwork (cf. Bell's "co-operation"), Drucker argues that there are too many managers in services, and that better teamwork, giving individual workers more responsibility and flexibility, would do away with unnecessary layers of management. But teamwork, for Drucker, is also based on a better division of labour. For example, by contracting-out custodial and clerical work, nurses are freed up for the patient care for which they are trained. He does not mention that contracting-out in combination with cutbacks has led to a casualization of nursing, with both part-timers and full-timers confronting intensified work schedules. This is a major concern for Canadian unions of nurses.

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[6] See various issues of *Labor Notes* (Detroit).

Drucker sees the greatest need for outsourcing and improved productivity in government, which he thinks, in true neo-liberal fashion, would benefit from market competition. And he warns that:

> a rapid increase in the productivity of service workers is required to avert the danger of a new 'class conflict' between the two dominant groups in the post-capitalist society: knowledge workers and service workers. To make service work productive is thus the first social priority of the post-capitalist society, in addition to being an economic priority (Drucker, 1993: 95-6).

Drucker continues to say that "there is a danger that the post-capitalist society will become [sic] a class society unless service workers attain both income and dignity. This requires productivity. But it also requires opportunities for advancement and recognition" (Drucker, 1993: 96). Drucker has the bit about income and dignity right, but his neo-liberal prescriptions will not provide these things. He says the structure of post-capitalist society will be different than earlier capitalist and socialist societies. "Both capitalist and socialist societies were, to use a scientific metaphor, 'crystalline' in their structure. Post-capitalist society is more likely to resemble a liquid" (Drucker, 1993: 96). Observing current trends, and following the tradition of Harry Braverman, I would argue that this liquid is the essence of capitalism -- *sweat* (cf. Garson, 1988).

Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* paints a much different picture than that of Bell and Drucker. Rather than a post-industrial utopia which does not exist, Braverman takes us into the nether world of real work in capitalist society. He shows us how science and technology have been harnessed by capital to further the exploitation and control of labour and the labour process.

Braverman's work has been much discussed, and much debated. He has been criticized for overdrawing the tendency towards *de*skilling, when often we find a *semi*-skilling of workers, and for insufficient attention to the role of class struggle at the point of production. I will not reproduce that debate here, but simply note my agreement with Sweezy's (1978) contention that many critics misrepresent the work of Braverman.[7] *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is too often taken to be simply a study of the deskilling of work, but it is more than that. Braverman's sub-title refers to the "degradation of work" (elsewhere he refers to the "degradation of labor"), which is a broader process than deskilling. The book includes chapters on: "Surplus Value and Surplus Labor"; "The Modern Corporation"; "The Universal Market"; "The Role of the State"; "The Structure of the Working Class and Its Reserve Armies"; along with chapters on Frederick Taylor's "scientific management" and on skills. In a reply to critics, Braverman (1976: 122) himself noted that his book was an attempt at "a concrete picture of the working class, what it is made up of, the trends of income, skill, exploitation, 'alienation', and so forth among workers, the place of the working population as a segment of the entire population, etc."

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[7] See also the recent special issue of *Monthly Review* (Vol. 46, No. 6, November 1994) commemorating Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

That Braverman's work is too often not taken as a whole is, it can be surmised, a result of the continuing existence of empiricism and positivism in the social sciences, and the political need for some (like Bell and Drucker) to neuter or dismiss Braverman's marxism. Symptomatic are the number of critiques of Braverman that do not even mention "alienation" and "exploitation" of labour. My reading of the evidence leads me to accept Braverman's thesis of increasing alienation and exploitation through degradation, deskilling (as a process) and segmentation of work and workers. The use of new technology to further deskill and segment work, the internationalization of capitalist production, and the drive to cheapen labour through both globalization and erosion of labour's strength ("union busting"), feed into (re)casualization as a way to *dis*organize labour. The fact that most new jobs are being created in a service sector which can be staffed by an already unorganized female labour force is a propitious circumstance for capital. But (re)casualization of work in its various forms is not being restricted to women or the service sector (Werlhof, 1984).

Observing the same processes as Bell and Drucker, researchers like Menzies (1991) and Reiter (1991) argue that capitalist restructuring, in the drive to increase productivity, is "manufacturing McJobs" -- in goods and services production. Menzies (1991: 31) notes that "many jobs are becoming part time or temporary. Even if they are full time, they're referred to as 'turnstile' jobs because people exit at the same level they entered". Menzies asserts: "What's significant about the McJob is it could become the most plentiful of the new types of jobs being created by the technology of the post-industrial information age" (Menzies, 1991: 31).

> The McJob is not so much a feature of a particular type of occupation or industry. It's symbolic of people's relation to the technology on the job: whether they're working with the technology or for it; whether they control it or it controls them. Increasingly, computers determine the work to be done, which means control is being transferred to the computer and those who control and programme it (Menzies, 1991: 31).

Menzies, like Drucker, uses the example of nurses in hospitals to illustrate her point. But her discussion reveals, **pace** Drucker, that it is the structure of the new 'post-whatever' society itself that is creating more social polarization. This is obvious in a number of areas.

As noted in the previous section, the Economic Council of Canada reports a declining proportion of Canadian families with middle-level income (ECC, 1990: 15). This trend has become so obvious as to call forth a number of articles in major newspapers on "the shrinking middle class".[8] Citing, among others, the ECC's project director for a study of employment and the service economy, one article in a *Globe and Mail* series on the shrinking middle states:

> Some attribute the decline of the middle to the growth of the service economy, with its concentration of low-wage hamburger flippers on one end and high-income computer programmers on the other. Others say it is because women, with their generally lower incomes, have joined the labour force in greater numbers. Part-time and temporary jobs, whose numbers soared during the 1980s, and the decline of unions, which tend to even out

[8] For more in-depth analysis see Kuttner (1983) and Ternowetsky and Thorn (1991).

wage levels, are also blamed for the shrinkage in the middle (*The Globe and Mail* December 29, 1990).

Defenders of the capitalist system are quick to tell us that "we are not all getting poorer". And there was a great flurry of excitement in the mainstream media over Statistics Canada's report that, in 1989, the annual income of the average Canadian family including two or more people topped the $50,000 mark. But the "average" Canadian family includes more than two people. And such a figure is representative of nothing, given the polarization of incomes. The Canadian Council on Social Development's *Fact Book on Poverty* tells us that there are over four million poor people in Canada, 25 percent of whom are children. And with current and rising levels of unemployment in Canada, these people have little to look forward to.

Unemployment rates have climbed steadily throughout the OECD countries since the early 1970s (Frank, 1987). While the unemployment rate dropped back down from 12 percent in Canada after the 1981-82 recession to just over seven percent, the official unemployment rate returned to double digit figures in the most recent recession, and promises to remain high according to most forecasts, in what the mainstream media are calling "the jobless recovery". Moreover, the official rate does not catch all unemployment, and researchers at Statistics Canada point out that the duration of unemployment (number of weeks unemployed per worker), increased throughout the 1980s. As well, the official unemployment rate does not touch underemployment. Gower (1990) points out that, if we count unutilized hours rather than unutilized workers, the current unemployment rate would increase by at least two percentage points.

Sivanandan (1990) goes so far as to say that, rather than labour emancipating itself from capital in the sense anticipated by Marx and Engels, using the new technologies of the information age, capital has emancipated itself from labour. Mies et al. (1988) would say that capital has emancipated itself from proletarian labour. Advances in communications and transportation mean that capital can now roam the globe in search of cheap, docile labour. Deskilling and segmentation of work, combined with use of robotics, means that capital needs smaller numbers of workers, who are more easily replaceable -- to use a euphemism, more "flexible". And despite all the talk of "job enlargement", "job enrichment", "quality of working life" (QWL) and so on, Taylor's principles of scientific management seem to endure (Silver, 1987).

Given the degradation of labour and increasing structural unemployment, in a talk in the mid-1970s Braverman (1975) forecast a future of competition for employment that used to be considered "second" jobs -- the sorts of jobs that people would tolerate when "moonlighting" for extra money. Increasingly these "McJobs" are the only ones available. (Re)casualization and degradation of labour are leading to social polarization -- to a hollow labour market and a hollow society. If standards of life and work are not to further erode, the labour movement has its work cut out for it.

What Future for Canadian Labour?

In light of the breakdown of so-called Fordist political-economic structures -- the "great U-turn" as Harrison and Bluestone (1988) put it -- some writers on the left are calling for a new social-democratic social compromise to replace the Fordist one between capital and labour. We see this in the work of Harrison and Bluestone (1988), Lipietz (1987) and Menzies (1989), the latter calling for a "new social contract" to reclaim "a democratic middle ground of shared values". This would be "a common ground of indivisible social goals which can yield diverse participation in a de-massified society without the perils and the injustice of polarization" (Menzies, 1989: 243).

What organized labour demands, of course, is more focus on the job-creating aspects of economic growth -- a "recoupling" of labour with the economy. But labour recognizes that recoupling cannot be achieved by resuscitating unproductive, labour-intensive forms of production. Labour does not wish to return to the past, but wishes to be involved in developing new forms of high value-added production that include labour as a partner, not simply as a "factor of production" seen only as a cost or tool to be replaced by new capital inputs where possible. The Canadian branch of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), for example, has articulated an alternative, drawing on the European experience of "co-determination", with labour, business and government involved in planning mutually beneficial economic restructuring (USWA, 1992).

Trade unionists' main concern regarding the growth of so-called contingent labour is that it runs counter to their struggles for full and better employment, and contributes to the current social and labour-market polarization in Canada, to the particular disadvantage of women and youth. Much has been reported in the media in recent years about a "lost generation of youth", who have only unemployment or low-waged, dead-end, casual service-sector jobs to look forward to.[9] In opposition to the contingent economy, some social-democratic labour economists argue for a "share economy" as the more humane way to increase human resource flexibility. The share economy "is represented by long-term employer-employee relationships that can be adjusted based on norms, standards or various formulas. Some of the key institutions of the share economy include profit sharing, gain sharing, performance bargaining, leaner job ladders, retraining, and redeployment" (Belous, 1989: xi). Belous describes this as the "new deal model" of human resource management, as outlined in Table 2. With the new deal model, as opposed to the contingent model, emphasis is placed on labour, business and government partnerships, and long-term economic planning.

To all of this should be added the possibility of work-sharing, which has been discussed in the past as a way to deal with unemployment, but also as a basic feature of the "leisure society". In the 1960s, given the increasing application of new technology to production and vastly expanded capacity for supplying basic human needs, the expectation was that those in the developed countries would have increasing leisure time to fill, and those in the underdeveloped countries could begin to escape the daily

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[9] Not only is this a waste of human potential, the trend appears to be having a negative impact in terms of high youth crime rates and attraction to fascistic political movements, which prey on alienation by offering youth simplistic explanations for their problems (e.g., that non-white immigrants are taking all the good jobs).

TABLE 2. The New Deal Model Versus the Contingent Model of Human Resource Management.

New Deal Model	Contingent Model
• Unions play a central role in the development and operation of human resource systems.	• Unions play a small, peripheral role in the human resource system.
• Government is a leading influence in human resource systems in terms of regulations and guidance.	• Government, while still a factor, is not looked to as a major source of guidance.
• Contingent workers are the exception rather than the norm.	• Contingent workers play a major and central role in the flexible system.
• International economic forces play only a small role in establishing human resource systems.	• International economic forces have a large impact in establishing and altering human resource system compensation levels and work rules.
• Greater emphasis is on security than on risks and rewards.	• Risks and rewards are given more emphasis, and security is viewed as a less obtainable objective.

SOURCE: Richard S. Belous, *The Contingent Economy*, Washington, D.C.: National Planning Association, 1989: 95.

chore of simply trying to survive. Since the 1960s, our capacity to produce has been augmented, not diminished, but social imperatives still come second to economic growth in our market economy.

According to labour and women's groups the problem with flexible work schemes to date is that they have too often been implemented to the advantage of the employer, and to the disadvantage of the employee. It is the worker who must be flexible. However, there has been some experimentation with flexible working arrangements which are more "worker-friendly". A few employers permit "flex-time" arrangements, which allow their employees to better balance work and family responsibilities. There has also been some use of "job-sharing", which allows two employees working part time to share one full-time job. And, especially in Europe, there has been much discussion of "work-sharing" which, through reduced hours for full-time workers, would allow for the unemployed and underemployed to be better incorporated into the active labour force. This discussion is just heating up in Canada (O'Hara, 1993).

With respect to part-time work in particular, the potential for labour is seen in possibilities for phased retirement for older workers, or for phasing younger workers or disadvantaged groups into the labour force by allowing them to gain some workplace experience. And women in Sweden, for example, have benefited from their legislated right to work part-time while they have young children, without loss of seniority or benefits (Sundstrom, 1987). But this example raises the crux of the problem of part-time work -- that it is most attractive and beneficial to employees if they are guaranteed their rights and benefits, at least pro-rated, in terms of hours worked and seniority.

As to what reforms might be implemented to improve conditions for part-timers, labour activists see two obvious possibilities. The first is to expand collective bargaining to incorporate part-timers, many of whom remain unorganized. The second is to improve labour legislation to ensure that part-timers gain better coverage with respect to rights and benefits. The intent of legislative reforms would be to raise the minimum standards in the labour market overall (Fudge, 1991). The difficulty with the collective bargaining solution for contingent workers is that many are employed in small workplaces while, for the most part, labour legislation in Canada is more conducive to organizing larger workplaces.

The Canadian system of labour market regulation is based on the single employer, single location fragmented model. This model is feasible for organization of large units of employees. But trade unionists argue that, without national or industry-wide regulation, it is difficult to organize small groups of workers. The problem is exacerbated when the workers are part-timers who often work shifts or may not have long-term employment with one employer. Consequently, many trade unionists would like to see legislation more conducive to organizing on a sectoral basis. Given the increasing employment of contingent workers by small business, the demand for sectoral bargaining will probably increase. Sectoral bargaining is enjoyed by many European workers. It was considered as part of the NDP labour law reform in British Columbia, and is being demanded from the Ontario NDP government by labour, women's and community groups.

Feminists argue that a major problem with the current fragmented system is that it reinforces gender segregation. More women than men are employed as contingent workers in small workplaces.

Those working in large production units which employ primarily male workers have fared well, until recently, with the fragmented system. But Fudge (1993: 36) contends: "What is needed is the development of new forms of broader-based bargaining and inclusive unionism which do not replicate and reinforce the deeply fragmented, gendered, racialized and hierarchical labour market which currently exists." According to Fudge, not just labour law reform, but reform of the heretofore male-dominated union movement is needed. She concludes that inclusive unionism is necessary not only for more women to enjoy trade union representation, but for the survival of a strong and effective union movement for both men and women confronting the spread of contingent labour.

A second area of labour legislation where trade unionists and feminists would like to see reform is in labour standards. It is commonly noted that many contingent and women workers fall outside the provisions of labour standards acts. In a lengthy discussion of employment standards, Fudge (1991: 16) argues: "Existing labour standards legislation have failed to protect workers from employers' attempts to exploit flexible labour." She goes on to note that:

> emphasis upon the length of employment with a particular employer as a means of determining entitlement to employment benefits encourages employers to use labour flexibly through a variety of means including on-call labour (business' counterpart to just-in-time inventory), temporary and part-time work, contracting out, and lay-offs, while imposing few burdens upon employers regarding the social costs of such labour (Fudge, 1991: 21).

In the second half of her paper, Fudge discusses how labour standards legislation could be applied to various sorts of leaves, hours of work, and employment income and security. Moreover, the majority of non-unionized workers would benefit from an increase in minimum standards, which would create a sort of "level playing field" for employees. Of course, many employers would object to such strengthening of legislation in the interest of workers, as was seen with the recent debate over reform to labour standards legislation in Saskatchewan. In that case, a vocal business lobby was successful in stopping the provincial government from translating progressive legislative reforms into regulations which would give part-time workers more control over their lives (Broad and Foster, 1995).

Overall, the difficulty with the social-democratic reform option is that, while some business leaders might agree to certain aspects of a social-democratic program, the overall program is antithetic to the current neo-liberal corporate agenda, as the experience of the NDP government in Ontario reveals. Moreover, many on the left argue that the accumulation crisis of capitalism cannot be remedied by social-democratic reforms, nor is the capitalist ruling class as a whole open to these in any event. So the socialist left advocates a more revolutionary alternative than social democracy. This is not to argue that all of the social-democratic reform measures lack merit, or are incompatible with a more radical restructuring program. The social-democratic program simply does not go far enough -- i.e., capitalism is not now open to major reform that would benefit the working class as a whole.

As was noted above, Sivanandan (1990) contends that, with the new international division of labour (NIDL) and technological restructuring, capital has emancipated itself from labour. Davis and Stack (1993) articulate this in terms of Marx and Engels' conception of a contradiction between the

forces of production and the relations of production. Marx and Engels argued that, at a certain point in the development of a social formation, the development of the productive forces (land, labour and capital) outgrow the existing relations of production (property relations). In other words, the existing property relations present a block to the further development of the productive forces. This can be seen now in two senses: (1) "With fewer jobs and lower wages as a result of the new knowledge-intensive forces of production, the circulation of commodities in exchange for wages becomes impossible";[10] and (2) "The 'cost of production' of marginalized workers exceeds their usefulness as labourers - in the logic of capitalism, they are people with no value" (Davis and Stack, 1993: 11,9). According to Barnet:

> The problem is starkly simple: an astonishingly large and increasing number of human beings are not needed or wanted to make the goods or to provide the services that the paying customers of the world can afford. Since most people in the world depend on having a job just to eat, the unemployed, the underemployed, and the 'subemployed' - a term used to describe those who work part-time but need to work full time, or who earn wages that are too low to support a minimum standard of living - have neither the money nor the state of mind to keep the global mass consumption system humming. Their ranks are growing so fast that the worldwide job crisis threatens not only global economic growth but the capitalist system itself (Barnet 1993: 47).

Davis and Stack (1993: 12) argue: "Between people's needs and the immense productivity of the knowledge economy stands a system of property relations - 'private property', as a social convention, developed, not without much struggle, during the beginning of the capitalist period in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries". Many marxists have argued that the property relations of capitalism were necessary to marshall the productive forces for the great developments that ushered in the Industrial Revolution. Whether capitalism was a necessary, or simply a sufficient condition for this development is open to question. But, given the continuation of capitalist relations of production, Davis and Stack (1993: 11) contend: "The problem becomes not how to produce wealth, but how to distribute it". They go on to say: "The knowledge-intensive productive forces are straining against the chains of private property relations. The qualities of knowledge, to be fully maximized, require a system based on co-operation and sharing, because co-operation and sharing generate more information and social wealth" (Davis and Stack, 1993: 12). And co-operation and sharing are the antidote to the alienation and exploitation that are not only endemic to capitalist relations of production, but exacerbated by the present neo-liberal direction of economic restructuring (Menzies, 1989).

A point stressed by Marx and Engels is that capitalism is an historical system, with a beginning and eventual end. Capitalism is also, in human terms, an irrational system. United Nations statistics show a deterioration of living conditions for the majority of the world's people through the post-World War II heyday of American hegemony and its subsequent decline (Amin, 1984; Moreau, 1991). There

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[10] For example, the NIDL is based primarily on capital's drive to cut production costs by running off to Third World low-wage zones like Mexico to produce for the so-called world market. This results in more unemployment and underemployment for formerly high-waged workers in Canada and elsewhere who constituted that market. So, one might ask, what happens to the market?

is increasing immizeration revealed daily in, for example, the famine-struck and war-torn African faces on our television screens. Defenders of capitalism are wont to attribute the plight of Third World peoples to natural disaster and irrational fratricide. But the real culprits are capitalist "green revolutions" and imperialism. I once overheard a comment most apropos -- "Perhaps capitalism **can** deliver the goods, but it doesn't deliver them to all addresses".

While it is easy to target capitalism as **the** problem and say what socialism is opposed to, it is more difficult to articulate a socialist alternative. We can say some general things about co-operation and sharing as a guide, and look for seeds of an alternative society in the so-called new social movements. But that is the subject of another paper (See Amin et al., 1990; Broad, 1993; and Waterman, 1993).

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