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Denizens and the precariat

Around the world, more people are being turned into denizens; they are having rights associated with citizenship whittled away, often without realizing it or realizing the full implications. Many are joining the precariat, an emerging class characterized by chronic insecurity, detached from old norms of labour and the working class. For the first time in history, governments are reducing the rights of many of their own people while further weakening the rights of more traditional denizens, migrants.

Mainstream politicians and political parties – on the right and left as conventionally defined – have become stridently utilitarian. While the past should not be romanticized, the class-based political parties that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came closer to deliberative or participatory democracy. Groups debated and shaped class-oriented perspectives. By contrast, what has emerged in the globalization era could be called utilitarian democracy. Without class-based values or ideas of class struggle to

guide them, politicians and old political parties have resorted to a commodified politics that focuses on finding a formula to appeal to a majority, often depicted as ‘the middle class’.

It scarcely matters to these politicians that their policies deprive a minority of rights and push them into the precariat. They can win elections as long as they can sell themselves to a majority. But the minority is growing by the day. And it is becoming restless, as the millions demonstrating discontent in the squares and parks of great cities testify.

Citizens and rights

The idea of citizenship goes back to ancient Greece. It made a stride forward in 1789 with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, that stirring emancipatory call stemming from the Renaissance and its message of escape from a slavish ‘God’s will’. Henceforth, a citizen was someone who had *rights*. This was what Tom Paine – the Englishman who helped forge the American Revolution and Constitution, and the French Revolution – intended in his epoch-shaping tracts, *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*.

It fell to T. H. Marshall (1950), writing after the Second World War, to define citizenship in its modern form as ‘a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community’. To be a citizen meant having ‘an absolute right to a certain standard of civilisation which is conditional only on the discharge of the general duties of citizenship’. While Marshall’s later conception of the ‘duties of citizenship’ included a duty to labour, with which this book takes

issue, he recognized the tension between rights and capitalism, noting that ‘in the twentieth century, citizenship and the capitalist class system have been at war.’ Citizenship imposed modifications on the capitalist class system, since social rights ‘imply an invasion of contract by status, the subordination of market price to social justice, the replacement of the free bargain by the declaration of rights.’

That was roughly correct in the ‘re-embedded’ phase of Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* ([1944] 2001), the period of social-democrat supremacy between 1944 and the 1970s. In the subsequent ‘disembedded’ phase, contract has invaded status, and social justice has been subordinated to the market price.

There is also a tension between universal human rights, which should apply equally to everybody, and the idea of rights embodied in citizenship, confined to people with a certain status. Rights in the modern era have been depicted as ‘melting’ with citizenship (Bobbio 1990), with citizenship coming to be defined as *belonging* to an entity (usually a sovereign nation) and entitlement to rights seen as a function of that belonging.

In the early twentieth century, what Zolberg (2000) called ‘the hypernationalist version of citizenship’ predominated, leading to the ‘nationalization of rights’, which Hannah Arendt ([1951] 1986) identified as leading to totalitarianism. Countries also took advantage of international migration. Some operated discriminatory quota systems, as the USA did in the 1920s to restrict citizenship mostly to those from ‘Protestant countries’. National citizenship became linked to obligations, notably to men’s duty to perform military service.

The end of the Second World War led to an advance in the framework of rights, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

of 1948 and a spate of international documents, including the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1966 International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, while asserting universal rights, these reflected the conventional link between rights and national citizenship.

Thus the Universal Declaration (Article 13) interprets the right to freedom of movement as the right to emigrate – to *leave* a country – but not a right to immigrate – to *enter* a country. This is a recipe for leaving migrants without rights anywhere and without protection by national laws and institutions. As such, jurists have seen a contradiction between human rights and the territorial rights of national sovereignty embedded in the Universal Declaration. Similarly, the Refugee Convention asserts a principle of non-expulsion (*non-refoulement*) of refugees and asylum seekers, but does not grant them entitlement to the full rights of national citizens.

Rights are thus seen as a badge of citizenship, and only citizens have all the rights established in their own country. It is in this sense that most migrants are denizens – people with a more limited range of rights than citizens. But they are not the only group that fall into this category. As we shall argue, some migrants may have more rights than some ‘nationals’. The reality is that in the globalization era more people are being converted into denizens, through losing rights.

A human *right* is universal, applying to everyone. If someone is to be denied a right, there must be legally established reasons and strict respect for due process in denying it. Entitlement to a right is not dependent on some behavioural or attitudinal conditionality, other than adherence to the law of the country and due process. It is crucial to

emphasize these points, since a contention underpinning this book is that governments are abusing them with increasing ease and impunity.

A full citizen has access to five types of rights – civil, political, cultural, social and economic – as recognized by the 1966 Covenants and by regional equivalents stemming from the Universal Declaration. Marshall (1950) famously asserted that civil rights were the achievement of the seventeenth century, cultural rights of the eighteenth, political rights of the nineteenth and social rights of the twentieth century. If so, we might say that the challenge ahead is to ensure that economic rights will be the defining achievement of the twenty-first century.

However, as emphasized by Bobbio (1990) and others, the nation state is not the only form of association for generating rights. Most of us belong to associations that establish and enforce individual and group rights within specific communities. A right is what is granted to those who join and remain good members of a club. That perspective produces an image of layers of citizenship and layers of rights. So we can think, for example, of occupational citizenship, implying that some have a ‘right to practise’ a set of activities with designated titles, such as doctor, lawyer, carpenter or baker, along with a right to receive income, benefits, status and representation or agency – rights developed and legitimized within an occupation, often over generations, as in the legal and medical professions.

A fundamental aspect is the right to *belong* to a community or a self-identifying set of communities. This is why freedom must be interpreted as associational freedom, a perspective that stretches from Aristotle through Arendt, but which has been lost by modern social democrats as well as by libertarians and neo-liberals, who see freedom in individualistic terms.

THE MAIN TYPES OF RIGHTS

* Civil rights include the right to life and liberty, a fair trial, due process, equality before the law, legal representation, privacy and freedom of expression, and the right to be treated with equal dignity.

* Cultural rights are rights of individuals and communities to access and participate in their chosen culture, including language and artistic production, in conditions of equality, dignity and non-discrimination.

* Political rights include the right to vote, participate in political life, stand in elections, and participate in civil society.

* Social rights include the right to an adequate standard of living, social protection, occupational health and safety, housing, health care and education, and preservation of and access to the commons.

* Economic rights include the right to practise one's occupation, share in the economic resources of the commons, enjoy a fair share of economic growth, access all forms of income, and bargain individually and collectively.

Human rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable, meaning they cannot be taken away except in specific situations subject to due process. Thus a person convicted of a crime in a court of law may lose their right to liberty.

The term 'claim rights', or 'republican rights', is intended to mean rights that society should move *towards* realizing. As explained in Chapter 4, policies and institutional changes should be judged by whether they move towards realizing rights for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in society.

Rights constantly evolve, at national and international levels. For example, a Charter of Emerging Human Rights, which highlighted distributional and ecological claims, was formulated as part of the Universal Forum of Cultures (Barcelona Social Forum 2004). It made little impact, but should be revisited.

Denizens and restricted rights

In the Middle Ages in England, a denizen was an outsider – an ‘alien’ – who was granted by the king, or an authority operating on his behalf, the right to settle and to work in a town in his proven occupation. He gained some of the rights of a citizen of the town, but rarely all of them and not necessarily forever.

As the idea of citizenship evolved, the notion of denizenship moved to national level. Writing his *Law Dictionary* in the early nineteenth century, Sir Thomas Edlyne described a denizen in these terms:

an alien born, but who so obtained, *ex-donationem regis*, letters patent to make him an *English* subject; a high and incommunicable branch of the royal prerogative. A denizen is in a kind of middle state between an alien and natural-born subject... He may take lands by purchase or devise, which an alien may not... no denizen can be of the privy council, or either house of parliament, or have any office of trust, civil or military, or be capable of any grant of lands, etc. from the crown.

Thus a denizen was usually denied political rights, but was granted designated economic rights as well as the citizen's normal civil rights.

In British colonies, the governor was empowered to grant letters of denization to foreigners if they arrived with letters of recommendation from the relevant British secretary of state. Or they could petition the governor, who could submit their names to the secretary of state for approval. Denizens had to swear the oaths of Allegiance

and Supremacy, disavowing the Pope's temporal authority, abjuring the claims to the English throne of descendants of the Pretender, and affirming the Declaration against Transubstantiation. While Catholics were exempted from the last of these, they were restrictions on 'cultural deviance'.

Thomas Hammar (1994) is credited with the modern reintroduction of the term *denizen*, to refer to migrant workers who came to Western and Northern Europe from the 1960s onwards and became long-term residents. They were granted negative freedoms, including access to the labour market, and gained some positive social security rights. But denizenship remained an 'in-between' concept (Oger 2003; Walker 2008).

This idea of denizenship as an 'in-between' status has historically been one of *progress* for the person involved. A denizen was someone who moved from being an outsider to a partial insider, with some rights. But denizenship should be seen as *regress* as well. In the globalization era, while the rhetoric of rights gained force and popularity, the reality has been the conversion of more people into denizens, denied certain rights or prevented from obtaining or retaining them. This does not affect only migrants. If Hannah Arendt's idea of citizenship is 'the right to have rights' (Arendt [1951] 1986), today it would be better to think of citizenship as a continuum, with many people having a more limited range of rights than others, without any simple dichotomy of citizen and non-citizen.

Until the 1980s, the conventional view was that over the long run, in a democratic society, residence and citizenship should coincide (Brubaker 1989). This would not be true today. Many residing in a country never obtain citizenship or the rights attached to it; others

who have resided since birth lose rights that supposedly go with citizenship.

Many denizens not only have limited rights but also lack 'the right to have rights'. Asylum seekers denied refugee status are an example; migrants who cannot practise the occupation for which they are qualified are another. Often, they do not have the means or the procedural avenues to contest their marginal status. Many lack the capacity to claim or enforce rights, or fear that the act of asserting a claim right would have a high probability of retributive consequences or disastrous costs. Others have no avenues at all for pursuing nominal rights.

Historically, a denizen was granted citizenship rights on sufferance, on demonstration of worthiness, which was a matter of discretion by or on behalf of the ruler. Modern denizens are in a similar position. A denizen can also be seen as someone subject to 'unaccountable domination', that is, domination by others whose conduct cannot be held to account. This is contrary to the republican ideal of non-domination, meaning subject only to accountable legitimized power.

There are six ways by which people can become denizens. They can be blocked from attaining rights, by laws, regulations or non-accountable actions of state bureaucracies. The costs of maintaining rights can be raised. They can lose rights due to a change in status, as employee, resident or whatever. They can be deprived of rights by proper legal process. They can lose rights *de facto*, without due process, even though they may not lose them in a *de jure* (legal) sense. And they can lose them by not conforming to moralistic norms, by having a lifestyle or set of values that puts them outside the range of protection.

One egregious path to denizenship is the loss of rights due to growing criminalization. This is partly because governments have made more activities into crimes. The UK's New Labour government passed 28 criminal justice bills in its 13 years in office, adding the equivalent of one new offence a day to the statute book, many of them trivial (Birrell 2012). The prison population nearly doubled. And digital technologies have also increased the long-term costs of being criminalized, making it harder to wipe the record and exposing people to discrimination long after what may have been a minor misdemeanour.

In sum, denizenship can arise not just from migration but also from an unbundling of rights that removes some or all of the rights nominally attached to formal citizenship. The neo-liberalism that crystallized in the globalization era has generated a 'tiered membership' model of society. Worst of all, the unbundling of rights has gone with a class-based restructuring of rights. This is the ground on which the precariat must make demands.

The right to work and 'labour rights'

Let me start with the importance of work. As I have said before:
Labour – the party of work – the clue is in the name.

Ed Miliband, Leader of the UK Labour Party, June 2013

We must insist on a distinction between 'work' and 'labour', and recognize its implications for the 'right to work', a concept that has caused confusion ever since it was first asserted. While central to

citizenship, it is only meaningful if all forms of work are treated with equal respect. Labour is only part of work.

Every age has had its stupidities about what is work and what is not. The twentieth century was the most stupid of all. As argued in *The Precariat*, and in an earlier book (Standing 2009), we should return to the insights of the ancient Greeks, who had a better conceptualization of work, despite their sexist and slave-based system. Labour was not done by citizens; it was done by slaves, *banausoi* and *metics*. Work was what the citizen and his family did around the home; it was reproductive activity done in civic friendship, *philia*. Play was for recuperation and a balance of life.

The main aim of a citizen was to free up time for leisure, for *scholē*, which was understood as the time and space to participate in the life of the *polis* (community), in the *agora*, the commons, the open social spaces. *Scholē* was a combination of learning and public participation; it was intrinsically political. It was also a vehicle for moral education, through watching and participating in the great theatrical tragedies, where empathy was learned.

Flash forward through the centuries, through the nonsense of Adam Smith and Emmanuel Kant, who both dismissed as unproductive anybody doing what we call 'services', to the triumph of labourism and the male-breadwinner model in the twentieth century. For the first time, all those doing work that was not labour disappeared statistically. As Arthur Pigou famously said, if he hired a housekeeper or cook, national income and employment went up. If he married her and she continued to do the same work, national income and employment went down. This folly persists, in policy and statistics.

In the speech cited above, Miliband went on to say: ‘Our party was founded on the principles of work. We have always been against the denial of opportunity that comes from not having work.’ This is the Labour Party’s problem. Only work done for bosses, in subservience, in master-servant relations, as labour law has put it, counts in this vision of society.

The first batch of Labour MPs in 1906, when asked what book had most influenced their political thought, cited John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* ([1860] 1986). The theme of that elegiac essay had been the need to struggle for the values of work against the dictates of labour. Interpreted for today, his argument was that only creative, ecological, reproductive work done in freedom should count. Alienated resource-depleting labour should be resisted. This inspired William Morris, another contemporary voice shouting against labourism. He would have been horrified at the labourist trap into which Miliband fell when going on to justify workfare, forced labour for the unemployed.

As explained elsewhere (Standing 2009, 2013a), we should define the ‘right to work’ as the right to pursue an occupation of one’s choice, where occupation comprises a combination of work, labour, leisure and recuperation that corresponds to one’s abilities and aspirations. While that will never be fully realized, policies and institutional changes should be judged by whether they move towards or away from it for the most deprived in the community.

The emerging class structure

Each epoch and productive system spawns its class system. As argued in *The Precariat*, globalization, starting in the 1980s, has generated a class structure, superimposed on earlier structures, comprising an elite, a salariat, proficians, an old 'core' working class (proletariat), a precariat, the unemployed and a lumpen-precariat (or 'underclass'). A group of scholars has since come up with a variant of this classification, though it differs in significant respects (Savage et al. 2013).

Class can be defined as being determined primarily by specific 'relations of production', specific 'relations of distribution' (sources of income), and specific relations to the state. From these arises a distinctive 'consciousness' of desirable reforms and social policies.

Starting at the top of the income spectrum, the elite or plutocracy consists of a tiny number of individuals who are really 'super-citizens'; they reside in several countries and escape the obligations of citizenship everywhere while helping to limit the rights of citizens almost everywhere. They are not the 1 per cent depicted by the Occupy movement. They are far fewer than that, and exercise more power than most people appreciate. Their financial strength shapes political discourse, economic policies and social policy. Thus the Koch brothers in the USA have spent billions in funding Republican congressional candidates, conservative think tanks, and groups opposing action on climate change.

In *Superclass* (2009) and *Power, Inc.* (2012), David Rothkopf has argued that a global elite of 6,000 runs the world without regard to national allegiance. These super-citizens include corporations,

whose influence over US policy has been reinforced by the 2010 Supreme Court ruling that they have the same rights of free speech as individuals and can spend what they wish to promote their views. In a study of corporate networks, a mere 147 entities (mostly financial groups and mostly owned or run by the elite) were found to control 40 per cent of the value of the world's multinationals; 737 entities controlled 80 per cent (Torgovnick 2013).

In some respects, the elite coalesce with senior corporate citizens belonging to the salariat. This class consists of those in long-term employment or with contracts that promise permanency, if they adhere to conventional rules of behaviour and performance. They receive extensive non-wage enterprise benefits and all the forms of labour security outlined in the earlier book.

The salariat has been the primary beneficiary of twentieth-century social democracy. Its members come closest to having all the rights associated with being national citizens. Most are also corporate or occupational citizens, or both, in that they receive benefits and rights granted to members of these club-like entities. What puts them in a distinctive class position is that they receive much of their income from profits and shares, often indirectly through company or private pension plans, and benefit from generous tax breaks (subsidies) on their spending – housing, insurance, pensions, charitable donations and so on. This inclines them to support a market society and neo-liberal individualism, an orientation reinforced by the trend to a commodified education system, deprived of much of its enlightenment content.

Alongside the salariat in income terms are proficians, consisting of a growing number of people, often youthful, who are mobile

self-entrepreneurs, wary of salaried employment, flitting between projects and occupational titles. Some hope to enter the plutocracy, most live a stressful life, subject to burn-out and nervous exhaustion. But most like their bank balances.

Below the salariat and proficians in terms of income is the old working class, the proletariat. Here we plunge into treacherous conceptual waters. The proletariat still exists, but it is not a majority anywhere and is shrinking. It was never a homogeneous class. But it could be defined by several modal characteristics, notably by its 'relations of production' and its 'relations of distribution'. The working class was expected to supply stable labour, even if its members were subject to unemployment. The term that characterized their working lives was proletarianization, habituation to stable full-time labour. Even their representatives, trade unions and labour parties, preached a doctrine of disciplined labour.

Their relations of distribution meant their income came mainly from wages, supplemented by enterprise benefits provided to raise labour productivity. Outside the workplace, income was supplemented by transfers from kin and the community, and income-in-kind from public services and 'the commons'. So, the proletariat was defined by its reliance on mass labour, reliance on wage income, absence of control or ownership of the means of production, and habituation to stable labour that corresponded to its skills.

From the nineteenth century up to the 1970s, the representatives of the proletariat – social democratic and labour parties, and trade unions – strove for labour de-commodification through making labour more 'decent' and raising incomes via a shift from money wages to enterprise and state benefits. The normal 'consciousness'

was a desire for more secure employment, to increase the ease of subordinated labour.

All labour and communist parties, social democrats and unions subscribed to this agenda, calling for ‘more labour’ and ‘full employment’, by which was meant all men in full-time jobs. Besides being sexist, this neglected all forms of work that were not labour (including reproductive work in the home, caring for others, work in the community, and other self-chosen activities). It also erased a vision of freedom from labour that had figured powerfully in radical thinking in previous ages.

The precariat

As that labourist agenda ran out of steam, a new group – the precariat – began to emerge. Rather than repeat a description of its evolution, we may just note its defining characteristics. Many are perceived as negative. But there are also positive features, which are what make the precariat a potentially transformative ‘dangerous class’.

Distinctive relations of production

First, consider its relations of production. The precariat consists of people living through insecure jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment or labour-force withdrawal (misnamed as ‘economic inactivity’) and living insecurely, with uncertain access to housing and public resources. They experience a constant sense of transiency.

The precariat lacks all seven forms of labour-related security that the old working class struggled to obtain, and that were pursued

internationally through the International Labour Organization (ILO). Of course, there have always been workers with insecure conditions. That alone does not define today's precariat. But the precariat has distinctive relations of production because the new *norm*, not the exception, is uncertain and volatile labour. Whereas the proletarian norm was habituation to stable labour, the precariat is being habituated to unstable labour. This cannot be overcome simply by boosting economic growth or introducing new regulations.

Labour instability is central to global capitalism. Multinational capital not only wants flexible insecure labour but can also obtain it from any part of the world. In a global market economy, trying to curb labour instability in any one country would fail. This is not a counsel of despair; it is a call for an alternative approach.

Put bluntly, the proletariat's representatives demand decent labour, lots of it; the precariat wishes to escape from labour, materially and psychologically, because its labour is instrumental, not self-defining. Many in the precariat do not even aspire to secure labour. They saw their parents trapped in long-term jobs, too frightened to leave, partly because they would have lost modest enterprise benefits that depended on 'years of service'. But in any event, those jobs are no longer on offer to the precariat. Twentieth-century spheres of labour protection – labour law, labour regulations, collective bargaining, labourist social security – were constructed around the image of the firm, fixed workplaces, and fixed working days and work-weeks that apply only to a minority in today's tertiary online society. While proletarian consciousness is linked to long-term security in a firm, mine, factory or office, the precariat's consciousness is linked to a search for security outside the workplace.

The precariat is not a ‘proto-proletariat’, that is, becoming like the proletariat. But the centrality of unstable labour to global capitalism is also why it is not an underclass, as some would have it. According to Marx, the proletariat wanted to abolish itself. The same could be said of the precariat. But the proletariat wanted thereby to universalize stable labour. And whereas it had a material interest in economic growth and the fiction of full employment, the precariat has an interest in recapturing a progressive vision of ‘freedom from labour’, so establishing a meaningful right to work. The precariat should be sceptical about growth, seeing the downside in terms of social externalities, ecological destruction and loss of the commons.

Distinctive relations of distribution

Second, the precariat has distinctive relations of distribution, or remuneration. Rather than compressing income into capital (profits) on the one hand and wages on the other, the idea of ‘social income’ (Standing 2009) aims to capture all forms of income that people can receive – own-account production, income from producing or selling to the market, money wages, enterprise non-wage benefits, community benefits, state benefits, and income from financial and other assets.

In early industrial capitalism, it was unusual for workers to receive only money wages (McNally 1993). But during the twentieth century, the trend was away from money wages, with a rising share of social income coming from enterprise and state benefits. What distinguishes the precariat is the opposite trend, with sources of income other than wages virtually disappearing.

This is a structural change. The precariat lacks access to non-wage perks, such as paid vacations, medical leave, company pensions and so on. It also lacks rights-based state benefits, linked to legal entitlements, leaving it dependent on discretionary, insecure benefits, if any. And it lacks access to community benefits, in the form of a strong commons (public services and amenities) and strong family and local support networks. This has been under-emphasized in labour-process analysis.

The enclosure movement, precursor of the Industrial Revolution, created conditions conducive to proletarianization. With twentieth-century capitalism, community systems of reciprocity and solidarity fell into decay, as social functions were taken over by the state and corporations. Then, in the globalization era, commodification and privatization of social amenities and services completed the dismantling of what had been a vital component of social income throughout history.

Another distinctive aspect of the precariat's relations of distribution is that it has no access to income from profits or rent, whereas groups above it have been gaining capital income in some form or another. It does not make sense to divide people into 'capitalists' and a unified 'working class' when the salariat receives a large and growing part of its income from profits. This is a greater source of inequality than commonly appreciated, since it provides higher-income earners with a share of global capital income. It has accompanied a regressive shift in the functional distribution of income, from wages to profits. The salariat's material interests have become more unlike those of other workers.

STRENGTH OF RIGHTS BY CLASS

<div><div>Rights</div><div>Class</div></div>	Civil	Political	Cultural	Social	Economic
Plutocracy, elite	●	●	●	○	●
Proficians	●	●	●	●	●
Salariat	●	●	●	●	●
Core	●	●	●	●	●
Precariat	●	●	●	●	×
Lumpen-precariat	×	×	×	×	×

FIGURE 1: *Matrix of strength of rights by class*

Note: ● weak ● quite strong ● strong ● doubtful, under attack × absent
○ not needed

Political rights: The precariat is relatively disenfranchised, as its members are less likely to have a vote (e.g. migrants) or less likely to exercise it (e.g. youth, minorities). As long as the precariat remains a minority or stays divided, politicians have little electoral incentive to promote policies in its favour.

Civil rights: The precariat is losing rights to due process, especially in the areas of employment and social benefits.

Cultural rights: Governments are demanding more conformity to societal norms and majoritarian institutions, intensifying a cultural marginalization of minorities.

Economic and social rights: The precariat is losing economic and social rights, notably in the spheres of state benefits and the right to practise an occupation.

Distinctive relations to the state

A *third* feature of the precariat is its distinctive relations to the state. The state is not the same as government. It consists of the institutions and mechanisms that determine how society is ordered and how income and assets are distributed. As will be argued later, the precariat lacks many of the rights provided to citizens in the core working class and salariat. Members of the precariat are denizens.

The word precarious is usually taken as synonymous with insecure. But being precarious also means depending on the will of another. It is about being a supplicant, without rights, dependent on charity or bureaucratic benevolence.

The precariat is confronted by neo-liberal norms, in state institutions, conventional political rhetoric and utilitarian social policy, which privilege the interests of a perceived 'middle class', alongside the plutocracy. The state treats the precariat as necessary but as a group to be criticized, pitied, demonized, sanctioned or penalized in turn, not as a focus of social protection or betterment of well-being.

While we might say that political parties of the right look after their middle class, as consisting of the salariat and proficians, along with parts of the plutocracy they wish to cultivate, social democratic parties look after their middle class, as consisting of the lower rungs of the salariat and the proletariat, along with liberal members of the elite. It has served the interest of both sides to ignore or disparage the predicament of the precariat, as long as it was a small minority. This will change.

Lack of occupational identity

A *fourth* feature of the precariat is lack of an occupational identity or narrative to give to life. This is a source of frustration, alienation, anxiety and anomic despair. Recognizing this does not imply a romantic view of the past, since throughout history many people have had to survive through myriad unpredictable activities. Nevertheless, the turmoil in occupational communities is pervasive in the globalization era and has created trauma in the precariat. Even many who manage to enter a profession or craft feel uncertain about their future, unsure about what they are doing or about having a ladder to climb. The guild traditions that guided occupational life for two millennia gave people an anchor, a code of ethics, status, feasible lifetime trajectories and communities of practice.

Much of an earlier book (Standing 2009) was devoted to analysing how the neo-liberal strategy set out to dismantle occupational communities, largely unnoticed by commentators. In so doing, governments eroded the ethics of reciprocity and solidarity that had been an integral part of occupational life. Social democrats were as remiss in rejecting the positive aspects of the guilds as the political right. In the UK, guild life has virtually disappeared, leaving just the pantomime of the City of London's livery companies, an excuse for the elite to dress up in funny togs and have lavish get-together dinners. But the precariat has no occupational trajectory by which to define life.

Lack of control over time

A *fifth* feature of the precariat, again distinguishing the precariat from the proletariat, is that its members must undertake a great deal

of work that is not paid labour. They are exploited and oppressed by a squeeze on time unlike the past. We may call the phenomenon ‘tertiary time’ to distinguish it from ‘industrial time’, the underpinning of industrial capitalism (Standing 2013b). The precariat cannot demarcate life into blocks of time. It is expected to be available for labour and work at all times of the day and night.

This is epitomized by the growing phenomena of crowd-labour and zero-hours contracts; millions of people (the statistics do not tell us) are hired without specified hours of labour, but are required to be on standby for moments of activity. Others are expected to flit between activities, to network constantly, wait, queue, retrain, fill in forms, do a little of this, a little of that. It all goes with the precariatized mind, a feeling of having too much to do at almost all times. It is corrosive, leaving people fatigued, stressed, frustrated and incapable of coherent action.

The pressure extends from reproductive work, with pressure to prepare for some mirage of a tomorrow, through rounds of retraining and résumé-refreshing, to work on personal financial management, juggling debts and ways to make ends meet. To take ‘time out’ is to risk missing opportunities and falling behind, although it is never clear behind whom. For the precariat a high ratio of work to labour is a norm.

Detachment from labour

A *sixth* feature underlines why the precariat should not be seen solely as victim or vulnerable, terms taken too much for granted. Those in the precariat are more likely to have a psychological detachment from labour,

being only intermittently or instrumentally involved in labour, and not having a single labour status – often being unsure what to put under ‘occupation’ on official forms. This makes them less likely to develop the false consciousness that the jobs they are doing are dignifying.

They are therefore more likely to feel alienated from the dull, mentally narrowing jobs they are forced to endure and to reject them as a satisfying way of working and living. Do not tell me I am being a responsible citizen in doing this lousy job of packing shelves, serving drinks, sweeping floors or whatever it is today! Detachment in this sense is potentially liberating. Do not say my job must be satisfying or a route to ‘happiness’. I do it for the money. I will find my life and develop outside it.

Low social mobility

A *seventh* feature is one the precariat shares with many in the proletariat, though not with the salariat and proficians. It emphasizes why it is unhelpful to compress all ‘workers’ into a single ‘working class’. It is that the precariat has a very low probability of social mobility. The longer a person is in it, the lower the probability of escape. In most of Europe and North America, social mobility has declined, alongside growing income inequality, since the start of the globalization era (Blanden, Gregg and Machin 2005; Sawhill 2008; OECD 2010). Ironically, this has emerged during a period in which governments have claimed to be promoting meritocracy and social mobility.

Over-qualification

An *eighth* feature is over-qualification. For the first time in history, the mainstream worker – or what Marxists call ‘labour power’ – is

over-qualified for the labour he or she is expected to undertake. As a society, we have yet to come to terms with this, and so far the political response seems to be the wrong one.

In early industrial capitalism, most workers were expected to learn a trade that conformed to the skills practised in their labour. Today, it is rare for people to use more than a fraction of their skills or qualifications in a job. 'Credentialism' rules. Having high-level qualifications is just enough to enter the labour market lottery. For many jobs, candidates must have either a well-connected parent or qualifications greater than could possibly be used by the job in question. This leads to an epidemic of status frustration and to stress from 'invisible underemployment', having underemployed skills. For the precariat today, there is nothing invisible about it.

Uncertainty

A *ninth* feature is that the precariat is subject to a peculiar combination of forms of insecurity. The labourist model of industrial capitalism was based on the norm of a nuclear family in which the male 'breadwinner' was expected to earn a 'family wage', enough to keep a dependent wife and several children in subsistence. In the twentieth century, 'fictitious' labour decommmodification took place through the construction of enterprise and state benefits supposed to cover what economists call contingency risks, those that arise from what one is doing. These were wrongly depicted as labour 'rights'. They were acquired for specific groups who struggled to secure them, but they were never universal or unconditional.

Besides being mostly sexist and patriarchal, as befitted the labourist model, compensatory benefits were constructed on the premise that

one could, in principle, calculate the probability of a risk coming about (unemployment, illness, pregnancy, retirement, etc.). Thus for the proletariat in stable labour, contingency risks could be covered by social insurance. The interests of the 'rough' minority were of less concern.

However, in a tertiary open market economy, social insurance systems cannot give strong social protection. The precariat faces uncertainty, 'unknown unknowns'. With uncertainty (as distinct from risk), a person cannot calculate the probability of an adverse event. Today there are far more spheres of uncertainty, due largely to economic liberalization and a market system based on competition and created scarcity. The probability of adverse shocks and hazards is higher, the cost of adverse events is greater, and the ability to cope with and recover from them is lower. This is more worrying than suggested by the term 'risk society'. And not only is the precariat exposed to more spheres of uncertainty than other groups, it is also less resilient, having fewer resources to deal with them. So the impact of adverse events is more severe.

Poverty and precarity traps

This leads to the *tenth* feature of the precariat, which no other group experiences – a combination of poverty traps, exploitation and coercion outside the workplace, and precarity traps that amounts to a tsunami of adversity. The welfare state, in all its variants, was built for and by the proletariat. It was based on national or social insurance, with benefits tied to regular contributions by or on behalf of regular employees. As the precariat has grown, this model has decayed. All

welfare states have moved towards means-tested social assistance, supposedly targeting help on 'the poor'. In the past, the poor were the 'rough', outside the mainstream of society. Now social policy is geared to identifying the poor through means-testing.

For the precariat this creates severe poverty traps. Anybody receiving means-tested benefits who then takes a low-wage casual job can face a marginal 'tax' rate close to 100 per cent. Since going from benefits to labour costs time and money, there is no incentive to labour at all. Though governments have introduced tapers in the form of 'in-work' benefits and tax credits, they have failed to overcome the poverty trap. Millions in industrialized countries face an effective tax rate of over 80 per cent, double what the salariat is expected to tolerate, and treble what multinational corporations are supposed to pay when they are not siphoning off profits to overseas tax havens.

As there is no incentive to take low-paying jobs, poverty traps have led predictably to state coercion in the form of 'workfare', whereby youth and others are obliged to take low-wage jobs or do unpaid 'work experience', on pain of being penalized and demonized as 'scroungers', 'skivers' and the like.

There has also been a growth of precarity traps, situations where taking low-paid jobs can be expected to lower income subsequently (see Article 17 of the Charter). The state requires the precariat to undertake a lot of work to try to gain entitlement to benefits, through numerous steps of personal action, each a barrier to be overcome, a trap for the unwary, nervous, ignorant, frail or short-tempered. Life is built around queuing, form-filling, providing extensive documentation, frequent reporting for interviews, answering 'trick' questions,

and so on. The process becomes harder, more humiliating and prolonged. Taking a low-wage job that could end at any moment would risk being back at the beginning of this benefit-claiming process within weeks. No rational person would take such a job in these circumstances. Yet the precariat is being forced to do so.

This form of precarity trap is widespread in the countries of Northern Europe, including the UK, where wages at the lower end of the labour market and state benefits are chasing each other downwards. Elsewhere, other precarity traps are more common. They include the situation where taking a low-status low-wage job lowers the probability of obtaining a career job later, a trap made worse by the threat of benefit sanctions if the low-wage job is refused. Another precarity trap arises from the difficulty of moving in search of employment. In many countries, youths, in particular, cannot rent an apartment because without a 'permanent' job they are not accepted as tenants.

In sum, the precariat is defined by ten features. Not all are unique to it. But taken together, the elements define a social group, and for that reason we may call the precariat a class-in-the-making. Critics may claim the notion is too vague, as if that were not true of 'the working class' or 'the middle class'. However, two questions remain. Is the precariat a single group? And is it the new dangerous class?

Varieties of precariat

The precariat is not homogeneous. There is nothing unusual about this. All classes have had fractions, especially during their evolution.

But the precariat is divided to such an extent that one could describe it as a class at war with itself. This may change sooner than some observers imagine.

In *The Precariat*, the precariat was divided into ‘grinners’ and ‘groaners’, those who accepted the status with equanimity and those who felt frustrated, angry and desperate. A complementary way of looking at what has been happening is to identify three varieties of precariat.

The first consists of people bumped out of working-class communities and families. They experience a sense of relative deprivation. They, their parents or grandparents belonged to working-class occupations, with status, skill and respect. Looking back to an imagined or real past, they become atavistic, asking why life cannot be as it was. They are also relatively uneducated, and so more likely to listen to populists peddling neo-fascist agendas. People in this part of the precariat typically blame the ‘other’ for their plight and are keen to punish others in the precariat by cutting ‘their’ benefits, even when they are receiving benefits themselves or face the prospect of needing them.

The second variety consists of traditional denizens – migrants, Roma, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers in limbo, all those with the least secure rights anywhere. It also includes some of the disabled and a growing number of ex-convicts. This group too experiences relative deprivation, comparing current experience with ‘home’ or a previous world lost to them. The nostalgia may be delusional, but anger is likely to be combined with a pragmatic need to survive. This part of the precariat may be detached from the political and social mainstream. They keep their heads down. That should not be

mistaken for lack of resentment or readiness to become active if a vision emerges to energize them.

Their anger may feed into a willingness to labour hard, to offer a high effort bargain. It is not surprising that migrants are preferred as labourers, or that, in a number of OECD countries, the majority of new jobs in recent years have reportedly been taken by migrants. That is why the first variety of the precariat is so easily mobilized against the second.

However, there is a third, rapidly growing variety. It consists of the educated, plunged into a precariat existence after being promised the opposite, a bright career of personal development and satisfaction. Most are in their twenties and thirties. But they are not alone. Many drifting out of a salariat existence are joining them.

The defining feature of this part of the precariat is another form of relative deprivation, a sense of status frustration. They are not doing what they set out to do, and there is little prospect of doing so. But because of their education, and awareness of the drabness or absurdity of the labour they are expected to accept, they are well placed to appreciate the delusion of labourism and the need for a new progressive vision. We should not be surprised to find a new youthful romanticism, a flourishing artistic outbreak, analogous to what happened two centuries ago (Hobsbawm [1962] 1977). Perhaps the biggest challenge for this part of the precariat is to induce the other varieties to share a common vision. There is no reason why that cannot happen, just as craftsmen and intellectuals acted as educators and leaders of 'the working class' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it is a challenge.

In sum, we can say that the first part of the precariat experiences deprivation relative to a real or imagined past, the second relative to

an absent present, an absent 'home', and the third relates to a feeling of having no future. But enough of the three groups must find a common identity, for the precariat must form a class-for-itself, if only to have the strength to seek to abolish itself.

Why the precariat is 'a dangerous class'

The precariat is a class-in-the-making, in that those in it have distinctive relations of production, relations of distribution (sources of income) and relations to the state, but not yet a common consciousness or a common view of what to do about precarity. While many understand the precariat and what it means to be in it, some scholars reject the concept as describing a class (e.g. Braga 2012). One understands the reluctance of Marxists to dispense with the dichotomy of capital and labour, though while they dismiss ideas of a new class they often talk of 'the middle class', a most un-Marxian concept. But their desire to compress the precariat into old notions of 'the working class' or 'the proletariat' distracts us from developing an appropriate vocabulary and set of images to guide twenty-first century analysis.

To say the precariat is 'dangerous' is to make the point that its class interests are opposed to the mainstream political agendas of the twentieth century, the neo-liberalism of the mainstream 'right' and the labourism of social democracy. However, as of 2013, the precariat was still not a class-for-itself; while all three varieties were aware of what they were against – insecurity, impoverishment, debt, lack of occupational identity and multiple inequalities – they were not yet

agreed on, or perhaps even aware of, what they needed or wanted. The precariat was still in the 'primitive rebel' phase, like the Luddites of the early nineteenth century or others that have emerged in the disembedded phase of transformations.

The precariat is dangerous for another related reason, because it is still at war with itself. If populist demagoguery had its way, the first variety would turn vicious towards the second, as has been happening in Greece, Hungary and Italy. It is also dangerous because, as predicted in *The Precariat*, the combination of anxiety, alienation, anomie and anger can be expected to lead to more days of riot and protest. And it is dangerous because stress, economic insecurity and frustration can lead and are leading to social illnesses, including drug-taking, petty crime, domestic violence and suicide.

Finally, the precariat is dangerous because it is confronted by a strident divisive state. Many in it feel commodified, treated as objects to be coerced to labour, penalized for not labouring, exhorted by politicians to do more. Nobody should be surprised if they react anomically. But since the precariat is emotionally detached from the labour it is expected to do, it is less inclined to imagine that jobs are the road to happiness or that job creation is a sign of social progress. The precariat pins its hopes and aspirations elsewhere. Quite soon, it will echo a slogan of 1968: 'Ça suffit!'