

Economics, Politics, and Labour Process Theory

● Labour process theory has lost direction and distinctiveness. Two substantive issues will be considered as explanations for its demise. First, the relationship between labour process theory and Marxist economics, and second, the political orientation of labour process theorists. Contemporary labour process theory derives from Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974). Braverman has been consistently misunderstood as being more or less orthodox in Marxist economics, and politically pessimistic. But Braverman followed Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* (1968) and implicitly accepted their departure from Marxist theories of value and crisis. This means that labour process theory cannot be restored by a straightforward reconciliation with Marxist economics. The labour theory of value, the significance of the capitalist corporation, and the theory economic crisis, are all problematic in the work of Baran and Sweezy, and therefore Braverman.

The political implications of labour process theory need to be scrutinised. A parallel can be drawn between the deskilling thesis and the Marxist theory of crisis based on the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (hereinafter LTRPF), in that both can be used to justify a revolutionary political programme. For their adherents, discarding either or both the deskilling thesis and the LTRPF is seen as paving the way for reformism. The trajectory of the labour process debate needs to be understood in the political

In focusing on the relationship between labour process theory and Marxist economics the authors highlight as problematic labour process theorists' abandonment of the labour theory of value and acceptance of managerialism in a way which conflates labour process theory with organisation theory. The similarity in the political rhetoric of the deskilling thesis and the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is brought out, and it is argued neither provides an adequate theoretical basis for revolutionary politics. The challenge for labour process theory is to show the connection between the subordination of labour and capitalist property rights and how those property rights can be dismantled.

context of the defeats suffered by the working class since the mid-1970s, especially in Britain and the US. Although Braverman can be criticised for diverting labour process theory from Marxist economics, his revolutionary politics can and should be defended, even if either or both the deskilling thesis and the LTRPF have to be jettisoned.

According to Braverman's deskilling thesis work has been degraded because of an inexorable tendency, under monopoly capitalism, for conception to be separated from execution. Conception is concentrated in an ever smaller section of the workforce, while for most workers, reduced to executing tasks conceived by others, work becomes increasingly meaningless. This process is epitomised by the destruction of craft skills by scientific management in the US. Criticisms of Braverman on several issues have set the agenda for the labour process debate: the romantic view of craft work that is the basis for the deskilling thesis; the failure to consider management strategies apart from Taylorism, and the denial of workers' capacity to resist and force changes in management strategies; not allowing for the full circuit of capital, and the possibility that in the era of monopoly capitalism, increasing the exploitation of labour through deskilling in the labour process is not the only way to ensure profitability; deliberate neglect of the subjectivity of labour and the related humanistic view of alienation; failure to account for the continuing sexual division of labour; and inadequate treatment of new technology (Knights and Willmott 1990).

Complaints have been made that labour process theory has lost any clear focus, that it has been depoliticised, and that a 'core theory' needs to be reiterated (Thompson 1989; 1990; Armstrong 1988; Cohen 1987). Some explanations for the demise of labour process theory can be dispensed with. A parochial British view is that labour process theory has been debased by being used to teach would-be managers in business schools and the invasion of the labour process debate by business school-type disciplines such as organisation theory (Nichols 1992). But just because some industrial sociologists have found employment in business schools and acquired the title 'lecturer in organisational behaviour' does not mean that their whole outlook has changed (Smith and Thompson 1992), and it cannot explain the changing emphasis in labour process theory. If the sociologists employed in business schools had been seriously corrupted, they would long since have abandoned labour process theory in favour of more lucrative, wacky-sounding, pseudo-radical, management consciousness raising.

Prosaically, the extensive criticism of Braverman is seen as simply the product of the pressure on academics for publications. The labour process 'debate' provides a mini 'industry' within which to publish (Smith and Thompson 1992). It is perpetuated because radicals, like everyone else, have to differentiate their product (Goldberg 1980, 250). But this does not explain why particular differences have been generated rather than others.

Labour process theory faces real problems of differentiation from business school-type disciplines on two fronts. If labour process theory is detached from Marxist economic concepts, then there is little to distinguish it from organisation theory (e.g. Child 1984; Clegg 1990). But if labour process theory retains its identification with Marxist political economy, then it will have to engage in dialogue with neo-liberal (e.g. Coase 1990; Williamson 1985) and radical (e.g. Hodgson 1988; Lazonick 1992; Pitelis 1991) institutionalist economics, in which the organisation of work is a major concern (Williamson 1980; Putterman 1986a). Two issues will be discussed: in the 'Economics' section the relationship between labour process theory and Marxist economics, specifically the labour theory of value and managerialism; and in the 'Politics' section the political orientation of labour process theorists. In relation to the latter point, the criterion for assessing labour process theories should be the efficacy of the strategies suggested for workers' organisations.

i.) The Labour Theory of Value

Labour process theorists are confused about the relationship between the labour process and Marxist economics. This is reflected in the eclecticism with which labour process theorists who have long since abandoned other tenets of Marxist orthodoxy continue to invoke the LTRPF (Edwards 1990; Knights 1990), and even long waves (Kelly 1988; Clegg 1990; Littler 1990), without regard for the controversies surrounding these concepts within Marxist political economy.

There is a general unease amongst labour process theorists about the labour theory of value (hereinafter LTV). In a review of the labour process debate, Littler asks:

how much of Marx's economic theory is necessarily connected to a specific study of the labour process. Does the notion of the labour process make much sense

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independently of, for example, the labour theory of value? The labour theory of value is not a set of ideas which are shared by all labour process writers. Many labour process writers try to have their cake and eat it: that is to say, they recognise the problem but do not deal with the theoretical implications. Instead, they tend to sidestep the problem (1990, 79).

One of the alleged culprits is Thompson, who argues that 'relations of exploitation... need not and should not involve a labour theory of value' (1989, 242; 1990, 99). Even though he rejects the LTV (1990, 102), Thompson maintains that the labour process is still privileged as a focus for analysis since it, 'generates the surplus and is a central part of man's experience in acting on the world and reproducing the economy' (1990, 99-100).

Thompson's abandonment of the LTV is less the outcome of contradictions that have arisen within labour process theory itself, and more an acknowledgement that in Marxist economics value theory has 'come under widespread attack' (de Vroey 1982, 34). In particular Thompson is responding to Hodgson (1982a), once one of the leading figures in the neo-Ricardian critique of Marxist economic theory, and of the LTV (1982a; 1982b) and the LTRPF in particular (1974). Callinicos can be conveniently labelled as a Fundamentalist Marxist (Fine and Harris 1979), since he defends both the LTV and the LTRPF. He notes that:

Defenders of the two theories have had a bad press recently. Rational choice Marxists and neo-Ricardians (two sets with a large intersection) tend to denounce them as 'obscurantists' and to accuse them of being hostile to the use of mathematical techniques in economic theory (1989, 71).

At first sight Steedman's assessment of the impact of neo-Ricardian critique of Marxist economic theory appears to be reassuring for labour process theory. He maintains that those aspects of Marx's political economy that are independent of 'his reasoning in value magnitudes' are unaffected by the Sraffa-based critique of the LTV. These include: 'the concepts of labour, labour power and of surplus labour', as well as the 'emphases on the labour process, on coercion therein, and on the everchanging nature of the labour process resulting from both workplace conflicts and the competitive struggle.' (1977, 206)

However, Callinicos argues that acceptance of the neo-Ricardian critique has had two important consequences for Marxism (1989, 74), both are of relevance for labour process theory. First, exploitation is no longer seen as the extraction of surplus value in the production process. Instead exploitation is located in distribution, through the market, and not as a relationship between people in the production process (Callinicos 1989, 74; Bradby 1982, 115). This reverses Braverman's starting point for analysing the labour process, his view that during the twentieth century Marxism has increasingly focused 'not upon the profound inner nature of capitalism and the worker's position within it, but upon its various conjunctural effects and crises. In particular, the critique of the mode of production gave way to the critique of capitalism as a mode of distribution' (1974, 11).

The second consequence of accepting the neo-Ricardian critique is that once the law of value is rejected the search for laws of motion governing the capitalist, or any other historically specific mode of production, tends to be abandoned (Callinicos 1989, 74–75). Analytical Marxists have turned to transhistorical principles and universal characteristics of the human condition to explain historical change (*ibid.*, 75). Within labour process theory the tendency has been in the opposite direction. Littler and Salaman reject Braverman's 'universal framework' for capitalism and assert that 'there can be no theory of the capitalist labour process' (1982, pp.257, 265). They conclude 'that the linkage between the logic of capital accumulation and transformations of the labour process is an indirect and varying one' (*ibid.*, 257). Instead of trying to identify an underlying dynamic of the capitalist labour process, most labour process theorists have settled for devising ever 'more complex typologies' of 'labour control strategies', and an elaborate 'sociological classification of industries and periodizations of change' (Littler and Salaman 1982, pp.264, 265; Edwards 1979). Many labour process theorists would probably endorse Littler and Salaman's clever-sounding justification for their taxonomitis: 'capitalist reality is more complex' than Braverman imagined it to be (1982, 258).

Whether or not labour process theorists explicitly reject the LTV, many of them effectively abandon the law of value for all explanatory purposes by complicating the connection between capital accumulation and the labour process, often using Marxian sounding phraseology about the 'full circuit of capital' (Knights and Willmott 1990, 13; Thompson 1989, 231; 1990, 103).

Callinicos sees the LTV as providing the basis of a link between class structure, class struggle and profits, relating production to capitalist development. Without the LTV, 'class is merely an instance of the more pervasive and fundamental phenomenon of domination', as in Weberian or Nietzsche-inspired theories (1989, 69-70). This opens the way for those labour process theorists (Knights 1990; Willmott 1990) who are preoccupied with power and subjectivity and ignore profit (Nichols 1992, 11). Against such tendencies Callinicos makes an exegetic appeal, 'one of Marx's central claims is surely that exploitation explains domination', and domination within production is only a necessary condition in the historically specific capitalist mode of production rather than, as in the Nietzsche-Weber tradition, the outcome of an inherent human struggle for domination (1989, pp.71, 163).

For labour process theorists the importance of the LTV is that it shows that the capitalist labour process is exploitative. But if the LTV is not necessary for this purpose, or if the dynamic of the capitalist labour process is explained by domination rather than exploitation, then the connection with Marxian political economy is largely severed, and it becomes difficult to distinguish labour process theory from radical organisation theory. In value terms, the importance of the distinction between labour and labour power is that it shows that surplus value is extracted from labour power in the labour process. But this overlooks the wider significance of the distinction between labour and labour power beyond exploitation and the LTV.

Thompson (1989; 1990) defers to Hodgson's critique of the LTV (1982a) in the belief that the LTV is not necessary to show that exploitation takes place within the labour process. However, Thompson dilutes the distinction between labour and labour power by alluding to a 'wage-effort exchange' (1990, 101; Burawoy, 1985, pp.31, 75n57). This implies that an amount of 'effort' is specified in the labour contract. This obscures the very point on which Marxian, neo-Ricardian, neo-liberal institutionalist and radical institutionalist economists are all agreed; that unlike neoclassical economics, Marx's distinction between labour and labour power highlights the necessarily incomplete nature of labour contracts. As Steedman admits, once it is accepted that the concept of labour power is redundant in value terms, 'The only real force of Marx's insistence that it is labour-power (or the disposal over it) that is sold by the worker is that labour contracts are never absolutely precise—perhaps necessarily so' (1982, 151-153).

This is very much an afterthought on Steedman's part, it does not lead him to explore the labour process. The complaint against neoclassical economics, shared by radical (Berg 1991, 174; Marglin 1986) and Marxian political economy (Bowles 1986, 331), as well as neo-liberal institutional economics, is 'that it makes little useful contact with organisation of work issues' (Williamson 1980, 6; Putterman 1986b, 317). This complaint also applies to neo-Ricardian economics, which similarly takes production as given (Bradby 1982, 117; de Vroey 1982). Steedman's discussion of 'an "abstract" capitalist economy' illustrates the point. When analysing the relationship between wages, profits and prices of production, he assumes that 'production relations', including the balance of forces on the shop-floor, remain constant. Although he claims that this does not mean that the importance of the labour process is denied (1977, 16–17), it does separate the labour process from the rest of Marxian political economy, in the same way that management issues are discussed separately from neoclassical economics.

The neo-Ricardians' mathematical sophistication may have terrorised labour process theorists, but it should be noted that, like neoclassical economics, neo-Ricardian analysis is best suited to an equilibrium analysis of perfect competition (Bradby 1982, 117). As Hodgson (1988, 274n5) notes, from a radical institutionalist perspective, the unreal world of equilibrium and perfect competition, which is so readily susceptible to mathematical analysis, is also a world to which it is difficult to apply a meaningful concept of time (Callinicos 1989, 72; Coase 1990, 15). The centrality of a labour process that takes place over time must be in serious doubt in neo-Ricardian, as in neoclassical economics, where the very existence of time itself is problematic. Besides, to suggest that both Sraffa and the LTV 'direct class analysis towards the investigation of the labour process' (Wright 1981, 161) is quite simply 'empirically false as a statement about what Sraffians do' (Bradby 1982, 115).

By questioning 'the assumption of complete labour contracts', neo-liberal institutional economics has begun to address similar issues to Marxism concerning the labour process (Green 1988; 1992). Whether or not Marxian and institutionalist analyses of production are converging (Green 1988; 1992; Young, 1992), Marxian (Bowles 1986), and Marxian influenced radical institutionalist economists have found it worthwhile to engage in serious debate with neo-liberal institutionalism (Pitelis 1993). Labour

process theorists who defer to the neo-Ricardian rejection of the LTV (Thompson 1990) have so far failed to respond to Marxist economists who have taken institutionalism seriously (Hodgson 1988).

Neither radical nor neo-liberal institutionalists are much concerned with the LTV. A major point at issue between them is whether the distinction between labour and power labour is universal or specific to capitalism. Hodgson suggests that labour and labour power are, like the labour process, universal categories which bear 'no specific and exclusive relation to a particular mode of production.' (1982b, 62) If the capitalist employment relationship is not unique, then there is potentially a bridge across the contested terrain which separates Marxian political economy from neo-liberal institutionalist approaches to exchange relationships (Goldberg 1980, 253). Against this, Bowles argues that neo-liberal institutionalism is only 'superficially indistinguishable from the Marxian view' (1986, 352) and that the neo-liberal stance obscures the coercive separation of workers from the means of production, evidenced by the existence of a reserve army of labour, on which the availability of labour power as a commodity is predicated. Similarly, Friedman sees in the distinction between labour and labour power the inherent tension within capitalism between treating labour as a commodity and as a non-commodity (1986).

The dialogue with neo-liberal institutionalism highlights the importance of the distinction between labour and labour power, perhaps the most fundamental distinction in Marxian economics (Bowles 1986, 333n6). But for most labour process theorists the importance of the distinction between labour and labour power is perceived only in terms of the LTV. Having abandoned the LTV, labour process theorists have cut themselves off from Marxian political economy. Unlike Marxian and radical economists, and with the important exception of Friedman (1984), an economist, labour process theorists have ignored or dismissed neo-liberal institutionalism (Littler 1990, 72-76). This reflects the separation of labour process theory from political economy and the movement of labour process theory away from questions of profit and efficiency and towards issues of power and subjectivity.

For Fundamentalists the confusion over the relationship between Marxist economics and labour process theory is solved by returning to Braverman. Thus Callinicos is satisfied that the LTV will 'encourage researchers to pursue the kind of study of the capitalist labour process inspired by Harry Braverman' (1989, 69), and for Cohen, the problem with 'post-Braverman conceptualisations of the

labour process' is that, 'Labour process writers have never considered the labour process from the point of view of value; the issue simply has not been on their theoretical agenda' (1987, pp.35, 48).

Unfortunately for the Fundamentalists, Braverman's account of the labour process is largely structured by Baran and Sweezy's (1968) analysis of 'monopoly capitalism' (Elger and Schwarz 1980, 362; Elger 1982, 33). Braverman, therefore, 'implicitly differs with Marx to the extent that the analysis of Baran and Sweezy is at variance with that of Marx', and the 'differences are substantial' (Friedman 1990a, 15). Baran and Sweezy do not use Marxian value categories at all, and from their analysis 'Marxian economic theory could be seen as irrelevant to contemporary capitalism' (Desai 1979, 114–115). This is because they 'prefer the concept "surplus" to the traditional Marxian "surplus value"' (Baran and Sweezy 1968, 23n). They define 'economic surplus' as 'the difference between what a society produces and the costs of producing it' (*ibid.*, 23). Braverman only confuses the issue when he states that the 'surplus' he seeks to identify, 'because it is a surplus of labor rather than of value, is somewhat different from the surplus Baran and Sweezy sought to trace' (1974, 255).

ii.) Managerialism

Baran and Sweezy (1968) diverge from Marxism over their characterisation of the modern capitalist corporation and the occurrence of economic crises. Baran and Sweezy can be termed 'managerialist' in the sense that they accept that there has been a significant separation of ownership from control which frees corporate management from the control of owners. They diverge from most managerialism because they do not accept that the separation of ownership from control undermines Marxist class theory (Nichols 1970; Zeitlin 1989, 9). Zeitlin does not agree that outside control of corporations is no longer relevant. He argues that Baran and Sweezy's formulation reifies 'giant corporations' and, as with the managerialists, leads to a sort of 'capitalism without capitalists' (1989, 44). Baran and Sweezy are a continuation from Berle and Means' (1932) managerialism (Cole et al. 1983). In an extensive review of managerialism, Scott characterises Baran and Sweezy's position as 'Marxist managerialism' (1985, 26), and in a survey of theories of the firm Sawyer concludes that 'Baran and Sweezy accept that a managerial revolution has taken place, so that control of the giant corporation rests in the hands of management' (1979, 135).

The basic difference between mainstream managerialism and Baran and Sweezy, is that they 'do not see the emergence of a managerial class as changing the basic objective of the firm, which remains the reaping of profits.' (Sawyer 1979, 136; Pitelis 1987, 15) They believe that 'the giant corporation' has transformed capitalism, but reject the view that corporate management forms 'some sort of separate, independent, or "neutral" social class' (1968, 46). A problem for Baran and Sweezy is that their emphasis on 'the location of power' being 'inside rather than outside the typical giant corporation' means that if the major goal of modern corporations remains long-term profit maximisation (*ibid.*, pp.30,37), this results from the subjectivity of managers within large corporations, not objective constraints upon them. They conflate objective and subjective aspects of capital:

Business is an ordered system which selects and rewards according to well-understood criteria. The guiding principle is to get as near as possible to the top inside a corporation which is as near as possible to the top among corporations. Hence the need for maximum profits. Hence the need to devote profits once acquired to enhancing financial strength and speeding up growth. These things become the subjective aims and values of the business world because they are the objective requirements of the system. The character of the system determines the psychology of its members, not vice versa. (*ibid.*, 53–55)

When capitalism is qualified (Wheelock 1986) as 'advanced,' 'late,' 'post-industrial,' 'monopoly,' 'state monopoly,' 'managerial,' 'organised,' 'disorganised,' etc., this is usually a prelude to arguing that established theories, be they Marxian or neoclassical, have been rendered redundant by changing circumstances. Baran and Sweezy assert that the LTRPF which characterised the competitive phase of capitalism has been superseded by 'the law of rising surplus' in the monopoly phase (1968, 80, 118–119). So their underconsumptionist theory of economic crisis (Fine and Harris 1979, 79) follows from their managerialism (Elger and Schwarz 1980, 362). The problem for monopoly capitalism is the absorption of its rising economic surplus. The system remains contradictory because although it tends to generate ever more surplus it fails to provide sufficient consumption and investment to absorb the surplus. (Baran and Sweezy 1968, pp.113–114)

Although couched in terms of a Marxist refutation of Schumpeter's 'bourgeois ideology', the consequence of substituting the tendency for the surplus to rise for the LTRPF is that crises are no longer inevitable, 'Schumpeter's perennial gale of creative destruction has subsided into an occasional mild breeze.' (Baran and Sweezy 1968, 82) Baran and Sweezy maintain that 'the normal state of the monopoly capitalist economy is stagnation' (1968, 113). But this is misleading, because their purpose is to come to terms with the passing of two decades after the Second World War 'without the recurrence of severe depression' (*ibid.*, 17). They do not predict the inevitable relapse of capitalism into its normal state of crisis, but attempt to explain how an abnormal state could be sustained indefinitely. The Great Depression of the 1930s, 'accorded admirably with Marxian theory', but in the 1960s the problem for Marxism was to come to terms with the 'affluent society' (*ibid.*, 17). Subsequently, Fundamentalists have taken Baran and Sweezy to task for failing to anticipate the onset of another capitalist crisis (Harman 1984; Mandel 1981, 34).

In Baran and Sweezy's model of the capitalist economy the surplus allows society room to manoeuvre (Desai 1979, 114), and the tendency for the surplus to rise can be offset by absorption. This is achieved by a massive expansion of 'the sales effort' and the creation of artificial needs, the growth of civilian government spending to ensure effective demand, and military expenditure (Baran and Sweezy 1968). Once the economy is dominated by big business organised into giant corporations crises become avoidable because both the corporations and those who manage them, 'look ahead and calculate with great care. It is their initiative that sets the economy in motion, their power that keeps it moving, their policies that get it into difficulties and crises' (*ibid.*, 62). By implication, reciprocation within the 'Big Business community' (*ibid.*, 60) should ensure that crises are not allowed to occur. Crisis becomes, for Baran and Sweezy as for Keynesians, the outcome of mismanagement, not the inevitable consequence of capitalist accumulation (Harman 1984, 148–154).

The problem with Baran and Sweezy's work is not merely that they admit to neglecting the labour process (1968, 22; Friedman 1977, 29), but that their analysis of monopoly capitalism is essentially a liberal critique of the market power of large corporations. This directs attention away from corporations' control over process of production (Semmler 1982). There is clearly a contradiction between Braverman's emphasis on the labour process and

his acceptance (1974, 260) of Baran and Sweezy's managerialism. Braverman's managerialism is irreconcilable with Fundamentalist Marxist political economy. This undermines Cohen's assertions that 'Braverman's primary concern is not with "control" or even deskilling *per se*, but with the specifically capitalist logic which constructs these tendencies', and that 'scientific management is not simply a strategy of "control" or "deskilling" for its own sake but is inextricably bound up with the very logic of profitability inherent in capitalism itself.' (1987, pp.36, 37) Braverman ignores 'any exploration of the contradictions and struggles which beset mechanisation in the form of the tendency and counter-tendencies to the falling rate of profit' (Elger 1982, 33). But labour process theorists have continued to invoke the LTRPF without regard for its incompatibility with Braverman or its predication on the LTV.

Braverman's statement that Taylorism represents 'nothing less than the explicit verbalisation of the capitalist mode of production' (1974, 86) conflates objective and subjective aspects of capital in the same way as Baran and Sweezy. In Braverman's analysis the constraint upon management in the labour process is the self-imposed requirement for management to preserve a role for itself, not the operation of the law of value through competition ensuring that only the average socially necessary labour time is used in production. Thus the separation of conception from execution is 'the ideal toward which management tends, and in pursuit of which it uses and shapes every productive innovation' in order that the labour process 'is henceforth carried on by management as the sole subjective element' (Braverman 1974, pp.171–172). The subjectivity of management becomes the dynamic of the capitalist labour process. It is difficult to resist Wood's conclusion that:

Braverman presents as the essence of the twentieth century a particular rationality of its dominant class, a rationality which is all pervading, so that all parts of society function smoothly to reproduce the totality. In effect, the capitalist class is treated unquestionably as, in Marxist terms, a 'class for itself', fully conscious of its economic interests and organised and conspiring to realise them. (1982, 14)

At the risk of exaggerating his managerialism, it is worth noting the resemblance between Braverman and Burnham, the arch-managerialist who coined the term the 'managerial revolution'.

According to Burnham, with the advent of modern mass production:

the gap, estimated both in amount of skill and training and in difference of type of function, between the average worker and those who are in charge, on the technical side, of the process of production is far greater today than in the past. (1962, 79)

Braverman's managerialism has not been the subject of extensive debate within labour process theory. Labour process theorists who criticise him for neglecting subjectivity tend to implicitly accept managerialism, which opens the way for them to substitute taxonomies of management strategies for an analysis of the labour process based on the logic of capitalist accumulation. Burawoy's categorisation of 'factory regimes' rests on an assumption of significant variations in the degrees of power that managers enjoy within corporations:

One must ask... what impact the growth of the corporation, and in particular the institutional separation of ownership and control had upon the consciousness of managers. Could it not be argued that the specialisation of the managerial function led to attempts to introduce scientific management? Variations might appear not only between different fractions of capital but also within the firm itself. (Burawoy 1985, 46)¹

Although the influence of managerialism is pervasive, there is still a dichotomy between managerialist and non-managerialists within labour process theory. Against managerialism Friedman restates the law of value, 'a law which is enforced by competition' (1990a, 4), and Kelly argues that managerial strategies aimed at conceding greater industrial democracy are likely to be undermined because competition ensures that large corporations keep their labour productivity, unit costs, product quality and other salient dimensions of competitiveness broadly in line with their rivals. (1988, 217). Support for this view can be drawn from the pricing procedures of large corporations which confirm the Marxian theory that the process of production is the centre of gravity of market prices (Semmler 1982, 111).

The managerialist view is that control over the labour process is not essential for profitability if control over product markets can be

achieved (Littler and Salaman 1982, 257; Thompson 1989, 231). Littler claims that it is not possible for a 'managerial logic', linking the market to the labour process, to be 'integrated into a labour process framework', because of 'the separation of ownership and control and the problematic linkage of corporate and labour-management strategies' (1990, 82). He even goes so far as to claim that Braverman 'adopts a neoclassical view of the firm as an agent which transforms inputs into outputs in such a way that profits are maximised.' (1990, 56) Given that one of the major criticisms of neoclassical economics is that it ignores the labour process, it seems somewhat ludicrous to accuse Braverman of being neoclassical! The similarity between Marxist managerialists, mainstream managerialists, and neoclassicals is that they 'deny the potential importance of capitalist control through share-ownership in the process of capital accumulation' (Pitelis 1987, 34, 113n3). On this point Littler and other labour process theorists are probably closer than Braverman to the managerialist position exemplified by Marglin's statement that, 'in modern capitalist society the pre-eminent collectivity for accumulation is the corporation' (1986; Pitelis 1987, 34).

There is a general perception of the need to transcend the false dichotomy between Marxist theory 'based on a necessitarian, deterministic logic which emphasises iron laws, a strict succession of stages, the inevitability of the proletarian revolution', and 'attempts to soften Marxism's core by stressing indeterminacy, complexity, the importance of agency, the relative autonomy of the political etc.' (Mouzelis 1988, 107). One way to do this is to situate subjects in an institutional context.

Although there are differences concerning theories of competition and monopoly within Marxism, there is agreement that the 'institutional framework' within which accumulation takes place needs to be elaborated (Wheelock 1983, 19; Burkett 1991, 65; Semmler 1982, 109). Both the market and the corporation need to be de-reified and recognised as historically specific institutions. The imperative for accumulation is located in an institutional context. If, as Marxist economists maintain, there is an increasingly institutionalised rate of profit in modern capitalism (Eatwell 1982, 218), then the institutions through which this institutionalisation takes place, primarily capital markets, have to be analysed. In contrast to neoclassical economics, neo-liberal institutionalists recognise that markets in general, and capital markets in particular, are historically specific institutions (Coase 1990, pp.7-9; North

1990; Putterman 1986a). Competition in the capital market operates through the enforcement of market regulations, for example to report profits or cease trading (North 1990). Although not explored by neo-liberal institutionalists, it should be obvious that changes in ownership through the capital market are significant for the labour process. The increased influence of financial institutions, for example, can affect the social relations of production, forcing corporations to minimise risks and maximise profits by lowering labour costs (Stearns 1990, 196).

If Marx's analysis is to be extended 'to incorporate the concrete institutions and processes (e.g. multinational corporations and banks, trade networks, and accompanying changes in state forms) which have developed over the last century' (Burkett 1989, 65), then the starting point must be to repair 'the core of Marxist theory, the theory of the enterprise' (Stinchcombe 1983, 5). If an analysis of the labour process is to be integrated into a theory of the enterprise, then the dialogue between Marxian, radical, and neo-liberal institutional economists (Stephen 1984) needs to be extended beyond the disciplinary boundary of economics to include sociological labour process theory (Green 1992, 111). Unfortunately the disciplinary boundary is reinforced by labour process theorists who use exactly the same slogan as radical organisation theorists to dismiss institutional economics: 'Organisations are all about power' (Littler 1990, 72; Clegg 1990; Turk 1983, 189). But not all neo-liberal institutionalists insist that only efficient institutions prevail (North 1990), while radical and Marxist economists take efficiency seriously in explaining work organisation (Marginson 1993). Radical organisation theorists see efficiency as a socially constructed constraint and deride the Marxist notion that efficiency belongs to 'the essence of capitalism' (Clegg 1990, 226).

The diversity of labour process strategies pursued by management is seen by labour process theorists as support for a managerialist position, confirming that corporate management enjoys considerable autonomy and is able to pursue its own interests independently from the requirements of capital. Friedman avoids the managerialist position by explaining variations in management strategy as the result of 'management error' (1990b, 180; 1977). Armstrong, a defender of Braverman, draws on neo-liberal agency theory (Jensen and Meckling 1986) to discuss 'the effect of capitalism on the labour process' (Armstrong 1989). According to agency theory the 'management

problem' is that 'of ensuring that managers, so far as is possible, make decisions which are in the interests of ownership' (ibid., pp.309, 311). A diversity of management strategies is more or less inevitable, because of different incentive structures constructed for management, and also because of the costs of information and computation (Jensen and Meckling 1986). However, neo-liberal institutionalists maintain that profit maximisation remains paramount, and for Marxian political economy, invoking agency theory allows the existence of a diversity of management strategies to be explained within the constraint of the private ownership of capital.

Williamson (1985), criticises managerialism with the argument that the discipline of the capital market is reproduced inside the corporation through the multidivisional structure. This is a valuable counter to the managerialist labour process view that pressure on the labour process is lessened because firms do not necessarily compete through cheapening labour (Knights and Willmott 1990, 13–15; Littler and Salaman 1982, 257), which assumes that corporations are unified entities, and that workers in monopoly corporations share in monopoly profits. Against this, seeing the corporation as an internal capital market allows for the decomposition of the so-called 'full circuit of capital', as seen with the rise of flexibility and contracting out, which means that workers, say in final assembly or design, do not necessarily benefit from advantages that the corporation enjoys in say accounting or distribution.

The underlying issue remains that of locating the imperative for capital accumulation. Although subjective decisions affecting the rate of accumulation may take place within corporations, as maintained by managerialists, the amount of surplus invested depends upon institutionalised pressures on management. Therefore the rate of accumulation has a multifarious causation and cannot be derived solely from endogenous motivation (Norton 1988). The implication of managerialist labour process theory is that to the extent that corporate management is relieved of the immediate pressure of external competition and the requirements of capital, such as are implied by the law of value, there is considerable leeway to choose labour process strategies. An institutional political economy of the corporation allows management's labour process strategies to be located within the institutional constraints, both from the structures within corporations and from external markets. Moving in this direction, Norton (1988; Scott 1985, 163) suggests the value of synthesising

Marx's labour process theory with Chandler's (1962) business history approach to corporate strategy and structure. Potentially an examination of the relationships between external market institutions, corporate organisation form, and the labour process could begin to dissolve the arbitrary distinction between endogenous and exogenous causation in accumulation.

The LTV, the LTRPF, managerialism and the deskilling thesis have important political implications. Allegedly, accepting the separation of ownership and control undermines the theoretical justification for revolutionary politics (Nichols 1970, 67). As a result of their managerialism Baran and Sweezy end up condemning capitalism not for its inevitable economic crises, but for the measures that have to be taken to stave off crises. The absorption of an ever increasing surplus involves the proliferation of unproductive activities, the sales effort being their special target (1968, 116). Their complaint is that with the expansion of such activities, 'a large and growing part of the product of monopoly capitalist society is, judged by genuine human needs, useless, wasteful, or positively destructive' (ibid., 331). The irrationality of capitalism is not the waste of human potential that results from inevitable crises, but the way in which the surplus has to be used for irrational, rather than egalitarian purposes (Desai 1979, 114), in order to prevent economic crisis, and 'an economic system in which *such* costs are socially necessary has long ceased to be a socially necessary system' (Baran and Sweezy 1968, 144).

Politics

Although still convinced of the need to overthrow capitalism, Baran and Sweezy no longer believe in the revolutionary potential of industrial workers in advanced capitalist countries. As a diminishing minority of the working class the organised core of workers in the basic industries have largely been integrated ideologically and as consumers through sharing in the surplus. Instead they look to 'the impoverished masses in the underdeveloped countries who are struggling to free themselves from imperialist domination and exploitation' (1968, 22).

Managerialism has been consistently criticised by Marxists defending the vision of the working class leading the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism (Zeitlin 1989). They dispute the separation of ownership and control and dismiss the political implications of managerialism, and the suggestion that the working class is finished as a force to be reckoned with. Zeitlin argues that it is,

in the relationship between workers and giant companies in the 'center economy', that the allocation of resources, the wage structure, the organisation of production and the long-run tendencies of the entire economy are decisively shaped. And the workers here are mainly organised workers; they are certainly not—let alone seethingly—impotent. On the contrary, they wield 'decisive economic power,' and the real question is how, and in whose interests, they will yield it in the future. (1989, 213)

Mandel sets out the Fundamentalists' objections to 'third-worldist' Marxism. He argues that Baran and Sweezy,

have to project the system's real enemies outside the system itself: third-world peasants; marginalized super-exploited layers; and so on. But they are nowhere able to demonstrate that these social forces anywhere have a potential social and economic strength comparable to that of the modern proletariat. Since such forces are not vital to the system's basic productive relations, they can be variously ignored, or integrated, or crushed, without making the system incapable of functioning. So this is not really a 'collapse of capitalism' theory at all (1981, 86).

Baran and Sweezy were part of a trend in radical thinking during the 1960s, when Marcuse believed that the system had become 'one dimensional', absorbing all elements of protest from workers in advanced countries, and C. Wright Mills held that the only real hope of change was from intellectuals and students, and only nostalgia made the left look to the working class (Harman 1984, 76–77). Elger and Schwarz identify Braverman too closely with Baran and Sweezy and interpret his position as a pessimistic,

neo-Marcusian view of virtually contradiction-free capitalist hegemony in monopoly capitalism. Both within the labour process, where craft controls give way to the total regulation of production by capital, and within the sphere of exchange, where domestic production is superseded by commodity production and the manipulation of wage and price movements, capital creates a passive working class. The capacity of monopoly capital to compensate economic trade unionism from an expanding surplus sets the seal on

this hegemony in a way which renders political and cultural domination automatic and of little independent significance. This emphasis on the profound dominance of capital is qualified only in terms of the persistence of inarticulate working class disgruntlement which might, under the pressure of extreme crisis, reopen the prospects for revolutionary politics (1980, 361–362).

Braverman clearly followed Baran and Sweezy's managerialist economic analysis (Friedman 1990a, 15), but he did not accept their third-worldist politics (Foster 1989, 240). Instead he attempted to restore confidence in the revolutionary role of workers in advanced capitalist countries. Braverman has been continually, if not wilfully, misrepresented as 'depicting a progressively de-skilled and decidedly non-revolutionary working class' (Tanner, Davies and O'Grady 1992, 444). But he responded to the 'pessimistic' interpretation of *Labour and Monopoly Capital* as a description of the unending 'degradation of labor':

Neither Marx nor Engels considered themselves 'pessimists' on that account; on the contrary, they found in this unremitting assault of capital upon labor the precondition for revolt. (Braverman 1976, p124)

The difference between Braverman and those Fundamentalists who share his 'confidence in the revolutionary potential of the working classes of the so-called developed capitalist countries' (ibid., 124) is that Fundamentalists see the LTRPF and concomitant economic crises as providing the imperative for revolution. In contrast Braverman believes that it is the increasing and inevitable degradation of work which will compel the working class to fulfil 'the task which they alone can perform' (ibid., 124).

There is a clear political parallel between the LTRPF and the deskilling thesis. Braverman had a revolutionary vision, but his Marxist-managerialist mentors, Baran and Sweezy, robbed him of the crisis, in its classic Marxist formulation, as the 'precondition for revolt'. In place of the LTRPF Braverman substituted a contradiction of capitalism between the ability to buy off the working class in the sphere of circulation and the degradation of work. Possibly the neglect of the labour process by Marxists, criticised by Braverman, can be explained by their confidence that the LTRPF provided sufficient justification for revolutionary politics.

The parallel between the LTRPF and the deskilling thesis extends to the rhetoric used to defend both:

Any sensitive reading of his work should reveal that Braverman actually regarded the deskilling tendencies of technical change as a system-wide dynamic or 'law of motion' in capitalist economies which could, temporarily and locally, be interrupted or reversed by a variety of factors, many of which have been rediscovered by his critics as supposed refutations. (Armstrong 1988, 157)

If the LTRPF is substituted for deskilling then the same passage reads like a defence of Marx:

Any sensitive reading of his work should reveal that Marx actually regarded the LTRPF as a system-wide dynamic or 'law of motion' in capitalist economies which could, temporarily and locally, be interrupted or reversed by a variety of factors, many of which have been rediscovered by his critics as supposed refutations. (cf. Callinicos 1989, 73)

Fundamentalists are sensitive about 'quasi-psychological motives' being attributed to their theories (Rees 1992, 113). Callinicos complains that the Marxist theory of working class action has been 'caricatured by Andre Gorz, according to whom Marx conceived the proletariat as a secular equivalent of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, the protagonist of an eschatological philosophy of history whose culmination is the revolution' (1989, 184). In the same vein Hodgson combined his neo-Ricardian critique of the LTRPF (1974) with a polemic against Trotsky's fatalistic Marxism which relies on inevitable economic crises to deliver a unified working class fired with the revolutionary class consciousness which so far Trotskyists have been unable to foment for themselves (1975). Similarly, Braverman's 'gravedigger thesis once promised an answer to how labour would be conditioned: the vision was that a more homogenised, massified and objectively interdependent working class would be produced out of the capitalist labour process.' (Nichols 1992, 16; Tanner, Davies and O'Grady 1992, 448)

A more generous interpretation of the centrality of the LTRPF, or the deskilling thesis, is that revolutionaries see in these theories the justification for organising for the immediate revolutionary

overthrow of capitalism in order to save workers from the ravages of economic crises or degradation of labour. Luxemburg believed that the inevitability of capitalist crises makes socialism objectively necessary: 'the historic necessity of the socialist revolution manifests itself above all in the growing anarchy of capitalism, which drives the system into an impasse.' (1989, 27) Contemporary Fundamentalists have made the LTRPF the touchstone of revolutionary politics. They claim that the LTRPF was central to Marx's account of capitalism, since 'it showed the impossibility that any tinkering with the system, any self-regulation by capitalists, would be able to ward off crises, since any such self-regulation was bound to break down when the rate of profit fell below a certain point.' (Harman 1984, 17; Mandel 1981; Yaffe 1973) In the Fundamentalists' eyes, questioning the LTRPF is seen as the prelude to an inevitable degeneration into reformism.

There is a parallel with labour process theory. Labour process theorists have engaged in a 'long-running debate concerning the neglect of the "subjective factor"' by Braverman (Thompson 1990, 114). The criticism repeatedly levelled at Braverman is that by deliberately avoiding discussion of the subjectivity of workers he overlooks the way in which management has to adapt control strategies in order to take account of workers' subjectivity and resistance. But for revolutionaries, resistance that reforms management strategy cannot transform capitalism. The importance of resistance is that it prepares workers, to use Luxemburg's words, activity 'creates the subjective factor of the socialist transformation, for the task of realising socialism', even though it cannot 'realise objectively the desired social change.' (1989, 49)

Labour process theorists who criticise Braverman for failing to acknowledge workers' continual capacity to resist, substantively change management strategy, and improve their situation, see themselves as more optimistic than him. They present the 'overall trajectory of the labour process debate' since Braverman as 'a trend toward increasing optimism' (Tanner, Davies and O'Grady 1992, 444). The paradox is that whereas these critics celebrate the capacity of workers to effect piecemeal reform of the capitalist labour process, they have almost all lost faith in the potential of the working class to lead a revolutionary transformation of society.

Revolutionaries are more concerned with the development of working class consciousness necessary for the overthrow of capitalism, than they are with the immediate effect of workers' resistance

on management strategies. This is neither because, as Thompson alleges, revolutionaries deny ‘the desirability or possibility of progressive reforms within capitalist production’ (1990, 120), nor because ‘worker action can be considered functional to capital unless it leads to revolution’ (Tanner, Davies and O’Grady 1992, 444). Rather, as Callinicos explains, revolutionaries are conscious that, ‘Change may arise as an unintended consequence of molecular acts of resistance. But the change may not be consciously initiated by or benefit the resisters.’ The importance of resistance is that it can ‘generate collective agents capable of pursuing the conscious goal of social change.’ (1989, 11) Self-limiting resistance, orchestrated from above and aimed solely at effecting reform, is less likely to be successful in achieving even minor reforms than resistance aimed at revolutionary transformation. Resistance short of revolution can only deflect capitalism, it cannot effect lasting change because:

The economic power of property ownership was, according to Marx, so strongly cemented that only the political organisation of the working class in its most extreme form—violence—would be able to break it. (Gustafsson 1991, 24)

This is not necessarily a pessimistic conclusion so long as a revolutionary transformation of society can be envisaged, but:

If one were to name that aspect of Marx’s thought which is currently regarded with most scepticism even by those generally sympathetic to his ideas, it would probably be [his] belief that the struggle of the working class within capitalism will generate a collective actor capable of installing socialism. (Callinicos 1989, 187)

Thompson exemplifies this loss of faith amongst labour process theorists:

there is a direct and empirically unsustainable link in Marxism between the analysis of the capitalist labour process and a theory of social transformation through class struggle. While a politics of production can be derived from the dynamics of the labour process, this has no automatic progression to a wider social transformation in the Marxist sense. (1990, 102; 1989, 246)

The ostensibly optimistic critique of Braverman emphasises the possibilities for successful resistance by workers within the capitalist labour process. But the view that a variety of managerial strategies are compatible with capitalist production, some more acceptable to workers than others, opens the way to reformism in the sense that the ultimate possibility and necessity for a revolutionary transformation of society is denied. The major concern becomes deciding which strategies of resistance workers should adopt in order to persuade management to pursue more palatable strategies.

With the defeats inflicted on workers since the mid-1970s, and the lack of successful working class resistance, it is difficult to resist giving way to shortcuts. Instead of championing workers' capacity to resist and change management strategies, it is tempting to make direct appeals to management to adopt strategies which are deemed to be more acceptable for workers and less likely to provoke resistance. The more sophisticated management and organisation theorists, such as Child (1984), have drawn on labour process theory to make this very point. Child accepts that there are real constraints within capitalism, but attempts to persuade managers to choose control strategies that will avoid provoking unnecessary resistance from workers. Thus managers would refute the deskilling thesis by their own actions. There is little to distinguish reformist labour process theory from the organisation theory espoused in business schools except for the different jargon used.

It might be objected that the alleged political consequence of abandoning either or both the deskilling thesis and the LTRPF is not sufficient reason for adhering to either theory, and to do so gives rise to a 'conflict between what one ought to believe and what one would like to believe, between "scientific" and "extrascientific" considerations' (Van Parijs 1980, 12). But if it is accepted that 'conscience enters into economics' and that 'values and beliefs' play an important role in shaping different views of the economy (Marglin 1991, 225), then the persistent favour which the LTRPF theory of crises and the deskilling thesis have enjoyed within Marxism can no more be dismissed as "extra-scientific" (Van Parijs 1980) than can their rejection.

Political, or "extra-scientific" reasons can be suggested for the rejection of the LTRPF and the deskilling thesis. It must be asked whether the keenness in some quarters to see the deskilling thesis or the LTRPF refuted is the cause or effect of renouncing the Marxist revolutionary vision? Fundamentalist Marxists are

susceptible to the accusation that they impose a theory of crisis on the capitalist economy, in the face of viable reforms, and a theoretical unity upon the working class, despite obvious divisions, in order to reinforce their political aspirations. These political sympathies probably explain why Fundamentalists (Armstrong 1988; Callinicos 1989; Cohen 1987) have embraced Braverman without too much regard for the contradictions between his managerialism and their Marxist economics. It might be suspected that critics of the LTRPF and the deskilling thesis have amplified minor economic reforms, and highlighted divisions between workers, in order to establish that revolution is neither necessary nor possible. Reformist political sympathies may well explain why some labour process theorists, who know little and care less about the finer points of Marxist economics, have been receptive to the neo-Ricardian rejection of the LTV, even though it might be incompatible with labour process theory.

This is not to say that there is not a problem with relying on the theory of crisis or deskilling as the justification for revolutionary politics. Callinicos's Fundamentalist view is that because 'the economic situation under capitalism is liable to deteriorate independently of the improvements which workers or capitalists consciously seek', any basis for class compromise is undermined (1989, 203). He poses the question as to what socialists should do in situations where compromise is possible. However, his answer is that compromise should be avoided because it would disarm the working class should a crisis subsequently prove unavoidable. His argument is not so much that revolution, however unpleasant, is necessary because crisis is inevitable, but that since it is impossible to be certain that crises can be avoided indefinitely, it is better not to take the chance of pursuing compromise. In this argument crisis and deskilling can be used interchangeably.

The Fundamentalist argument turns out to be fallacious because it does not rest on crisis or deskilling being demonstrably unavoidable, but on the assertion that either or both is possible, and that revolution is the only strategy to be pursued given that possibility. Under all circumstances revolution is the best strategy, because the irrefutable possibility that crisis or deskilling will ensue makes it worth enduring the upheaval of revolution even though it might be unnecessary (Callinicos 1989, 205).

Fundamentalist reasoning does not offer any criteria by which to judge the success of revolutionary strategies short of revolution

itself (Friedman 1986). A better argument, especially in relation to the labour process, is that resistance is its own justification, whether it results in reform or revolution. Feminist theorists make two related points: first, no matter how they are achieved, 'reforms create more confidence for things to go further' (Segal 1990); and second if 'the process is the product' (Jagger 1983, 277), then the criterion for the success of resistance is the perpetuation of resistance itself. This does not rule out reform, by changing management's labour process strategy, being judged a successful outcome, so long as the capacity of workers to resist is not subordinated to changing management strategy through means other than resistance by workers themselves. Although deskilling is probably incompatible with socialism (cf. Nyland 1987), no management strategy can be judged better than another from the point of view of workers except for the means by which management strategy is changed. The danger of managerialism within labour process theory is that if it is believed that management strategy can be changed by means other than resistance, and that one management strategy, say 'soft' management (Alvesson and Willmott 1992), is intrinsically better than others, then this opens the way for compromise that bypasses, or worse still, subordinates resistance to changing management strategy by other means.

Labour process theory has become increasingly concerned with power and subjectivity to the exclusion of profit and efficiency (Nichols 1992). This is either the cause or effect of the detachment of labour process theory from Marxist economics. There is confusion about the relationship between labour process theory and Marxist economics. Where it has been explicitly addressed, labour process theorists have tended to abandon the LTV in deference to the neo-Ricardian critique of Marxist economic theory, (Thompson 1989, 1990) severing the connection with Marxist political economy. The result is that there is little to distinguish labour process theory from the analysis of power in radical management and organisation theory.

Unfortunately for Fundamentalist Marxists (Armstrong 1988; Callinicos 1989; Cohen 1987), labour process theory cannot easily be reconciled with Marxist economics because Braverman (1974) departed from Marxist economics by accepting Baran and Sweezy's theory of monopoly capital (1968). Baran and Sweezy do not use

Conclusion

Marxian value categories, and their approach to the capitalist corporation is essentially managerialist. Braverman's Fundamentalist defenders have tended to overlook the incompatibility of his managerialism with Marxian economics in general and the LTV and LTRPF in particular, while those who criticise him for his neglect of subjectivity tend to implicitly accept managerialism (Burawoy 1985; Littler 1990; Littler and Salaman 1982).

The separation from Marxist economics has excluded labour process theory from the emerging dialogue between Marxist, neo-liberal institutionalist and radical institutionalist economists who take the organisation of work seriously, unlike neoclassical and neo-Ricardian economists. Debate with institutionalism highlights two issues: first, the importance of the distinction between labour and labour power, aside from its connection with the LTV, should provide the basis for reuniting labour process theory with economic theory; second, the reification of the corporation and the market results in a dichotomy between endogenous and exogenous explanations of accumulation by corporations represented by the managerialist and anti-managerialist positions. An institutionalised rate of profit needs to be located in historically specific market and corporate institutions.

Turning to politics, managerialism is usually associated with reformism and a denial of the necessity or possibility of revolution. However, although Braverman follows Baran and Sweezy's managerialist economics, his politics are definitely revolutionary. What he tries to do, to suit his own political purpose, is to resurrect a law-like tendency, akin to the LTRPF, within the corporation. He derives the inexorable separation of conception from execution from the almost unconscious collective subjectivity of management. This is why Taylorism is so problematic within Braverman's analysis; the more managers deny it the more they are alleged to believe in it (1974, 87). Braverman's functionalism (Littler and Salaman 1982, 256) can easily give way to conspiracy theory (Callinicos 1989, 79).

There is a political parallel between the deskilling thesis and the LTRPF in that both are used by Fundamentalists to justify revolutionary politics. The parallel has to be extended to attempts to refute the deskilling thesis, which can be interpreted as the cause or effect of renouncing revolutionary politics. Amongst both defenders and critics of the deskilling thesis there is an exaggeration of the effect of the labour process in creating either unity or division within the working class.

Reacting against this, Kelly declares the labour process debate to be politically uninteresting because it does not engage with the issues of political and trade union organisation which influence the consciousness and unity of workers, such as the level of shop steward confidence and the nature of the trade union bureaucracy (1988). It can be argued that:

Class unity in politics does not follow from common embedding of classes in relations of production. It follows instead from political processes proper. Class unity in concrete class relations in factories derives from class unity in politics, not the reverse. (Stinchcombe 1983, 245)

Although the immediate interests of workers in production diverge, their grievances and interests '*can be unified* into a common political program. The unification is a political achievement.' (ibid., 246) The purpose of labour process theory should be to 'provide the basis of a theoretically informed praxis', by identifying those tendencies which might lead to 'the formation of a collective identity among workers' (Wardell 1990, pp.172, 165).

In general there is an over-reliance on the confirmation or refutation of theories such as the LTRPF and the deskilling thesis as the justification for adhering to or rejecting revolutionary politics. Instead criteria short of revolution itself are needed for assessing strategies of compromise and resistance. Compromise may be justified if it can deliver management strategies that are more acceptable to workers. But compromise is likely to undermine workers' continuing capacity to articulate their collective preferences and to resist the future imposition of unacceptable management strategies. Resistance is more likely to perpetuate further resistance, even if its immediate unintended consequence is a less acceptable management strategy.

The labour process debate since Braverman needs to be politically contextualised. Braverman believed in the revolutionary potential of the American working class. The subsequent defeats suffered by organised workers have sapped both workers' and labour process theorists' confidence in the prospects of workers leading a revolutionary transformation of society. It is labour process theorists' pessimism which prevents them from even perceiving Braverman's revolutionary optimism. Political pessimism has led to the deskilling thesis being

discarded, not theoretical refutations or observable changes in the labour process (cf. Tanner, Davies and O'Grady 1992).

Marxist political economy supports revolutionary politics best, not by prophesying impending crises or the further degradation of labour, but by showing that the subordination of labour in the labour process is specific to and inherent in capitalism and can only be changed by removing capitalist property rights. The issue for labour process theory is how the inevitable resistance of workers to subordination in the labour process can be unified and linked to the dismantling of capitalist property rights.

Acknowledgement

A version of this paper was presented to the Organisation and Control of the Labour Process 9th Annual Conference, UMIST, 1991. We are grateful to Paul Dobson, Graham Crow, Andy Friedman, Dawn Lyon, Dave Morgan, Kate Mulholland, Theo Nichols, Paul Smith and the *Capital & Class* Editorial Board for their comments.

Note

1. Burawoy appears to confuse the distinction between labour and labour power with the separation of ownership and control, and therefore to attribute the latter to Marx (1985, 32,71note29)

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