Bitter Fruit of Neo-Liberalism?
The Cause of the Unemployed

by

Pierre Bourdieu, Frederick LeBaron and Gerard Mauge, College du France

The following discussion of the unemployed movement in France was published in Le Monde on January 17, 1998. Written by Pierre Bourdieu, Frederic LeBaron and Gerard Mauge, the document develops a scathing indictment of French economic policy. The text is reprinted here as a sociological event. But Bourdieu and his colleagues invite supportive readers to treat their document as a petition, sending signatures and positions to the address given at the bottom of the text.

Those who have become known as 'the excluded' - those excluded provisionally, temporarily, long term or for ever from the market-place of work - are almost always those who have no voice, and who are excluded from collective action. How has it happened then that after several years of isolated and apparently hopeless effort by a minority of activists, a collective action appears at last to have broken through the wall of media and political indifference?

At first, came the laughable panic and hardly disguised antipathy of certain media professionals, journalists, trade unionists and the (Continued on Page 2)

The Post-Contract Workplace?

by

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At a recent reunion of Boston College sociology Ph.D’s, venerable social critic S.M. Mike Miller noted that the fact that we can’t figure out what to call the current era probably indicates something of significance about its nature. We are, he said, a post-industrial, post-modern, post-structural, post-Fordist, post-feminist world, where new labels, if not new paradigms, are proving elusive. This elusiveness is evident, too, when the topic is the transformation of work -- there are those who posit the end of work or the non-job job but as yet there is no shared understanding as to what might be next. The inability to label the change extends to the employment contract, that implied agreement that glues employer and employee together beyond the cash nexus. That there is a new employment relationship has come to be taken for granted in the business, popular, and social science literatures, yet the nature of this post-contractual relationship, like so much else, is subject to ongoing debate.

A composite of current rhetoric illustrates the emergent beliefs about the post-contract workplace:

Casual, flexible, ‘nontraditional’ employment is today’s new deal, as we seek mutually beneficial post-paternalistic contracts, manage our own (boundaryless) careers, become resilient rather than dependent, egalitarian not subordinate, and mobile as opposed to secure. We are ‘eager to stay, ready to leave.’ As free agents, subcontracted every one, practicing reciprocal investment, what sort of implicit or explicit compact can we expect? Will it be quid pro quo rather than entitlement-oriented? Is an individualized contract a contradiction in terms?

If, indeed, we are ‘all self-employed,’ do we prefer opportunity to guarantee, performance-based rewards to pay based on seniority, self-interest to loyalty?

This upbeat scenario does not reflect the reality of most work arrangements in America at century’s end, yet the persuasiveness of such beliefs calls for scholarly attention. Sociological study of the employment contract must distance itself from the rosy rhetoric and (Continued on Page 3)
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political classes, who saw in these demonstrations by the unemployed only an intolerable brake to their shopkeepers' interests and their sole monopoly of the right to speak on 'exclusion' and the national drama of unemployment'.

Confronted by this unwelcome mobilization, these professional manipulators, these permanent occupiers of the heights of television, saw in it only a manipulation of distress, an operation set up for the media, the illegitimacy of a minority, or the illegality of peaceful actions.

Then came the spread of the movement and the eruption onto the media and political scene of a small group of organized unemployed: the first victory of the movement of unemployed is the movement itself (which is helping to distract a bewildered population from the National Front).

The unemployed movement is at the same time the blue-print of a collective organization, and a chain reaction of which it is the product and which it itself contributes to producing: from isolation, depression, shame, personal resentment, revenge on scape-goats, to collective mobilization; from resignation, passivity, individualization and silence to gaining the right to speak; from depression to revolt, from the individual unemployed person to the collectivity of the unemployed, from misery to anger. That's how the slogan of the marchers ends up in reality: "Who sows misery, reaps anger".

But also, it reminds us of some essential truths of neo-liberal societies, which led to the movement of November-December 1995 and which the powerful apostles of the "Tietmeyer thought" try so hard to disguise. In the first place the undeniable relationship between unemployment rate and profit rate. The two phenomena --the exorbitant consumption of some and the misery of others -- not only come together --while some get rich in their sleep, the others become poorer by the day-- they are also interdependent: when the stock exchange rejoices, the unemployed suffer, the enrichment of some is linked to the pauperization of the others. Mass unemployment remains in fact the most effective tool in the hands of employers with which to impose the stagnation or lowering of wages, to push up working rhythms, to deteriorate working conditions, to increase job insecurity, to impose flexibility, to create new forms of domination in the workplace and to dismantle the legal protection of workers. When enterprises "downsize," with some of the "social schemes" announced flamboyantly in the media, their investment returns rise spectacularly. When the unemployment rate falls in the US, Wall Street is depressed. In France, 1997 has been the year all records were broken on the Paris Stock Exchange. But above all, the movement of the unemployed calls into question the carefully maintained divisions between "good" and "bad" poor, between "excluded" and "unemployed", between unemployed and wage-earners.

"Nobody can ignore today that 'urban violence' has its roots in unemployment, generalized social insecurity and mass poverty."

Even if one cannot equate in a mechanical way unemployment and crime, nobody can ignore today that "urban violence" has its roots in unemployment, generalized social insecurity and mass poverty. The "exemplary" convictions of Strasbourg, the threats to reopen correctional institutions or the suppression of family allowances to parents of trouble-makers, who allegedly have failed to uphold their parental duties, are the hidden face of neo-liberal employment policies. When the welfare state is replaced by the American styled "security state," will not even employed workers be obliged, as Tony Blair proposes, to accept any miserable job?

Because it makes us understand that any unemployed person is potentially condemned to the long-term unemployed and that the long-term unemployed are potentially excluded, that exclusion from unemployment benefits means to be condemned to assistance, social aid, charity, the movement of the unemployed calls into question the division between "excluded" and "unemployed": when the unemployed are sent to the social aid office, they are deprived of their status as unemployed and they are rejected into exclusion.

But above all it makes us understand that any wage-earner may lose their job at any moment, that the generalized job insecurity (especially of the young), the organized "social insecurity" of all those who live under the threat of a "social scheme", turn any wage-earner

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examine the facts regarding changing work relations, at the same time taking seriously the popular perceptions of the new contract, and scrutinizing the gap between rhetoric and reality. Challenges are many -- researchers must take into account the material as well as symbolic aspects of the exchange relationship, acknowledge the different types of implied contracts that exist, and assess the forces for stability that persist alongside the forces for change.

What are the consequences of the widespread belief that employment relationships are more unstable now than in the past?

An initial challenge arises from the fact that the workforce is increasingly polarized along economic lines, suggesting that data about 'work' and 'employment' should be disaggregated -- and that a single contract may not exist. Various sources, among them the National Organizations Study, have documented increasing inequality in earnings, fringe benefits, and other job rewards. There is evidence of diminished firm internal labor markets, loss of job security, and ongoing wage stagnation primarily among those least educated. Those with college degrees are doing better in all categories. Studies of the new contract, then, must acknowledge this polarization in material conditions, and emphasize the fact that low-skilled workers are doing relatively poorly. For these workers, there is no apparent 'mutual benefit' or 'partnership' despite the fact that employers continue to rely upon their low-cost labor. Employer expectations have changed, too, especially with regard to skill levels, as I have explored elsewhere. Employer-sponsored educational opportunity replaces job security for many at the bottom tier -- an inequitable exchange, despite the value accorded to education in our culture.

What of those workers for whom material conditions have improved -- how and why have their contracts changed? The prevalent belief is that job security has become more tenuous for all workers, and the most often cited evidence is the rise in contingent work, or non-permanent employment relationships. Indeed, temporary attachment is the premise underlying the composite 'new contract' rhetoric above. The popular view is that as many as one-third of workers fall into this category, and that the percentage is growing. Admitting the definitional morass, numerous statistics dispute these beliefs -- DOL categorizes only 6% as contingent workers, a percentage relatively unchanged in decades -- but the myth persists. Even if employers and employees are loosely coupled, there is still some sort of glue binding them, so researchers should investigate the nature and scope of the contract for those with temporary workforce attachments.

Of greater consequence are the perceptions surrounding the new contract, in particular beliefs about its stability. Given the Thomas theorem, i.e. if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences, what are the consequences of the widespread belief that employment relationships are more unstable now than in the past? The Left Business Observer cites studies that show current perceptions of risk are higher than actual risk, suggesting the 'real consequence' is that anxious workers won't challenge the boss (the recent UPS strike notwithstanding). Thus the idea of the new contract functions symbolically to sustain existing power relationships, as well as to mitigate worker activism. This offers a rich area for sociological research, as there are likely other symbolic meanings that can be derived from worker anxiety and the post-contract rhetoric.

It should be noted that whether the new contract is real or a myth, 'the boss' is in a difficult position, too. Human resources books and articles have begun to sound the alarm about managerial problems posed by the so-called flexible, mobile, impermanent employees. Loyalty seems the greatest concern. In other writing, I have argued that middle managers are especially conflicted, as they are expected to manage the beliefs of their employees, at the same time as they are employees themselves, subject to work intensification and heightened anxiety. The middle managers' contract is also in flux, and it may be in their personal and professional best interests to preserve much of the old contract. Consequently, they can be a force for stability and even resistance. Among laid-off white-collar workers, early evidence reveals that

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attitudes differ by gender and age, with the older white men feeling the most loyalty to the traditional version of the contract. More scholarly work is needed that accounts for such demographic differences and variations due to organizational position, as well as such contextual factors as industry, family situation, community, so forth. A theory of multiple contracts seems necessary. Especially important will be to hear the range of employees’ voices on this subject, as there is surprisingly little data on how workers themselves feel about workplace changes, and the contract in particular.

In the near and mid-term future, sociologists should continue to debunk commonplace (and inaccurate) understandings of the employment relationship. That there is a gap between rhetoric and reality is as important as the reasons for such. Wide communication is necessary in order to assure that social scientists, policy makers, and the general public have an informed sense of the complexity and problematic nature of the post-contractual employment relationship. Those concerned about the growing inequality between rich and poor, the spirit-dampening effect of the misperceptions regarding employment security, and the difficult position of the middle manager have many opportunities for activism. Likewise, scholars of organizations, occupations, and work have much to contribute to our understanding of what is ‘next,’ keeping in mind that there is still room for negotiation with respect to labels and paradigms. Suggestions anyone?

Section News and Announcements

As you may have noticed, the OOW website is “under new management” —namely, our overworked colleague, Frank Steinhart. As Frank develops the site, sign on, use and peruse the site’s various features.

Note in particular the work of the Graduate Committee, in the form of a new electronic forum on the “The Transition to Teaching” in our field. This forum should be of particular relevance to graduate students and junior faculty.

CALLS FOR PAPERS AND NOMINATIONS

The SSSP Labor Studies Division invites nominations of outstanding books or monographs for the 1998 Distinguished Publication Award. To be nominated, the book or monograph must have a publication date of 1996 or 1997.

"Labor studies" is a broad term encompassing the study of the employment relationship, work processes, labor markets, and the collective behaviors of workers and employers. Nominators must be members of the Labor Studies Division of the SSSP. Authors of nominated books or monographs need not be members of the Division or SSSP. Nominators should provide full bibliographic information for the nominated book or monograph and a written rationale explaining why the work is worthy of the Labor Studies Division award. Please send all nominations by March 1, 1998 to Peter Meiksins, Chair of the Distinguished Publications Award Committee, Department of Sociology, Cleveland State University, Cleveland OH 44115. Email: p.meiksins@popmail.csuohio.edu.

There is still time to nominate books for the Weber Award, which this year will honor an outstanding book on organizations, occupations, or work published in the last three years. The deadline is March 1. To make a nomination, please send three copies of a justification for your nomination and nominee contact information to Robin Leidner, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, 3718 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6299 (rleidner@sas.upenn.edu). If possible, please ask the publisher to forward three copies of the nominated book to Leidner.

Special Issue of Work and Occupations on "Ethnicity, Race, and Gender in the Workplace." The increasing diversity of the workforce compels us to look at how ethnicity and gender intersect with other axes of stratification such as class in the placement, treatment, and collective life of workers. This special issue is devoted to theoretical or empirical (qualitative and quantitative) articles that further our understanding of the interacting effects of ethnicity and gender on social inequality in the workplace. Possible topics include, but are not limited to: ethnicity and gender in employment relations, organizational careers, and wage attainment; network ties, employer practices, and occupational

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segregation by ethnicity and gender; union organizing among race-ethnic minorities and women; employment in ethnic enclave economies; the politics and effectiveness of affirmative action and comparable worth; and legal and illegal immigration and employment issues. Short paper proposals can be sent now to Special Issue Editor, Jennifer L. Glass, Department of Sociology, W140 Seashore Hall, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242 USA; jennifer-glass@uiowa.edu; fax: (319)335-2509. Completed papers must be sent to Glass by December 1, 1998 in order to receive full consideration.

The Second Wave: Southern Industrialization, 1940-1970: A Conference at the Georgia Institute of Technology, June 5-6, 1998. Georgia Tech's School of History, Technology, and Society invites paper proposals for a conference focused on the second wave of southern industrialization that occurred following World War II. Key "New South" manufacturing sectors (textiles, steel, tobacco) had experienced slowed growth or stagnation in the interwar decades. But during and after the war, corporate and state policies triggered a fresh round of infrastructure, military, and industrial investments that reshaped the landscape of production from the Carolinas to Texas.

We welcome proposals from scholars in various disciplines whose research examines this broad regional dynamic, whether at the level of the firm, the industry, the urban/rural district, the state or geographic region. Travel and local expenses for presenters will be reimbursed, thanks to a University System of Georgia grant. Proposals should be limited to one page, accompanied by a short vita (two page maximum). As we plan to seek university press publication of the conference papers, proposals should reflect research not already published or submitted for publication.

Due date for receipt of proposals: March 1, 1998 Mail, email or fax submissions will be accepted. Due date for receipt of completed papers (for commentators and website posting): May 10, 1998. Mail submissions to Prof. Philip Scranton, HTS–Georgia Tech, Atlanta, GA 30332-0345. Fax: 404-894-0535 Office phone - 404-894-7765. Email: philip.scranton@hts.gatech.edu (no attached files, please).

WORK, EMPLOYMENT, & SOCIETY 1998 Conference. The journal Work, Employment, & Society holds its 1998 conference at Cambridge University, on 14-16th September 1998. Papers are requested in the following areas: globalisation, flexibility & post-fordism; access to employment, exclusion & unemployment; alternative conceptions of work the new unionism; transitions in work: life history, age and the family; gender, sexuality and work; work and the millennium: the future of work. These streams are not exclusive; papers are invited on themes that fall within the general area of interest of the journal.

Send abstracts (under 1200 words) to:
Dr Wendy Bottero, Sociological Research Group, SPS, Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RQ, (email: wb201@cam.ac.uk). Fax +44 1223 334550. Closing date for abstracts: 1st March 1998. Early applications are encouraged.

Teaching Formal Organizations. The ASA Academic and Professional Affairs Program is getting ready to revise Teaching Formal Organizations: A Collection of Course Syllabi. The new edition will not only feature sample syllabi for undergraduate and graduate courses in organizational sociology, but may also include other teaching resource materials, such as in-class exercises, audio-visual aides, writing and research assignments, brief essays on the state of the subdiscipline, and a bibliography. Submissions of any relevant materials in hardcopy form are welcome. We will request that materials selected for inclusion in the book be resubmitted in electronic form so that the final publication will have an attractive, consistent format. Please send materials not later than March 31, 1998 to: Donna Bird, Department of Sociology, University of Southern Maine, PO Box 9300, Portland, ME 04104-9300. Direct questions to Donna at 207/780-4102 or donnab@usm.maine.edu

Special Issue of WORK AND OCCUPATIONS on “Social Relations in Service Occupations" The rapid rise of the service sector has produced an important, but understudied social relationship—that between workers and their customers or clients. Work and Occupations plans to publish a special issue devoted to the theoretical challenges and many social problems presented by such social relations in the service occupations. We take this opportunity to invite you to submit a manuscript for review for the special issue.

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In this issue, we will promote original, empirical (qualitative or quantitative) research on the many facets of the relationship between workers and their customers and clients. Examples of the types of papers appropriate for this special issue can be found in the May 1997 issue of Work and Occupations.

Short paper proposals and queries may be sent now to Holly J. McCammon, Deputy Editor, Work and Occupations, Box 1811 Station B, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37235 USA; mccammhj.vanderbilt.edu; fax: (615) 322-7505. In order to receive full consideration, complete papers must be sent to Holly McCammon by September 1, 1998.

New Listserve Announcement: Focus on the Corporation. Critical students of corporations will be interested to learn about Corp-Focus, a moderated listserve which distributes the weekly column "Focus on the Corporation," co-authored by Russell Mokhiber, editor of Corporate Crime Reporter, and Robert Weissman, editor of Multinational Monitor magazine.

Focus on the Corporation scrutinizes the multinational corporation -- the most powerful institution of our time. Once a week, it reports and comments critically on corporate actions, plans, abuses and trends. Written with a sharp critical edge and occasional irreverence, Focus covers a variety of legal, political, and moral questions bearing on the relation between corporate rights and social accountability. To subscribe to Corp-Focus, send an e-mail message to listproc@essential.org with the following all in one line:

`subscribe corp-focus <your name>`

Work and Occupations: An Embarrassment of Riches?

As the current issue of Footnotes reports, the Social Science Citation Index has released its latest rankings of journals according to their frequency of citation in the literature. These data enable readers, editors, and authors to see which journals seem to enjoy the greatest prominence in our fields. While the data should be approached with caution, the results are of particular interest to OOW section members.

The most remarkable development reported in the Journal Citation Reports is the news that Work and Occupations has enjoyed a dramatic increase in the frequency with which its articles are cited by authors in the social sciences. This journal emerged as the second most frequently cited periodical in the field of labor, behind only Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations Review. Indeed, as of 1996, Work and Occupations was the 5th most frequently cited journal in all of sociology, ranking just behind ASR, AJS and the Annual Review of Sociology, but well ahead of such venerable publications as Social Forces and Social Problems. This trend surely stems from the growing interest in work, occupations, and organizations, both in the profession and beyond, and from the highly skilled labor provided by those associated with the journal as well. Revealingly perhaps, the most frequently cited articles in Work and Occupations of late are those dealing with gender inequality at work, indicating the continuing intellectual vitality enjoyed by this domain.

About OOW and Its Newsletter

This newsletter is published under the auspices of the American Sociological Association's Section on Organizations, Occupations, and Work. The Section is guided by its Council, whose members for the 1996-97 year are listed further below.

The OOW newsletter strives to incorporate relevant intellectual and professional materials from all quarters of the section and beyond. Submissions to the OOW Newsletter and website are strongly encouraged. Please send any section-relevant news, articles, announcements, or letters of opinion intended for the newsletter in electronic form to the Editor at the address listed below. To ensure the timeliness of announcements, it is wise to send such material to the website administrator as well. Email (or DOS-readable disk) is fine. Articles should be under 1,000 words, and other items should be shorter. Realize that space requirements for the newsletter compel us to edit what you send. Letters and articles informing readers about intellectual or political events of relevance to the section are particularly encouraged. Material should be sent to the relevant address listed below.

Visit the OOW Website at:

www.northpark.edu/acad/soc/oow
**From the Editor**

No, the OOW newsletter is not itself being downsized. We’re reaching the limits of this year’s “allocation pages” (ASA speak for “money”), so this issue is a bit more cramped than in the past. Despite such limits, the issue holds two noteworthy articles that are sure to provoke much thought.

The first is Mary Ellen Boyle’s essay, “The Post-Contract Workplace.” Boyle reminds us that beneath the buoyant condition of the US economy lie some important shifts in the employment relation -- and symbolic representations of it -- that render obsolete customary notions of the “job.” The result has been a proliferation of questions that need to be addressed. Can we speak of a “post-contractual” pattern of employment? Which occupational groups are drawn into such a contingent pattern, and which groups retain the standard employment relation? What is the nature of the ‘glue’ that binds employees to firms, even in an era of disposable ties? How is the widespread belief in job instability itself forcing workers to recast their expectations? Boyle’s paper helps us formulate such questions. She is one of a number of scholars -- whose ranks include Vicki Smith, Irene Padevic, Nancy DiTomaso, Arne Kalleberg and others -- seeking to understand the dilemmas and contradictions to which the “new dualism” gives rise.

Nicely paired with Boyle’s essay is an unusual manifesto written by, of all people, Pierre Bourdieu. Maybe you’ve heard of him. Casting a critical and characteristically French eye on that nation’s economic policies, Bourdieu, LeBaron and Mauge’s piece is at once an intellectual critique and a political intervention. Calling for solidarity with the movement of the unemployed -- “the excluded” -- in France, whom they view as the casualties of the neo-liberal drift of the propertied classes, Bourdieu et al. heap scorn on leaders who quite literally bank on the passivity and resignation of the superfluous. Clearly, one can raise many questions about the statement’s analytic thrust. Yet the piece sensitizes us to the labor market climate that prevails in so much of Western Europe, in which double-digit unemployment has been the norm. It reminds us of the potential links between our theories and political actions. And it leads us to seek out institutional paths that might lead beyond the Scylla of the contingent economy (as in our country) and the Charybdis of the permanently unemployed.

Readers of this issue may want to respond to its contents by signing onto the OOW website and registering their reactions to the statement of Bourdieu and his colleagues. Frank Steinhart is constructing a mechanism that will allow readers to post their letters.

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**Bourdieu: The Cause of the Unemployed**

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into a potential unemployed. Forceful evacuation will not evacuate “the problem”. Because the cause of the unemployed is also the cause of the excluded, casual workers, and wage-earners who work under the same threat. Because a moment may come, in which the reserve army of the unemployed and casual workers, which condemns to submission all those who have the provisional chance to escape from its ranks, will turn against those who have based their policy (oh socialism!) on a cynical confidence in the passivity of the most subdued. Direct any petitions in solidarity with this document to: Frederic Lebaron, 2, rue de Malte 75011 Paris. Send faxes to Lebaron at 01.44.27.18.43. By E-mail to damiensa@easynet.fr
From the Editor
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All of which leads me to enlist your support in helping Frank Steinhart, our website guru, build the OOW website beyond its current capacities.

As a rule, the ASA sections are quite backward technologically. (The recent electronic mailing our section conducted, however awkwardly, was the first of its kind in the ASA.) This is all unfortunate, for the new electronic media might conceivably contribute to our section’s intellectual life, beyond what the Annual meetings and the newsletter alone can do.

With this spirit in mind, Frank and Robert Althauser (chair of the OOW Graduate Committee) have constructed an electronic forum regarding the “Transition to Teaching.” This forum should be of particular interest to OOW members in particular, for it allows us to link “the teaching of labor” with “the labor of teaching.” Graduate students, junior faculty and the rest are therefore invited to sign on to this forum via the website, and contribute to the intellectual vitality of the section. The alternative is the price Bourdieu outlines—the passivity that takes its toll on us all.

If readers deem it worthwhile, we might also construct an “Annotations” section of the website, wherein members can electronically share references (laden with opinions) on selected fields. We might also hold electronic panel discussions, with “virtual audiences” logged on. These things are possible. Honk if you think any one of them is worth OOW’s (and especially Frank’s) investment of labor time.  

--Steven Vallas
Georgia Institute of Technology