

## Tertiary Time: The Precariat's Dilemma

Guy Standing

[Author's final copy as submitted to *Public Culture*; published as "Tertiary time: The precariat's dilemma", *Public Culture*, Vol.25, No.1, 2013, pp.5-23]

**ABSTRACT:** Progressive politics has always been about the struggle to reduce social inequities and inequalities. What takes priority depends on the type of society we live in. Today, people in rich countries live in societies that are tertiary, not industrial, in that what we do is largely covered by "services". In a tertiary society, one iniquitous form of inequality is control of time. Time is a key asset. But we do not have a conceptualization of tertiary time. We must rectify that so as to develop a progressive politics of time.

### A prelude

To linger over a drink, to lay in bed next to one's love, to strum a guitar or tinkle on the keyboard, to read a classic play, to scribble lines of poetry, to read a political tract of some long-forgotten rising star, to kick a ball a thousand times with one's son or daughter, to run around the boundary hoping to stop the ball... Each of us would have a long list of activities with which we would like to fill the unforgiving minutes.

Time is precious. Admirable advice to be given to a teenager is: create good memories. Using time wisely is a skill sometimes learned, too often not. This writer is a child of 1968, a foot-soldier, but one who has defined himself by reference to the radicalizing liberationist forces unleashed around that year, and the time we used mingling.

The ancient Athenians had a word, *thorubus*, signifying a buzz of opinion and dissent in the streets. For my generation, the values engendered by the use of all that time in *thorubus* - and the memories of political involvement - have been reinforcing. Today, millions of people will define themselves for the rest of their lives by where they were and what they did in the momentous year of 2011, when the squares and streets of great cities heaved with the energy and anger of the crowd. In using time in the way they did, they changed themselves.

The lovemaking? Never discount it, renewing our humanity and solidaristic endeavors. Nor the coming together in the morning, in a resolve to oppose the ugly today and propose a convivial tomorrow, a space in which all of us have control of time, in which we can say to each other that we *do* have the time to read, write, love, play, care and reflect.

And yet we have no politics of time. We have little appreciation of the inequality or inequities of time. For over a century, social and Christian democrats have been united in wanting to maximize the number of people in labor, in jobs. They decry idleness. They strive unrelentingly to make social benefits conditional on labor and the pursuit of it. They serve the interests of commerce and do its bidding. Meanwhile, commerce deploys advertising in ever more sophisticated ways to induce us to consume more commodities and to commodify ourselves in laboring more intensively.

We need to appreciate that time is a basic *asset*. Throughout history, class struggle has been about the redistribution of the assets that are vital to the good life of the era, largely defined in terms set by the dominant social formation.

Like any other asset, time is distributed unequally and inequitably. Some individuals and groups have more control over how they allocate their time, and have more “free time”. The way the mal-distribution occurs is not mainly the outcome of merit or hard work. But however it comes, it is unequal. Consider the everyday of a single mother, and observe the time squeeze. Enter the house of a member of the salariat and observe the leisurely pace and diversity of time use. The contrast seems sentimental. But it exudes the essence of inequality.

The inequality of control over time is the premise of this essay. To appreciate how the inequality is evolving, and how the emerging precariat is particularly hard hit, we need first to remind ourselves of how public and private perceptions of *work* have been manipulated through the ages, to the point where an ideological hegemony mocks our imagination.

### **The cultural evolution of work**

Think of time as the ancient Athenians did. It was divided into four primary uses. “Labor” was the onerous use of time in directed work, intended to produce “exchange value”, doing tasks for an income or subsistence. Labor was done solely by non-citizens, by the *banausoi* and *metics*. The rationalization for denying them citizenship was that their labor precluded them from having the time needed to be a citizen.

By contrast, “work”, or *praxis*, was done by citizens and their families, and consisted of activities in and around the home, with family and friends. Work was essential to strengthen civic friendship, or *philia*. It was reproductive, regenerative and civilizing activity.

A third use of time was “play”, the recreation needed for restoration of the capacities for work, to recuperate, to be entertained, to exercise, and so on. Many modern commentators lump “play” activities in the fourth use of time, “leisure”. This denudes both concepts. The ancient Greeks understood leisure, *schole*, as distinctive. It combined learning and participation in the life of the *polis*. For Aristotle, *aergia*, laziness, was necessary for *schole*. And as Arendt (1958: 82) noted, abstention from certain activities was necessary for a meaningful political life. Cato later famously coined the aphorism, “Never is a man more active than when he does nothing.”

In short, Athenians crystallized two distinctions – between work and labor and between recreation, or play, and leisure. Their model was sexist and based on a peculiar class structure. But it was richer than later perspectives. Indeed, every age has had its silliness in its treatment of work and leisure. Our age may be the silliest of all.

Consider a few landmarks in the evolution of thinking about work. The physiocrats and mercantilists dismissed as unproductive any work outside agriculture. In the eighteenth century, Adam Smith, father of modern economics, dismissed as unproductive all services, including the work of priests and hairdressers. Emmanuel Kant said that anybody doing what we call services should not be a citizen. In the early years of the United States, laborers were

denied the vote and full citizenship, precisely because they had no property. It was only with industrial capitalism that laboring became the desirable norm. But the silliness reached its apogee in the early twentieth century, epitomized by the pithy remark of Arthur Pigou, the economist who was the butt of Keynes, that if he hired a housekeeper or cook, national income rose, whereas if he married her and she did the same work, national income fell.

Standard statistics were shaped by that laborist and sexist characterization of work. They remain that way. So, if a person goes from looking after frail relatives to pouring tea for a boss, national income and employment go up; if the person goes in the other direction, a job is “lost”. What counts as work depends not on what you do but whom you do it for. The cultural hegemony is highlighted by the fact that very few social scientists mock this silliness.

Finally, recall the distinction made by Marxists. For them, particularly Engels, work is defined as having “use value”, whereas labor has “exchange value”. Work includes all tasks or activities we do outside the market, in the sense that it is not directly paid. But, as demonstrated by agonized debates in progressive journals in the 1970s, Marxists too have embroiled themselves in silly debates on what is or is not productive labor. Feminists tried to rescue the situation, but sadly their considerable literature failed to engage mainstream thinking. Laborism marched on. The left wanted full-time “jobs” and more people in them.

The crucial point from this brief review is that many of the most rewarding and “productive” activities we undertake are work but not labor. And yet we have no proper statistics on the extent of work we do. We have labor statistics.

A matching evolution occurred in orthodox thinking about leisure. Veblen’s seminal analysis of bourgeois leisure in 1899 highlighted the conflation of play – as “free time” for recuperation, spending, and pleasure – and leisure as public, civilizing, inherently political activity. The “vicarious leisure” of the idle bourgeois wife as a symbol of material success became twinned with the laborism of the era. The twentieth century was to extend the impoverishment of the concept of leisure as well as work. We will come back to that.

### **The precariatization of time**

Of course, the way time is treated depends on the nature of society and the economic system.<sup>1</sup> In agrarian society, it makes no sense to think of standardized working weeks. When, where and how much work is done depends on the climate, season and vagaries of the crops or livestock. In fourteenth-century Britain, various parts of the country operated on local times. In a small area of interlocked villages and towns, it took generations before the state could impose a national time system.<sup>2</sup>

Industrial capitalism not only imposed national time zones and an imperialism based on Greenwich Mean Time, but created a system of working and living based on blocks of time. People pushed into the proletariat could aspire to a life in which a short block of years in school was followed by a long block in full-time labor and then a short block of years in retirement, if their health held out that long. As the system rigidified, the sexist structure

sharpened, with men designated “breadwinners” and women relegated to domestic secondary worker roles.

Daily life was also regimented into blocks. A worker rose early in the morning, went to a workplace to labor for ten or more hours, went back to the home-place, played a little and went to bed. Time and place were intimately linked. And labor was distinguished from other uses of time. Political struggle took place in efforts to liberate time from labor.

Indeed, early socialist opposition to industrial laborism involved efforts to rescue work from labor. In the UK, a journalist asked the first batch of Labour Members of Parliament in 1906 which book had most influenced them. The majority cited Ruskin’s *Unto the Last*, not anything by Marx. Ruskin’s great essay had been a plea to restore the values of work over the dictates of labor.

Another block of time was the period for training. Skills were mostly learned early, in time set aside for apprenticeships; these were expected to shape a lifetime trajectory, with predictable rises in status every few years.

Other blocks of time emerged. Industrial capitalism unleashed an onslaught on cultural time uses, chipping away at the numerous “holy-days” and days that had evolved over centuries as means of socialization, collective rites of passage, political symbolism and expressions of societal solidarity and historical morality. These were avenues of leisure, not just days of play. Industrial capitalism cut the number of such days, and marginalized the political character of others.

In their place emerged two modern blocks of time, the weekend and vacations, time zones that suited the Fordist model of capitalism. The weekend was a twentieth-century notion. It was only in the 1930s that the five-day, 40-hour workweek was adopted in the United States. Paid holidays - time off as reward for labor - always remained a mirage for much of the proletariat. But they were a powerful image of late industrial capitalism.

The complex blocks of time eroded agency. For agency, we need *control* of time. The clock did not just discipline, as E.P. Thompson so elegantly showed in an essay in 1967; it represented denial of agency. Human agency is the core of decommodification. The industrial capitalism that labor unions and social democratic parties remolded during the mid-twentieth century involved fictitious decommodification (Standing 2009). Not only did it make access to state and other benefits dependent on labor, directly or indirectly, it also rested on a consensual denial of worker agency, quietly surrendered in return for an edifice of so-called labor rights.

With globalization, the temporal and spatial norms of industrial capitalism – working hours and fixed workplaces – have crumbled. Manipulation by systems designers, with their “balanced scorecards”, BPR (business process re-engineering), “knowledge management”, “human resources management” and such like, have closed the pores of the working day. And outside, capital and its state have disrupted countervailing *thorubus* and *aergia*.<sup>3</sup>

Among other effects, modern information and communication technologies disrupt the architecture of conversation or, as Czech novelist Milan Kundera (1996) put it in *Le Lenteur* (*Slowness*), it enfeebles the capacity of conversation to organize time. We might say that, by its erratic and incessant interruptive power, it disrupts the capacity to use conversation to build and sustain strong relationships.

In short, inside the labor market and in society, there has been a shift to a model in which “tertiary time” has become the norm. Although we do not yet have a clear concept of tertiary time, the model of blocks of time is misleading for understanding modern work, labor, leisure and play.

### **Tertiary time and the precariatized mind**

In tertiary society, time is invaded. We are unable to maintain boundaries of activities. The pressure to combine tasks, often very different in character, leads to situations of “unbounded rationality”, having too many options.<sup>4</sup> It is almost the new norm for people to face a barrage of demands on time at any moment. In terms some social scientists use (Davies 1994), *process* time (time set aside for activities having use value) is invaded by *abstract* time.

Tertiary time includes all the efforts by “human resource” managers intent on preventing worker discretion while making them feel they have it, as at Walmart through its anal tracking systems. But it extends well beyond the formal boundaries of labor. It includes demands on time made by the state, and is chipping away at the space for sustained concentration.

So, for example, we may devote a period to something that intrinsically requires continuity of attention, such as care or studying, but are bombarded by demands to use the time on other tasks, invading the space to the detriment of the quality of care or studying. “Multi-tasking” is an imperative of commodified life. In a term used by Claudio Ciborra (2004), the work of *improvisation* eats up time and in the process shapes interaction and reflective capacities.

One cannot depict this as a triumph of technical rationality, since the invasion of our temporal space corrodes rationality. At its extreme, it deprives us of the capacity to use time proficiently in any way. The situation has become much more intractable than when Bertrand Russell wrote *In Praise of Idleness* and Ivan Illich much later worried about “busyness”.

The result, epitomized by the intrusive, ever-present electronic rushes that come with connectivity, is the precariatized mind. It is linked to the perceived need to stay in touch and to compress as much into units of time as possible. It contributes to the pandemic of stress and to newly widespread social illnesses such as attention deficit disorder and to behavior that mimics it. We learn to flit, and are at risk of feeling normal in flitting, between undemanding activities rather than delve into something in depth. When an activity becomes mentally challenging, it is emotionally easier to switch to something facile. That makes us “happy”.

Fret not. The behavioral psychologists and utilitarians who dominate social policy say that being happy is what living should be about. But the precariatized mind is a diminishing mind. It is easily co-opted by subliminal advertising, by commodified politics and politicians peddling platitudinous recipes, easy to digest because they make no demands on the mind. Yet the precariatized mind is enervating and ultimately depressing because one cannot feel in control.

The point of most relevance here is the systemic blurring of work and labor. The strongest trend is a growth of “work-for-labor”, done to enhance “employability” and to function as a flexible worker. Time in labor may be declining, modestly, but time in work-for-labor is mounting. We are in near-constant panic; since there is no standard of excellence, no amount of work-for-labor makes us feel secure.

Whereas in industrial capitalism, the worker was exploited and oppressed in labor, and mostly left to play and recuperate in “free time”, now workers are paid for fewer hours but are expected to do more work-for-labor for which they are unremunerated. The easy part to see and measure is “overtime”, much of it “unpaid”. But there are other forms of obligatory work that crowd out time for other activities.

First, there is work-for-reproduction, including time allocated to acquire and refine those modern “skills” subsumed in that alienated term *emotional labor*. Deportment, grooming, winsome smiles, “docile bodies” – all require time, and are much more significant in a tertiary system. Many cannot reproduce their labor power, because they do not have control of workplace, home or time, or a way of sustaining labor power. This is a paradox. We undertake work-for-labor, constantly trying to recast ourselves. But no sooner have we done so than obsolescence and redundancy mock the effort.

There is also a culture of incessant training-for-labor. A “human resource” consultant told the *Financial Times* that everybody should expect to spend at least 15 percent of their time every year in training. You are never as good as you were, and you are never good enough for tomorrow. Do more training.

Another form of work-for-labor is ethics work. This has become a required feature of some professions, which make taking courses in ethics a condition for the “right to practice”, and is being mooted for others. But tertiary work is intrinsically a zone of ethics. The service provider is regularly required to make ethical decisions, which take time and nervous energy. The financial crisis and austerity era will intensify the ethical strain on providers, as the state shrinks provision of healthcare, education and cultural support, forcing people to make more decisions on whom to care for, and how much of what sort of support to provide.

Another form of obligatory work is what might be called work-for-self-management, including financial affairs management, work one must do to satisfy fiscal demands placed on us by a complex state. Previous generations did not have most of those demands.

Then there is work-in-waiting, an economically neglected form of work encompassing several ideas, including “waiting around”, as in filling time anomically, waiting for sporadic labor, waiting “on call” and waiting in queues, traffic jams, offices or clinics, “waiting your turn”. These are mostly obligatory uses of time (Corbridge 2004).

Twentieth-century bureaucratization intensified most forms of waiting. Standardized labor schedules compressed time use into funnels of time, to the detriment of the proletariat and lower rungs of the salariat, with their regimented working days. But forcing workers to wait for scarce labor was a disciplinary mechanism, as well as an exercise of economic power.

Every Great Transformation has involved work-in-waiting as a mechanism giving space for the newly powerful to re-engineer the character of labor. Waiting was a feature of the *population flottante* of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe (Darnton 1999). Today it is linked to the renewed growth of migration (Bayart 2007), and its more circular character. In developing countries, it exists among slum dwellers (Appadurai 2002), those stigmatized as surplus to requirements and loiterers (Mbembe 2004) and the urban unemployed (Jeffrey and Young 2011). It is also linked to the complexity of the state, and the way social policy is becoming more directive and coercive.

This leads to what could be called work-for-state, all the tasks undertaken to satisfy demands made on individuals by the state, for instance, to claim benefits. Its unpleasantness is compounded by what might be called a work-for-state deficit, in that many people are never able to do enough to succeed or gain security.<sup>5</sup> Much of the work imposed on supplicants is deliberate, designed to dissuade those entitled to state benefits from applying for them, thereby “saving” public funds, so-called “taxpayers’ money”.

In sum, we are induced to work and labor in all sorts of places at all times. The notion of a fixed workplace is fading; the notion of “hours of work” in labor statistics is misleading. We turn homes into an extension of “workplace”, and vice versa. We multi-task, and suffer from “a precariatized mind”, flitting between activities and trains of thought, with debilitating effect (Standing 2011). Increasingly people take their labor home; many take play to their nominal workplace. More perform labor in several workplaces, and the work they do outside home and their nominal workplace is a growing part of their total work and labor.

Meanwhile, industrial notions of skill, and seniority systems based on a presumption of skill refinement through years of practice, are crumbling. Now that the historic guild system for occupational regulation has been destroyed by the neo-liberal onslaught, occupational splintering and restructuring can accelerate; fewer people are able to practice the occupation for which they trained.<sup>6</sup>

All the forms of work mentioned are unremunerated but impose costs on people, of one sort in doing them, of another sort in terms of risk of lost income if not done. The costs are intensified by the pressure of unbound rationality. Which time use offers a higher return? How much time should I devote to this work-for-labor compared with other possible activities?

## **The inequality of time**

This leads to the worst aspect of tertiary time, the growing inequality in control over time. The rich and salariat have relatively strong control over their time, the precariat very little.<sup>7</sup> In all the forms of work delineated earlier, there are regressive tendencies. For instance, the affluent can hire an expert to manage their money, instead of working themselves. If they need to interact with the state bureaucracy, they can delegate the work to an intermediary or, more likely, minimize the need to do so.

Those in the precariat cannot afford to hire experts to manage their finances. And the potential cost of mistakes, given the scarcity of money, means they should but cannot take more time to understand the intricacies. Other forms of work-for-labor crowd out the time and energy needed to do so. And the precariat must spend an huge amount of time dealing with diverse bureaucracies.

Then there is the inequality of play. The frenzy of labor re-commodification in the neo-liberal era encroached on more active forms of play. Holidays were in retreat even before the financial crisis. In the United States – the only rich country without mandatory paid vacations – people were already taking fewer and shorter holidays. Entitled to only sixteen days a year, on average, they take just fourteen, with one third of those with entitlement not taking any at all. But the precariat does not receive paid holidays. Over a quarter of all private sector employees do not receive any. Paid vacations are a concealed form of inequality.

A similar pattern has emerged in Britain, where one in four employees do not take all their holiday entitlements. One reason is fear of coming back to a backlog of tasks and another is the fear of losing a job, inducing “presenteeism”. Again the problem is worst for those in the precariat, since their labor relations mean they have no entitlement to holidays. They may have to give up a job if they wish to take a holiday, involving a decision that puts at risk any therapeutic value a holiday might have.

Another source of inequality comes via training-for-labor work. Those in the precariat must do more of it, if they are to have a reasonable probability of avoiding a fall into a marginalized underclass. To appease potential employers, they must be prepared to learn new tricks called skills, often by taking night classes or the equivalent, and must deploy more “emotional labour”, smiling more, paying more respect and adhering to norm-based behavior at all times.

Life may not be a “social factory” (Negri and Hardt 2000). But the panopticon state means that actions anywhere can be communicated everywhere, including to current and prospective bosses. Social record-keeping is a disciplinary device, pressurizing the precariat to behave in “responsible” ways and to avoid behavior, or expressions of certain opinions, that might exact disapproval. Joining a particular civic association may not be useful on that CV or on a profile that could be obtained by a prospective employer or some authority. All this exacts a time pressure not suffered to anything like the same extent by those higher up the social scale.



The inequality in training-for-labor is intensified by the fact that the precariat has a lower expected return to any training while being under greater pressure to do more. Members of the salariat, with a structured career ahead of them, can take training with a high probability of increasing income and status. But someone moving in and out of dissimilar jobs will be under pressure to arbitrage between types of training, partly because all will have an uncertain return.

Inequality in time control has been accentuated by the occupational re-regulation that neo-liberals have engineered (Standing 2009), and which has been a scarcely noticed revolution. The transfer from guild regulation, where control over time was restricted by cultural traditions, to state regulation, where unbridled competitiveness is the mandate of regulatory boards and the financial interests behind them, has led to two changes affecting inequality relating to time.

It has put pressure on those in the lower rungs to work more, and has contributed to the restructuring of occupational communities into elites (retaining professional cultures) and masses having no control over tasks or job descriptions. Many in the precariat must do more tasks around their main job and consider a wider range of training on the side.

There is also inequality in the extent of work-in-waiting. The precariat is forced to indulge in much more of this than groups higher up the class structure. The extra time reflects inequality and is a means of intensifying it. Those in and out of short-term jobs and unemployment are under direction to perform tasks in seeking jobs and satisfying bureaucrats, and to wait around at beck and call. They are subject to surveillance and must be instantly available, or risk losing benefits. At the limit is so-called “workfare”, pioneered in Wisconsin and increasingly aped across Europe and elsewhere.

The transaction costs of work imposed by the state on the precariat are ignored. It is taken for granted that they can queue, make themselves available for interviews, or trek off somewhere to be made more “employable” or “rehabilitated”. Their time is given no respect. Every utilitarian government, wanting to reform the minority, has extended “behavioral conditionality” in social policy, influenced by the “libertarian paternalism” that utilitarians have embraced. This is forcing the new social category of “claimants” to do more futile time-using, unremunerated work.

### **The precarity trap**

Those in the salariat might appreciate that reality by trying to do what a typical welfare claimant must do, bearing in mind that the claimant will probably be less educated, less confident, less healthy and more stressed, all of which will make the needed time greater. They should appreciate too that the state, remorselessly tightening conditional welfare, has made it increasingly time-consuming to claim and retain state benefits, imposing more time and money costs on those seeking means-tested and behavior-tested benefits.

Every social scientist knows that means-tested social assistance – now favored by mainstream politicians on both sides of the Atlantic – produces severe poverty traps. If state benefits are only for those deemed to be poor, then a recipient who takes a low-paid job is likely to lose almost as much or more in foregone benefits as gained in earnings. This situation has been made worse by more flexible labor markets, in which real wages have fallen while entitlement to non-wage enterprise benefits has shrunk.

Even if benefit withdrawal is spread over several months, or tax credits are used, international evidence shows that those at the edge of the labor market often face an effective marginal income tax rate of over 80 percent.<sup>8</sup> In effect, the poor and the precariat face a tax rate that is more than double what high-income earners moan about.

Now picture the situation from the precariat's perspective. On losing a job, they must apply for benefits. This starts a time-using process. They must pay for transport to a labor exchange, fill out intimidating forms, answer intrusive questions designed to trick, prove residence or whatever, and accept the indignity of being investigated. Having made a long and relatively expensive trek to the bureaucratic office, with prolonged queuing, they may find they have the wrong documents, or not enough of them. Back they go, to do it all over again. The process often takes months, not days.<sup>9</sup> They have to commute again and again. Meanwhile, they will exhaust savings, use up friends' goodwill, incur debts and possibly lose housing.

At the end is the precarity trap. Once they have used up a great deal of time, as well as energy and morale, to obtain benefits, they will face two further pressures. Bureaucrats will tell them how they must use their time, including entering some workfare scheme. And there will be the fear of having to go through all that time-using activity once again.

Imagine being a "welfare claimant", finally obtaining a benefit, having spent months obtaining entitlement, and then being offered the possibility of a low-paid, short-term job the other side of town, without benefits. The person will be confronted with two ticking questions: Suppose I lose the job in a few weeks? All that time and uncertainty again?

So, besides facing a poverty trap – gaining only 20 percent of the meager income relative to what they were receiving on benefits – there is a precarity trap, which arises from the high probability that they would soon lose the low-wage job and go more months without income while applying for benefits again. Any economics student who concluded it would be rational for the person to take the low-wage casual job should be failed. The combination of the precarity and poverty traps means that the precariat can easily lose more from taking low-wage jobs than not doing so.

The precarity trap takes several forms. But in general it highlights the fact that new forms of work are intensifying personal insecurity, while using up time in destructive ways.

## The erosion of leisure

So, we are induced to do more labor and work-for-labor, and work-for-reproduction, by the materialist pressures bearing down on us. And we are induced to consume insatiably, led to believe that this is the goal of labor and work. And what happens? We use our limited “free time” to play, because we need to recuperate and unwind and because commercial interests want us to do so, while no powerful interest wants us to indulge in leisure in the Greek sense of *schole*.

A consequence is a squeeze on time for real leisure. We do not have the energy or time to indulge in cultural activity or participate in political activity, in the *thorubus* mentioned in the prelude, or in the *aergia* that Aristotle had in mind. Reflection, debate, creative and regenerative idleness, all are disparaged or seen as time-wasting. A result is the thinning of democracy, alongside the commodification of politics and politicians. Although there are other reasons for it, the thinning is shown in declining turnouts in elections, declining membership of political parties and declining activity inside them.

The original Greek idea of a citizen was someone with the status and capacity to participate in the life of the *polis*. Although put into effect in a sexist, inegalitarian way, it recognized that deliberative democracy requires both time in participation and time to acquire and sustain the capacity to participate effectively.

Consider developments in the United States, duplicated in other affluent countries. Bear in mind that civic knowledge and participation in political life were perceived as vital by the founding fathers, as they were in ancient Greece. The initial impetus for public schooling was to teach people how to be citizens. Not anymore.

A study by the National Conference of Citizenship found that civic knowledge, and engagement and use of time in voluntary community activity, were in retreat. Civic knowledge also goes with higher voter turnout, which is associated with a higher probability of election of people attuned to local communities.

None of this is surprising. But all stem partly from the squeeze on time. Another telling stylized fact emerged from that study. While 60 percent of adults were registered to vote – a dismally low level – three quarters admitted to steering clear of political discussion as much as they could. This may reflect the commodification of politics, with its sound-bite platitudes, epitomized by debates between presidential candidates reduced to thirty-second quips, concocted by public relations gurus. Quipping becomes a supreme political skill.

Loss of control over time has gone with civic disengagement, a loss of energy opposed to commodifying trends. Commodification closes the pores of the whole day, not just the pores of time in labor, the more limited objective perceived by Marx as inherent to industrial capitalism. A result of today’s closure is the erosion of *schole*.

## **Whither a politics of time?**

So, we are faced by a multi-fold challenge. We are under pressure to labor and do more work-for-labor, squeezing out leisure that befits a true citizen. For the precariat, due to globalization and labor market flexibility, the returns to labor are shrinking, making it necessary to labor more to obtain subsistence income. As workers, we do not have control over time. Labor is constant, everywhere. And the inequalities of time control are palpable.

In the industrial capitalism era, the working-class struggle was to liberate time from labor, so as to gain more time for play and leisure. Although the struggle was sexist, the craft guilds across Europe and elsewhere, working-men's clubs in Britain, the bistros in France –called by Balzac “parliament of the people” – and their equivalents elsewhere, enabled men to gain leisure in which to learn and participate in politics. Craft unions led the way in forging modest space for leisure, through workers' education and involvement in political parties.

Today a similar struggle must be forged, through understanding how work must be rescued from labor and from disrespect, and how leisure must be rescued from play and from disrespect. A commodifying tertiary society has destroyed the industrial structure of time, and neo-liberalism has succeeded in weakening both guilds that provided a structure for leisure and trade unions that fought for “free time”.

What is to be done? First, although there is a long tradition of time-use surveys, we need better statistics on how people work. We must also articulate the challenge politically, and find the language to do so. And we must rethink the class-based struggle for “free time”. For instance, we must foster a Slow Time Movement, analogous to the Slow Food Movement.

We must elevate all forms of work to the same level of legitimacy as labor. We should insist that politicians and social scientists stop talk of making “jobs, jobs, jobs” the main objective of economic and social policy. Stop talking of “getting people into work”, when those people may be working as hard as those in jobs. In making a fetish of “full employment”, the laborist left slipped into false consciousness in wanting everybody to be in subordinated wage labor, in subordinated service to capital. What a failure of the critical imagination!

Amongst the biggest challenges is to find ways for those having to do a lot of work-for-labor to escape from the pressure to do so. There is a need to revive agency and construct forms of “associational freedom” to check the market freedom tyrannizing the precariat.

To counter the stigmatizing work-for-state that the precariat is forced to do, its collective Voice must be embedded in every state agency with which it has to deal. Social policy should stop being paternalistic, treating those unfortunate enough to need benefits as “undeserving” until they prove themselves “deserving”. It will not stop unless those on the receiving end are able to enforce due process and humanize the rules. The governance of social agencies should allow for an active role of the supposed recipients. Members of the precariat must not be treated as objects, as “clients” who should be “grateful” for help.

While associational freedom and collective agency must be revived, the progressive challenge is to achieve a redistribution of the key assets of tertiary capitalism - financial capital, economic security, time, quality space and knowledge. We will not discuss the others beyond time, but they are closely related.

Progressive politics should invert the twentieth-century social democratic strategy. During the construction of laborist welfare states, a goal was “labour decommodification”, which involved a shift from money wages to state and enterprise benefits in social income. That forced workers to be in the labor market to gain entitlements, or to be a dependant of someone in the labor market. This was not decommodification of labor power. This model broke down in the 1970s and was always sexist and inequitable.

Now full labor commodification should be the aim, alongside decommodification of “labor power”, the person who is a worker. Labor should be compensated solely by money wages, making contracts transparent and the result of bargaining. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with making labor – the activity of supplying time, effort, energy and skill – a commodity, for exchange value. But only if workers have economic security will they be able to bargain for a wage for a proper supply of labor.

That requires decommodification of the person, which requires as a necessary condition, sufficient ex ante economic security in order to be able to bargain rationally. That is unlike labor-based social insurance or means-tested (targeted) social assistance that has spread in every tertiary society in the past two decades.

Social insurance and social assistance have reproduced forms of inequality, and with flexible labor markets have done so even more. The precariat has low wages and no benefits; the salariat has high wages and an enriching array of enterprise and state benefits. In brief, the old laborist strategy must be reversed.

The only way to do that would be to move towards giving every legal resident of the country an unconditional, individualized basic income. The idea has a long history, and has drawn adherents from diverse normative backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> It is the context that has changed. Today’s precariat has no prospect of obtaining basic income security from social insurance or social assistance.

A mechanism is needed to enable people to have better access to all the key assets of tertiary society, including security. A basic income would give that. The crisis in tertiary capitalism is associated with pervasive and chronic economic insecurity, due to economic uncertainty (“unknown unknowns”) and systemic insecurity hitting people via shocks and expensive hazards.

This character of insecurity means more people face uninsurable risks. But insecure people make bad democrats, tending to support populists and worse. Security is needed to permit rational behavior. Psychologists have shown that basic security fosters altruism, tolerance towards others and socially responsible behavior. And it provides a necessary condition for

gaining control over personal time and, more philosophically, is necessary for developmental freedom. We must understand that *aergia* and *thorubus* are necessary for effective agency.

A basic income would tilt the balance of incentives and pressures away from labor towards work, away from pouring tea for bosses to caring for relatives, friends, ecology and the various communities in which we wish to live. It is definitely affordable and could be constructed as an alternative macro-economic stabilizer. However, there is just one form of “conditionality” that could be linked to its introduction.

### **The ethos of Pericles**

Twentieth-century social democrats slipped into a political trap, by regarding as a triumph having as many people in full-time subordinated labor as possible. In effect, they wanted people pouring tea for bosses rather than working for themselves, their families and communities. Representatives of capital wanted the same. Meanwhile, commodifying forces invaded the spheres of work and play, chipping away at “free time” and putting a squeeze on leisure.

Today, we need mechanisms to “thicken” democracy. That is a vital task for progressives. What has this to do with time or economic security? Well, if we stopped making a fetish of labor and jobs, and understood that other forms of work and leisure are just as important and “productive”, then we might turn to efforts to promote them.

A basic income would help in recovering some control over time, lessening the pressure to labor rather than work on our enthusiasms, on care, and on cultural and social work. But we might allow just one form of conditionality in moving in this direction. In 451 BC, Pericles was the first to introduce payments for jury service, claiming that a poor person could not afford to do the work otherwise, which would be counter to deliberative democracy. He went further, in instituting a regular modest payment as reward for participating in the deliberations of the *polis*.

Today, our democracy is under threat from the commodifiers and the financial elite. Our public culture is under strain. One way of helping to check the threat would be to attach a moral condition, not a legally binding one, to the basic income. When someone signs on to receive it, they should be required to sign a commitment to vote in national and local elections and to participate in at least one political meeting annually in a local hall or centre, at which all registered political parties could be represented and quizzed on topical policy issues of the day. At the very least, it would be an expression of *scholé* and a mildly progressive move.

### **References**

Arendt, H. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Bayart, J.-F. 2007. *Global Subjects: A Political Critique of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1992. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Castree, N. 2009. "The Spatio-temporality of Capitalism." *Time and Society* 18, no. 1: 26-61.
- Ciborra, C. 2004. *The Labyrinths of Information: Challenging the Wisdom of Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Corbridge, S. 2004. "Waiting in Line, or the Moral and Material Geographies of Queue-jumping." In *Geographies and Moralities*, eds. R. Lee and D.M. Smith, 183-98. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Darnton, R. 1999. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books.
- Davies, K. 1994. "The Tensions Between Process Time and Clock Time in Care-work: The Example of Day Nurseries." *Time and Society* 3, no. 3: 277-303.
- Hammer, M. and J. Champy. 1994. *Re-engineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Hardt, M. and A. Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Harvey, D. 2006. *The Limits to Capital*. London: Verso (Second Edition).
- Heydebrand, W. 2003. "The Time Dimension in Marxian Social Theory." *Time and Society* 12, nos. 2-3: 147-88.
- Jeffrey, C. and S. Young. 2012. "Waiting for Change: Youth, Caste and Politics in India." *Economy and Society*. doi:10.1080/03085147.2011.635435.
- Kaplan, R. and D. Norton. 1996. *The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kundera, M. 1996. *Slowness*. Translated by Linda Asher. London: Faber and Faber.
- Leff, W. and M. Haft. 1983. *Time without Work*. Boston: South End Press.
- Linder, S.B. 1970. *The Harried Leisure Class*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mbembe, J.-A. 2004. "Aesthetics of Superfluity." *Public Culture* 16, no. 3: 373-405.
- Standing, G. 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Standing, G. 2009. *Work after Globalization: Building Occupational Citizenship*. Cheltenham and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

Standing, G. 1999. *Global Labour Flexibility: Seeking Distributive Justice*. London and New York: Macmillan.

Suchman, L.A., 1987. *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, E.P. 1967. "Time, Work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism." *Past and Present* 38, no. 1: 58-97.

---

<sup>1</sup> For related analysis, focusing on time orders and abstract versus process time, see Bourdieu (1992), Heydebrand (2003), Harvey (2006) and Castree (2009).

<sup>2</sup> It was an aspect of the Great Transformation that Karl Polanyi missed. The essence of that Transformation was the slow creation of a *national* market system.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, there is a huge literature, most by money-seeking consultants keen to invent new buzzwords and catchy systems. This paper will not go into all that. The most influential and manipulative is the "balanced (sic) scorecard" model (Kaplan and Norton 1996), which inter alia has been a primary instrument in the commodification of education. For a critique in the context of the global trend to labour flexibility, see Standing (1999). Meanwhile, BPR became a ruse for downsizing employment, with elimination of middle management. It was satirized in the UK as Bastards Planning Redundancies. One can also interpret BPR as a mechanism to force more workers to use more time to make decisions that are in the interest of the corporation.

<sup>4</sup> There have of course been several modern treatments of the difficulty of dealing with unstructured "free" time. See, e.g., Linder (1970) and Leff and Haft (1983). Some commentators believe we are still ruled by industrial mores. For reasons elaborated elsewhere (Standing 2009, 2011), I reject that. We do not live in a Taylorism++ era.

<sup>5</sup> Think of welfare claimants confronted with a 100-page application form, with numerous explanatory notes and instructions. Stressed by other demands on time, and fearful, they may spend an hour doing the work, when actually they might need three hours to do so adequately, four to do it optimally.

<sup>6</sup> For a description of how occupational communities have been dismantled, removing control over many aspects, including skill formation and time, see Standing (2009).

<sup>7</sup> The precariat is defined elsewhere (Standing 2011). Briefly, it consists of a growing number of people living and working in conditions of insecurity, without an occupational identity or career.

<sup>8</sup> What is most extraordinary is that even staunch advocates of means-testing admit this, and persist.

<sup>9</sup> In the United States, those with disabilities can take three years to obtain disability benefits. The latest degradation in a growing number of states are urine tests; "claimants" must have their urine tested to determine whether or not they are "deserving poor". To add injury to insult, they must pay for the urine test. One suspects this is deliberately stigmatizing. The claim is that it can determine past drug taking, which in the wonderful minds of those supporting the idea, would imply that the person would be "undeserving" of a benefit because they had caused their own plight. Anybody thinking social policy evangelicalism will stop there is surely naïve.

<sup>10</sup> The debates have been incorporated in the work of BIEN since 1986 - see [www.basicincome.org](http://www.basicincome.org).