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A Politics of Inferno

The neo-liberal state is neo-Darwinist, in that it reveres competitiveness and celebrates unrestrained individual responsibility, with an antipathy to anything collective that might impede market forces. The state's role is seen primarily as setting and strengthening the rule of law. But the rule of law has never been minimalist, as some neo-liberals depict it. It is intrusive and oriented to curbing nonconformity and collective action. This extends to what Wacquant (2008: 14) called 'the public anathematization of deviant categories', notably 'street thugs', the 'unemployed', 'scroungers', the failures, losers with character flaws and behavioural deficiencies.

The market is the embodiment of the Darwinian metaphor, 'the survival of the fittest'. But it has a disquieting tendency to turn strugglers into misfits and villains, to be penalised, locked up or locked out. Policies and institutions are constructed that treat everyone as potential misfits and villains. For example, those who are 'poor' must prove they are not 'lazy' or that they are sending their children to school regularly to obtain entitlement to state benefits.

The precariat hovers on the borderline, exposed to circumstances that could turn them from strugglers into deviants and loose cannons prone to listen to populist politicians and demagogues. This is the primary issue underlying this chapter.

The panopticon society

While the 'social factory' is not right as an image of how life for the precariat is being constructed, a better image is a 'panopticon society', in which all social spheres are taking the shape envisaged by Jeremy Bentham's panopticon papers of 1787 (Bentham, 1995). It is not just what is *done* by government but what is *allowed* by the state in an ostensibly 'free market' society.

Let us recall Bentham's vision. He is known as the father of utilitarianism, the view that government should promote 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. This conveniently allows some to rationalise making the minority thoroughly miserable, in the interests of preserving the happiness of the majority. Bentham took this in a scary direction, in a design for an ideal prison. An all-seeing guard would be in a central watchtower overlooking prisoners in their cells in a circular building. The guard could see them, but

they could not see him. The guard's power lay in the fact that the prisoners could not know whether or not he was watching, and so acted as if he was watching, out of fear. Bentham used the term 'an architecture of choice', by which he meant that the authorities could induce the prisoners to behave in desired ways.

The key point for Bentham was that the prisoner was given an appearance of choice. But if he did not make the *right* choice, which was to labour hard, he would be left to 'languish on bad bread and drink his water, without a soul to speak to'. And prisoners were to be isolated, to prevent them forming 'a concert of minds'. He realised, just as neo-liberals were to realise, that collective agency would jeopardise the panopticon project.

It was an idea Michel Foucault took up in the 1970s as a metaphor for producing 'docile bodies'. Bentham believed his panopticon design could be used for hospitals, mental asylums, schools, factories, the workhouse and all social institutions. Around the world his design has been adopted and has been extended inadvertently by twenty-first-century company towns. The worst case so far is Shenzhen, where 6 million workers are watched by closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras everywhere they go and where a comprehensive databank monitors their behaviour and character, modelled on technology developed by the US military. One could talk of 'Shenzhenism' in the way social scientists talk of 'Fordism' and 'Toyotism' as systems of production and employment control. 'Shenzhenism' combines visual monitoring with 'dataveillance' and behavioural incentives and penalties to sift out undesirables, identify suitably conformist workers and induce workers to think and behave in ways the authorities want.

The invasion of privacy

Panopticon techniques are on the march. Let us start with a vital aspect of life, privacy or the space for intimacy, where we live with our secrets and most precious emotions and spaces. It is an endangered species.

What is legitimised as privacy is subject to legal interpretation, and legal rulings have tended to shrink it. But the panopticon trend is remorseless. CCTV is ubiquitous, used not only by the police but also by private security companies, businesses and individuals. Nor is the footage simply for private use. Consider one little example. A resident in a tough neighbourhood of San Francisco, concerned about street security, set up Adam's Block as an open-access site webcasting a video feed from a street intersection. That site was obliged to shut after threats and complaints to the webcam owner that privacy was being abused. But others secretly installed cameras in the same area, live-casting under a new name, claiming to 'empower citizens to fight crime and save lives'. There are said to be many similar neighbourhood webcams throughout the United States.

Google Street View, launched in 2007, has already attracted the attention of data protection regulators in North America and Europe for illegally (apparently inadvertently) obtaining personal information from unsecured wireless networks along routes travelled by Google's cameras. Street View puts people's houses, cars and activities on display for all the world to see, and there is no way to object apart from politely requesting that images be blurred. This is something few people will know how to undertake, assuming they have checked what Street View has captured in the first place.

Social media, such as Facebook, are also shrinking the zone of privacy, as users, predominantly young people, reveal, wittingly or unwittingly, their most intimate details to 'friends' and many others besides. Location-based services take this a step further, letting users alert 'friends' to where they are (and enabling businesses, the police, criminals and others to know too). Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook founder and chief executive, told Silicon Valley entrepreneurs: 'People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people... That social norm is just something that has evolved'.

Surveillance prompts images of a 'police state', and certainly it starts with the police, strengthening a divide between the police and the watched. Surveillance also induces 'sousveillance', watching the watchers. During demonstrations against a Group of 20 meeting in London in 2009, an amateur video taken on a mobile phone showed a policeman beating a man who had been innocently walking in the street; the man died. It was a reminder that guards are not necessarily protectors. And as sousveillance grows, police surveillance will become more pre-emptive. Watchers of the police will be transformed into categories to be dealt with because they are a threat to the police.

The invasion of privacy and the technological capacity to peer deep into our lives are a base for extending the panopticon and its objectives into every aspect of them. There is even monitoring from inside the body. New pills produced by US drug companies will provide doctors with data from inside the body. Some might regard this as beneficial and a matter of free choice. But the situation could arise where, if we did not agree to internal monitoring, health (or other) insurance premiums could be raised or we could be denied coverage. Such technology could become mandatory or be enforced by insurance firms.

On the internet, surveillance is business. Information from people's web searches, social media pages and other internet activities is routinely fed to commercial companies. Social networking may have started as 'friendly encounters of a voyeuristic kind'. But it is becoming 'complicit surveillance', co-opted for commercial or more sinister motives. A net-watch society is being built.

As the US *National Broadband Plan* (Federal Communications Commission, 2010) points out, it is now possible for a single firm to build up individual 'digital identity' profiles, 'including web searches, sites visited, clickstream, email contacts and content, map searches, geographic location and movements,

calendar appointments, mobile phone book, health records, educational records, energy usage, pictures and videos, social networks, locations visited, eating, reading, entertainment preferences, and purchasing history'. Most people do not know what information is being collected about them and who has access to it.

When Facebook launched Facebook Beacon in 2007, automatically sending 'friends' details of members' online purchases, a sousveillance campaign by MoveOn.org forced it to switch the application to an 'opt-in' programme. In 2009 Beacon was shut down following a class action privacy lawsuit. But Facebook is still collecting information on members from other sources, such as newspapers, messaging services and blogs, 'to provide you with more useful information and a more personalised experience'. Most users, from inertia or ignorance, accept Facebook's default privacy settings, which share information widely. According to one US survey, 45 per cent of employers checked social network profiles of prospective employees. Non-US users also consent, without realising it, to having personal data transferred and processed in the United States. Users are not notified when or how the data are used.

Website privacy controls have not worked well. Electronic systems have eroded privacy and given the state enormously powerful tools with which to construct a panopticon system. Those in the precariat are most vulnerable because they indulge in activities that are open to monitoring and judgment calls and because they are more exposed to the consequences.

Warrantless wiretapping is spreading too, monitoring us all. The 'war on terror' has brought the panopticon society closer. The US National Security Agency has advanced digital identification and monitoring techniques as a global system (Bamford, 2009). It can now indulge in non-legalised access to everything we do electronically or over phone lines. The surveillance-industrial complex is global. The Chinese are matching the United States. When the National People's Congress was held in Beijing in 2010, 700,000 security personnel were posted across the city. Inside the Great Hall of the People, proposals reportedly put forward by delegates included calls for all internet cafés to be taken over by the government and for all cell phones to be equipped with surveillance cameras. Soon it will be impossible to tell.

Panopticon schooling

It starts early. Schools and universities are using electronic methods to teach, monitor, discipline and assess. A Swedish businessman has created a largely automatic schooling model, used for thousands of Swedish schoolchildren, which is being exported with commercial success. The children are closely monitored, but they see their teachers for only 15 minutes a week. Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was attracted by the system for academy schools in London.

Some schools in the United States have provided students with laptops equipped with security software allowing remote activation of the computer's

webcam, enabling them to view the students at any time without their knowledge. A class action suit was brought by students in February 2010 against a school district in suburban Philadelphia after a school accused a student of indulging in 'improper behaviour in his home'. This was surely a violation of his civil rights. And apart from opening up blackmail possibilities, such technology also provides the panopticon capacity to create docile minds and bodies. A middle school in South Bronx, New York, installed software in laptops so that officials could view whatever was displayed on the screen. The school's assistant principal spent part of each day checking what students were doing, often observing them using Photo Booth, a programme that uses the webcam to turn the screen into a virtual mirror. 'I always like to mess with them and take their picture', he told a documentary programme.

Most of us do not know if we are subject to such practices. Those Philadelphia children certainly did not. The fact is that the techniques exist to monitor behaviour, and the data can be accessed and used as people move into their adult lives. That is what is happening.

Hiring, firing and workplace discipline

The encroachment of panopticon apparatus into hiring, discipline, promotion and dismissal strategies of companies and organisations has been largely unchecked. It particularly jeopardises the life chances of the precariat, in subtle and diverse ways.

The neo-liberal state claims to favour non-discriminatory labour practices, trumpeting equal opportunity as the essence of 'meritocracy'. But it has largely turned a blind eye to discriminatory techniques and practices based on electronic surveillance, insurance markets and subsidised research in behavioural psychology. The resultant discrimination is more refined but works in the same way as crude forms based on gender, race, age or schooling. The latest twist is genetic profiling. It is appropriate that crucial research has been done in authoritarian Singapore. A study there showed how people with a particular variant of a gene (called HTR2A) are less moody and more likely to make docile workers. What is the message of this path-breaking research? Give temporary workers some variant HTR2A or weed out those without it?

Hormones also play their part. Research in Japan suggests that those with low levels of the stress hormone cortisol were more prepared than those with higher levels to accept low current income in the hope of receiving more later. If you were hiring someone for a temporary job, which person would you recruit if you knew their hormone levels? Then there is testosterone. High levels go with a desire to dominate and take risks. For most jobs, particularly precarious jobs, employers do not want workers frustrated by low status and high control. The Singapore research indicated that high testosterone diminishes a person's capacity to be a conforming team worker. It is not hard to identify the level of

someone's testosterone – a mouth swab will do. Or firms can devise 'aptitude tests' that applicants must complete.

The precariat must be careful, since the way one lives affects testosterone level. If you live an exciting life, it goes up; if you live a docile one, it goes down. Job access could depend on keeping it low! Some will dismiss such scenarios as scaremongering. But what is the purpose of this genetic research? Unless there are checks on its use, behavioural sifting will only grow stronger. *The Economist* (2010c) enthused that it would make 'management science into a real science'. On the contrary, it is more likely to lead to social engineering.

Besides those developments, a growing number of US firms weed out job applicants with bad credit records, believing they would make risky employees. So past behaviour outside your work is used against you. Companies are doing this systematically, also drawing on social networking sites to assess character traits as well as past misdemeanours, relationships and so on. But this is unfair discrimination. There are many reasons for a spell of 'bad credit', including illness or a family tragedy. Secret screening by crude proxies for possible behaviour is unfair.

We mentioned earlier how firms are demanding that job applicants produce time-consuming CVs and that at some stage there will be resistance. Will that be anomic protest, through sullen refusals to comply? Or will be it a 'primitive rebel' action, such as saturating agencies with phoney applications? Or will it be a political protest, through organised resistance, by a campaign to limit the boundaries of personality vetting, by setting codes for what companies should and should not do? The last could become a badge of honour, respected by those with empathy for the condition of the precariat, as an assertion of a right of privacy, a rejection of the intrusion.

Beyond recruitment, the panopticon is in its element in tertiary workplaces. National industrial capitalism spawned company towns. There were over 2,500 in the United States (Green, 2010). In modified forms, this paternalistic concept has persisted, some evolving into vast corporate creations. Thus IBM and PepsiCo have town-sized campuses in the middle of nowhere. The Chinese have gone further with Shenzhen; Foxconn is the global leader. But they are all exhibits of a panopticon market society.

In early 2010, it was revealed that Wall Street firms were hiring 'moonlighting' active Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents to train managers in 'tactical behaviour assessment' techniques. These are ways of checking on employee honesty by reading verbal and behavioural clues, such as fidgeting or use of qualifying statements like 'honestly' and 'frankly'.

Privacy in jobs is evaporating. Most US firms now require recruits to sign electronic communications policies stating they have no rights to privacy or to ownership over any content on company computers. Whatever is put on a computer belongs to the company. All notes, photographs and drafts are alienated. Moreover, firms now prefer to remove an employee immediately

rather than have them serve a notice period, during which they could download information, contact lists and so on.

Two-thirds of American employers electronically monitor employees' internet use, according to a 2010 survey by the American Management Association and the ePolicy Institute. It is distance control, since employees do not know if they are being watched. They are monitored for sexual harassment, boss disparagement, spilling trade secrets and so on.

Managements can now view computer screens, capture computer keystrokes, identify websites frequented and track workers' whereabouts through GPS-enabled mobile phones, webcams and minuscule video cameras. Lewis Maltby, author of *Can They Do That?* (2009), attributed the growing monitoring to financial pressure, which has made firms want to tighten control and lower costs, and to the increased ease of doing it. Companies can buy machine-monitoring software and worker-tracking cameras at a local shop or through internet retailers. It is that easy.

Smarsh, one of many firms providing monitoring systems, services over 10,000 US companies. Its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) boasted, 'Employees should assume that they are going to be watched'. A national survey found that one in two employees knew of someone who had been fired for email or internet misuse; many also said they knew of someone fired for inappropriate cell phone use, instant messaging misuse or inappropriate text messaging. Monitoring for dismissal has grown as much as for hiring and ordinary discipline. Surveillance is direct, personal and intrusive. It will become more so.

A form of employee monitoring favoured by the United Kingdom's Labour government was the online grading of service providers by 'clients'. This is like naming and shaming, a shabby way of seeking to control by stigmatisation. The health minister introduced a scheme by which patients could rate doctors. A society demanding constant feedback does not trust its professionals to be professional. The doctors' ratings website followed similar monitoring of teachers. Should they be hounded by children who take grim pleasure in denigrating them, without any sense of accountability? It risks turning professionals into walking wounded and tipping them in a precariat direction. Why risk being humiliated online by being rigorous? Give them what they want! This is an illusion of empowerment that degrades responsibility and professionalism. Soon, everybody will be rating everybody else.

The state as libertarian paternalist

A new perspective on social and economic policy is behavioural economics, which has produced libertarian paternalism. *Nudge*, an influential book by Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler (2008), two Chicago-based advisers and friends of Barack Obama, was premised on the idea that people have too much information and so make irrational decisions. People must be steered, or nudged, to make

the decisions that are in their best interest. The authors do not attribute the idea to Bentham but say the state should create ‘an architecture of choice’.

On becoming US President, Obama appointed Sunstein to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, based in the White House. Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, Conservative Party leader David Cameron told members of parliament to read the book; on becoming Prime Minister in 2010 he set up the Behavioural Insight Team, quickly dubbed ‘the Nudge Unit’, in Downing Street, advised by Thaler. The mandate was to induce people to make ‘better’ decisions, in the interest of ‘society’.

Steering people is always questionable. How do we know that the nudgers know what is best for any individual? Today’s conventional wisdom becomes yesterday’s error. Again and again, policies or practices that seem unwise turn out later to become norms and vice versa. Who is liable if the guided decision proves to be wrong or if it leads to a mishap?

As an example of how nudging is proceeding, in 2010 the UK National Health Service sent a letter offering people a ‘summary care record’, giving their medical history, that would be made available to any health worker. Those receiving the letter faced a designed ‘choice environment’, requiring a decision to opt out or be automatically covered. But there was no opt-out form included, so people wishing to do so had to go to a website, find a form to download, print it, sign it, send it as a letter to their general practitioner (GP) and hope it would be acted upon. Bureaucratic hurdles were deliberately raised, increasing the cost of opting out and giving a bias to ‘presumed consent’.

Those least likely to opt out are the uneducated, the poor and the ‘digitally excluded’, mostly elderly without access to online facilities. As of 2010, 63 per cent of all those over the age of 65 in the United Kingdom lived in a household without internet access. There is government pressure, led by its ‘digital inclusion champion’, for more people to have access. And the cost of not having it is being raised. In effect, people are being penalised for not having access.

Old-fashioned state paternalism is popular with governments. It can infantilise citizens and demonise parts of the precariat. In 2009, the United Kingdom’s Department of Business, Innovation and Skills issued a guide called *Parent Motivators* directed at parents of dependent unemployed graduates. It was condescending, clearly presuming that graduates could not work out basic decisions for themselves. One commentator concluded it was the first time educated adults in their 20s were ‘being officially infantilized, a move that is unlikely, moreover, to dispel growing suspicion about the value of many modern degrees’ (Bennett, 2010). Other guides of the same genre included *Preparing for Emergencies*, *Break Out* on how to avoid paedophiles, *Heat Wave*, the *Dad Card* on how to be a good father, and a *Breakfast4Life* toolkit.

Parent Motivators, written by consultant psychologists at public expense, suggested parents were partially to blame for their offspring’s unemployment and urged them to show ‘tough love’. One of its authors said, ‘If you are

making life too comfortable at home, why would they get a job?’ At least that recognised that jobs were not attractive in themselves. But here was the state indulging in paternalistic steering while contributing to the demonisation of part of the precariat. They cannot work out how to behave themselves!

One could give many examples of the use of behavioural economics and libertarian paternalism to bear on the lives of the precariat, notably through clever use of ‘opt-out’ rules, making it hard to opt out and almost obligatory to ‘opt in’. The new buzz word is ‘conditionality’. There has been a remarkable growth of conditional cash transfer schemes or CCTs. The leading examples have been in Latin America, led by the *Progresa* scheme (now *Oportunidades*) in Mexico and Brazil’s *Bolsa Familia*, which by 2010 was reaching over 50 million people. Seventeen Latin American countries have CCTs. The essence of these schemes is that people are given small state benefits, in the form of cash, only if they behave in predetermined ways.

Conditionality has been imported into rich countries, including the United States, and CCTs have been widely used in Central and Eastern Europe. One of the most detailed was *Opportunity New York – Family Rewards*, an experimental scheme with incredibly intricate financial incentives and penalties for doing and not doing certain things. The premise of all CCTs is that people need to be persuaded to behave in ways that are best for them and for ‘society’. Thus the World Bank (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009) believes they can overcome ‘persistent misguidedness’; it attributes poverty to an inter-generational reproduction of deprivation, such that CCTs will break the cycle by persuading people to behave responsibly.

The morality of this approach is dubious. It epitomises the Bentham project of creating an ‘architecture of choice’, chipping away at not just freedom but also personal responsibility. The relevance for the precariat is that there is talk about ‘second-generation CCTs’ to be targeted at young adults. Already there are conditionalities in many benefit schemes and these are being tightened. Thus in the United Kingdom, doctors are now required to report on their patient’s degree of employability if they are receiving disability benefits, turning a confidential doctor-patient relationship into social policing.

One should worry where such trends could lead. In India, following the libertarian paternalists, a cash transfer scheme targeted at economically insecure women promises them cash when their first child reaches adulthood, on condition that they are sterilised after the birth of a second child. This too creates an ‘architecture of choice’.

Making the precariat ‘happy’

Meanwhile, the paternalists who have dominated social policy since the 1990s have refined a utilitarian mentality built around the desire to make people

‘happy’, to the extent that provision of happiness has become quasi-religious and dignified by being called ‘the science of happiness’. In some countries, including France and the United Kingdom, official statistics are being collected to measure people’s happiness.

Let us suppose we have a society in which politicians and their advisers want to make people ‘happy’. The utilitarian rationalisation for inducing labour has grown in sophistication. Calvin sanctified capitalism by saying that salvation came to those who did good works. But ours is the first society where policy makers and commentators purport to believe that jobs make us happy.

By saying jobs should make us happy and that jobs define us and give us satisfaction, we are setting up a source of tension because the jobs most of us have to perform will fall short of those expectations. The precariat will suffer from stress. We should be happy; why are we not happy? The sane response should be that jobs are not there to make us happy, and so we should treat them as mainly instrumental, to obtain an income. Our happiness comes primarily from the work, leisure and play we undertake outside our labour, and from the income security we obtain from a job, not from the job itself.

If this were accepted as the premise for social policy, we could pursue a balance between how we use our time. Intuitively, many in the precariat may understand that. They cannot move to a stable and satisfying way of life because social and economic policies do not provide the basic security and sense of being in control of time that are indispensable.

Hedonistic happiness based on jobs and play is dangerous. Endless play would be tedious. The pleasure is transient and self-limiting. We stop when we think we have had enough. As pleasure from play is ephemeral, people who depend on it are doomed to fail. Hedonism is self-defeating – the hedonistic treadmill. Hedonists fear boredom. The great philosopher Bertrand Russell understood the need for boredom, expressed best in his wonderful essay *In Praise of Idleness*. Hedonistic happiness through play and ‘pleasure’ eventually induces addiction and intolerance of anything other than pleasure, a point brought out by behavioural biologist Paul Martin in his book *Sex, Drugs and Chocolate: The Science of Pleasure* (2009).

Satisfaction is contentment with life in general and with one’s relationships. However, making a fetish of happiness is not a prescription for civilised society. The precariat must beware of the modern equivalent of a bread-and-circuses existence being offered by the state through pseudo-science and nudging.

The therapy state

While they set out to make people happy, libertarian paternalism and the utilitarianism underlying it have unleashed a cult of therapy, mirroring what happened in the period of mass insecurity at the end of the nineteenth century

(Standing, 2009: 235–8). The hegemonic instrument in today's equivalent is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which originated in the United States but which is globalising with indecent commercial speed.

In the United Kingdom, after the shock of 2008, instead of dealing with the structural causes of stress and depression, the government mobilised CBT to treat the outcomes. It claimed that millions were suffering from anxiety or depression, as if those were the same. Cognitive behavioural therapists were expected to teach people how to live, how to react and how to change their behaviour. The government launched the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, by which anybody could be referred by their doctor to the National Health Service for CBT. This was buttressed by a 'talking treatment' programme, in which mental health coordinators were stationed in Jobcentres. The claim was that CBT would raise employment, as a result of Jobcentres sending the unemployed to therapy centres around the country. The need for a doctor's referral was dispensed with. Why bother with diagnosis when the cure has been identified?

The government put aside funds to pay for initial treatments of eight sessions, planning that within five years anyone would be allowed to 'refer themselves in' for treatment. How eight CBT sessions would 'get Britain working', as was claimed, was unclear. Instead of recognising the causes of difficulties, the intention was to treat the victims of economic mismanagement and encourage them to think they needed therapy.

It is normal to be anxious if you are living a precariat existence, in and out of unemployment, worried about having enough money to buy food or where you will be sleeping next month. Why should this normal anxiety be reason for sending someone on expensive therapy treatment? It might turn anxiety into depression, a much worse ailment. The acid test would be to apply the libertarian paternalists' choice principle. Let the unemployed be allowed to choose between the eight sessions of CBT or the money equivalent. Any bets which most would choose? The trouble is that the 'architecture of choice' is not designed that way.

The Labour government was considering whether some disability claimants should have CBT before going on 'employment support allowance', which an official described as 'an eight-week period which prevents people going into long-term disability'. Who will determine who 'needs' CBT? Soon, the powers that be will be saying that, unless people take a CBT course, they will lose entitlement to benefits. And will taking a CBT course be treated confidentially? Or will the fact that, as a result of their 'weakness', they have been on such a course be passed on to potential employers?

There is nothing wrong with therapy *per se*. What is dubious is its use by the state as an integral part of social policy. It is part of the panopticon state, used to create 'docile minds' and to deter subversive thoughts, such as that the menial, low-status precarious jobs pushed in the direction of unemployed people *should* be rejected. Only if people are allowed to reject them will the

creators of such jobs be pressured to improve them or to do without them because they are unworthy of human endeavour.

Workfare and conditionality

Part of the libertarian paternalism agenda is to make social policy more 'conditional', providing state benefits as long as recipients behave in ways set by the state, ostensibly in their best interests. This includes programmes that require people to accept jobs or training after a short period of benefit entitlement or lose benefits and risk a permanent blot on their record, held somewhere in an online database.

The precariat is being offered several variants of 'labourfare', misnamed workfare (for a predictive critique, see Standing, 1990). One form is to make benefits so unattractive that people will not want to take them and will take almost any job instead. This is the view of Lawrence Mead, an American libertarian invited by Downing Street to advise the British government immediately after it was elected in 2010. His view of claimants is that 'government must persuade them to *blame* themselves' (Mead, 1986: 10, emphasis in original). In another form the idea is that anybody who becomes unemployed, or who has been unemployed for a few months, will be offered a job, which they must accept or lose their benefits. These ideas have been around for a very long time, harking back to Speenhamland, the Poor Law and the workhouse.

Language is used to shape perceptions. The UK Coalition government has argued that its 'workfare' plans are intended 'to break the habit of worklessness'. Nobody has demonstrated that the unemployed, or others in need, have such a 'habit'. There is considerable evidence that the reasons many people are unemployed or on the labour market margins have nothing to do with any such habit. Many have too much 'work' to do that labourists do not recognise as work, such as caring for frail relatives or children. Many have episodic disabilities.

To break the alleged habit, it was announced that jobseekers would be required to take 30-hour-a-week jobs for four weeks, as a mandatory work activity. If they refuse to take or fail to complete the placement, benefits will be stopped for three months. The intention is to make unemployment a contractual arrangement – working for benefits with a contract with the state. The underlying motive was exposed when the jobs the unemployed would be required to do were revealed – litter clearing and removing graffiti from walls.

The *Welfare White Paper* of November 2010 asserted that there was a 'national crisis' of benefit dependency, supposedly shown by the fact that 4.5 million people were receiving 'out-of-work' benefits. Iain Duncan Smith, the Minister of Work and Pensions, claimed that nearly 3 million jobs had gone to immigrants in the past decade, partly because many Britons were 'addicted' to social security benefits. This compressed two claims into one

deduction. Migrants could have taken jobs because they had particular skills or were prepared to work for lower wages or because, in an open flexible labour market, they happened to be in the right place at the right time. Some may even have gained jobs precisely because they were not citizens and could be dismissed or abused with impunity. Some could have come with experience that young British workers had not had a chance to acquire because they were young. Some could have displaced older workers presumed by employers to be less efficient. All these hypotheses are possible. To make a direct link from the existence of social benefits to migrants 'taking British jobs' is simply prejudice.

The other claim, that millions of Britons are 'addicted' to state benefits, was another prejudicial statement. Millions are receiving benefits due to high unemployment, low earnings by many in temporary and part-time jobs – the precariat – or disability, illness, frailty and so on. The government should have addressed the poverty, unemployment and precarity traps many people face, none of which are the fault of those described as addicted to benefits.

The well-known 'poverty trap' will remain as long as means testing remains, even if the tapering of benefit loss with income gain is made less steep. The 'unemployment trap' will also remain. The more wages fall at the lower end of the labour market, the higher the earnings replacement rate will be if unemployment benefits are to remain adequate for survival. Meanwhile, the 'precarity trap' is worsening. If jobs are generated in one place while the unemployed are living in a deprived area somewhere else, and if those jobs are low paying and temporary or part-time, benefit recipients take a big risk in going for them. They have to travel, which is costly, they risk jeopardising a network of family, friends and places that give life meaning and identity, and they must give up benefits that may have taken months to obtain in the first place. And they are expected to do all this when those jobs may last no more than a few weeks.

Part of the precarity trap is that the jobs some may be forced to take will generate hostility to jobs in general. It is a middle-class prejudice to think the jobs the unemployed are driven to take are conducive to good working habits and labour commitment.

Workfare in the United Kingdom will expand the precariat. It will put hundreds of thousands into temporary jobs deliberately made unattractive to ensure people will not want to stay on them. If the placements were real jobs, paying a pittance would also make it harder for others doing similar jobs to bargain for decent wages. But, as with all workfare schemes, there should be no presumption that placements will be 'real jobs'. It is also unclear how a four-week forced job will 'break' a habit of worklessness. It could do the reverse, making many people sullen and resentful. And doing an enforced full-time job will prevent people from searching for a real job.

Workfare schemes do not cut public spending either. They are expensive, involving high administrative costs and low-productivity 'jobs'. Their main intention is rather to massage the level of unemployment down, not by creating

jobs but by discouraging the unemployed from claiming benefits. Research in the United States found that the fall in welfare rolls after the introduction of similar schemes in the 1990s was due primarily to people withdrawing from the labour force, without having jobs. The policy was impoverishing.

Workfare advocates ignore basic economics. A market economy needs some unemployment, for efficiency and anti-inflationary reasons. It is not just the unemployed themselves who adjust expectations and aspirations as they search but others who adjust their behaviour to the existence of unemployed people competing or considering avenues for improving their lives.

While social democrats and labourists laid the ground for workfare, they have come up with a variant that, if taken literally, would be catastrophic. They argue that all unemployed should be ‘guaranteed’ a job and that this at a stroke will give substance to the ‘right to work’. In effect, they want to maximise labour and jobs, which they see as conferring rights and the means of achieving happiness and social integration. This interpretation flies in the face of evidence that many obtain little pleasure from their jobs. They are obliged to do repetitive, inane or dirty and onerous tasks that they do for one reason, to earn income to subsist and help their dependants to do so.

Responding to the UK government’s workfare proposals, Douglas Alexander, the Labour Party’s Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, came out in favour of stricter incapacity benefit tests and the Danish model of guaranteeing jobs and obliging people to take them or lose benefit. ‘This is a form of conditional welfare’, he said, ‘Real guarantees of work, but real sanctions if the offer is not taken up’. Alexander claimed the difference between this stance and the government’s was that the government had adopted the American model of cutting benefits without ensuring a job was available. He was responding to criticism from a former general secretary of the Labour Party that the party appeared to side with the ‘feckless poor’ against ‘the hard-working squeezed middle’. But it might be more principled politics to think through the policy in terms of what it means for the precariat.

Workfare advocates place labour above work. Pushing everybody into jobs leads to the Soviet trap: Eventually the unemployed are dubbed parasitic while resentful workers lessen their effort, which led to the wry joke, ‘They pretend to pay us, we pretend to work’. Long before that, Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 put the matter succinctly when saying that guaranteeing everybody a job would lead either to government taking over almost the entire economy or to coercion. He would have had no difficulty in seeing which way it is going.

Demonising the precariat

Since the Great Recession began, governments have stepped up their demonisation of the victims of the global market economy. Four groups have been targeted – ‘migrants’, ‘welfare claimants’, ‘criminals’ and the ‘disabled’.

The tendency to demonise migrants is global, as if they are some form of alien species. A worst scenario case would be an outbreak of mass deportations, with populist politicians fanning the fears of the domestic precariat. One hopes there is enough sense to prevent anything like that. Fortunately, there are also hefty costs to put off the zealots. One study (Hinojosa-Ojeda, 2010) estimated that mass deportation of 'illegal' migrants from the United States would cost more than the Iraqi and Afghan wars combined. But fear of deportation makes undocumented migrants accept lower wages and worse labour conditions.

In the United Kingdom, as in many countries, national newspapers have fanned anti-migrant feelings. As they are much more read than local papers, people read about migrant problems, even though their area may have none. While only 10 per cent of people in the United Kingdom are immigrants, the average Briton believes the figure is 27 per cent. National media pinpoint the exceptional. The same is true of 'benefit scroungers'. A single case is picked up and everyone in the country reads about it, imagining it could be just down the road. If we read just *local* newspapers, most people would not hear about that case or generalise from it. The globalisation and commodification of communications give power to those who want to demonise. Thus a government can cite two examples to suggest that most of the unemployed suffer from 'a habit of worklessness', and readers can be led to believe that these two cases represent millions.

Another demonised group are 'criminals'. We saw earlier how the state is criminalising more and more people. Many are merely people who cannot function well in a market society. Others are criminalised by accident. Public employment services have become agents for conformity and social discipline that may push some unemployed to break the rules. Doctors are being turned into labour disciplinary agents, required to report on whether their patients are employed or employable. This may lead to 'convictions', for idleness or fraud. The precariat is exposed to unpleasant, insecure wage labour, which it would be understandable to want to escape from or rebel against. The penal system curbs that tendency and raises the cost of doing so. With more sophisticated monitoring coming along, more may be caught and socially branded.

In some countries, prisoners are banned from being able to vote in elections. The United Kingdom's Labour government repeatedly delayed lifting the ban, in violation of European Union law, and a proposal to do so by the new Coalition government was heavily defeated in a free parliamentary vote. A few other countries also ban prisoners from voting, and many US states ban former prisoners as well, a form of life sentence that actively fosters civic disengagement.

In general, demonisation is easier in societies characterised by systemic economic insecurity and anxiety. Insecurity makes it easier to play on fears, 'unknown unknowns' and images created and manipulated by visual and linguistic artists hired to do precisely that. This leads to what should be the biggest fear of all.

Thinning democracy and neo-fascism

What should worry all those who believe in democratic values and freedom is that, with the commodification of politics, there is a ‘thinning’ of democracy, with fewer people belonging to mainstream political parties and low turnouts in most elections. This thinning is hitting progressive parties particularly hard.

In the United Kingdom, an audit of political engagement showed that in early 2010 only one in ten potential voters was ‘politically committed’, while one in ten was ‘alienated and hostile’ (Hansard Society, 2010). The biggest group, one in four, consisted of the ‘disengaged, distrustful’. Only 13 per cent could name their member of parliament. The disengaged were mainly young (under 35) and working class – the precariat. The report said the alienated/hostile group were ‘extraordinarily difficult to engage and it would be unrealistic to hope that they can be converted to voters’. The bored/apathetic group would also be hard to motivate to vote. More of the disengaged were inclined to vote Labour than Conservative but were turned off by what was on offer.

Thin democracy, sporadic voting by youth and the drift to the right go together. In the European Union elections of 2009, average turnout was 43 per cent, the lowest since 1979. Left-of-centre parties did badly almost everywhere. Labour took 16 per cent of the vote in the United Kingdom. Right-wing parties did well everywhere. Socialists were crushed in Hungary, while the extreme right-wing Jobbik won almost as many seats. In Poland, the ruling centre-right Civic Platform won. In Italy, the centre-left gained 26 per cent of the vote, seven percentage points less than in the 2008 general election before the crisis, against 35 per cent for Berlusconi’s People of Liberty Party. In the German elections of 2009, there was a record low turnout of 71 per cent; the right did well. Everywhere, the social democrats were in retreat.

One problem is that politicians are now sold as brands, while class-based politics has been debased, partly because the social democratic project could not survive globalisation. A result is sound-bite and image-based politics, based on a shared acceptance of the neo-liberal economic framework. This is bound to erode support for social democracy.

There seemed one exception, the United States in 2008, where Barack Obama managed to mobilise young Americans hoping for a progressive agenda. Regrettably, he was packaged and oversold. His social networking adviser came from Facebook; another adviser created an ‘Obama brand’ through clever marketing tools, with a logo (sunrise over stars and stripes), expert viral marketing (Obama ringtones), product placement (Obama adverts on sports video games), a 30-minute infomercial and a choice of strategic brand alliances (Oprah for maximum reach, Kennedy family for gravitas, hip-hop stars for street cred). Afterwards, Obama was given the Association of National Advertisers’ Marketer of the Year Award. Company adverts copied him: Pepsi’s ‘Choose Change’, IKEA’s ‘Embrace Change’ and so on.

This is commodified politics, buying and selling fleeting images and buzzwords, preferring symbols over substance. There is deep alienation in having costly public relations and advertising selling a transcendental campaign involving a man as a brand surrounded by images of freedom and change without substance.

Obama won against weak Republican opposition, in the midst of a disastrous war and an economy on the edge of meltdown. He could have risked attacking the neo-liberal project. Instead he backed the International Monetary Fund, which had been a primary culprit in its hubris, bailed out the banks and appointed Larry Summers as his principal economic adviser, the man who devised the policy responsible for the sub-prime housing crisis. Obama never tried to reach out to the precariat, even though many in it had been hopeful that he would do so. The social democratic imagination could not empathise with real predicaments.

In the United States and elsewhere, anger grew at some of the corrupt aspects of the globalisation era. Recall the systemic use of subsidies. Naomi Klein among others has called the globalisation era 'crony capitalism', revealing itself not as a huge 'free market' but as a system in which politicians hand over public wealth to private players in exchange for political support. Ironically, far-right groups captured the anti-corporatist backlash. If the state has been captured by cronyism, why should anyone support a 'strong state'? Old-style social democrats are unable to respond with conviction because they accepted the neo-liberal construction and did nothing to support the precariat that grew in its shadow. The fact is that subsidies to capital were used for political and economic ends. The crude reasoning was that if a politician or party did not give subsidies to powerful interests, such as 'media barons', others would. If subsidies were not given to financial investors and 'non-doms' (rich individuals claiming to be domiciled elsewhere for tax purposes), other countries would entice them away. A generation of social democrats went along with that crude opportunism, losing all credibility in the process.

There are more worrying trends than a social democratic project on its last legs. Insecure people make angry people, and angry people are volatile, prone to support a politics of hatred and bitterness. In Europe, left-of-centre parties have been punished by the electorate for allowing inequality and insecurity to rise while going towards a workfare state. Far-right parties have grown, openly appealing to the fears of those made most insecure.

Italy led the way. The alliance forged by Berlusconi was aimed at the precariat – the Italian part of it. The political ethos deserves to be called 'neo-fascism'. Underlying it is an alliance between an elite outside the mainstream of society – epitomised by Berlusconi himself, Italy's richest man who owns the country's leading commercial TV stations – and the lower middle class and those fearful of falling into the precariat. The day after being re-elected in

2008, Berlusconi announced his intention to 'defeat the army of evil', by which he meant rid the country of 'illegal migrants'. Playing on people's fears around law and order, he instigated a series of authoritarian measures. Roma camps were demolished and Roma were fingerprinted; parliament legalised vigilante patrols; the period during which asylum seekers could be held in 'identification and expulsion centres' was extended to six months; a policy was introduced to turn back migrants at sea in the Mediterranean before they could land, sending them to caged internment centres in Libya. Berlusconi and his colleagues called the judiciary 'a cancer' and dismissed parliament as 'a useless entity'. No wonder Italy is called an illiberal democracy.

Racist attacks in Rome spread, legitimised by the re-election as mayor in 2010 of Gianni Alemanno, a former neo-fascist activist. Several social scientists noted that the young thugs perpetrating the racist attacks were less ideological than their predecessors of the 1930s and more interested in personal identity, opposing anybody perceived to be different. Another change was an emphasis on alcohol, linked to a shift from the fixation with a *bella figura* to a peculiar pride in losing control. Claudio Cerasa, author of *The Taking of Rome*, a book on the rise of the political right, described Alemanno as a product of neo-fascism, not a cause. In 2007, a year before he was first elected, a quarter of Rome's schoolchildren voted for *Blocco Studentesco*, an affiliate of the far-right *CasaPound*. It was the mood of the times.

What is happening in Italy is beginning elsewhere too. In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy, a right-winger who had already taken a tough line on immigration as interior minister, notably after the 2005 riots in the *banlieues* of Paris and other French cities, wasted no time in copying Berlusconi. In 2009, thousands of migrants were summarily deported, and in 2010 large numbers of Roma were expelled to Romania and Bulgaria. President Sarkozy was playing to his core voters. Part of the precariat was turning to the far right. The white working class and older members of the precariat voted for the National Front in March 2010 regional elections, the Front winning 17.5 per cent in the twelve regions where it had candidates in the second round. After Sarkozy's UMP party (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*) was soundly beaten by a disoriented left-of-centre coalition, he moved further to the right. In a 2010 poll, a third of UMP voters said they would support joint electoral pacts with the National Front.

The extreme right has made inroads in many European countries. The biggest shock to the political mainstream was the Swedish election in late 2010, when the far-right Swedish Democrats made big gains while the iconic Social Democrats had their worst result for decades. It symbolised the end of the famed 'Swedish model'. Elsewhere too, far-right groups with xenophobic messages were making progress. The ugly Jobbik party, with its black uniforms and jackboots, made inroads in Hungary. In the Netherlands, the Freedom Party advanced in the June 2010 election, demanding limits on immigration, a

reduction in red tape for small businesses, lower taxes and more elderly care. There, and in Denmark, where the populist Danish People's Party won a further tightening of the most draconian immigration laws in Europe, a Liberal-led government is dependent on anti-immigrant parties for survival. In Austria, the far-right Freedom Party took more than a quarter of votes in provincial elections in Vienna in October 2010, nearly doubling its support from 2005.

In the United Kingdom, the British National Party briefly caused a scare, sweeping to wins in the EU elections in 2009, only to implode due to the crassness of its leader. It would be too sanguine to think the undercurrents that led to its surge in popularity will be washed away. Other equally unpleasant groups such as the English Defence League have picked up the space, while some centrist figures have not been averse to stirring anti-migrant sentiments.

The policies pursued by most European governments have created an environment conducive to populism. The United Kingdom is no exception. By favouring flexible labour markets, it has allowed the precariat to grow without responding to its insecurities or fears. It has shifted social protection decisively towards means testing, which gives priority to those most in need while pushing long-standing 'citizens', who might be near-poor, towards the back of the queue for benefits, including housing.

Low-income deprived communities blighted by de-industrialisation breed antisocial behaviour; their inhabitants are surrounded by squalor and suffer from relative deprivation. As such areas attract a disproportionate number of migrants and low-income ethnic minorities, the 'white' or 'citizen' inhabitants experience multiple fears, chiefly of losing what little they have. Condemning them for their reactions and behaviour, when flexible labour markets and means testing create those conditions, is a false morality. The responsibility lies with policy makers, whose policies have fostered tensions and engendered extremism.

The Labour government responded with populist measures, launching pilot schemes to pay unemployed migrants to go home with one-way plane tickets, using a private commercial crime services company, and announcing a plan to help 'traditional communities', a euphemism for assisting low-income white neighbourhoods. Governments elsewhere have also turned to populist approaches.

In the United States, the Tea Party movement began in 2009 after TV commentator Rick Santelli called for a display of outrage against President Obama's financial plans. Those who joined the Tea Party were anti-government, demanding low taxes and free markets. The initial target was the Democrats, but Republicans deemed insufficiently committed to tax cuts and smaller government were also threatened. The Republican National Committee in 2010 was forced to adopt a rule urging party leaders to support candidates who could prove right-wing credentials by passing ten criteria set by the Tea Party.

Elite interests have flirted with the Tea Party. It has attracted the support of groups tied to oil companies and Wall Street (Fifield, 2010). Elements of the elite are coalescing with elements in the dwindling working class and the precariat, the one funding and ensuring media coverage, the others providing the foot soldiers and voters. Unless mainstream parties offer the precariat an agenda of economic security and social mobility, a substantial part will continue to drift to the dangerous extreme.

The Tea Party's first national convention contained much talk of illegal immigration and opposition to 'the cult of multiculturalism' and 'Islamification'. T-shirts had slogans such as 'I'll keep my freedom, my guns and my money'. The Birthers were there, claiming Obama was an alien imposter. Like the British National Party in England, the Tea Party accused immigrants of swamping America's Judeo-Christian values. 'This is our country', a delegate said to wild cheers, 'Take it back!' There was nobody at hand to say it had not been taken away.

The Tea Party is neo-fascist, wanting a small social state and authoritarian government. It consists predominantly of 'angry white men and women' affected by loss of jobs and dwindling living standards. Two-thirds of the jobs that went in the two years after 2008 were 'blue-collar' jobs held by men. Angry whites are judgmental about 'giving money' to people, and polls show that white men have become more conservative. Support for 'gun rights' rose from 51 per cent in 2008 to 64 per cent in 2010.

Glen Beck, a Fox News presenter hailed by the American right, is a self-confessed former cocaine addict and alcoholic who calls himself a 'borderline schizophrenic'. He pitches to those with little education or political knowledge. In his bestseller *Glen Beck's Common Sense*, he addressed the reader as follows:

I think I know who you are. You are a person of 'strong beliefs', with a 'warm heart'. You work hard, you're not reckless with money, you're worried about what the economy means for your family. You're not a bigot, but you stopped expressing opinions on sensitive issues a long time ago because you don't want to be called a racist or a homophobe if you stand up for your values and principles. You don't understand how the government can ask you to make more sacrifices just so that bankers and politicians can reap the benefit. Dear reader, Glen Beck can help you. He will stand up with you and say, 'Don't tread on me.'

Beck has become a multimillionaire celebrity. The fringe has become the mainstream. The old political mainstream has not had an alternative narrative to offer, beyond hoping for economic growth and jobs. It has had no answer to rising insecurity and inequality; unimpressed, the progressive part of the precariat stayed away from the polling stations in the midterm elections of 2010.

In Japan, the precariat is also split; large numbers of angry people, mostly young men, are joining groups dubbed by the media as the Net Far Right because members are organised via the internet and gather together only for demonstrations. Most hold low-paying, part-time or short-term contract jobs. According to sociology professor Kensuke Suzuki, 'These are men who feel disenfranchised in their own society. They are looking for someone to blame, and foreigners are the most obvious target' (Fackler, 2010). The largest group, with over 9,000 members in 2010, is called *Zaitokukai*, an abbreviation for its full cumbersome name – Citizens Who Will Not Forgive Special Privileges for Koreans in Japan. Such groups have been stepping up hostile demonstrations against migrants and say they model themselves on the US Tea Party.

Unless the commodification of politics is checked, we will see a further thinning of democratic involvement, particularly on the part of the progressive part of the precariat. Politics is now dominated by market practitioners. An eerie example was the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election, won by Victor Yanukovich, a man linked to the country's oligarchs and with criminal convictions for theft and assault. The oligarchs put up funds to hire a firm to sell him to the voters. It was led by a US Republican Party strategist, Paul Manafort, whose firm had been employed as advisers to several US presidents. Before they began work, Yanukovich was languishing in the polls, having been rejected in 2004. They repackaged him. Meanwhile, the consultancy firm founded by David Axelrod, Obama's political adviser, was aiding the other main candidate, as was John Anzalone, who also worked for the Obama campaign.

Three things are noteworthy about this bizarre election in a European country of 50 million people. It exemplified the commodification of politics; it was foreign commodification consistent with a mutant form of globalisation; and it involved a criminal elite, funding its interests in the form of a candidate. Meanwhile, huge numbers of Ukrainians advertised their votes for sale on the internet. The US Republican company outscored the US Democrat company.

The global commodification of politics should particularly worry the precariat. Probably the most regressive development in the United States, and by implication elsewhere given how its legal rulings become global precedents, was the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United vs Federal Election Commission*. The Court decided that any corporation, trade union or trade association could make unlimited contributions to political campaigns, on the peculiar grounds that they had the same rights as individuals to participate in elections. It was no surprise that the subsequent midterm Congressional elections were dominated by ferocious 'attack ads', funded by bodies set up to conceal where the money came from. Funds for right-wing candidates went up sixfold, most going to candidates who campaigned in favour of tax cuts,

more subsidies to corporations, weaker environmental protection, reversal of healthcare reform and a tougher stance on migration and immigrants.

At a stroke, the ruling eroded a democratic principle, that each citizen has an equal right to vote and an equal weight in the process. The biggest loser is the precariat. For whereas corporations will put money into campaigns for the elite and the salariat, while the weakened unions will support their core employees, there is no powerful interest to represent the precariat. Not yet.

In sum, the precariat must be worried by the surge of neo-fascism and the pressure for a smaller social state. At present, it cannot resist. Some whose social and economic situations place them in the precariat have been politically infantilised. They are so anxious and insecure that they are easily seduced to support populist and authoritarian actions towards those depicted as a threat. Many in the precariat have lost (or fear losing) what little they had and are lashing out because they have no politics of paradise to draw them in better directions.

Conclusions

The precariat is depicted as needing monitoring, therapy and coercion to take jobs. But the libertarian paternalist solution of workfare is a means of disrupting any attempt to build occupational careers, as is therapy when used as social policy. The diagnosis of mental incapacity and the prognosis of therapy combine to accentuate feelings of precariousness. These are not policies to appeal to the uneasiness and anger in the precariat. The reverse is more likely.

Surveillance is permeating all institutions of society. At each point it will engender sousveillance or a counterculture, and this in turn will have a feedback effect inducing tighter surveillance. Surveillance cannot rest once it has been legitimised. It can only be stopped by active resistance, by class-based action.

Surveillance fosters aggression and suspicion of motives. If a man is caught on CCTV patting a young girl on the cheek, is it a sign of kindness or predatory sexual intent? If there is doubt, it will justify checks, as a precaution. You can never be too safe. A protector is never far from being a controller. A consequence will be withdrawal of normal acts of friendship. The same ambivalence and distancing tendency feed into businesses. Application of timekeeping, workplace attendance and efficiency audits are instruments for penalising nonconformists, who may be the most innovative and creative minds. Above all, surveillance chips away at civic friendship and trust, making people more fearful and more anxious. The group with most reason for that fear and anxiety is the precariat.

The utilitarianism that underpins the neo-liberal state boils down to a creed about making the majority happy while making the minority conform to the norms of the majority, through sanctions, nudges and surveillance. It is the tyranny of the majority brought to a new level of intensity. The utilitarians could get away with it as long as they were dealing with a small underclass and as long as incomes were, at worst, stagnant in the lower end of society. Once the precariat grew and incomes started to fall sharply, anger at the utilitarian agenda and the host of inequalities was bound to become explosive.