Standing, Guy. "A Politics of Paradise." *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 155–183. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849664554.ch-007>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 10:43 UTC.

Copyright © Guy Standing 2011. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

A Politics of Paradise

It is time to revisit the great trinity – freedom, fraternity and equality – in developing a progressive agenda from the perspective of the precariat. A good start would be a revival of republican freedom, the ability to act in concert. Freedom is something that is disclosed in collective action.

The precariat wants freedom and basic security. As the theologian Kierkegaard put it, anxiety is part of freedom. It is the price we pay for liberty and can be a sign that we have it. However, unless the anxiety is moderated, anchored in security, stability and control, it risks veering into irrational fears and incapacity to function rationally or to develop a coherent narrative for living and working. This is where the precariat is today, wanting control over life, a revival of social solidarity and a sustainable autonomy, while rejecting old labourist forms of security and state paternalism. It also wants to see the future secured in an ecological way, with the air clean, pollution in retreat and species revived; the precariat has most to lose from environmental degradation. And it is stirring in wanting to revive republican freedom, rather than the alienating individualistic freedom of the commodified.

Although the precariat is not yet a class-for-itself, it is a class-in-the-making, increasingly able to identify what it wishes to combat and what it wants to construct. It needs to revive an ethos of social solidarity and universalism, values rejected by the utilitarians. Their smugness was captured by a leader in the influential *Financial Times* (2010b), which stated bluntly, ‘Universality is a wasteful principle’. On the contrary, it is more important than ever. It is the only principle that can reverse growing inequalities and economic insecurity. It is the only principle that can arrest the spread of means testing, conditionality and paternalistic nudging. It is the only principle that can be used to retain political stability as the world adjusts to the globalisation crisis that is leading to a decline in living standards for the majority in the industrialised world.

For the precariat, twentieth-century labourism is unattractive. For its time, the social democratic project was progressive, but it came to a dead end with dour Third Wayism. Social democratic politicians feared to mention inequality, let alone address it, embraced flexible insecure labour and disregarded liberty, advancing the panopticon state. They lost credibility with the precariat when they depicted themselves as ‘middle class’ and made the life of nonconformists harder and more insecure. It is time to move on.

There is a need for a new politics of paradise that is mildly utopian and proudly so. The timing is apt, for a new progressive vision seems to emerge

in the early years of each century. There were the radical romantics of the early nineteenth century, demanding new freedoms, and there was a rush of progressive thinking in the early twentieth century, demanding freedom for the industrial proletariat. It is already late, but the discrediting of labourism alongside the moral bankruptcy of the neo-liberal model of globalisation is a moment of hope for an emancipatory egalitarianism geared to the precariat.

In thinking what that would look like, it is well to reflect that what seems impossible today has a habit of becoming not just possible but eminently practicable. In his preface to the 1982 edition of *Capitalism and Freedom*, originally written in 1962 when monetarism and neo-liberalism were still being mocked, the arch-monetarist Milton Friedman commented, 'Our basic function is to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable' (Friedman, 1982: ix). This is where progressive thinking stands today.

A first task is to assert what has been denied by the labourists and neo-liberals. People should be trusted to think and act in their best interests, and should be trusted to respect others. They should not be treated as lazy, potential criminals, law breakers or inherently selfish. The libertarian paternalist nudgers should be told to mind their own business and their architectures of choice; the panopticon should be rolled back. Proper education and 'quality time' are the way to help people make their own decisions. Contrary to what libertarian paternalists say, most people do not make sub-optimal decisions because they are overwhelmed by information; they make them because they do not have the time or energy to sift the relevant information, do not have access to affordable expert advice and do not have Voice to exercise their choices.

The same could be said about jobs. The fact that there is an aversion to the jobs on offer does not mean that masses of people do not want to work. There is overwhelming evidence that almost everybody wants to work. It is part of the human condition. But it does not follow that everybody should be in jobs or treated as suffering from a 'habit of worklessness' if they are not.

The precariat is faced by systematic insecurity. It is oversimplifying to divide it into a 'good' precariat and a 'bad' one. However, there is a part that wants to confront the insecurities with policies and institutions to redistribute security and provide opportunities for all to develop their talents. This part, probably overwhelmingly youth, does not look back fondly to the labourist employment security of the pre-globalisation era.

The 'bad' precariat, by contrast, is fuelled by nostalgia for an imagined golden age. It is angry and bitter, seeing governments bailing out banks and bankers, giving subsidies to favoured elites and the salariat, and allowing inequality to rise, at their expense. It is drawn to populist neo-fascism, lashing out at governments and demonising those who seem favoured by them. Unless the aspirations of the 'good' precariat are addressed, more will be dragged into the circles of the 'bad'. If that happens, society will be threatened. It is happening.

The precariat's foremost need is economic security, to give some control over life's prospects and a sense that shocks and hazards can be managed. This can be achieved only if income security is assured. However, vulnerable groups also need 'agency', the collective and individual capacity to represent their interests. The precariat must forge a strategy that takes account of this twin imperative.

Make denizenship fair

The precariat is made up of many types of denizen, with different but limited bundles of rights. It would gain if disparities were reduced and if rights were properly defended. Every part of the precariat has an interest in enhancing the rights of other denizens, even if some political groups try to turn one group against another. 'Denizens unite!' would not be a bad slogan. And it is vital to remember that it is not just migrants who have denizen status. Increasingly, the state is converting more citizens into denizens.

Most egregiously, it is taking away rights from the 'criminalised'. This is a form of double jeopardy. Unless a crime is overtly political, or if a legal process has ruled that someone should not have the right to vote, there is no justification for taking away political rights or social rights. Given the state's tendency to imprison and criminalise more people, this issue deserves greater public debate.

Migrants are the primary denizens. There have been various proposals to create a process by which they could gain citizenship with a full range of rights, including 'citizenisation', decoupling status from nationality. A concept of 'residenceship' would integrate migrants better, since they would automatically become citizens after a certain period, rather than be 'naturalised'. This contrasts with the idea of 'permanent permits'; while protecting against arbitrary deportation, these would merely confirm denizens as outsiders. Universality is about overcoming such distinctions in a globalising world. As it is, governments have been increasing the conditions necessary to enjoy even denizen status. In countries that have adopted 'citizenship tests' for those wishing to settle, the precariat should demand that anybody wishing to take political office should pass them too. Better still would be to abolish them as fraudulent, since their main objective is to raise barriers to entry.

Among the most needed reforms affecting denizens are those related to the right to practice, the right to work in the sphere of one's competence and 'calling'. Millions are denied that right, through licensing and other means. Liberalising occupations would open them to migrants otherwise relegated to the precariat. Germany may by chance take a lead here. In October 2010, the labour minister said that to attract more skilled migrants Germany would introduce a law recognising foreign qualifications. This is an *ad hoc* response to a global

challenge. What is needed is an international accreditation system, whereby governments and occupational bodies establish standards of qualification and mutual recognition, so that those qualified in skills in one country can more easily practise them in other countries. In most occupations, there is no need for licensing. An accreditation system could require practitioners to show potential purchasers of their services proof of qualification, which would allow the *caveat emptor* (buyer beware) principle to apply fairly.

Migrants, most of all asylum seekers, lack mechanisms to represent their interests. An egalitarian strategy would demand that representative bodies be given space in which to operate and be assisted financially. In 2010, a British campaign called Strangers into Citizens lobbied for an ‘earned amnesty’ for the undocumented after five years. If two years after registering they were in a job and spoke English, they would automatically receive citizenship. One could quibble with this, but state-legitimised bodies are needed to represent all groups of denizens as they struggle to obtain *de jure* and *de facto* rights.

Many others lose economic or social rights by virtue of a past demeanor or some action resulting in a concealed record blemishing their character, without their knowing or being in a position to refute it. Tony Blair once said that nobody who had not done anything wrong should be concerned with the advance of surveillance. This is a wretched perspective. One reason is that we do not know what is being collected on any of us or whether it is correct or incorrect. The precariat is most in need of protection and must demand that *de facto* denizenship is rolled back.

Recovering identities

The precariat is at the centre of the turmoil around multiculturalism and personal identities. A defining feature of all denizens is absence of rights. Citizenship is about the right to possess an identity, a sense of knowing who one is and with whom one has shared values and aspirations. The precariat has no secure identity. But in a globalising world, we cannot run away from multiculturalism and multiple identities.

States must allow for multiple identities; everybody is a denizen of some sort in having rights within some self-regulated identities and not in others. Each identity brings distinctive bundles of ‘rights’. Thus a person has an identity as an adherent to a religion or as an atheist, which gives rights within a community that others do not possess (rights to certain holidays, a right to pray or not to pray, etc.). The crucial tests come with mechanisms of hierarchy, oppression and excommunication, and with ensuring that the exercise of any community right does not impinge on the rights or identity of others.

Even more crucial for the precariat are rights that come from belonging to a particular occupational identity. If a person is a plumber or a nurse, they

should have rights accorded to every member of their occupation, including the right to state that they are qualified and approved by their peers. However, it is a different matter to say that someone not accepted by their peers should not have the right to practise, which is how many people are being tipped into the precariat. This is why occupational identity must be based on an accreditation system, not licensing geared to competitiveness, and why it must rest on democratic governance structures within occupational bodies in which all interests can participate (on how, see Standing, 2009). Occupational democracy is central to twenty-first-century freedom.

Turning to the political side of identity, modern neo-fascism is vehemently against acceptance of others' identity and culture. Neo-liberals also oppose the idea of identity on the grounds that individuals in a market society have no common identity. They presume a common personhood, a melting pot of folk, as implicit in the US and French constitutions. Both postures are unhelpful, to put it mildly. It would be better to assert that we can and do have multiple identities, and we need to construct institutions and policies to defend and enhance them.

The precariat is most exposed to a crisis of identity. It must not desert multiculturalism or the legitimization of multiple identities. However, it must do more, in that it must have its interests represented in all identity structures and institutions. This is not a plea for a new form of corporatism. It is a call for the precariat to become a class-for-itself.

Rescuing education

The commodification of education must be combated by those being processed to join the precariat. The spectre of teacherless universities backed by panopticon techniques should be banished by democratic and transparent regulation, involving professional associations and laws specifying that tertiary learning, as well as other levels, should not be 'teacherless'.

Determination of content should be restored to the professionals – teachers and academics – while the 'customers', the students, should have a voice in shaping the structure and objectives of education. And the precariat should be enabled to gain a liberating education on a continuing basis, not simply be subject to human capital preparation. This is not being idealistic or naïve. Of course, students do not know what is best for them. None of us do. What is needed is a governance system that balances the forces moulding the process. At present, the commodifiers are in full control. This is terrifying.

There needs to be a reversal of the dumbing down involved in 'human capital' schooling. In the United States, experts refer to a lost capacity to read and a 'massified' attention deficit syndrome. The United States is not unique. Liberating education for its own sake must be restored to primacy and the

commodifiers must be resisted. We cannot remove them altogether but a balance in favour of liberating education must be institutionally achieved.

Those who want universities to serve entrepreneurialism and business and to foster a market perspective should heed the great intellectuals of the past. As Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher, put it, 'The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning'.

Earlier, John Stuart Mill, speaking on being installed as Rector of St Andrew's University in 1867, stated, 'Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings'. The commercial rejection of this principle is something that the precariat must taunt into retreat. The philistines must be stopped.

There is another more pragmatic issue. A partial answer to the status frustration arising from youths being formally over-educated for the available jobs would be to make degrees 'leisure goods' (rather than investment goods). People could be encouraged to gain degrees over a longer time, by facilitating sabbaticals for more people during the course of their adulthood and not putting so much emphasis on going straight from secondary school to university.

The precariat may dream of a sort of 'universitisation' of life, a world in which to learn selectively and broadly at all times. For that, it must have a feeling of greater control over time and access to a public sphere that enhances education as a slow deliberative process.

Work, not just labour

It has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself – a convenient belief to those who live on the labour of others.

William Morris (1885), *Useful Work Versus Useless Toil*

Work must be rescued from jobs and labour. All forms of work should be treated with equal respect, and there should be no presumption that someone not in a job is not working or that someone not working today is an idle scrounger. It is not idleness that damages society. Really idle people may damage themselves, if they dissipate their lives. But it costs society much more to police and punish the tiny minority than would be gained by forcing them to do some low-productivity job. Moreover, a little idleness would not be bad. How do we know that one person's apparent idleness is not his moment

of repose or contemplation? Why do we feel it necessary to presume and condemn? Some of the greatest minds in history had spells of idleness, and anybody who has read Bertrand Russell's essay *In Praise of Idleness* should be ashamed to demand frenetic labour from others.

One should not lose a sense of proportion. Labour is needed; jobs are needed. It is just that they are not the be-all-and-end-all of life. Other forms of work and time uses are just as important.

John Maynard Keynes, the greatest economist of the twentieth century, forecast that by now people in rich societies would be doing no more than 15 hours a week in jobs. Before him, Karl Marx predicted that, once the level of productivity enabled society to serve its material needs, we would spend our time developing our human capabilities. In the late nineteenth century, William Morris, in his visionary *News from Nowhere*, saw a future in which people would be unstressed, working on their enthusiasms and being inspired to reproduce nature, thriving in association with their neighbours. None of them foresaw the insatiable drive for consumption and endless growth set by a commodifying market system.

Now is the time to assert that pushing everybody into jobs is the answer to the wrong question. We must find ways of enabling all of us to have more time for work that is not labour and for leisure that is not play. Unless we insist on a richer concept of work, we will continue to be led by the folly of measuring a person's worth by the job they are doing and by the folly that job generation is the mark of a successful economy.

The precariat has most to gain. It does a disproportionate amount of work that is not labour and is forced to do much work that is neither productive nor enjoyable. Let us have better statistics that reveal how much work is being done. We could then mock those who claim or imply that anybody not in an identifiable 'job' is lazy or a welfare scrounger. Let us start with statistics on how much time the precariat spends in dealing with state bureaucrats and other intermediaries.

Full labour commodification

Contrary to the labourist declaration that 'Labour is not a commodity', there should be full labour commodification. Instead of forcing people into jobs, lowering their wages and those of others affected by the downward pressure they exert, people should be attracted by proper incentives. If there are jobs, as is claimed, and if nobody comes forward to fill them, then let the price rise until either the person offering the jobs thinks they are not worth the price (wage) he or she is prepared to pay or people are sufficiently attracted to fill them. Let governments apply the same rules to the labour market as they claim to do for other markets. For proper commodification, the price must be transparent and

fully monetised. This means phasing out those fancy enterprise benefits and converting them into benefits that can be bought by market choice. Respecting principles of social solidarity can be handled separately. Non-monetary benefits are a major source of inequality and are contrary to efficient labour markets. The precariat has no prospect of obtaining them. They go to the salariat and a dwindling privileged minority of core workers. To encourage marketisation, they should be taxed at a higher rate than money earnings; at the moment they are often a means of tax avoidance. And payment systems should be transparent in being linked to the application of skill, effort and time. It is relevant that research shows that workers are more content if paid an hourly rate, which is the most transparent method of all.

Proper commodification is a *progressive* move. Consider the classic practice of maternity leave, from the perspective of social equity and the position of the precariat. If a woman is a salaried employee, she can receive pay and leave from an employer, with most of the wage being paid by the government. In the United Kingdom, women receive statutory maternity pay for up to 39 weeks and leave of up to a year. There is also paternity leave for 2 weeks, and either parent can take unpaid time until the child is five years old. Bearing in mind that employers are compensated by the government for most of the cost of maternity and paternity pay, it is a regressive benefit, favouring the salariat to the detriment of the precariat. While appealing for a labourist, how many low-income earners are in a position to receive it? It was only in 2009 that the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission *proposed* dropping the qualifying period of employment for entitlement. But many women in the precariat will be out of a job at some time during their pregnancy. They would then be unlikely to obtain a new job and so would not have access to maternity leave benefits. The precariat should have the same entitlements as everybody else. Universality does matter.

This leads to the next demand: Jobs should be treated as *instrumental*, a proper commercial transaction. Those claiming they are a primary source of happiness, and that those reluctant to partake in the delights of jobs should be coerced to do so for their long-term happiness, should be told to mind their own business. For most in the precariat, jobs are not the road to nirvana. To be told they are the source of happiness is to make them something they were never meant to be. Jobs are created because somebody wants something done. Or at least that is what they should be created for. Let them be properly commodified. If this is the rule of a free market economy, then let it apply to all commodities.

Occupational freedom

The precariat wants to develop a sense of occupation, merging forms of work and labour in ways that facilitate personal development and satisfaction. The demands

of labour and jobs are intensifying, and just as many valuable forms of work are being done in sub-optimal stressful circumstances, so play is helping to squeeze out leisure. One of the great assets of tertiary society is *time*.

Instead of treating jobs as instrumental, we are told to treat them as the most important aspect of life. There are many forms of work outside jobs that can be more satisfying and socially valuable. If we say having a job is necessary and defines our identity, jobholders will feel stressed if they fear losing not just a job but their perceived social worth, status and living standard.

In late 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a comment by Alan Blinder, a former vice-chairman of the US Federal Reserve, in which he wrote that Americans had ‘only three things on their mind right now: jobs, jobs and jobs’. He gave no evidence to support this insight. But if a majority can only attain something close to security by holding onto jobs, then obviously jobs will be paramount and stressful. It is not being utopian to say this is unhealthy and unnecessary. We must stop making a fetish of jobs.

It is not even clear that economic growth in rich countries requires more jobs, as shown by evidence of ‘job-less growth’ and even ‘job-loss growth’. And trying to raise growth through artificial job creation may be ecologically destructive. After all, jobs and labour tend to go with resource use and depletion, whereas other forms of work tend to be reproductive and resource preserving.

In shifting from jobs, the right to *work* must be strengthened; the way to do this is to make it easier to enable people to undertake work that is not labour and to equalise the opportunity to do so. While the need for such work is growing, those best placed to do it are the affluent because they have the time or can purchase it. This is a concealed form of inequality because those with advantages are best placed to accumulate additional advantages.

In the United States, the post-2008 recession prompted a growth in work that was not labour. The irony went unnoticed. For instance, thousands logged onto Volunteernyc.org, a volunteer work clearing house. In part, this was in response to President Obama’s call for more public service; reviving community spirit was back in favour. We may wish that to be so. Yet no political party has a strategy for providing incentives or opportunities for such work. The rush to do it testifies to a desire to work on socially worthwhile activities. Losing jobs can be liberating. In this, to be in the precariat is a two-sided experience. Being tied to a job is the hell of the jobholder society, as feared by Hannah Arendt (1958). The organic belonging becomes sclerotic, stultifying. But being economically insecure is no better, leaving the precariat unable to take up volunteering or other social work. Their debts and precariousness prevent it.

The rush to volunteering testifies to a desire to do activities that we would regard as work if we had not been subject to decades of indoctrination implying that work equals jobs. Both Polanyi ([1944] 2001) and Arendt understood this, but neither could take the recognition into the policy sphere. Polanyi lamented commodification, Arendt lamented jobholderism, but neither had a vision of

how to achieve a work-and-leisure society. In the wake of the globalisation crisis, there is an opportunity to move forward.

Some of the names of emerging NGOs are encouraging – New York Cares, ‘Big Brothers, Big Sisters’, Taproot Foundation and so on. Professionals, out of jobs that had used only a restricted range of their talents and aspirations, have found outlets to put dormant talents and interests to work. Think too of the NGO in New York called Financial Clinic, which arranges for experts to advise low-paid workers on financial management. These are proficians who might otherwise fall into the precariat.

Government has played its part. Among the growing organisations were AmeriCorps, which takes young volunteers for a year, Teach for America, which sends college graduates to teach in low-income-area schools, and Volunteernyc.org, New York’s public service site. By mid-2009, US non-profit organisations had 9.4 million employees and 4.7 million full-time volunteers. And firms were allowing regular employees time off for public service. This may presage a new social pattern but must have displacement effects. For instance, 10,000 lawyers were laid off in the United States in the first quarter of 2009, and many were induced to do *pro bono* work for public interest groups, at nominal fees. In March 2009, the US Congress passed the Edward Kennedy Serve America Act, a sweeping reform of the national service programme launched in 1993. This effectively tripled the size of AmeriCorps, which turned 7 million people into community volunteers in the following year. The Act distinctively mobilised older Americans through ‘encore fellowships’, giving them ‘second careers’ in education, health care and non-profit management. A survey in January 2009 by AARP, which represents Americans aged over 50, found that nearly three-quarters of old agers wished to give time to social work rather than money.

Besides volunteering, there are many forms of neighbourhood and care work initiatives. Most people in modern society feel that they can devote too little time to care, for their relatives, friends and community, and receive too little from others when in need. Let us call it work and build it into our sense of occupation.

In sum, occupational freedom requires an equal opportunity for the precariat and others to undertake a wide range of work and labour in building their own sense of occupational career, without the state making a particular form of labour somehow morally and economically superior to others.

Work rights

The precariat should demand that the instruments of so-called ‘labour rights’ be converted into the means of promoting and defending work rights.

Increasingly, people doing work are not employees, and it is artificial to define employees in complex ways just to enable them to have labour-based entitlements. Work rights should include rules on acceptable practice *between* workers and *within* occupational communities as well as between ‘labour’ and ‘capital’. The precariat is at a disadvantage in these respects; a regime of ‘collaborative bargaining’ to give it Voice is required to complement regimes of collective bargaining between representatives of employers and employees, an issue to which we will return.

The precariat should also demand construction of an international work-rights regime, beginning with an overhaul of the International Labour Organisation, a bastion of labourism. How this could be done is dealt with elsewhere (Standing, 2010). Without a proper global body, the Voice of the precariat will be muted or ignored.

All work that is not labour needs to be made part of work rights. For instance, if people are expected to deal with financial management and make decisions on how they spend money, rather than being subject to paternalistic nudging by the state, they should have access to affordable information and professional advice, and enough quality time to deal with them.

The work of care is still not a sphere of rights backed by legislation and instruments of social protection. This is vitally important for women in the precariat, particularly as the triple burden grows. But it is also important for men, as more realise the potential of involving themselves in care and in other forms of work that are not labour. A work-rights agenda here would involve thinking of the care provider, the care recipient and intermediaries, all of whom can easily suffer from exploitation, oppression and self-exploitation.

Work as social activity should also become a zone of rights. We have seen how volunteering and community work have been spreading, particularly since 2008. The risk is that it could become a privileged activity for a minority and an instrument of workfare for others. Moreover, retirees and underemployed employees are effectively subsidised if they enter a market for services that are also provided by workers who depend on the income from doing that work as labour. In those circumstances, the presence of volunteers reduces the economic opportunities of the precariat.

Finally, work rights encompass ethical codes. Every occupational community should have such codes, and most would wish to impose them on their members. Sadly, some powerful occupations, such as accountants, long lacked them, allowing their greedy elites to rake in large incomes by putting ethical considerations aside and demeaning the lower ranks in their broader working communities. Occupations that lacked a tradition of collective ethics, such as bankers, conspicuously contributed to the financial crisis. The precariat must insist that ethical codes become part of every occupational community and economic activity.

Combating workfare and conditionality

Unless the precariat makes a nuisance of itself, its concerns will be ignored in utilitarian democracies. A tyranny of the majority may come about simply because the precariat is unorganised or overlooked because of its disjointedness and lack of Voice in the political process. This is currently the situation. As a result, policies that please the median voter and those who finance politics usually prevail. To combat this, the precariat must be institutionally represented and demand that policies meet ethical principles. At present there is an institutional vacuum, which a few valiant NGOs try to fill, at best sporadically.

Consider workfare, as introduced in the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, Germany and elsewhere. Essentially, the unemployed must accept designated jobs or forfeit benefits, possibly being marked for life as a 'scrounger' on some dataveillance system. The employed majority may think this is fair, though they would not accept it if applied to themselves (or their children). Unfortunately, in a utilitarian situation, the unfairness will be ignored or dismissed. A majority will be happy.

The state is delegating job placement activities to commercial providers, paying them by the number of unemployed placed in jobs or by the measured reduction in claimant numbers. This commercialisation of what was once a public service sets up several moral hazards. It depersonalises to the point of making it neither a service nor public but merely a commodifying transaction. The intermediary is a firm, and in a market economy a firm exists with one overriding mandate, to make profits.

Imagine the scenario. An agent wants a man put in a job quickly, to increase the agent's own income. There is a job paying a minimum wage at the other end of town; it is unpleasant but it is a job. The man says he cannot accept it because of the travel and other costs, because the long hours would make it difficult for him to spend time with his family or because it does not accord with the skills he has spent his adult life developing. He is promptly recorded as having refused a job. Under the new rules in the United Kingdom, which copy US schemes, if he refuses three such jobs, he will lose entitlement to benefits for three years. This will not be based on due process or a fair hearing but solely on a decision by the commercial agent, who is accuser, judge and jury. The state is happy because welfare rolls are cut. The man has no proper right of appeal against the penalty imposed on him, which may threaten his life as a functioning citizen and blot his record, putting him in a precarity trap.

Nobody versed in basic principles of justice would accept such a procedure for themselves or for their relatives. But as long as it is not their problem, or as long as such rules are not brought to their attention so that they are obliged to reflect on this sort of unfairness, the drift will continue.

Similarly, the UK government contracted out medical examinations for incapacity benefits to a firm called Atos Origin; it promptly declared that

three-quarters of claimants were fit to labour and would thus have their benefits reduced by a third. While most claimants would probably have been too intimidated to object on their own, some areas had groups to represent claimants; within months there were numerous appeals, 40 per cent of which were successful. Doctors told the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) they were under pressure to do quick cheap checks and declare patients fit.

Islington, a low-income borough of London, has a voluntary Islington Law Centre that reported a success rate in appeals of 80 per cent (Cohen, 2010). Such bodies should be an integral part of public policy, funded by government. And claimants should be represented inside the agencies, so that the chance of abuse of the vulnerable is reduced. After all, making appeals is risky, costly and time consuming. Not everywhere is like Islington, with its local community of lawyers and activist journalists.

The precariat must demand that democratic transparent principles should be applied at every stage of policy development and implementation. Conditionality and commercialised social policing must be rolled back as being alien to freedom, universalism and respect for nonconformity. If jobs are so wonderful, people should be drawn to them, not driven into them. And if services are so vital, then let education and affordable access be the means by which everybody can obtain them.

Associational freedom: the precariat's *agency*

This leads back to the nature of freedom. It is not an ability to do what we want, even allowing for the caveat that it should do no harm to others. Freedom comes from being part of a community in which to realise freedom in the exercise of it. It is *revealed* through actions, not something granted from on high or divined in stone tablets. The precariat is free in the neo-liberal sense, free to compete against each other, to consume and to labour. It is not free in that there is no associational structure in which the paternalists can be rebuffed or the oppressive competitive drive held in check.

The precariat needs collective Voice. The EuroMayDay movement is just a precursor, activities of primitive rebels preceding the emergence of collective action. Now is the time for bodies that represent the precariat on a continuing basis to bargain with employers, with intermediaries such as brokers and with government agencies most of all.

As a first task, recovering control over privacy is an imperative. The precariat lives in public spaces but is vulnerable to surveillance and undemocratic nudging. It should demand regulations to give individuals the right to see and correct information that any organisation holds on them, to require firms to inform employees, including outworkers, if any security breach occurs affecting them, to require organisations to undergo annual information-security audits

by an accredited third party, to put expiry dates on information and to limit use of data profiling on the basis of some probability of behaviour. Data protection and freedom-of-information laws have been a step in the right direction but do not go far enough. Active Voice is required. The precariat must mobilise around an agenda to recover and strengthen privacy and the right to correct misinformation.

The precariat will grow angrier about the ecological destruction taking place around it. Deniers of man-made climate change have mobilised the extreme right and populism to depict government efforts to limit pollution as a plot to extend state power. The precariat should be wise to that. But it is being frightened by the prospect of fewer jobs, which are presented as the source of income security, and slower growth, which is depicted as somehow trickling down to them. In rich countries, the precariat is told that raising production costs would accelerate the transfer of jobs to poorer nations. In developing countries, it is told that measures to reduce energy use would slow job generation. Everywhere the precariat is told it must accept the *status quo*. It needs to realise that the problem is the primacy given to jobs rather than to the environment. To reverse that, we need to be less dependent on job generation.

The precariat Voice in the sphere of work and labour is weak. In principle, trades unions could be reformed to represent precariat interests. But there are several reasons for thinking this is unlikely. Trade unions lobby and struggle for more jobs and a larger share of output; they want the economic pie to be bigger. They are necessarily adversarial and economistic. They make gestures to the unemployed, to those doing care work and to 'green' issues. But whenever there is a clash between the financial interests of their members and social or ecological issues, they will opt for the former. Progressives must stop expecting unions to become something contrary to their functions.

A new type of collective body will have to take up the challenge of 'collaborative bargaining' (Standing, 2009). Such bodies will need to consider the full range of work and labour activities that the precariat has to undertake and its social aspirations. They must develop a bargaining capacity vis-à-vis employers, labour brokers, temporary agencies and an array of state bodies, notably those dealing with social services and monitoring activities. They must also be able to represent the precariat in dealings with other groups of workers, because its interests are not the same as those of the salariat or core employees, who may have labour unions to speak for them. And they must be associations that facilitate social mobility, providing structured communities in which mobility can be more orderly and feasible than at present.

One problem is escaping from the neo-liberal trap, based on the claim that any collective body of service providers distorts the market and should be blocked on antitrust grounds. Fortunately, there are promising models emerging in several countries. One is worker cooperatives, modernised to allow for more flexible involvement.

A Polanyian message is that associations emerging to help 're-embed' the economy in society following the globalisation crisis should allow nonconformity, to accommodate the precariat while enhancing egalitarianism. The principles of cooperativism have something to offer in this respect. Intriguingly, before his election as UK Prime Minister, David Cameron announced an intention to allow public sector workers, except the police, courts and prison services, to run their organisations as worker cooperatives, negotiating contracts with the relevant government department. This would move towards a modern form of guild socialism and turn over the management of occupations to occupational associations. Challenges to be overcome would include transparency, over-tendering, accountability once contracts were negotiated, and governance of rules on distribution of income, labour opportunities and internal promotions. Problems would also arise in jurisdiction and relations with other services. How would a service deal with labour-saving technical change?

On launching the idea in February 2010, Cameron cited examples such as call centres, social work, community health and nursing teams, hospital pathology departments, and rehabilitation and education services in prisons. This list prompts several questions. How large should the group be that is designated as a 'worker cooperative'? If all National Health Service hospitals in a local authority area were selected as a group, problems would arise in determining what share of income would go to groups with widely different earnings and technical skills. Would the share be paid on a *pro rata* basis, depending on relative earnings at the outset? Or would the rule be equal shares, regardless of skill or amount of time spent doing the work? If the cooperative unit were smaller, confined just to doctors, nurses or pathology departments, then internal rules might be simpler, but any internal change might have implications for individuals in the group. For that reason, changes offering a better or less costly service might well be resisted or simply not considered.

The difficulty with integrated social services is determining the monetary value of particular parts of it. Do doctors deserve 70 per cent of the value of medical services and nurses the remaining 30 per cent? Or should it be 60–40 or 80–20? One could say the shares should be determined democratically, in that government departments would bargain with the cooperatives. But just stating that should prompt us to think of the potential spheres of negotiation, including transaction costs. There would be legitimate tensions between related occupational groups. Think how nursing auxiliaries would react if the allocation for nursing services was split 70–30 in favour of registered nurses. Nevertheless, the proposal is a move towards collaborative bargaining. It recognises that, in a tertiary society, we exist not just as individuals but as willing members of groups, with a sense of identity. It harks back to nineteenth-century friendly societies and 'mutuals', and to the occupational guilds.

To work well there would have to be a strong floor of rights, so as to facilitate flexibility and give sufficient income security to induce people to be

amenable to changes in organisation and their own personal profile. One under-appreciated drawback of the old employment security model was that, because benefits and income rose with duration in the service, firm or organisation, people clung to jobs when it would have been personally and organisationally advantageous for them to move. The gilded cage too often became a leaden cage. The cooperative principle is laudable but it must not become another means of stifling occupational mobility.

Besides cooperatives, another form of agency that would serve the precariat is an association of temporary workers. There are several variants. The Freelancers' Union, set up for 'permalancers' (permanent freelancers or temporaries) in New York, provides a wide range of services to individual members. Another variant, which is based on legislative help, is the freelance editors' association in Canada (Standing, 2009: 271–3). A third model might be something like SEWA (the Self-Employed Women's Association of India). Others are emerging and should be supported by progressive politics. They will give new meaning to associational freedom.

Above all, flexible labour markets and the overbearing state mean the precariat needs Voice inside policy agencies. The salariat knows how to defend itself against bureaucrats and complex administrative procedures. It can raise its voice. But the precariat is disadvantaged. While many in it are just insecure, others have additional disadvantages. For example, in the United Kingdom, two out of every five on incapacity benefit are said to be mentally ill. Add the poorly educated and migrants with limited command of the language, and their need for advocates and pressure groups inside policymaking structures can be appreciated. They need to be able to contest unfair dismissals, unpaid or underpaid benefits, deal with debt and resolve problems while negotiating their way around increasingly complex procedures seemingly designed to make it as hard as possible to qualify for and obtain benefits.

Reviving equality

In the twentieth century, inequality was seen in terms of profits and wages. For social democrats and others, redistribution was to be achieved by controlling the means of production, through nationalisation, and obtaining a greater share of profits through taxation, which could then be redistributed in state benefits and public services.

That model fell into disrepute and socialists are in despair. In a collection of essays on *Reimagining Socialism* by American socialists who saw the means of production going to China, Barbara Ehrenreich and Bill Fletcher (2009) wrote: 'Do we have a plan, people? Can we see our way out of this and into a just, democratic, sustainable (add your own favourite adjectives) future? Let's just put it on the table: We don't'.

They should take heart. The egalitarian ethos has moved on. The baton is being picked up by the precariat, the rising class in a tertiary society where means of production are nebulous and dispersed, and often owned by workers anyhow. Every Transformation has been marked by a struggle over the key assets of the era. In feudal societies, the peasants and serfs struggled to gain control of land and water. In industrial capitalism, the struggle was over the means of production, the factories, estates and mines. Workers wanted decent labour and a share of the profits in return for conceding control of labour to managers. But in today's tertiary society, progressive struggle will take place around the unequal access to and control of five primary assets.

They can be summarised as economic security, time, quality space, knowledge and financial capital. The progressive struggle will be about all five. We know the elite and salariat have most of the financial capital and that they have gained vastly more income without any evidence that they are more astute or hard working than their predecessors. Their affluence makes a mockery of claims of a meritocracy. Control of the income from financial capital means they can buy more of the privatised quality space, squeezing the commons on which the precariat and others rely, and they can have control over their own time that others can only dream of.

There is no magic bullet for redistributing all the five assets. In each case, institutional changes, regulations and bargaining will be required. However, one policy that has been discussed for many years would help in all respects. Before considering how the precariat could obtain a greater share of the five key assets, let us define the key idea and give the ethical rationale for it.

A basic income

The proposal has already been a theme of precariat demonstrations and has a long history with many distinguished adherents. It has gone under many names: The most popular is a 'basic income' but others include a 'citizen's grant', 'social dividend', 'solidarity grant' and 'demogrant'. While we will use the most popular name, a variant is proposed here that takes account of two desirable objectives that have not been part of the argumentation so far.

The core of the proposal is that every legal resident of a country or community, children as well as adults, should be provided with a modest monthly payment. Each individual would have a cash card entitling them to draw a monthly amount for basic needs, to spend as they see fit, with add-ons for special needs, such as disability. In most rich countries, it would be less radical than it may appear, since it would mean consolidating many existing transfer schemes and replacing others that are riddled with complexity and arbitrary and discretionary conditionality.

Such a basic income would be paid to each individual, not to a larger contestable group, such as ‘the family’ or ‘household’. It would be universal in being paid to all legal residents, with a waiting period for migrants, for pragmatic reasons. It would be in the form of cash, allowing the recipient to decide how to use it, not in a paternalistic form, such as a voucher for food or other predetermined items. It must promote ‘free choice’, not be a means of nudging. It should be inviolable, in that the state should not be able to take it away unless a person ceases to be a legal resident or commits a crime for which denial is a specified penalty. And it should be paid as a *regular* modest sum, not as a lump sum payment along the lines of the ‘baby bond’ or ‘stakeholder grant’ intended under the United Kingdom’s Child Trust Fund, which raises ‘weakness-of-will’ and other problems (Wright, 2006).

The grant would be unconditional in behavioural terms. There are laws, courts and due process to deal with questionable behaviour. They should not be mixed up with a policy to provide basic security. If they are, neither security nor justice will be provided. In principle, cash transfers liberate; they give economic security with which to make choices about how to live and develop one’s capacities. Poverty is about unfreedom as well as about not having enough to eat, not enough clothing and an inadequate place to live. Imposing conditions, whether behavioural or in terms of what the recipient is permitted to buy, is an act of unfreedom. Once it is accepted, what is to stop policy makers going to the next step? They can easily think they know what is best for someone who is income-poor and less educated. Conditionalists will tend to extend conditions and tighten how they operate until they become coercive and punitive. A basic income would go in the other direction.

A basic income would not be quite like a negative income tax, with which it is often compared. It would not create a poverty trap, in which as income rises the benefit is lost, acting as a disincentive to labour. The person would retain the basic income regardless of how much is earned from labour, just as it would be paid regardless of marital or family status. All earned income would be taxed at the standard rate. If the state wanted to limit the amount going to the affluent, it could claw it back through higher tax on higher incomes.

The objections to a basic income have been reviewed extensively, notably in an international network formed in 1986 to promote debate. Originally called BIEN (Basic Income European Network), it changed its name at its Barcelona Congress in 2004 to BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network) to reflect the fact that a growing number of its members were from developing countries and other countries outside Europe. By 2010, it had flourishing national networks in many countries, including Brazil, Canada, Japan, Mexico, South Korea and the United States as well as in Europe.

The main claims made against an unconditional basic income are that it would lower labour supply, could be inflationary, would be unaffordable, would be used by populist politicians and would be a ‘handout’, a reward

for sloth and a tax on those who labour. All of these have been answered in the BIEN literature and by other scholarly work. However, in thinking of the advantages of basic income for the precariat in terms of the key assets (and how to pay for it), we will respond to some of those criticisms here.

Philosophically, a basic income may be thought of as a ‘social dividend’, a return on past investment. Those who attack it as giving something for nothing tend to be people who have been given a lot of something for nothing, often having inherited wealth, small or vast. This leads to the point elegantly made by Tom Paine (2005) in his *Agrarian Justice* of 1795. Every affluent person in every society owes their good fortune largely to the efforts of their forebears and the efforts of the forebears of less affluent people. If everybody were granted a basic income with which to develop their capabilities, it would amount to a dividend from the endeavours and good luck of those who came before. The precariat has as much right to such a dividend as anybody else.

A desirable step towards a basic income is integration of the tax and benefit systems. In 2010, a development moving the United Kingdom towards a basic income came from what many would have thought an unlikely direction. The Coalition government’s plans for radical reform of the tax-benefit system recognised that the system of fifty-one benefits that the previous government had built up, many with different eligibility criteria, was befuddling and rife with moral hazards linked to poverty and unemployment traps. In amalgamating state benefits into two – a Universal Work Credit and a Universal Life Credit – it would have been possible to advance tax-benefit integration and facilitate a more orderly tapering of withdrawal of benefits as earned income rose. Integration could create the circumstances for a basic income to emerge. Sadly, the work and pensions minister, a Catholic, was persuaded to force benefit recipients to labour, ushering in workfare and allowing commercial agents to have control. But integration would be a step towards rebuilding a system of social protection with a universalistic base.

Redistributing security

The asset of security has several elements – social, economic, cultural, political and so on. We are concerned here with the economic dimension. Chronic insecurity is bad in itself and is instrumentally bad, affecting the development of capacities and personality. If this is accepted, then there should be a strategy to provide basic security. The precariat is stirring precisely because it suffers from systemic insecurity.

One can have too much security or too little. If one has too little, irrationality prevails; if one has too much, a lack of care and responsibility prevails. An emphasis on security may become reactionary, resisting change and justifying regressive controls. However, basic economic security would

still leave existential insecurity (we worry about those we love, our safety and health, etc.) and development insecurity (we want to develop our capacities and live a more comfortable life, but must take risks to do so). And a sense of stability is required in order to be rational, tolerant and compassionate. Basic security must be assured, not something that can be taken away at someone's discretion without just and proven cause.

Utilitarians and neo-liberals ignore the need for universal economic security as a means of enabling people to internalise principled behaviour. They tend to see people who are failures of a market society as a collective 'other'. Thinking of targeting a group of people called 'the poor' is to pity and condemn in roughly equal measure. 'They' are deserving, undeserving or transgressing, to be benevolently helped, reshaped or punished, according to how we good folk judge them. To talk of 'the poor' is to talk of pity, which is akin to contempt, as David Hume taught us. 'They' are not like 'us'. The precariat's retort is that they are us or could be at any time.

Thinking of universal basic security is to shift the mind away from pity to social solidarity and compassion. Social insurance was about producing security in an industrial society. It could not work now and did not work very well then. But the principle of solidaristic security was laudable. It has been lost in the plethora of targeted schemes seeking to weed out the 'undeserving'. What does it matter if 0.5 per cent of the people are lazy? Should policies be designed with the 0.5 per cent in mind or to give security and freedom to the 99.5 per cent, so that society has a more relaxed, less anxious life? Many control policies that politicians, their advisers and bureaucrats devise may appeal to prejudiced minds and gain votes, but they are costly and largely counterproductive. It costs the taxpayer much more to force a few unproductive people into unproductive jobs than just to let them drift, if that is really what they want. It would be better to offer disinterested advice, as a service, not as a thinly disguised sanction.

The vast majority would not be content to live off just a basic income. They want to work and are excited by the possibility of improving their material and social living. To hound a tiny minority for their 'laziness' is a sign of our weakness, not our merit. In that regard, a little experiment conducted in the backstreets of London in 2010 had heart-warming lessons. Some homeless vagrants were each asked what they most wanted; their dreams were modest, as befitted their situation. The money to fulfil those dreams was provided without conditions; a few months later, nearly all of them had ceased to be homeless and a burden on the local authorities. The savings for taxpayers of giving that money amounted to fifty times the cost of giving it.

Basic security is, first, having moderate, not extreme, *uncertainty*; second, knowing that if something went wrong there would be affordable and behaviourally acceptable ways of *coping*; and third, having affordable and behaviourally tolerable ways of *recovering* from a shock or hazard. In a

market society with conditional welfare schemes, costly private options and little social mobility, those conditions do not exist and must be constructed. The starting point for the precariat is dealing with uncertainty, since they are faced by uninsurable 'unknown unknowns'.

The need for multi-layered *ex ante* security (as contrasted with the *ex post* security offered by social insurance, which deals with specific contingency risks) is thus a reason for wishing the good society of the future to include an unconditional basic income. Those affluent politicians lucky enough to have lived off private welfare all their lives should be told that having 'welfare for life' is what everybody deserves, not just them. We are all 'dependent' on others, or to be precise we are 'interdependent'. It is part of the normal human condition, not some addiction or disease. And providing fellow human beings with basic security should not be made conditional on some moralistically determined behaviour. If certain behaviour is unacceptable, it should be made a matter of law, subject to due process. Linking social protection to conditionality is to bypass law, which is supposedly the same for all.

Basic security is an almost universal human need and a worthy goal for state policy. Trying to make people 'happy' is a manipulative ruse, whereas providing an underpinning of security would create a necessary condition for people to be able to pursue their own conception of happiness. Basic economic security is also instrumentally beneficial. Insecurity produces stress, which diminishes the ability to concentrate and learn, particularly affecting those parts of the brain most associated with the working memory (Evans and Schamberg, 2009). So, to promote equal opportunity, we should aim to reduce differences in insecurity. More fundamentally, psychologists have shown that basically secure people are much more likely to be tolerant and altruistic. It is chronic socio-economic insecurity that is fanning neo-fascism in rich countries as they confront the delayed downward adjustment of living standards brought about by globalisation.

This leads to a first possible modification of the proposal for a basic income (see also Standing, 2011). We know that the globalised economy produces more economic insecurity and is prone to volatility, and that the precariat experiences uninsurable fluctuations in economic insecurity. This creates a need for income stability and for automatic economic stabilisers. The latter role used to be played by unemployment insurance and other social insurance benefits, but these have shrivelled. If a basic income were seen as an 'economic stabilisation grant', it would be an egalitarian way of reducing economic volatility. It would be more efficient and equitable than conventional monetary and fiscal policy as well as all those deplorable subsidies that foster inefficiency and a host of deadweight and substitution effects.

The value of the basic income card could be varied counter-cyclically. When opportunities for earning were high, its value could be lower, and when recessionary conditions were spreading it could be raised. To avoid political

misuse, the level of the basic income could be set by an independent body, including representatives of the precariat as well as of other interests. This would be equivalent to the quasi-independent monetary bodies set up in recent years. Its mandate would be to adjust the core value of the basic income grant according to economic growth and its supplementary value according to the cyclical condition of the economy. The point is to redistribute basic security from those with 'too much' to those with little or none.

Redistributing financial capital

There are many ways of paying for basic income or stabilisation grants. The contextual point is that inequalities are greater than for a long time, in many countries greater than at any time. There is no evidence that such inequality is necessary. But more is due to the high returns to financial capital. The precariat should obtain a share.

Rich country governments missed an opportunity to reduce inequality following the shock to the banking system. When they bailed out the banks with citizens' money, they could have taken a permanent citizens' interest share of the equity, requiring a public-interest representative on the board of directors of all banks, or all receiving public assistance. When the banks started making profits again, some would have flowed back to the public who had effectively invested in the banks. It is not too late to do something like this.

Two reforms would help. First, subsidies to capital and to labour should be phased out. They do not benefit the precariat and are inegalitarian. Had one-half of the money spent on bailing out the banks been allocated to economic stabilisation grants, a decent monthly grant could have been provided to every citizen for years (Standing, 2011). Other subsidies are distortionary and contribute to inefficiency.

Second, ways must be found to redistribute part of the high returns to financial capital, returns that bear no relationship to the labour of those now profiting from its strategic position in the global economy. Why should people with particular skills – always accepting they are skills – live a vastly better economic life than others who have different skills?

Rich countries must come to terms with being *rentier* economies. There is nothing wrong with investing capital in emerging market economies and with receiving fair dividends from the investment. This side of globalisation should give rise to a win-win situation but only if some of the dividends are distributed to the citizens and denizens of the investing country.

Sovereign wealth (or capital) funds, which already exist in forty countries, are a promising way of doing that. If the income accruing to such funds could be shared, the precariat would gain a means of control over their lives. It is all very well for economists to claim that jobs will come in non-tradable sectors.

What we are learning is that most activities are tradable. Expecting jobs to be the means by which inequality is reduced is whistling in the wind. Jobs will not disappear. To think otherwise is to accept the 'lump of labour fallacy'. But many if not most will be low paying and insecure.

Capital funds can be used to accumulate financial returns to help pay for a basic income. There are precedents. The Alaska Permanent Fund, established in 1976, was set up to distribute part of the profits from oil production to every legal resident of Alaska. It continues to do so. It is not a perfect model, since its governance can result in the relative neglect of the precariat or tomorrow's Alaskans relative to today's. But, like the Norwegian Fund, it provides the nucleus of a capital fund mechanism that could be used to finance a modest basic income, however it might be called.

The precariat would also benefit from so-called 'Tobin taxes', levied on speculative capital transactions. There are arguments for believing that reducing short-term capital flows would be beneficial in any event. And then there are ecological taxes, designed to compensate for the externalities caused by pollution and to slow or reverse the rapid depletion of resources. In short, there is no reason to think a universal basic income is unaffordable.

Internationally, the recent legitimization of cash transfers as an instrument of development aid is promising. They were first accepted as short-term schemes for post-shock situations, as after earthquakes and floods. Later, as noted earlier, conditional cash transfer schemes swept Latin America. Donors and aid agencies have come round to them. Cash transfers, stripped of their phoney conditionality, should become the main form of aid, to ensure the aid raises living standards and is not used for regressive or corrupt purposes.

We should think afresh about the global redistribution of income. A book by jurist Ayelet Schachar (2009), *The Birthright Lottery*, has argued for a citizenship tax in rich countries to redistribute to people in poor ones, treating the material benefits of citizenship as property, an inheritance. This is akin to Paine's argument. It may be too utopian for immediate implementation. But it builds on the insight that citizenship is not a natural right, since borders are arbitrary. It conjures up a link between earmarked taxes and redistribution via basic transfers to those 'unlucky enough' to be born in low-income parts of the world. The only reason for thinking it utopian today is that in a globalising market society we are all expected to be egotistical, not global citizens.

So, there should be no qualms in saying that there are ways of funding moves towards a basic income in both rich and developing countries. The challenge is political; only if the precariat can exert enough pressure on the political process will what is possible become reality. Fortunately, as it exerts that pressure, evidence is accumulating of the beneficial effects of basic cash transfers in countries that only a few years ago would have been regarded as places where a basic income would be impossible.

Gaining control of time

A basic income would also give people more control over their *time*. And it would be an answer to the libertarian paternalists. They believe that people cannot make rational decisions because they are faced by too much information. In that case, they should favour policies that would provide people with more time in which to make rational decisions. People also need time to do work-for-labour and other forms of work that are not labour. Let us slow down. We need a Slow Time Movement, along the lines of the Slow Food Movement; both are integral to localism.

There are few levers to enable people to slow down. Instead, fiscal and social policy 'rewards' labour and penalises those who opt for less labour. People who wish to labour less are doubly penalised, not only in receiving lower earnings but also in losing entitlement to so-called 'social rights', such as pensions.

A basic income, delinked from labour, would be decommodifying in that it would give people a greater capacity to live outside the market and be under less pressure to labour. But it could increase the amount of labour by allowing people to move in and out of the labour market more easily. In other words, it might induce more labour but would do so in conditions of greater security and independence from market pressures. A basic income would also enable citizens to accept low wages *and* to bargain more strongly. If they judged that a certain amount was all that a potential employer could afford, they might take the job as long as they had enough on which to live.

It is the need to regain control over time that is so important. We need it to make decisions on risk management. Some libertarian paternalists claim that education fails to improve people's ability to make good decisions, justifying their nudges and use of sticks that look like carrots. However, a UK survey found that investors identified lack of time as the main barrier to managing risks (Greene, 2009). Risks can be explained so that people can make rational choices. Doctors can communicate risk to patients as part of the delivery of 'informed choice'. Statistical findings can be brought to people's attention. Financial service professionals could be obliged to accept a broader definition of risk and to engage with consumers to enable them to make more rational decisions, through a 'risk communication and recognition tool'. The point is that people need time in which to weigh up risks, as long as policies ensure the appropriate information is made available.

This recalls one of the worst precarity traps. The precariat is faced with a time squeeze from declining returns to labour and from pressure to do more work-for-labour and work-for-reproduction, partly because they cannot afford to pay for substitutes. Anxious and insecure, to the point of being 'spent', they have to do an excessive amount of work-for-labour and are unable to digest and use information that comes their way. A basic income would give them greater control of their time and thus help them to make more rational decisions.

Recovering the commons

Finally, there is the maldistribution of public quality space. This has two relevant dimensions. Most informed people recognise the frightening ecological threat posed by global warming, pollution and the disappearance of species. Yet much of the elite and upper parts of the salariat do not really care. Their affluence and connections can ensure they are not touched. They can retreat to their islands in clear blue sea and their mountain retreats. They want high rates of economic growth to augment their incomes and wealth, never mind the ecological destruction caused by resource depletion. It is the precariat that is naturally the green class in arguing for a more egalitarian society in which sharing and reproductive, resource-conserving activities are prioritised. Rapid growth is only needed in order to retain the grotesque inequalities that globalisation has produced. Just as we need to slow down in order to reduce the stress of frenzied labour and consumption, we also need to do so to reproduce nature.

The precariat must also struggle for a viable commons; it needs a rich public space. Perhaps the most revealing acts of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher – that architect of neo-liberalism so revered by successors Tony Blair and David Cameron – were the mass sales of council housing and playing fields and other facilities attached to state schools. That cut the public space for low-income citizens and denizens.

Three decades later the policy culminated in the austerity measures of 2010. Hundreds of public libraries are set for closure, just as they have been across the United States. These are precious public places for the precariat. Sports funding for state schools is targeted for huge cuts, with after-school clubs facing devastation. Other public facilities are being cut or will be priced out of range. And urban zoning of residence will become more systemic. The sale of council housing created a shortage of affordable rental accommodation for low-income earners in towns and cities. Rents for private accommodation rose, increasing the sums paid out in housing benefit to low-income earners. When the government looked for fiscal savings, housing benefit was an easy target. It plans to restrict benefit levels to the cheapest 30 per cent of homes in an area and cap the amount a family can receive. The reforms are bound to drive low-income earners out of high-cost, high living-standard areas, in what the Mayor of London, a Conservative, called ‘social cleansing’ and the Archbishop of Canterbury called ‘social zoning’.

Perversely, the move will make the labour market more chaotic. As low-income and relatively uneducated people concentrate in low-income areas, job opportunities will concentrate in higher-income areas. Pockets of poverty and unemployment will become zones or even ghettos, just as the *banlieues* of Paris are centres of deprivation, insecurity, unemployment and survival crime, and just as South African cities, zoned under apartheid, remain fragmented into heavily guarded gated areas and the seething anger of the townships.

There is also need for more secure public spaces in which the precariat can congregate and develop public civic friendship. The public sphere needs to be revived. Sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas, lamenting the fragmentation of the public sphere, has harked back to the eighteenth century of London's coffee houses, the salons of Paris and Germany's 'table talks'. His view, infused with nostalgia, is that the public sphere was killed by the welfare state, mass media, public relations and the undermining of parliamentary politics by political parties. Implicit is a belief that if only we had well-informed coffee-house denizens, democracy would revive.

There is something in this, in that while the precariat is the emergent class populating the modern coffee houses, pubs, internet cafes and social networks, there is a *deliberative* deficit. Habermas depicted the internet as generating an anarchic wave of fragmented circuits of communication that could not produce a public sphere. Fair enough. But he is too pessimistic. The precariat may be offered a fragmented public sphere, but it may fight for one where deliberative democracy can be revived. And a basic income can help even here.

Leisure grants

A worrying aspect of the jobholder society is the loss of respect for leisure in the Greek sense of *scholē*. That loss of respect goes with civic privatism and an individualism based on crude materialism. For the health of society and for ourselves, we need mechanisms to reverse the trend.

Thin democracy, the commodification of politics, and the power of public relations and elite money risk strengthening a tyranny of the majority and an unhealthy denigration of nonconformity. As a counter-movement, the precariat needs mechanisms to generate *deliberative* democracy. This promotes values of universalism and altruism, since it encourages people to think along 'veil of ignorance' lines and to depart from the standpoint influenced by their position along the social and economic spectrum. However, deliberative democracy requires active participation, which cannot be done by distracted people fed a diet of sound bites and platitudes. It requires debate, eye contact, body language, listening and reflection.

In ancient Athens, a stone device called a *kleroterion* was used to select a random 500 people to make policy, out of 50,000 citizens. It was undemocratic, in that women and slaves were excluded. But it resembles deliberative democracy. Research by James Fishkin, Bruce Ackerman and others indicates that public discussions often lead away from populist views. One experiment in recession-hit Michigan led to a rise of support for higher taxes, in the case of income tax from 27 to 45 per cent. In such experiments, the biggest changes in opinion come from those gaining most knowledge. It does not mean the

changes are always desirable. But it does indicate that deliberation makes a difference. Earlier psychological experiments found that those with basic economic security are more altruistic, tolerant and egalitarian than those who are economically insecure, and that group deliberation around related propositions led to even more support for providing people with a guaranteed floor of security (Frohlich and Oppenheimer, 1992).

Some advocate the use of the internet to conduct deliberative democracy, through polls. It has been used in Greece and China for a few projects, such as to determine how a local infrastructure fund should be allocated in Zeguo, China. It is being considered as a safety valve for social pressures. However, while using the internet would be intriguing, it cannot replace the concentration involved in public physical participation.

It is thus worth considering one interim variant of basic income grants, which could help turn the precariat away from populism. This is to require everybody entitled to a basic income grant, when they register eligibility, to make a moral commitment to vote in national and local elections, and to participate in at least one local meeting a year convened to discuss topical political issues. Such a commitment should not be legally binding, with sanctions; it should merely be a recognition of civic responsibility, as befits an ethos of emancipatory egalitarianism.

Even without the moral commitment, a basic income would be an instrument for encouraging deliberative democracy. Thin democracy is likely to be captured by elites or populist agendas. If democracies are less corrupt than non-democracies, as Transparency International estimates, then pro-participatory measures would strengthen democracy. And, presuming a linear relationship between degree of democracy and corruption, this would diminish corruption. With low turnout, it is more likely that entrenched candidates will win. The precariat and proficians, reflecting their more nomadic way of life, are more likely to switch to politicians regarded as trustworthy. Many elections are decided by who does not vote. This cannot be a good outcome.

Work-and-leisure grants can be related to the new enthusiasm for 'localism'. The desire for devolution under the rubric of a 'post-bureaucratic age' is seductive, favoured by both social democrats and conservatives. In the United Kingdom, the Conservatives cleverly invented the term Big Society, a vague euphemism that seems to embrace localism and a greater role for civic society and voluntary work. The think-tank Demos also emphasised localism in its pamphlet *The Liberal Republic* (Reeves and Collins, 2009), which linked it to 'a self-authored life' in which individual autonomy is paramount in shaping one's version of the Good Life.

There are troubles ahead. Localism may go with social zoning, with affluent areas gaining to the detriment of others. It neglects the need for associational freedom rather than just individual autonomy, which would leave the precariat at a disadvantage. Civic society can be dominated by the affluent and well

connected. And localism could usher in more paternalism. Already it is being linked to measures to promote 'pro-social behaviour'. An idea is to let citizens vote on how money should be spent in their neighbourhood in return for doing voluntary work or attending public meetings. This form of conditionality threatens principles of democracy. Voting is a universal right and the objective should be to increase deliberative democracy, not create insiders and outsiders. Moreover, localism could only succeed if people were civically engaged, and linking entitlement to a grant to a moral commitment to participate in democratic activity would be a better way forward.

An intention that should appeal to progressives is to raise the voting level, bearing in mind that where that happens the propensity to support liberal or progressive values rises. Brazil has compulsory voting, which may be why there has been little support for neo-liberalism there. A large number of poor, who pay little tax but gain from state benefits, push politicians to the left in social policy. So progressives should want to increase voter turnout, a reason for them to support leisure-conditional grants. Obligatory voting could be why Brazil may introduce a basic income before other countries and why a commitment to do so was passed into law in 2004.

There is a precedent for linking political participation to basic income grants. In 403 BC in Athens, citizens were given a small grant as a token for their participation in the life of the *polis*. To receive it was a badge of honour and an inducement to take responsibility in the conduct of public affairs.

Conclusions

The precariat may soon find it has many more friends. It is worth recalling the famous admonition attributed to Pastor Martin Niemöller on the rise of the Nazis in 1930s Germany.

They came first for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for me
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

The warning is relevant because the dangerous class is being led astray by demagogues like Berlusconi, mavericks like Sarah Palin and neo-fascists elsewhere. While the centre-right is being dragged further to the right to hold its constituents, the political centre-left is giving ground and haemorrhaging votes. It is in danger of losing a generation of credibility. For too long, it has represented the interests of 'labour' and stood for a dying way of life and a dying way of labouring. The new class is the precariat; unless the progressives of the world offer a politics of paradise, that class will be all too prone to listen to the sirens luring society onto the rocks. Centrists will join in supporting a new progressive consensus because they have nowhere else to go. The sooner they join, the better. The precariat is not victim, villain or hero – it is just a lot of us.