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## ABSTRACT

Although the economic and political climate has changed dramatically since the early 1970s, when the 'Quality of Working Life' (QWL) movement was officially 'born', such that QWL has now been effectively marginalised as an issue of public concern, the basic problems at the heart of this movement, and that of both its predecessors and ostensible descendents, are still very much alive. Indeed, it is argued throughout the present thesis that QWL theorists and practitioners have rarely recognised the nature of the problems at the heart of their own project, nor have they traced thoroughly the genealogies of their own theory and practice. Amongst many other things, the QWL project lacks sociological perspective. It is this particular criticism that formed the focus of the present thesis.

In approaching the subject matter of the thesis, a deliberate decision was made to locate discussion of QWL within a broader sociological context than its advocates were willing, or able, to do. Thus, it was hoped to show that mainstream approaches to QWL had either ignored completely, or inadequately conceptualised and treated, issues of key importance to a fuller understanding of the problems at the heart of QWL concerns.

The main areas chosen to highlight the weaknesses of QWL theory and practice, and to provide necessary sociological perspective, were those of structural contradiction in the relations between capital and labour; management; work; and worker participation. In addition, an attempt was made to map out and criticise both the homogeneity and diversity of QWL theory and practice. It was subsequently argued that whether considered as one homogeneous perspective, or as a number of divergent, though still related, perspectives, QWL theory and practice lacked sociological perspective, and, that such a lack of perspective had detrimental consequences for the intellectual validity (and, indeed, for the practical utility) of QWL initiatives.

Overall, it was concluded that the inherent limitations of the discourse of QWL precluded deployment of the 'sociological imagination'. However, without the deployment of such a perspective, attempts to comprehend the nature of the problems which lie at the heart of the QWL project are doomed to failure.

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**Quality of Working Life in Sociological Perspective.**

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts,

Department of Sociology & Social Policy,

**University of Durham.**

December, 1988.



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DECLARATION

I confirm that none of the material offered herewithin has been previously submitted for a degree, or other qualification, to this, or any other, university or institution.

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*For My Parents*

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## INTRODUCTION

Given the continuing concern in contemporary Britain with mainly quantitative employment issues, ie: the numbers of jobs available and the numbers of unemployed people looking for work, rather than with the more qualitative aspects of paid employment, it might be thought at best unfashionable, and at worst irrelevant, to have produced a thesis concerned primarily with issues pertaining to the quality of working life.

However, to entertain such thoughts is to succumb to a superficiality of approach similar in its way to that of most mainstream QWL (Quality of Working Life) advocates towards their chosen area of 'expertise'. Although the economic and political climate has changed dramatically since the early 1970s when the QWL 'movement' was officially 'born', such that QWL has now been effectively marginalised as an issue of public concern, the basic problems at the heart of this movement, and that of both its predecessors and ostensible descendents, are still very much alive. Indeed, it will be argued throughout the present thesis that QWL theorists and practitioners have rarely recognised the nature of the problems at the heart of their project, neither have they traced thoroughly the genealogies of their own theory and practice. With regard to the former criticism it can be argued, for example, that most mainstream advocates of QWL discuss QWL without any theoretical conception of the nature of work in our type of industrial capitalist society, or of the interests that determine the design of work and work organisation, or of the forces in society at large which encourage the development of appropriate and realistic expectations. As for the second strand of criticism, all too often QWL theorists and



practitioners seem unaware of their own place in, for example, the continuing process by which

*psychiatry and psychology have, across the twentieth century, produced a constant series of interventions within the process of production...Through such interventions the individual's relations with the world of production come to be re-defined on their behalf in a series of constantly refashioned images - efficiency, motivation, participation, co-operation, group relations, personal satisfaction and much else besides (1).*

Such a lack of sociological (and historical) perspective has detrimental consequences for the intellectual validity and practical utility of QWL initiatives.

Despite having been marginalised as an issue of public concern in Britain, QWL has not disappeared without trace. ACAS' (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) Work Research Unit (WRU), for example, is still engaged in promoting the improvement of organisational effectiveness 'through improving the quality of working life'. Indeed, the growing pressures of international competition, contributing to what Streeck terms the unprecedented 'uncertainties of management in the management of uncertainty', have in some ways provided the opportunity for an expansion in the unit's work, as more companies attempt to introduce flexible working practices and other types of organisational change (2). However, there is little in WRU's recent work to suggest that QWL as it is propounded today is any less open to the types of criticism outlined above than were its predecessors (3). Amongst many other things, contemporary QWL theory and practice still lacks sociological perspective. It is this particular criticism that forms the focus of the present thesis.

In approaching the subject matter of the thesis, a deliberate decision was

made to locate discussion of QWL within a broader sociological context than its advocates were willing, or able, to do. Thus it was hoped to show that mainstream approaches to QWL had either ignored completely or inadequately conceptualised and treated issues of key importance to a fuller understanding of the problems at the heart of QWL concerns.

The main issues chosen to highlight the weaknesses of QWL theory and practice, and to provide necessary sociological perspective, are those of structural contradiction in the relations between capital and labour, management, work and worker participation. These are all key areas of analysis and debate in industrial sociology and, as mentioned, integral to a more comprehensive understanding of issues pertaining to the quality of working life.

Perhaps the most important omission in QWL theory is a lack of understanding of the role of structural contradictions in management-labour relations. The failure of QWL to describe and analyse the structural antagonisms inherent in employment relationships permits the theory to ignore economic determinants of conflict and alienation, to underestimate the significance of economic and structural determinants of job performance, and to overestimate the possibility of reconciling the interests of workers and employers through QWL job redesign. This significant absence from QWL theory also partly helps to explain the inadequate conceptualisation and treatment of managers and management by QWL theorists. Managers hold a central role in QWL initiatives as 'principal change agents', allotted by QWL theorists and practitioners almost unlimited power to alter an existing division of labour, most other factors notwithstanding. However, no attempt is made by most advocates of

QWL to provide, for example, any account of the foundations of managerial authority within industrial capitalist society, nor are any clues offered as to how such a comparatively recent occupation as industrial management has come to be accorded such status and power by its social and behavioural science advocates. Chapter 1 of the thesis concerns itself with these issues, focussing on structural contradiction, management and QWL .

Chapter 2 concentrates on work and QWL, arguing that most QWL theorists discuss their chosen subject matter without, as mentioned earlier, any theoretical conception of the nature of work in modern society, or of the interests that determine the design and organisation of work, or of the forces in society at large which encourage the development of realistic and appropriate expectations. Work (and its inherent problems) in our type of industrial capitalist society is seen to be a much more complex phenomenon than QWL 'activists' have, in the main, realised; its subject matter going well beyond the boundaries constructed in most standard QWL definitions and approaches. Once again it can be argued that QWL theory and practice lacks sociological perspective.

Chapter 3 focusses on one of the most frequently propounded of QWL concepts, participation. Through a discussion of the various conceptions of participation and of the history and trends of worker participation in Britain, the issue in question is located in a broad sociological context. An analysis is then conducted of three types of QWL participatory scheme. As a result of this analysis it is argued that all three types of QWL scheme offer only a very limited opportunity for worker participation in organisational decision-making and that QWL conceptions of participation, in general, have both an ideological and political significance

unacknowledged by those propounding them.

Chapter 4 attempts to map out and criticise both the homogeneity and diversity of QWL theory and practice. The chapter endeavours, firstly, to construct an ideal-typical 'general perspective' of QWL in order to illustrate the homogeneity of QWL theory and practice and, secondly, to sketch out the diversity of theories and practical initiatives that are subsumed under the blanket term QWL. It is subsequently argued that whether considered as one homogeneous perspective or as a number of divergent, though still related, perspectives, QWL theory and practice lacks sociological perspective, and, that both sociological and historical perspective are required if, for example, the positive claims made for QWL initiatives are to be more carefully assessed and the genealogies, ideological assumptions and inherent limitations of QWL theory and practice are to be traced and exposed.

Finally, the findings of the research conducted will be briefly summarised in the process of offering some tentative conclusions.

## NOTES

1. MILLER, P. 'Psychotherapy of Work and Unemployment' in P. Miller & N. Rose (eds.) The Power of Psychiatry, Oxford, Polity Press. (pp. 143-176) p. 145.
2. ACAS Annual Report 1987. pp. 48-53. STREECK, W. 1987 'The Uncertainties of Management in the Management of Uncertainty' Work, Employment & Society 1.3. pp. 281-308.
3. See, for example, RUSSELL, S. 1983 'Quality Circles in Perspective' WRU Occasional Paper No. 24. & TYNAN, O. 1980 'Improving the Quality of Working Life in the 1980s' WRU Occasional Paper No. 16.

*It is not a question of what ought to be done, but of what is the course laid out by business principles; the discretion rests with the business men, not with the moralists and the business men's discretion is bounded by the exigencies of business enterprise. Even the business men cannot allow themselves to play fast and loose with business principles in response to a call from humanitarian motives. The question, therefore, remains, on the whole, a question of what the business men may be expected to do for cultural growth on the motive of profits.*

Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of Business Enterprise 1904.

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### Introduction

*The organisation of productive activity within enterprises has a peculiarly ambivalent quality in most modern economies. On the one hand co-operation is required for the production of goods and services. On the other hand the interest of the different parties concerned with production compete in certain fundamental respects. This is particularly true of management and labour. (1)*

In other words there are contradictory elements structured within the relations between management and labour in most modern industrial capitalist economies. Indeed, such contradictions are not temporally specific to the present, nor are they a recent discovery. Their origins can be traced back to the creation of 'free' labour and to the 'genesis of modern management' in the Industrial Revolution (2). Contradictions within the individual enterprise are both part of, and mirror, structural contradictions within society at large. To talk of such contradictions in social, economic and political structures is to discuss the ways in which

the various principles that underlie social organisation are inconsistent or clash with one another. To analyse contradictions is to locate internal tensions or strains which exist within systems and which may lead to either collapse of that system or some kind of adaptation of it by those wishing to retain it.

The concept of contradiction is traditionally associated with the Marxian perspective but it can be argued that the same notion exists in various forms throughout sociology (3). Watson (4) cites Eisenstadt's (1973) observation that 'both Durkheim and Weber saw many contradictions inherent in the very nature of the human condition in society in general and saw them articulated with increasing sharpness in the developments of the modern order in particular'.

A variety of studies have focussed on the specific sources of instability existing in industrial capitalist societies and having ramifications for life within those societies, as well as for the organisation of work in particular. Baldamus, for example, concentrates upon the implicitly conflictual relationship between the employer and employee: 'As wages are costs to the firm, and the deprivations inherent in effort means "costs" to the employee, the interests of management and wage-earner are diametrically opposed'(5). In 'The Meaning of Work', Alan Fox concludes that although the capitalist organisation of work, and its implicit priorities, destroys worker commitment, it also requires co-operation and involvement. It is this contradiction, he believes, that supplies much of the motivation for worker 'participation' and 'job enrichment' schemes.(6) In his wide-ranging study of competition and control at work, Hill stresses that



*The ways in which differences of interest affect the fabric of social and economic life are various and display no simple or universal manifestation in the conduct of industrial relations. The differences create the potential of industrial and social conflict but do not have determinate outcomes...The different parties within the industrial relations arena thus have many courses of action open to them, and there is evidence of a wide variety of strategies and outcomes historically and comparatively.*

but he also concludes that

*The central problem facing modern business is the impossibility of abolishing the conditions which create conflict without destroying the present form of the economy. Managers have to hope to find a palliative to suppress the symptoms of conflict and thus 'solve' the problems of industrial relations without curing the basic ailment. (7)*

As Cressey and McInnes write, from within an avowedly Marxist frame of reference,

*The two-fold nature of the relationship of capital to labour in the workplace implies directly contradictory strategies for both labour and capital which in turn represent the working out of the contradictions between the forces and relations of production at the level of the workplace itself. (8)*

The notion of structural contradiction is vital to an understanding of labour-management relations (whilst being inherent within those relations) and therefore to issues concerning the quality of working life. All too often, however, mainstream advocates of QWL (Quality of Working Life) show no appreciation of the importance of structural contradictions to an understanding of management - labour relations, despite the fact that those contradictions lie at the heart of the problems that QWL practitioners and theorists are attempting to solve. At the same time, radical critics of QWL have paid too little attention, on the whole, to the pervasive plurality of organisational life, tending instead to rely

excessively on structural analysis and explanation. It needs to be remembered, however, that too excessive a reliance on structural explanation and analysis per se can lead to 'over-determined views of human history and society (which) leave no room for and assign no weight to individual or group, experience, meaning and action. Structure predominates over agency.'(9) Such predominance has been noted in the work of Braverman and others within the Labour Process debate. As Storey has indicated, 'Approaches in this mode adopt a theoretical stance which is essentially structurally based and deterministic.'(10)

This has led, for example, to an inadequate conceptualisation and treatment of managers and management.

*owing to the deterministic streak in labour process thinking wherein capital is deemed to require a certain level of surplus value, a corresponding measure of exploitation, and a narrowly constrained set of control options, the interpretation of managerial action tends to be cursory. Managers too often are simply regarded as essentially unproblematic agents of capital who dispatch their 'global functions of capital' in a rationalistic manner. (11)*

Although it is correct to suggest that managers are structurally cast in roles 'whereby they mainly have to effect their plans through others, and where the activities of others may be held to the managers account', this in itself is not unproblematic.

*... a key structural element of management is control. But because perceived interests are thereby potentially threatened, workers do in varying degrees resist this control both individually and collectively, passively and actively. This dynamic of contestation constitutes the basis for a dialectical interplay between control and resistance. The means of control which are in consequence actually emergent have to be understood, therefore, as products of this process and not either as Management*

*Science idealisations or abstractions of the global functions of capital. Moreover, albeit that 'management' is structurally located, this does not result in an unproblematic, homogeneous and monolithic social entity. Struggle, resistance and compromise are also characteristic of the 'magic brotherhood'. (12)*

However, as Storey also indicates, the main current alternative to the labour process approach 'is to fall back upon numerous empirical studies which tend...to lead to an incapacity to make generalisations'.(13)

It would seem then that neither approaches in the labour process mode, nor the main current alternatives to those approaches can, as yet, adequately grasp the interplay of both action and structure. The implication of these criticisms is that a more satisfactory (and sociological) analysis of labour-management relations, and consequently, of issues relating to the quality of working life, will be one that takes more account of the interplay of both structure and agency as a process occurring within time.

In no way is such an analysis offered or attempted by mainstream QWL theorists, for, on the whole, their work lacks both sociological and historical perspective. This limitation is attested to in their treatment of management, the 'central change agent' for QWL theorists and practitioners ( QWL is both theory and technique and the link between them is predicated on the close ties between QWL advocates and their designated principal change agents, managers). No attempt is made by QWL theorists to provide, for example, a detailed analysis of the nature of modern industrial management and the foundations of its authority, nor is any account offered as to how such a comparatively recent occupation has come to be allotted such status and power by, amongst others, its social and behavioural science advocates.

In essence, QWL theory presupposes the manager to hold almost unlimited

power to change an existing division of labour, notwithstanding market, finance, corporate or other constraints. Obstacles to change are invariably located within the organisation eg. in particular social groups such as trade union representatives, or are thought to be embodied in outmoded philosophies derived in some way from scientific management; wider social forces or structural contradictions are rarely discussed.

It is therefore proposed here to outline briefly the historical and ideological development of modern industrial management in Britain both in order to help provide the base for a, hopefully, more adequate conceptualisation of management, and, also, so that the validity of the claims made on behalf of management by QWL theorists and practitioners can be more judiciously investigated and appraised.

## Management in Perspective

### Introduction

One of the most notable findings of a historical study of modern industrial management is that it is a comparatively recent phenomenon. As Hill suggests,

*Industrialisation and factory production were well established in Great Britain and the United States long before the emergence of management as a distinct system of control, and a separate occupational stratum. (14)*

Up until at least the end of the eighteenth century in Britain the only acceptable form of management was as a function of involvement by virtue of ownership. Any other arrangement was regarded as an abdication of responsibility and as courting disaster.

In Britain, mainly for this reason, as Pollard has indicated, joint stock

and other large industrial companies did not enjoy a good reputation during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Examples abounded of dishonest, alcoholic and absconding managers who had severely damaged the firms for whom they had worked, thus reinforcing current theories which promoted self-interest as the only possible driving force in industry. Such examples provided a powerful argument against the enlargement of firms beyond the point at which an intermediate strata of managers became necessary. (15)

During the Industrial Revolution entrepreneurs filled a number of roles; capitalist, financier, works manager, merchant and salesman. Moreover, among the problems that could broadly be called managerial the most pressing ones were not always the 'internal' ones corresponding to the tasks of present day managers but those which would today be left to public authorities, or specialist firms, such as the building of roads, canals and housing. Indeed, Pollard suggests that had a textbook of management been attempted during this period it would of necessity have concentrated on such 'external' problems which took up much more of the resources, time and energies of managing entrepreneurs than to the problems normally associated with modern managers. (16)

The continued existence of pre-factory forms of work organisation within the interstices of the new factory system also helped postpone the development of modern management techniques. Subcontracting remained the main system of labour management. This method of work organisation involved the transference of the entrepreneur's managerial responsibility for the co-ordination of productive activities and the direction of labour. The Entrepreneur thereby evaded the responsibility of making workers industrious without any consequent loss of power. This system of indirect

control and employment enabled the entrepreneur manager to concentrate on the other roles that he/she embodied (17). The delegation of the co-ordination and labour control functions was supplemented by a particular type of payment scheme: payment by results. This placed workers in a position whereby they had to regulate their own effort, and gave them an incentive to make certain that production was properly co-ordinated (18). This provided, in Marx's words, the 'cash nexus' symbolic of the new age ( despite again being a natural derivation from the methods of earlier periods) (19). The employment relationship between workers and their firms in a typical undertaking were dominated by the market principle of this 'cash nexus' (it should be stressed, however, that many early enterprises operated with patriarchal, paternalist or other 'styles' of organisation).

*These principles were that employers had no obligation towards their employees other than the payment of wages in return for work done, while employees in turn merely sold their time or effort for an agreed price. Employees thus exchanged a cost (time or effort) for a benefit (wages), and had no other obligation towards their employers. (20)*

This relationship entails the commodification of labour; workers become means rather than ends in themselves.

*Even before they arrived in the factory, workers had assumed a commodity status: labour was a commodity to be purchased in the market place when required and at a price fixed by the market principles of supply and demand. (21)*

The personalised relations between supervisor and worker typically embodied in the subcontract system helped modify the impersonality of the basic employment relationship. Bendix notes, however, that such close ties did not reduce the arbitrariness with which subcontractors exercised their authority. The 'middlemen' role of the typical subcontractor often ensured

did not reduce the arbitrariness with which subcontractors exercised their authority. The 'middlemen' role of the typical subcontractor often ensured a need to exploit their 'underhands' in order to survive economically. The actual management of labour was therefore in the hands of people who had neither the wealth nor leisure which had in the past made paternal benevolence a relatively easy virtue to practice. (22)

In the early phases of the Industrial Revolution then 'the entrepreneurial concern with workers was not managerial at all, if by "managerial" we mean the deliberate use of means to organise and control the workforce of an enterprise.' (23)

As Bendix rightly points out though

*...even the most resolute rejection of all concern with ideas or principles has the paradoxical result of becoming involved in the formulations of ideologies. (24)*

The ideology of 'self-help' and 'laissez-faire' supported the system of 'cash nexus' employment relations and the delegation of the labour control function. In the West, as Bendix indicates, industrialisation has been defended by ideological appeals which justified the exercise of authority in economic enterprises. Such entrepreneurial or managerial ideologies help the performance of the labour control function in two ways. Firstly they justify the authority of the few (the managing) over the many (the managed), thus suppressing conflict and maintaining co-operation between these two groups. Secondly, they also provide an internalised work ethic, which motivates workers to work well with a degree of steady intensity. (25)

Ideology then can be a managerial resource which supplements the authority contained in the (naturally open-ended) employment contract. The ideology

of self-help and laissez-faire contained within it, however, contradictory elements. It required, as Anthony has indicated, that 'self-interest...be seen as a moral principle'(26), but at the same time this appeal to selfishness, and the denial of any traditional moral content to the employment relationship, provided a fragile basis for managerial legitimacy and the internalisation of the work ethic. That workers tended to accept managerial authority had less to do with effectiveness of the ideology, rather,

*Labour discipline followed from the pressures of the labour market when jobs were insecure and scarce, the use of 'driving', dictatorial methods of supervision by foremen, and the way in which the organisation of production under subcontracting and payment by results imposed the penalty of poor work on the worker himself. (27)*

By the 1870s, the average size of British (and American) firms was still small by modern standards. In 1871, as Hobsbawm notes (28), the average British cotton factory employed 180 people, and this in an industry where the factory system had come to predominance relatively early. (At this time the average machinery manufacturing plant employed only 85 people). The small size of the typical productive unit and its physical location in one plant helped keep the scale and complexity of the managerial task within the bounds of the traditional system of internal management. 'Until late nineteenth century', as Chandler states, 'owners nearly always managed their enterprises. Those few that hired managers rarely employed as many as four or five, and they retained a close personal relationship with their managers, often making them partners in the firm. Such an enterprise may be termed a personal one.' (29)

The scale and complexity of a very few enterprises did however exceed the capabilities of the traditional system. This is true of the railways and



the postal services for example. Even in their earliest days the railway companies employed large numbers of men and were forced to find means of co-ordinating and controlling their work. For these undertakings the only suitable existing models of large-scale organisation were the military and the civil service.

Brown (30) suggests that the development of the early railway companies seems likely to provide interesting grounds ' for investigating the growth of industrial bureaucracy- both the control of a large labour force and the elaboration of an administrative hierarchy.' However, in so investigating, he seeks to get away from the dominance of purely functionalist analyses and to assess the role of "organisational choice". With this in mind he states that

*A preliminary examination of the literature reveals, for example, that many of the early railway managers had a military background and their assumptions and expectations regarding discipline, obedience, loyalty, uniform and the hierarchical grading of jobs appear to have strongly influenced the ways in which the labour force was controlled, and to have led to practices and procedures which cannot be seen as solely determined by the "needs" for punctuality and safety in operating train services. In the first decades of railway operation there was also considerable variation and experimentation in the attempt to find appropriate organisational structures and modes of operating so that the patterns eventually adopted were by no means seen as inevitable at the time. (31)*

Although it was generally the overwhelming pressure of other factors making for larger size (for example the increasing need for competitive efficiency) which broke down the wish to keep units small and forced British industry eventually to introduce 'modern industrial management' (32), these wishes, or rather values, played a not inconsiderable part in the process of change in the years 1870-1914 (and indeed well beyond) and

help provide an explanation as to the disparities in business strategy and organisational structure between Great Britain and the United States during this period. Both countries experienced growth in the size of the average firm at this time, but the British firms tended to be much smaller business units, with a typically lower market share than the average U.S. enterprise. (33)

Payne writes

*Except in those cases in which the original firm became large and powerful under the leadership of one or two men, in effect, in those cases where growth had taken place through internal acquisition - the basic weaknesses of the giant British concerns stemmed from the great extent to which the vendors retained their hold over their businesses when mergers took place. The result was large numbers of directors each of whom was reluctant to submerge his individuality to the degree necessary for strong and harmonious central direction. This policy was distinctly at variance with the best American practice, and it may be that this is the explanation of the apparently greater success of American combinations from the outset. (34)*

By 1919 the business scene in British industry was very different from that in America. Except in the cases of the railways and the postal services, the managerial class was tiny. Management consultants, journals and associations were still virtually unknown. (35)

Although, then, there had been enormous changes within Britain's economy and society since the earlier days of the industrial revolution, important underlying continuities still, however, persisted.

Overall, there was a continued dominance of British industry by the relatively small, family owned and run, self-financing enterprise, with its stress on kinship and tradition, and its inherent distrust of non-familial agents. This tendency militated against the growth of a separate stratum

of managerial personnel. Management was still basically a function of involvement by ownership, and the control of labour was not often perceived as the most pressing of entrepreneurial matters. Man-management continued to be largely based on systems of sub-contract (increasingly internal), the control function delegated and therefore evaded. Littler suggests five significant 'reinforcing advantages' of the internal contract accounting for its enduring appeal to the British capitalist:

*... firstly it was a flexible mechanism that enabled the work system to meet 'sharp fluctuations in demand without having to carry a permanent burden of overhead expenditure' entailed by a large office staff. Secondly, not only did it spread capital risks, it enabled capital risks to be determined in the first place: the employer was saved from numerous complex cost calculations. Thus, systems of internal contract acted as a substitute for accounting. Thirdly, internal contract provided financial incentives, and a path of upward mobility, for a key group of workers. Fourthly, it bypassed the awkward fact that many employers lacked technical skills and technical knowledge. Finally, it was the agency of effort stabilization and task allocation. (36)*

He goes on to say that

*In general, internal contract systems and delegated modes of control provided a historical solution to the contradictions between the increasing size of firms and simple entrepreneurial control, especially in the context of scarce resources (37).*

These arrangements continued to be both supported by, and bound up with, the dominant entrepreneurial ideology of laissez-faire and self-help, and the cash-nexus employment relationship. There were, however, powerful forces for change acting both upon and within these continuities as well as a variety of practises and influences pervading different industries through time.

The effects of increasing international competition, growing worker collectivity and the Great Depression of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, for example, engendered conflicts leading to the demise of traditional modes of control in certain sectors, especially in the metal and metal-working industries (those in the vanguard of industrial change), and the gradual and hesitant restructuring of work organisation within those industries. As Littler mentions (38), the future for employers in these sectors, as seen from the perspective of the late nineteenth century, was open, indeed a number of industrial experiments were attempted or advocated at this time. The years 1889-92, for example, as Ramsay indicates, were a peak period for the introduction of profit-sharing schemes; eighty-eight such schemes were started during these years (39). It is perhaps worth noting once again that these (and other such) pressures did not inevitably lead to one specific solution (as some labour process theorists have argued), namely the acceptance and implementation of Scientific Management techniques and subsequent bureaucratisation of the division of labour and the control structure in firms. Initial reactions to Taylorism by British employers in the early twentieth century were largely negative or hostile. This was in part due to the fact that in Britain there was only a limited mass market and fewer opportunities for standardisation and the specialisation of tasks. Moreover, British employers, especially in engineering, rejected a high-wage strategy, which was an essential element of the U.S. model, because of class-based notions of appropriate wage-levels. In fact, Britain continued to remain a low-wage economy. (40)

As Littler states

*Given this ignorance, indifference and pre-war hostility to Taylorism, then it is not possible to maintain that a widespread shift in employers' beliefs had occurred before the first world war, unless it can be shown that some other ideology had swept through the capitalist ranks, whereas the paternalism and welfarism of Quaker employers such as Cadburys were clearly confined to a small minority. This lack of a dominant ideology meant that few employers were able to conceptualise clearly alternative strategies, and, as a result, combined traditional labour management with gradual change. (41)*

Although 'rationalisation' did take place within areas of British industry pre-1919, it tended to occur mainly within the context of traditional arrangements (it should perhaps be noted that the internal contract system could function as both a mechanism of skill maintenance and craft autonomy or it could be used as a mechanism of deskilling) (42). The reorganisations and restructurings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century affected only a very small percentage of firms within specific industries. Most firms remained unaffected and even within those that did experience changes, this represented only the initial stirrings of systematic management. It did not represent the overall bureaucratisation of the firm nor the inauguration of management as a distinct occupational stratum. In general, change was slow and hesitant, and effective alternatives to traditional management were not readily created, nor often perceived as needed. (43)

### The Rise of Modern Management in the Inter-War Period

The establishment of the managerial function as a distinct role separate from the ownership function was achieved in Britain during the inter-war period.

The years 1919-1939 saw the rapid development of corporate capitalism in Britain. Despite Britain's slow start in relation to other economies, particularly the United States, by 1939 the British economy had as high a concentration of capital as any other western society. Whereas in 1907 there has been only seven companies with a market capitalisation of £8 million there were twenty-five such companies by 1924 and as many as sixty-one by 1939. (44)

In many ways the first world war was a watershed for all levels of structuration in Britain. State intervention in industry had occurred, albeit in a slow and ad hoc fashion, such that by 1918 the Ministry of Munitions was the largest employer in the country. The pressures of war-time production had led to the introduction of mass production methods and standardisation in many firms. At the same time labour shortages had impelled employers to pack their factories with unskilled workers, especially women, and this had led to the erosion of skill differentials in a number of industries.

At the shopfloor level, the war had seen the birth of the first shop stewards movement, leading to formal consultation between workers representatives and works managers for the first time on any widespread basis, and to the growth of militant labour demands. At national level, trade unions had also gained a new status and power with a shift to national, centralised wage-bargaining.

The immediate post-war setting found many employers in an uncomfortable situation. There existed (for them) as Littler states, an 'uneasy tension between old strategies and new, between going backwards or forwards.' (45). This dichotomy was embodied in two contrasting views, those of the 'reconstructionists' and the 'restorationists'. The former espousing, in

essence, a new national corporatism, the latter desirous of a return to pre-war conditions and to the pre-war social order.

The post-war boom although, in effect, generating the dismantling of many government controls and a return to pre-war practices, at the same time afforded a strong bargaining position to labour such that this era saw the birth of what Child terms 'British Management Thought'. The initial essence of managerialist ideology began to emanate from the lips of employers and consultants and from the printed page of the growing number of industrial and technical journals. (46)

Notions of business as 'service', of 'trusteeship' and the idea of 'professionalism' were mooted. Indeed, as Child points out, these notions implied that the right to managerial authority was now being claimed on the basis of effectiveness in the administrative function. From the employer's point of view any notion of trusteeship, for example, had to embrace administrative expertise otherwise there would be little reason why the state should not fulfill this role, as the Guild Socialists desired it should. This notion of trusteeship further implied, says Child, that positions of industrial control should be based on merit rather than on inheritance. This opened the door to distinctly managerial claims to industrial authority whilst at the same time undermining the current practice of continued kinship control. It is not difficult to see these and other related claims (such as the notion that a separation of ownership from control had taken/was taking place) in an ideological light; as defending the interests of a particular group, namely the employers, against the demands and criticisms of a strong and often militant labour force.

That these claims were but a bid to buy time was proved in practice when

in 1920 the boom ended and recession returned. There was, however, a more noticeable appreciation amongst many employers that an improvement in working conditions could lead not only to a more content and therefore less rebellious workforce, but also to increased productivity, as the work of the Industrial Fatigue Research Board had indicated. (47)

'Human Factor' psychology, as Rose calls it, criticised the tendency of scientific management theorists to treat men purely and simply as machines. Although their conceptions of the worker remained individualistic and their methods of investigation left little or no room for considering the worker's own definition of his/her work situation, the work of Myers et al. did to some extent at least demonstrate the importance of taking account of the cause and occurrence of fatigue and monotony at work. It also served to suggest that appropriate environmental conditions and the careful selection of employees suited to the task at hand could make work less uncomfortable for the employee whilst at the same time being profitable for the employer. (48)

Child locates the emergence of British management thought in a period of social and industrial conflict. He stresses that at this point formal British management thought was indistinguishable from the utterances of employers attempting to justify their authority in industry. Politically, those in control of British industry were being subjected to an attack from labour and needed to affirm the legitimacy of their authority. At the same time the practical value of a new body of administrative knowledge deriving from scientific management, industrial psychology and industrial welfare was becoming recognised, at least by informed or enlightened employers.

Within these and related processes the notion of management as a distinct



function and stratum was engendered.

The Depression of the 1920s, with dole for the labourer and over-capacity for the employer, forced a re-evaluation of economic and social beliefs. The 'restorationists' were silenced and the 'reconstructionists', comprising many enlightened employers and management consultants, reset their banner under the heading 'rationalisation'. For most British proponents of rationalisation, however, the term had a more limited meaning than its American counterpart. In the British context it was used to refer, as Littler mentions, 'to large scale horizontal mergers of firms plus, often a lesser theme, the application of scientific methods of management and control.' (49)

However, as Hannah indicates,

*Management was the crucial factor in the realisation of economies of the type based on the greater relative efficiency of firm over market in integrating economic activities on which the success of rationalisation depended.*  
(50)

He goes on to suggest that

*the transition from market relations to intrafirm organisation did not...occur costlessly and automatically with an increase in scale: it required considerable investment of time, capital, and skill in the creation of an efficient administrative structure. Only firms with this organisational investment capacity could embark on an extensive and sustained programme of expansion with reasonable prospect of success.* (51)

The material basis for the rationalisation movement was the increasing concentration of capital and the development of the 'new' industries such as chemical, electrical engineering and synthetic textiles. These industries all grew steadily during the inter-war period and began to replace in importance the old staple industries; they tended to require

large units of production and greater concentrations of industrial capital, they were technically more advanced, incorporating mass production techniques, and their size and capital concentrations rendered them more inflexible than the small firms of the Victorian economy. They did not, therefore, 'relish the free-for all of the traditional market place.' (52)

Between 1919 and the mid-1920s, scientific management schemes began to filter through into British factories. As Littler notes, at an ideological level there was some reconciliation between scientific management and industrial psychologists who had opposed Taylorism at first. This led, Littler argues, to a new form of scientific management marked by a coalescence of industrial psychology, first world war fatigue studies and Taylorite ideas of systematic job analysis and costing. The emergence of the Bedaux system in Britain exemplified this synthesis. (53)

After a sluggish start in the late 1920s, the Bedaux system spread rapidly throughout British industry during the 1930s, mainly, though by no means exclusively, within the 'new' expanding industries. By 1939 approximately 250 firms had utilized this system, including the giant ICI. Many of the firms where Bedaux became established were market leaders, and acted as a guide to best practice within their particular industries. As a result, Bedaux became the most commonly used system of rationalised management in British industry. (54)

According to Littler, the neo-Taylorite Bedaux system was particularly acceptable to British owner/managers because 'it limited the restructuring of management implied by classical Taylorism', and often enabled 'the control system to be clipped onto the existing management structure.' (55)

Although the managerial function as a distinct role and stratum was established during the inter-war period, rationalised, neo-Taylorite

administration did not entirely replace traditional methods. The delegation of managerial functions continued in a modified form in many firms for a number of years. (56)

### The Development of Modern Management

Over the course of the last half-century, as traditional structures of delegated control have been replaced by managerial systems, management has developed as a distinct occupational stratum in industrial and commercial organisations, and as a set of techniques of increasing sophistication and scope. During this period too, management has become differentiated from both owner-entrepreneurs and from other categories of employee (57). This has been paralleled by the foundation of specialist management institutes concerned with the technical problems of managing and the development of new managerial methods, and by the growth of a vast literature which treats management and administration as a distinct area of expertise based on a body of specialised knowledge. A process of differentiation has also occurred within the ranks of management, resulting from the growth of functional specialisation.

Management is neither a monolithic entity, nor a single occupational role, but a range of separate specialisms which deal with different aspects of the managerial function. Such differentiation has led to a distinction between line and specialist managerial roles, and to the proliferation of different departments concerned with aspects of work control. Differentiation, however, has in turn led to problems of control within the managerial group itself (58). As Hyman suggests

*Since Management is itself a collective labour process, internal coherence cannot be presumed a priori. The centrifugal tendencies of functional specialisms must be contained; the 'recalcitrance' of lower level managers must be overcome. Because the scope for private gain is often so great (whether through white-collar criminality or 'legitimate' career advancement), and because of the high degree of discretion associated with most positions, the problems of discipline and control may well be far greater in the case of managerial labour than with routine employees. (59)*

The almost unlimited power to change an existing division of labour attributed to managers by QWL theorists and practitioners suggests, however, that they, like their radical critics, presume management to be internally coherent. But it would be wrong to perceive management as a cohesive, rational, all-seeing entity, as has already been mentioned, and, following on from this, it would therefore be incorrect to argue that systems of work control are simply reflexes determined by the overriding system of monopoly capitalism, although they are obviously not completely detached from it. The control system is more complex, more contradictory and more autonomous because management responses are influenced by their own ignorance, their own structures of knowledge and perception and their own sectional interests and objectives. These interests will reflect, among other things, the position of managers in the organisational hierarchy, functional specialism, and professional attachment to colleagues with values that may be different from those of the employing organisation. Some of the manager's ideas may be held because they are useful to her/him in legitimating her/his position, not because they enable her/him to exercise control. (60)

Earl, for example, argues that even the theories and routines of technical

and administrative control, even accountancy, serve a mythical and legitimatory purpose:

*This accountancy rhetoric, by its apparently clear, fundamental, and inarguable expression of organisational ends and means, is particularly suited for justification and legitimation of actual or potential power and exchange relationships, with their inherent contradictions that cannot be openly admitted or in many cases be resolved. (61)*

Similarly, in 'Working Order', Eric Batstone reports the pre-eminence of accountancy and financial control in British companies and how the importance invested in financial control 'militates against the serious considerations of labour relations at top management level.' (62). Wider concerns of the enterprise and its performance are forced into a financial mould thereby increasing the dominance of financial logic. Batstone concludes that 'accounting systems do not merely foster particular priorities and discriminate between issues: their very language serves to obscure certain realities of action. In particular, once different terms are substituted for "human being", the notion of labour as a cost becomes easier.' (63). The language of accounting therefore serves as a 'camouflaging rhetoric' that establishes the appearance of logical connections between falling demand or profit and redundancy or short-time working without the necessity to argue or defend the case that has brought it about. The disguised conventions of accounting language thus serve to establish a presiding rationale, a ruling and unquestioned set of assumptions against which any alternative conception can make little or no headway.

In distinguishing between the technical and legitimating function of management thought, Child says that the latter is directed at securing social recognition and approval for managerial authority and the way it is

used (64). But it may be that the technical aspects also contribute to the securing of social recognition and approval. And if technical content does not itself rest upon an apparatus of scientific theory, then its claims to do so are 'rhetorical', 'mythical' and 'ideological' in their intention. In other words, all management thought is legitimatory and most of it would seem to be deceptively so. For Anthony, British management has long been on the retreat from its main task and duty, namely responsibility for the control and direction of labour, a notion that the brief history of the birth of modern industrial management outlined above would tend to support. He argues that

*Managers and employers have been able to avoid coming to terms with the 'stolidity of their ignorance' by re-inforcing strategies of insulation with an account that 'explains' their relationships with their subordinates in terms that do not require introspection about it. Management ideology...faces both ways in that it requires subordination and legitimates the authority of those who command it. It also serves two functions in this other sense: it clouds and obscures the view into management from the outside and it prevents managers from seeking any real understanding of their relationship of authority and its true foundation. Managers are prevented from examining the nature of their authority and their relationship with labour by the pursuit of ideological legitimation, which has served to obscure the issue. (65)*

Scientific management, for example, fulfilled both the functions conceptualised by Child; it served both to enhance the technical ends of optimum performance and efficiency achieved by detailed analysis and planning of operations, as well as serving to 'legitimate' management and to secure approval for its exercise of authority by demonstrating it was expert.

Thus, although scientific management was primarily aimed at achieving control by the detailed prescription of performance, it also aimed at the achievement of commitment (as well as assigning a pivotal role in the organisation to industrial engineers). (66)

Scientific management can then perhaps be seen as an ambitious and comprehensive attempt to square 'the contradiction at the heart of the specific managerial problem', in other words between the need to exercise control and the need to achieve commitment. The synthesis is established by way of the allegiance that is demanded to the 'scientific' laws that are revealed in the process of analysis. There can be no argument about what is to be done or the right way to do it. Once scientific management is extended to the selection of job occupants suitable in terms of physique, capacity and outlook, neither can there be any argument about interests and, as production increases so considerably, nor is there much room for disagreement about the division of the spoils. The legitimacy aspect of scientific management emerged in Taylor's famous claim that his system 'substituted joint obedience to fact and laws for obedience to personal authority. No such democracy has ever existed in industry before.' (67). This system would also involve 'a complete mental revolution on the part of the working men... as to their duties towards their work, toward their fellow men, and toward their employers. And it involves the equally complete mental revolution on the part of those on the management side.' (68). It was these legitimacy aspects that help explain why Taylorism was never fully adopted. As Anthony states

*It is not possible to imagine proposals that more clearly contrast and distinguish the formal objectives of the manager from considerations of his interest and status. The two are not often distinguished; indeed they are usually elided so that the interests of the organisation, its*

*corporate goals, or whatever, are presented as the manager's own. The pursuit of the organisation's goals thus legitimizes his own activity and justifies his status because they are claimed to be coincidental. In fact this is not often the case. (69)*

In other words, within the relationship of management to the social system of the organisation, management's need for its authority to be acknowledged means that the political aspect of scientific management, Taylor's unprecedented democracy, is the one thing that management cannot acknowledge, just as it can't abandon control in order to regain it.

Taylor bitterly complained that management never fully applied his philosophy, but rather only instigated the more mechanistic parts of it. This, as has already been mentioned, was particularly true of Britain.

Anthony says of the British case:

*While scientific management and its apparatus of detailed control appears, at last, as an opportunity for the employer to wrestle with the 'stolidity of his own ignorance' about labour, it remains one more instance of the employer's refusal to engage in a relationship and of his preference for insulation. Rather than join labour in an equal subservience to production, efficiency, and profit, management relies upon technique, makes the special responsibility of departments of methods or time-and-motion study, and contributes to the mindless pursuit of more mindless kinds of work. (70)*

For Anthony, scientific management never completely applied or accepted only partially introduced, without, as Littler says, 'a context of ideological underpinning' (71), destroyed the last vestiges of moral concern by employers and managers for their employees. (72). From this point onwards, the contradiction between the need to care (in order to justify an appeal for commitment) and the need to be scientifically efficient (in order to control) was squared, says Anthony, 'however superficially, by developments in the social sciences and the substitution



of behavioural analysis for care.' (73)

As Child has mentioned, towards the end of the inter-war period in Britain management thought was coming to anticipate some of the major features of Human Relations analysis, especially the social and non-logical view of worker motivation, the inattention to trade unionism and the very severely restricted view of industrial conflict. Although it took nearly twenty years for the implications of the Hawthorne experiments to begin to have practical consequences in Britain, the appeal of Human relations was considerable. It offered an edifice of scientifically acquired evidence in support of the most satisfactory conclusion: that, as Child puts it, the requisite skill could 'release the enthusiasm for co-operation with management which... work groups possessed as the result of their deep-felt need for "belonging". It also provided a series of explanations for appearances to the contrary, for the apparent absence of this instinct for belonging and co-operation.' (74)

Human relations as a managerial ideology was pre-eminent in Britain until the mid-1950s and was also for many years, as Rose has mentioned, an interchangeable term for industrial sociology (75). Child, for example, indicates that

*Industrial sociology leaned towards the assumption that employees necessarily desired to participate in and identify with firms as social institutions. At the same time it omitted an adequate review of factors external to the enterprise which might influence behaviour within it. By adopting a policy-recommending role these studies tended to become aligned with an exclusively managerial point of view and this contributed to their restricted analytical perspective. (76)*

Anthony describes the recruitment of social and behavioural science in the service of management as fulfilling several purposes.

*First, it will be efficient, it will give rise to unparalleled co-operation, transcend or even utilise conflict, and possibly displace the necessity and rationale of trade union organisation. Second, it will be good, its very efficiency will be brought about by providing possibilities of achieving the satisfaction of deep human needs in work (and at no cost). Third, this marvellous consummation of the hitherto incompatible is to be attained by a newly enlightened and expert management in command of the total technical, social, and human environment. This divine programme and prospect of control is taken to the point when management is advised that it actually controls human happiness, fulfilment, even sanity through the control of work. (77)*

For both Anthony and Rose, the central principle of a great deal of the social scientist's contribution concerns integration and the subordination of the individual's goals to those of the organisation that employs her/him. This central principle can be gauged in many of the approaches following on from, and often explicitly critical of, the Mayoite Human Relations school: from the work of the Tavistock Institute, through that of the neo-human relations school of Argyris, Herzberg and Douglas McGregor (whom Rose calls the 'organisational psycho-technologists') up to the Quality of Working Life movement in the 1970s and beyond. All seem concerned, to a greater or lesser degree, to achieve greater efficiency by promoting the development of organisations that are more humane and less irksome to their inhabitants, by 'sharing control', by allowing for greater participation and by acknowledging the needs of employees for responsibility and growth. But all fail to address the complexities of industrial and social reality in anything but a very partial manner, and none can be described as providing a truly sociological analysis. There is, in the work of these groups little, or more often no, notion of structural contradiction and consequently no recognition by those concerned

that they are engaged in the business of formulating far from neutral and often extremely partial palliatives, rather than providing a comprehensive and convincing analysis. Anthony is sceptical of the claims of these schools of thought that their approaches have improved the quality of life at work

*..the way in which many of the arguments are developed give rise to the clear impression that human happiness is not the purpose of the changes that are being proposed, but that human happiness will follow from 'directing their efforts toward the success of the organisation'. Human work and its reorganisation is still being regarded as instrumental to the achievement of other objectives and, while it is perfectly possible to achieve two quite different goals at the same time, it is sufficiently rare to justify one's suspicions about the authenticity of the claim if for no other reason than that the process of achieving them flies in the face of Kant's axiom that people should be treated as ends and not means... Managers, at least in the social science literature which is written for them, are encouraged to treat society by reference to managerial concepts which may be quite inadequate for promoting social changes which the application of those very concepts demands. Management's most recent position, or the one that it has been encouraged to occupy by those social scientists who write for it, is one that is beyond its resources of training and ability and for which it has no representative authority. (78)*

At this point, however, it needs to be remembered that there is more than one account of management available. As Nichols (79) has stressed, there has been a much greater emphasis placed upon the study of management ideas and ideology than there has on management practice. The former of these, management's thinkers and educators, can perhaps be regarded as the 'official' version of management, with its emphasis on 'science', rationality, instrumentality and a veritable flight from ambiguity; effectively seeking, amongst other things, 'to provide...some basis for persuading others that managers know what they are about, and some

comfort for managers in maintaining the illusion with the necessary confidence.' (80)

On the other hand there is an alternative theory, concerned to show the social and political character of the behaviour in managerial organisations; that practical managerial work is essentially social rather than analytical.

For Anthony, this alternative theory indicates that

*managerial organisations... can be seen as communities; that they are held together by informal moral relationships that may be stronger than the moral order that the hierarchical superstructure seeks to impose, and that moral and social relationships are cemented by myth, symbol, culture, and narrative. (81)*

He tentatively concludes from alternative theory that

*It is conceivable that a practice of management, comparable with the practice of medicine, teaching or law can be seen as emerging... If this is the case, it is possible that a moral foundation, far from being destroyed by management (in its official version), may be derived from real managerial behaviour. If a practice of management can be constructed on the foundation of what managers do rather than from an ideological account of what they do, then it might be possible to construct a moral foundation for management and that, in turn, could establish a foundation for managerial authority. (82)*

Obviously, such authority cannot rest on a 'concern' which is, in essence, only 'concerned' with the achievement of economic ends.

*The proposition is merely (it is sufficiently grandiose as it is) that the foundation of managerial authority, its legitimation by those subordinate to it, cannot be assured by any other means than the acceptance by management of its responsibility to the general community and for the government of its own. Efficiency and profit must be secured by other means, some of them likely to promote the anger and resistance of sections of the community that management must govern... Real authority must rest upon real moral concern, perceived to be real because its intentions*

*are real. (83)*

Although Anthony avoids the flight from ambiguity only too noticeable in the accounts offered by many other thinkers concerned with managerial and organisational problems, ('No organisation has ever succeeded in meeting the needs of its human inhabitants.' (84)) he does ignore however, to a large extent, the wider structural settings within which business management and organisational activity take place and, therefore, wider societal structural contradictions. His analysis thus lacks a certain sociological depth which, in turn, affects the validity of his prescriptions. These prescriptions are reminiscent, in some respects, of those mooted by Alan Fox in 'Beyond Contract', a thesis that Anthony was highly critical of in his earlier 'The Ideology of Work' (85). Perhaps what needs to be remembered above all, as Fox himself has indicated, is that

*the existing design of work and work organisation rests on a given distribution of power in society, and that power superiority has lain, and still lies, with those whose interests or objectives led them to impose a wholly instrumental criterion. (86)*

Fox goes on to say that

*Since the present predominant social meaning in work is upheld by power, any fundamental change to a different meaning would require a major challenge to existing power dispositions in society. (87)*

Any such challenge would have to extend beyond the work organisation to all the associated structures, values and relationships existing in society as a whole.

Bearing this in mind, it would seem then that the successful implementation of Anthony's prescriptions or a process of fundamental work humanisation of necessity entails a victorious challenge of the

existing distribution of power in society, and its associated structures, values and relationships. In other words, to return to Hill's central paradox, to abolish the conditions which at present create conflict for modern business would in turn necessitate the destruction of the present form of the economy.

Such a process, however, could not occur 'in time' without unforeseen consequences, nor would it, or could it, hope to eradicate completely ambiguity, contradiction or conflict within social relations.

Having argued that QWL theorists and practitioners ignore the role of structural contradictions in the relations between capital and labour, and provide an inadequate conceptualisation and treatment of managers and management, it is now proposed to turn to the more general area of 'work'. It will be argued that here, too, QWL theorists provide sociologically deficient interpretations and conceptualisations which, in turn, affect both the validity, and utility, of the prescriptions they offer.

## NOTES

1. HILL, S. 1981 Competition and Control at Work London, Heinemann Educational Books p.1.
2. See for example, POLLARD, S. 1965 The Genesis of Modern Management London, Edward Arnold & BENDIX, R. 1956 Work and Authority in Industry New York, Wiley.
3. Durkheim, for example, has commonly been associated with the particular strain or contradiction whereby social inequalities lead to a situation in which certain goals are stressed by the culture but to which access for many is systematically denied. His observation of industrial capitalism in action led him to an increasing awareness that persisting inequalities threatened the kind of social solidarity which he thought to be possible within the organised division of labour which characterises modern economic life. For economic life to be regulated there needed to be some kind of moral basis underlying it, otherwise 'anomie' would prevail, but he couldn't see how such a normative order could be achieved whilst inherited inequalities of opportunity and condition existed. See: DURKHEIM, E. 1984 The Division of Labour in Society London, Macmillan (trans. W. Halls).
4. WATSON, T. 1987 Sociology, Work and Industry London, RKP. p.217.
5. BALDAMUS, W. 1961 Efficiency and Effort London, Tavistock. p.105.
6. FOX, A. 1980 'The Meaning of Work' in G.Esland & G.Salaman (eds.) The Politics of Work and Occupations Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
7. HILL. 1981. pp.14-15 & p.261.
8. CRESSEY, P. & McINNES, J. quoted in LITTLER, C. & SALAMAN, G. 1984 Class at Work London, Batsford Academic. p.56.

9. BROWN, R.K. 1984 'Working on Work' SOCIOLOGY 18.3 p.317.
10. STOREY, J. 1985 'The Means of Management Control' SOCIOLOGY 19.2. p.194 (193-211).
11. op.cit. p.195.
12. op.cit. p196.
13. op.cit. pp.194-195.
14. HILL. op.cit. p.17.
15. POLLARD. op.cit. Chapter.1.
16. op.cit. Chapter. 7.
17. op.cit. Chapters 2 & 5. See also: BENDIX. op.cit. Chap.2 and ANTHONY, P.D. 1986 The Foundation of Management London, Tavistock. Chap.4.
18. HILL. op.cit. Chap. 2.
19. POLLARD. op.cit. Chap.5.
20. HILL. op.cit. p.20.
21. op.cit. p.23.
22. BENDIX. op.cit. Chap. 2.
23. op.cit. p.203.
24. op.cit. p.88.
25. op.cit. pp.438-445.
26. ANTHONY, P.D. 1977 The Ideology of Work London, Tavistock. p.67.
27. HILL. op.cit. pp.22-23.
28. HOBBSAWM, E.J. 1975 The Age of Capital 1848-1875 London. p.213.
29. CHANDLER, A.D. 1976 'The Development of Modern Management Structure in the U.S. and U.K.' in L. Hannah (ed.) Management Strategy and Business Development London, Macmillan p.28.
30. BROWN, R.K. 1977 'The Growth of Industrial Bureaucracy - Chance, Choice or Necessity?' in P.R. Gleichman et al (eds.) Human Figurations - Essays in



Honour of Norbert Elias Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift pp.206-207 (191-210).

31. *ibid.*

32. POLLARD *op.cit.* Chap.7.

33. PAYNE, P.L. 1967 'The Emergence of the Large-Scale Company in Great Britain, 1870-1914' in ECONOMIC HISTORY REVIEW 20.3. pp.519-520.

34. *op.cit.* p.536.

35. CHANDLER *op.cit.* p.28.,p.32. & p.40. For more detail on developments in the U.S.A. during the same period see CHANDLER, A. 1966 Strategy & Structure New York, Doubleday Anchor, esp. the 'Introduction'.

36. LITTLER, C. 1982 The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies p.67.

37. *ibid.*

38. *op.cit.* p.80.

39. RAMSAY, H. 1977 'Cycles of Control: Worker Participation in Sociological and Historical Perspective' SOCIOLOGY 11.3. p.484. The role of participation in QWL is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. of the present thesis.

40. LITTLER *op.cit.* pp.94-95.

41. *ibid.*

42. *op.cit.* p.76.

43. HILL, *op.cit.* p.33, speculates that the socially determined character of many of Britain's entrepreneurs/managers was not conducive to rationalised shop administration. He notes the absence of a strong technical and engineering base within British management at the time meant that, unlike America, scientific management did not readily find favour. Secondly, the economic pressures of market competition were often passified by the

continuance of the imperial system and tariff protection at home, and that therefore these pressures were not felt sufficiently strongly in many industries to promote more cost effective methods of administration. Nor, in contrast to the experience of the U.S., did long-established British industry ever grow at such a rate that the influx of new workers swamped the capacity of occupational organisation and traditional foremanship.

See also ARMSTRONG, P. 1984 'Competition between the Organisational Professions and the Evolution of Management Control Strategies' in K. Thompson (ed.) Work, Employment and Unemployment pp.97-120.

44. HANNAH, L. 1974 'Managerial Innovation and the Rise of the Large-Scale Company in Inter-War Britain' ECONOMIC HISTORY REVIEW 27.2 p.253.

45. LITTLER. op.cit. p.100.

46. CHILD, J. 1969 British Management Thought London, George Allen & Unwin. Chapter 3.

47. ROSE, M. 1975 Industrial Behaviour Harmondsworth, Penguin. Chap.2.

48. BROWN, R.K. 1989 'The Employment Relationship in Sociological Theory' in D. Gallie (ed.) Employment in Britain Oxford, Basil Blackwell (forthcoming).

49. LITTLER op.cit. p.101.

50. HANNAH 1974 op.cit. p.254.

51. idid. p.255.

52. LITTLER op.cit. p.105.

53. For a thorough discussion of Bedaux and its diffusion throughout British industry see LITTLER op.cit. pp.105-115.

54. ibid.

55. ibid.

56. HILL op.cit. Chap.2.

57. For a critique of the managerialist claim of a separation of ownership from control see DE VROEY, M. 1975 'A Marxist View of Ownership and Control' in T. Nichols (ed.) Capital and Labour London, Fontana and ZEITLIN, M. 1982 'Corporate Ownership and Control: The Large Corporation and the Capitalist Class' in A. Giddens and D. Held (eds.) Classes, Power and Conflict .

58. See, for example, BURNS, T. 1969 'On the Plurality of Social Systems' and DALTON, M. 'Conflicts between Staff and Line Managers' chapters 11 & 13 respectively in T. Burns (ed.) Industrial Man Harmondsworth, Penguin.

59. HYMAN, R. 1987 'Strategy or Structure? Capital, Labour and Control' WORK, EMPLOYMENT & SOCIETY 1.1. p.30. (25-55).

Hyman's Marxist analysis, in the above article, is a distinct advance on standard labour process theory. The latter, in many respects, represents a mirror image, albeit with radical critical intent, of orthodox organisation and management theory in which the organisation is seen very much as the rationally and consciously constructed tool of the owner or manager. Those in charge of organisations are viewed as carefully, consciously and ruthlessly adopting policies which will produce profits and aid capital accumulation. This is not to suggest that in capitalist societies managerial decisions are not in some ultimate way related to the profit motive which underpins the political economy. Rather, it is to indicate, as has already been mentioned, that organisational and employment decisions are often made for a variety of reasons not immediately connected with profits, or even, efficiency. Such reasons could include the pursuit of sectional interests of management, all the realities of 'muddling through', the following of habitual practices etc.

In addition to this, because theorists working within a Marxist framework

tend to be concerned with issues of class conflict and economic exploitation, they can often be led to exaggerate the extent to which managers focus upon employment and work design issues (as Hyman himself points out). Managers are seen, in other words, as continuously engaged in plotting as to how best to exploit workers. In reality, as 'alternative' managerial theory has shown, decisions about the way work is organised are best seen as just one element in the whole range of decisions which are made about finance, investment, technological change and market policy etc.

60. CHILD op.cit. p.23.

61. EARL, M.J. 1983 'Accounting and Management' in M.J. Earl (ed.) Perspectives on Management Oxford, OUP p.127.

62. BATSTONE, E. 1984 Working Order Oxford, Basil Blackwell pp.70-72. See also TILLET, A. et al. 1970 Management Thinkers Harmondsworth, Penguin, esp. the introduction, for a brief discussion of the importance of financial criteria of efficiency during the industrial revolution and beyond.

63. *ibid.*

64. CHILD op.cit Chap.1.

65. ANTHONY 1986 op.cit. pp.100-101. See also the same author's 1977 The Ideology of Work.

66. For a more detailed analysis of this latter point see ARMSTRONG op.cit.

67. F.W. TAYLOR, 1911, quoted in CHILD op.cit. Chap.2.

68. F.W. TAYLOR, 1911, quoted in ANTHONY 1986 op.cit. p.94.

69. ANTHONY, 1986 op.cit. p.94.

70. op.cit. p.95.

71. LITTLER op.cit. p.194.

72. *ibid.*

*The diffusion of 'scientific management' practices and shopfloor rationalisations began to obscure welfarism in the 1930s and the economic pressures pushed Quaker industrialists (the vanguard of the paternalist employers) into an acceptance of Taylorism and the unrestrained pursuit of maximum business efficiency. (p.194)*

73. ANTHONY 1986 op.cit p.53.
74. CHILD op.cit. p.116. See also ROSE op.cit. Chap.3.
75. ROSE. op.cit. Chap.3.
76. CHILD op.cit. p.135.
77. ANTHONY 1986 op.cit. p.54.
78. ANTHONY 1977 op.cit. pp.256-257.
79. NICHOLS, T. 1980 'Management, Ideology and Practice' in ESLAND & SALAMAN (eds.) op.cit. p.281.
80. ANTHONY 1986 op.cit. p178.
81. op.cit. p.188.
82. op.cit. pp.183-184.
83. op.cit. p.198.
84. op.cit. p.197.
85. FOX, A. 1974 Beyond Contract: Work, Power & Trust Relations London, Faber & Faber. For ANTHONY 1977 on FOX 1974, see pp.252-254.
86. FOX 1980 op.cit. p.191.
87. *ibid.*

*Work may be a mere source of livelihood, or the most significant part of one's inner life; it may be experienced as expiation, or as exuberant expression of self; as bounden duty, or as the development of man's universal nature. Neither love nor hatred of work is inherent in man, or inherent in any given line of work. For work has no meaning. (C. W. Mills 1956, p. 215)*

There is no one universally agreed definition of what work is. Work cannot be used unambiguously as referring to certain activities, but must also include reference to the purposes for which, and the context within which, these activities take place.

According to Richard Brown

*'Work' can refer to any physical and mental activities which transform materials into a more useful form, provide or distribute goods or services to others, and extend human knowledge and understanding. We cannot, however, distinguish work from its various opposites - 'leisure', 'idleness', 'play' - solely by reference to activities. Almost any activity can be work, and many of them, if performed for their own sake, are considered to be recreation, play or leisure - the antithesis of work. Some people play games, for example, to earn an income for themselves and to provide entertainment for others. Others play the same games... simply for pleasure. So in industrial society work activities are instrumental activities directed either towards meeting one's own needs or those of one's family, household, community, and/or towards securing the means by which such needs can be met. Work, in our society, involves providing goods or services for which others are willing to pay, and providing goods and services for which payment would otherwise have to be made. (1)*

As Kumar points out, work is also a social institution and, like all such institutions, has a history. How it seemed to people at one time is not how it seems at another (2). Nor was one meaning necessarily shared by all members of society at any given time.

*Where work was fulfilment to one man or group it could be seen as defilement to another man or group. As far as work is concerned the saying 'one man's meat is another man's poison' can carry the sense, not of the relativity of tastes and values, but of the brute fact of exploitation. Work has, in other words, not merely a history but an ideology. (3)*

At base all societies accept the necessity of work in order to survive. Indeed, for most societies, for most of the time, work is simply a fact of existence to which they must accommodate.

*Whatever else it may include, work also refers to those activities in a society which enable essential material needs to be met. For this reason it has central social and cultural significance in all societies. (4)*

Whatever meanings may therefore develop to supplement this basic instrumental one, they can never really oust it altogether.

In the case of most primitive and pre-industrial societies however, there would be little point in asking our 'modern' questions about the quality of working life, about identity and 'leisure', for such questions presuppose a separation of spheres which doesn't exist. For many of these peoples, their life of work, play, family, religion and community forms a continuous or overlapping set of activities.

Our modern notions of progress (discredited, but refusing to lie low), with their assumption that we live in the best of all so far possible worlds tend to militate against available historical and anthropological evidence to the contrary. There are, for example, as Sahlins has shown, some

societies of the hunting and gathering type where economic life is so simple and needs so undeveloped that their members have a degree of 'leisure' that many workers in the so called 'affluent' western economies do not themselves enjoy nor would believe possible(5). In mentioning such an example the intention is not to indulge in sentimental hankering of the 'world we have lost' variety, but merely to indicate that, although work of some kind is a necessity in all societies, work as it is presently organised in our type of society is neither the only way that work can realistically be organised, nor is it necessarily the proven 'best' of all so far possible ways (a claim often voiced). As was mentioned earlier, work alters its meaning to people in time, as well as having a variety of possible meanings at any given time.

In Britain, the development of an industrial capitalist society from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards meant far-reaching changes in the social organisation of work and the social relations of production.

The division of labour and the very nature of work tasks were transformed as the means of production became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few who employed as 'free' labour, formerly more economically independent workers. As this process gathered pace more and more people came to experience work in the form of paid employment. Today these two terms are often (mistakenly) seen as synonymous.

The industrial revolution and the subsequent developments in industrialized societies, as Weber emphasized, were dependent on and reinforced certain distinctive values relating to work.

*These emphasized the intrinsic importance and value of work and the obligation of all to work hard and to the best of ones ability; and the desirability of the rational organisation of work, free of traditional and personal restraints, to attain given ends. Labour was to be regarded*



*as a commodity to be brought and sold without regard to the character or needs of the labourer, and work was to be organised to maximise efficiency and productivity, not to provide interesting and rewarding tasks or opportunities for participation or control by the workers. (6)*

Much time and effort was expended by employers in attempting to get workers to internalize this work ethic and its consequent values. Indeed, as will be made clear throughout this present chapter, powerful mechanisms still exist to ensure that the appropriate obligations to work are internalized.

The values and preferences implicit in the design and organisation of work can be said to derive from the meaning of work that has been brought to bear by dominant groups and interests with the power to uphold that design and organisation. Thus, work is also a relationship of power.

The emphasis imprinted upon the design of work by dominant groups in the United Kingdom, as in most other countries of the modern world, is exclusively 'instrumental'; it is an emphasis on the practical outcome of work as against the value of the work experience itself for those who do it. Work in our type of society can therefore be said to be designed with an eye to extrinsic rather than intrinsic values.

*Work is designed exclusively in the light of such criteria as profits, output, fulfilment of production norms or effective performance, not in the light of that profoundly different conception that work should ideally provide a humane, balanced and fulfilling life for those engaged in it, thereby concerning itself with 'human' as against purely 'market', 'economic', or 'performance' requirements. (7)*

In our society, however, as in others, the dominant groups do not enjoy an absolute monopoly over the propagation of values and meanings. Rival values and meanings exist as a potential challenge to the prevailing order in the sense that, like any other ideas, they are a potential resource that

of society. Rather they are more likely to see their values in common sense or moral terms rather than in terms of political and power relations.

As Fox again indicates

*Fortunately for them they benefit from the same inequalities of control in the field of communication and socialisation as in the design and organisation of work. They are thus in a privileged position to influence people's conceptions of work and what they aspire to get from it. (10)*

It can be suggested, therefore, that to a very large degree the dominant social meaning of work accords well with that which informs the institutions of work themselves. This has very obvious implications for the relationship between the individual and work. To a significant extent the individual learns what to want and expect from work and what meaning it is to have in her/his life. Indeed, (and combined with this, as part and parcel of the same process ) the work that an individual does, or the fact that he/she need not or cannot work, is also indicative of so much else about her/his likely life experiences. (11)

*Work is important to an individual not just in ways of which he or she maybe aware, however, but also because the work people do -their occupations- are the most important influences on the life chances of them and their families. When it comes to considering income, health, educational opportunity and achievement of children, liability to accident, to unemployment and redundancy, rates of infant and adult mortality and morbidity, and many other social characteristics, it is occupational categories which reveal the clearest patterns of difference. Indeed for this reason most discussions of 'social stratification' or 'social class' in contemporary Britain are based on occupational categories. Such work-related inequalities of condition and opportunity exist even though those affected may not always be aware of them or may consider them unacceptable. (12)*

A person's occupation, their place in the division of labour, is also

intimately bound up with their own self-conception, in other words, with their sense of identity. According to Everett Hughes

*...a man's work is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself...a man's work is one of the more important parts of his social identity, of his self; indeed of his fate in the one life he has to live... (13)*

Bearing all this in mind, it could seem to be a mistake to assume that all members of society undergo a uniform process of socialisation. Society is stratified. People differ in their family, class and educational backgrounds and these backgrounds are an extremely important element in the eventual determination of an individual's occupation and therefore of the quality of working life he/she can expect to enjoy.

In the case of lower socio-economic groups, for example, low expectations and aspirations with respect to intrinsic rewards tend to strengthen the individual's receptivity to the widely propagated message that only the extrinsic rewards of work are really important. As Goldthorpe et al have shown, employees from these groups may give up more intrinsically satisfying work in order to obtain increased extrinsic satisfactions.(14)

In the 'middle class', on the other hand, the tendency is for the individual to learn a more complex set of 'orientations to work'. It needs be noted that these two examples are no more than simple generalisations, nor is it being suggested that 'orientations to work' are in anyway undynamic in essence or purely structurally determined(15). But these and related arguments are obviously important to any discussion of the quality of working life.

What is in effect being suggested is that QWL is a much more complex matter than those advocating its enhancement have in the main realised.

Its subject matter goes well beyond the boundaries outlined in most standard definitions and approaches (16). Many, if not most, commentators both within the 'Quality of Working Life' movement and outside of it discuss QWL without any theoretical conception of the nature of work in modern society, or of the interests that determine the design of work and work organisation, or of the forces in society at large which encourage the development of appropriate and realistic expectations. All too often, in other words, QWL theorists and practitioners offer only partial and inadequate analyses, devoid of sociological perspective. To paraphrase Dr. Johnson: particulars may be studied (often in a fashion methodologically suspect) but the whole is never surveyed.

However, if a particular philosophy does seem implicit in the work of many QWL commentators, then it is one which suggests that

*power, in western societies, is competitive, fragmented and diffused: everybody, directly or through organised groups, has some power and nobody has too much of it. (17)*

Pluralism is here not an ideal to be aimed for in a challenge to the inequalities of the established order, but rather taken as an existing political condition.

The arguments outlined throughout the present, as well as the previous, chapter of this thesis militate strongly against this conclusion and point to the fact that the division of labour in contemporary Britain is characterised by both alienation and anomie(18).

*For many in our society their role in the division of labour is one which is forced on them by the constraints of their upbringing, education and lack of opportunity in the labour market; there is no consensus as to the appropriate distribution of obligations and rewards as between different classes and categories of occupations whose situations are so unequal. (19)*

advance (23).

To emphasize the points being made here, it is now necessary to concentrate in more detail upon some of the issues already mentioned.

### The Social Meanings of Work

It has been suggested that different groups in society enjoy differing access to intrinsic and extrinsic satisfactions in work. There is, in effect, a systematic pattern of work-related inequalities. The predominant social meaning of work, namely 'instrumentalism' has different implications for occupational groups at different levels of the status hierarchy. Sharp variations exist in the experience of work and life by people at these different occupational levels to such a degree that one can refer to there being a relatively deprived 'majority' and a relatively privileged 'minority'. It needs to be remembered, however, that there is no sharp cut-off point between these two groups, as perhaps the construct implies, but rather a graduation of differences, with a certain amount of overlap in the middle ranges which makes categorisation extremely debateable at certain points.

Much evidence points to there having always been a tendency for major sections of lower-level employees to see their work in purely instrumental terms. Work, for them, often has little or no intrinsic meaning. For the most part work for the majority is

*little more than an irksome precondition for the business of living(24).*

Most people in our society accept a personal meaning of work well matched to the predominant social meaning embodied in the present design of work

and well-aired in the media and other forms of public communications. This meaning hails man the consumer, rather than man the producer. Emphasis is placed on what work achieves in terms of some practical outcome, not on what it does for the human personality.

For the 'minority', on the other hand, work offers not only increased extrinsic satisfactions, but also intrinsic satisfactions of a kind culturally valued as personality-enhancing. These latter satisfactions and rewards are derived from the greater discretion, autonomy and challenge which work at the higher levels of the occupational hierarchy is able to provide. That these kinds of work are regarded in such a way implies a certain conception of human personality. In this conception, work activities are seen as making available to those involved in them not just instrumental rewards, but also

*...enriching experiences through which men can meet challenges and overcome obstacles, develop their aptitudes and abilities and enjoy the satisfactions of achievement. In the course of these experiences men undergo psychological growth, realise themselves, and reach due stature as full, mature and autonomous moral agents (25). (My emphasis).*

Such a view is often regarded as the second of the two main traditional views of work in Britain (the other being work as instrumental necessity for societal survival), and is frequently incorporated into the visions of those seeking to challenge in some way (implicitly or explicitly, at the micro or macro level) the predominant social meaning of work in our type of industrial capitalist society. (26)

Most people, therefore, in the lower reaches of the occupational hierarchy are faced with low-discretion, highly prescribed (to use Jaques' terms) work, which allows little scope for the development of the human personality and limits, to follow Fox's argument through, their ability to

act as 'full, mature and autonomous moral agents'. We are again faced with another contradiction: on the one hand, society values individualism and personal growth, but on the other hand, the organisation and design of work, prohibits the expression of individualism and stunts the potential of personal growth for the majority by limiting their use of discretion and initiative at the workplace. These jobs which yield little intrinsic meaning are therefore valued (if valued is the correct expression) for the extrinsic rewards to be derived from them. Those at the lower end of the occupational strata are constrained to adapt to their situation by focusing on the instrumental rewards they can obtain through work.

Those at the higher levels of the occupational status ladder are able to enjoy not only high levels of material reward, but also the challenge to personal growth through intrinsically satisfying work.

*The owners and controllers who administer private and public property in the resources and facilities of production bring an instrumental approach to their task, and their practical interpretation and enforcement of this approach affords the majority of the rank and file little scope for self-actualisation through work. For them, instrumentalism and self-actualisation bear a strong- though well short of absolute- tendency to be mutually exclusive. The minority in higher status occupations...are fortunate in that, so far as their own roles are concerned, instrumentalism and self-actualisation tend to be compatible rather than mutually exclusive. (27)*

Blauner's classic discussion of work satisfaction lends weight to this argument. He reported that American surveys of workers' attitudes to their jobs showed an overwhelming majority at least moderately satisfied with their work (as indeed most 'sponge' surveys still do today). He considered this finding

*neither particularly surprising nor sociologically interesting. (28)*

For

*under "normal" conditions there is a natural tendency for people to identify with, or at least to be somewhat positively oriented toward, those social arrangements in which they are implicated. (29)*

What he did find of theoretical interest were the presence of marked occupational differences in work attitudes. In effect, work satisfaction varied greatly by occupation.

*When a scale of relative satisfaction is formed, based on general occupational categories, the resulting rank order is almost identical with the most commonly used occupational status classification... (30)*

Of course, it must be remembered that no direct and immediate relationship exists between the 'objective' nature of a job situation and the orientations of its occupants, in the sense that the former predictably determines the latter. People learn orientations to work from a variety of sources besides the work situation itself, and their experience of the job and their reaction to it are not merely mechanical responses to certain objective features of it, but the result of how they perceive those features and the meaning they give them in the light of their own more widely-acquired orientations.

As Brown has indicated

*In our society almost everyone is socialized to expect to have to take up paid work. Though the dominant value system of our society certainly reinforces such an obligation, the extent to which this expectation is internalized as a moral obligation varies as between classes, other social groupings and individuals. There are therefore likely to be differences in the overall view of employment and the definition given by employees to their relationship with and involvement in an employing organisation. As a result of the experience of employment as well as socialization*



*outside any workplace, expectations regarding employment are likely to continue to develop and change, and probably to become more specific, and if opportunities of achieving them appear limited or non-existent, also more limited. These more specific and limited orientations to work influence attitudes and actions in the labour market and in the workplace though in ways which are often very dependent on the particular context. Levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with paid work, whether expressed verbally or manifested in actions like absence from work or job-quitting, must be interpreted with reference to the expectations and priorities of the workers concerned. (31)*

The evidence brought to bear thus far demonstrates that, amongst other things, personal work meanings do not differ randomly between individuals. Those lower down the occupational status scale are likely to derive little conscious meaning from their work apart from the pay and security it offers them. Conversely, those near the top of the same scale are likely to see work not only in terms of the extrinsic rewards it offers, but also as a vehicle for personal growth and self-fulfilment, and other such intrinsic satisfactions. Personal meanings are therefore correlated, to a significant degree, with social stratification, for occupation is closely related to social class. How the individual sees work is a complex dynamic phenomenon, but it can at least be suggested that, to a considerable extent, it will depend on his or her location in the intricate social layering thought of as the class structure.

### Socialization

*When we examine the prior conditioning factors that help to shape people's expectations and orientations towards work and its place in their life, we become especially aware of those tendencies towards self-perpetuation of the social system that are notable in most societies for most of the*

*time, though it is vital not to so emphasize them as to obscure the dynamics of change with which they co-exist. (32)*

The life career of the individual is influenced to a very considerable extent by the class-family-education cluster of structural factors. As has been previously mentioned, the occupational structure of society which people enter when they take up paid employment is structured and segregated on the basis of class and status (as well as gender and ethnic) factors. People do not enter that structure with equal opportunities. Both the resources they take with them and the aspirations they hold will be influenced by their class, family and educational background together with the way this affects their perception of themselves as members of a particular gender or ethnic group.

Parental occupational and class background is likely to be very important to the individual's life chances both through the material advantages which can be given (being sent to a public school instead of a comprehensive, or being able to afford certain extra-curricula activities, for example) and through the kind of encouragement or discouragement which is provided. There may be direct pressures on the child's job preference, with the parents either encouraging or discouraging them from entering work like their own, or urging children to engage in a career which the parents would have loved to have had the opportunity to enter themselves.

*The orientations and aspirations which the individual finds prevalent in family, school, relatives, friends and other groups to which he looks for clues on how to live are themselves strongly shaped by work experience of past as well as present generations, and this experience will have been derived from the same class-stratified division of labour as he himself is about to enter. (33)*

Socialization in the home and in society at large, especially in the images

to be seen in the communications media, not only provides information about and evaluations of different occupations, it suggests what type of work might be appropriate for members of each gender.

Boys and girls tend to be socialized differently from a very early age and this process is strongly tied to ideas about work roles(34). Child socialization strongly colours work career aspirations with influences ranging from those of the games played in infancy, through cultural models provided by the media and advertising, to the personal observations made of the existing order of occupational segregation. Existing patterns thus tend to be reinforced.

The education system can also be seen as re-inforcing inequalities rather than radically challenging them. Quite apart from the continued existence of fee-paying schools, which allow educational advantage to be bought on the market by those with sufficient income, processes of selection and 'streaming', as well as a host of other inequalities, lead to a distribution of opportunities which, on the whole, favours those from economically privileged backgrounds. On top of this

*the assumptions of teachers, administrators, parents and-as time goes on-increasingly the children themselves, about the academic potential and occupational opportunities of particular categories of children, are a further constraint. Many from less privileged backgrounds clearly do succeed in using educational opportunities to be upwardly mobile, but they have to overcome handicaps on the way which are sufficient to block those with somewhat less ability, or less determination, or less luck. Though it is less than perfect, there is a clear relationship between educational qualifications and occupation, such that the better the qualifications the more rewarding the job. By the time any individual enters the labour market, therefore, the chances of a rewarding career are determined to a considerable extent. (35)*

## Work and Leisure: Rewards and Deprivations

There is a substantial amount of evidence available which shows that the rewards and deprivations of work (by no means all of which can be measured-see Baldamus, Efficiency and Effort, for example) are not distributed equally amongst the labour force of our society(36). This evidence points to a pattern whereby, as Brown concludes

*In terms of almost all the criteria considered-pay, hours, fringe benefits, job satisfaction, health, job security-the non-manual worker is more highly rewarded and suffers fewer deprivations than the manual worker...Among non-manual workers it is particularly those in professional, and, perhaps, to a lesser extent, managerial occupations who appear to have the most favourable conditions of employment (except with regard to the chances of earning the very highest salaries, where top managerial positions have the advantage); and certain non-manual occupations-'clerical' and 'selling'- have a balance of rewards and deprivations which is similar to that of many manual workers and worse than that of some of them. Among manual workers there is a general tendency for the more skilled to be better rewarded/less deprived, and in some respects, health for example, for the unskilled to have a considerably worse record than the skilled. Thus a clear class gradient remains, and the indicators are that it is not changing very rapidly. Further...many of the more disadvantaged workers-women, those in private sector services-are only weakly organised and so less able to take action to improve their situation. (37)*

There is a tradition, however, stemming from utilitarianism, which in broadly accepting that work based deprivations do exist and are both hierarchically and disproportionately distributed, nevertheless suggests that the alienated character of much industrial capitalist employment is compensated for by high wages and a fuller life lived outside the workplace in increased leisure time.

In what is often termed the 'Benthamite felicific calculus', the individual trades off the pain of work against the pleasure of leisure.

*He accepts the 'homelessness' of the sphere of work as the necessary and acceptable price of his being more truly 'himself' in his non-work sphere(38).*

Peter Berger puts it thus

*The typical and statistically normal state of affairs in an industrial society is that people do not work where they carry on their private lives. The two spheres are socially and geographically separate. And since it is in the latter that people normally locate their essential activities, one can say that they do not live where they work. 'Real life' and one's 'authentic self' are supposed to be centred on the private sphere. Life at work tends to take on the character of pseudo-reality and pseudo-identity(39).*

An elaboration of this utilitarian bargain is provided by, amongst others, Dubin and Strauss. These writers tend to stress the fact that workers 'central life interests' lie outside the workplace and that work for them is exclusively instrumental. However, this instrumentalism is seen explicitly in terms of 'free choice' by the individual concerned rather than in any other sense. Why, it is argued, should we not accept this instrumentalism as the expression of free individual preference, thereby respecting the worker's 'right to choose' but also conferring economic benefits upon society as a whole. People, in essence, freely choose instrumentalism like a commodity from a suitable range of alternatives. Following this line of thought it would, therefore, be seen as wrong to increase the potential for self-actualisation at work because this would be going against the will of the workers concerned(40).

These utilitarian arguments can of course be severely criticized, as a brief reading of the evidence presented in this chapter would suggest.

Firstly, the Benthamite contract can be shown to be fraudulent. 'Work' and

'Leisure' cannot be simply separated as if they had no connection, almost as if they were activities engaged in by two different people instead of the same individual. Long hours of tedious work can be seen to breed equally unexciting leisure. Dull and monotonous employment, the normal character of a very large number of jobs in industrial capitalist society, seems to dampen the capacity for active and enjoyable leisure.

As Alasdair Clayre puts it

*If nothing can repay a man in leisure for the capacities of enjoyment that depriving work has destroyed, then monotonous work is paid for in a coinage which work itself debases, and the entire notion of a fair-wage bargain for depriving work becomes suspect (41)*

Similarly, although subjectively leisure time may be seen as time away from paid employment, it is at the same time part and parcel of the same system that also includes work and the same pressures can be seen equally in both spheres. It only needs to be remembered, for example, that in an industrial capitalist society one person's leisure can easily be, or be part of, someone else's paid employment. According to Burns

*the swamping of everyday life by industrialism has not been succeeded by a mere ebbing, or forcing back, of the flood [ie. in the form of leisure time won]. Social life outside of the workplace has not re-emerged; it has been created afresh, in forms which are themselves the creatures of industrialism, which derive from it and which contribute to its development, growth and further articulation (42).*

Secondly, the arguments of Dubin and Strauss are open to as much, if not more, criticism.

Both writers are, in effect, (like so many QWL theorists and practitioners) apologists for the status quo. Dubin, for example, in his study of the 'central life interests of industrial workers' can be seen as advocating, by his presentation, that what is, must be taken as given (Dubin was a

contributor to the Arlington House Conference in 1972 at which the QWL 'movement' was effectively born) (43). A political position is presented as closed to any value-judgements not in line with the author's own conclusions. A class-related dimension of inequality in a major sphere of life is treated as a natural 'fact', beyond the reach or need of reform.

*Instead of seeing the worker's refusal to regard work as a 'central life interest' as itself a consequence of, and a form of adaptation to, their class-determined work situation, Dubin chooses to regard it as a justification of that situation; as an indication that all is for the best in the best of all industrial workers' worlds (44)*

Dubin ignores the general truth that if the individual is to maintain some semblance of average mental health and happiness he (sic) has, to some degree, to realistically adjust to everyday life as he (sic) finds it, to make 'realistic' assumptions and hold 'realistic' aspirations (as Anthony, amongst others, has suggested (45).

*Workers who see no reasonable prospect of securing a job which affords them intrinsic satisfaction, self-fulfilment and comparable related meanings-or who find that to secure such satisfaction they must pay a price in material rewards which to them seems excessive - are likely to moderate their aspirations accordingly, make the best of life as they find it, and emphasize such meanings as are within their reach - which as Dubin and many others have shown will probably be limited to financial rewards and perhaps certain additional meanings of subsidiary priority. After several years habituation to this situation their adaptation to it may become an established and structured element in their personality and attitude for life and work (46).*

The alienation of the worker under capitalism, as revealed in his or her acquiescence in a form of work which is denying or depriving etc, demonstrates the hegemony of capitalism to which the worker is exposed. These apologists are essentially engaged in a defence, rather than a detailed analysis or critique, of this hegemony.

Firstly, for example, in the present state of things, the majority of employees are not involved in deciding what goals their employing organisation will pursue, nor how these goals will be pursued. Beyond the workplace the same claim can be applied to society as a whole. All members of society do not collectively choose what the dominant social meaning of work in society will be.

Secondly, even if a choice were presented to all members of society, in our existing social context, between, say, on the one hand, a higher level of self-actualisation at work in tandem with a lower level of material reward, or on the other, higher material rewards at the cost of self-actualisation in work, many would not be able to enjoy a free and informed choice, despite the superficial impression of democracy in action. For a great many people would be constrained, firstly, by their existing material needs to choose the latter option, and, secondly, by the fact that to them self-actualisation may be nothing but an empty phrase, with no experiential meaning. As C. Wright Mills, for example, has written with regard to the 'craft ideal' and the modern worker.

*The craft life would be immediately available as a fact of their consciousness only if in the life-time of the modern employees they had experienced a shift from the one condition to the other, which they have not; or if they had grasped it as an ideal meaning of work, which they have not (47).*

In other words their background and past experience would militate against the exercise of an informed, free choice.

Thus, although any further discussion of the nature of 'free choice' would lead on to issues too complex to be investigated in any detail here, what can be stated is that the authors under discussion take up an essentially contestable position which they then portray as natural. They are, in



essence, engaged in the construction of ideology. As Fox comments with regard to Strauss

*When [he] thanks his Maker and declares it fortunate that so many in the lower ranks manage to adjust to their lot, we may fairly ask: fortunate for whom? It can scarcely be denied that those faring best from existing choices are those in the upper ranks, who, of course, have most to say in the choosing(48).*

It seems, then, that it is all too easily forgotten that

*...there is no evidence that the mass of the population anywhere has wanted an industrial society, and plenty of evidence that they did not(49).*

#### The Labour Market and Employment

The basic conception of the labour market in neo-classical economics is one which sees behaviour in it as both economically rational and individualistic, with the underlying processes reflecting the workings of supply and demand, income and price. This conception carries the implication that the labour market may therefore reflect, perpetuate or even increase inequalities derived from other sources, but will not, of itself, create inequalities. The labour market is thus merely a set of allocating mechanisms by which the supply of, and demand for, labour are matched. The basic question to be asked, therefore, is whether this conception holds up in reality.

Firstly, as Brown notes

*the labour market is not really one but a large number of partially overlapping markets. Labour markets are fragmented geographically, and industrially and occupationally (50).*

People are not perfectly mobile, whereas capital, by and large, is. Most

potential applicants for jobs are very restricted as to the geographical area in which they can seek work; the economic and personal costs of moving often proving insurmountable (witness, for example, the current North/South divide in Britain). Hence rates of unemployment may vary widely by region for lengthy periods of time.

Labour markets are fragmented occupationally in terms of the skills and qualifications which are a prerequisite for certain types of employment. Such lines of division may be deepened or added to by the actions of employers, for example in customarily seeking employees only from certain sections of the population, or of employee collectivities, be they trade unions or professional bodies, in attempting to preserve certain areas of work for their members, or for those with particular attributes, regardless of whether the work in question could, in fact, be undertaken by other people who happened neither to have the attributes espoused, nor to be members of the relevant associations.

*Taken in isolation, the hiring and firing decision may appear as a straightforward attempt to fill the jobs with the best people. Yet the criteria used to establish the suitability of the candidates, and often the very existence of the job itself, are the outcome of a number of struggles between management and worker over the price of labour, the labour process and job security. In this sense the labour market is more adequately seen as an arena in which a series of issues are constantly fought over, rather than a simple matching process (51).*

The need for labour market shelters (52) stems partly, though not automatically, from the fact that the labour market is always in a state of flux or movement. The establishment of shelters is not, by the same count, therefore, in any way a firm guarantee of worklife-long security for those under its protection at any given time. The fact that employers can

and do change their labour market strategy means that the distribution of labour market shelters and segments changes over time. Employers have, after all, a structured advantage when it comes to bargaining with labour over the contract of employment. When labour is not employed, for example, it creates an immediate crisis of personal income for workers and their families, whereas when capital is not employed it can 'wait' or be transferred to alternative uses or to consumption. In this and related ways a fundamental asymmetry exists between capital and labour.

The dynamic nature of the capitalist project at work in the labour market means that the only real certainty is uncertainty, but that some enjoy more certainty than others (indeed, some are more changed, than changing). The establishment of labour market shelters in no way fundamentally alters the asymmetrical character of the relationship between capital and labour, it is, in fact, a result of that relationship. The shelters and segments created in the labour market are always contingent (but not patterned randomly). They depend on the underlying struggle between labour and capital, on the competition between employers in product markets and on the competition between groups of workers for access to jobs.

With regard to occupational allocation, the more important limitations on the neo-classical view of the labour market are those which are critical of the primacy given to rational individual choice (53).

Effective choice requires that jobs be available and that those seeking work within a particular section of the labour market are not all after the same scarce jobs. Individual preferences should differ and a suitable variety of desirable types of work should be available. In times of full-employment this particular proviso can sometimes appear to be met, but this is generally far from the case (54).

'Choice' also requires that workers know which jobs have which characteristics and what attributes they need to be eligible for them. But information, like so much else in real life, is not perfectly available to, nor interpreted uniformly by, each and every person. In this respect the rational, atomistic model is, again, not a mirror of reality.

Of central importance to the notion of 'free choice' is the fact that the extent to which workers can 'choose' is limited by their own attributes, or lack of them, obtained during socialisation and education. There are, as already noted, gross inequalities of opportunity in society and these are both partly a product of, and further exacerbated by, the workings of the labour market under capitalism. Employers, for example, often discriminate against certain categories of employee, sometimes with no apparent rationale, but often on the basis of assumptions about the likely attributes and behaviour of these categories of persons. Those shown to suffer most heavily in this respect include women, youth, members of ethnic minorities and older workers (55).

*If, as in the case of discrimination on grounds of gender or colour, the (white, male) employees who benefit from these processes share the employer's 'tastes', and are more or less aware of the benefits such discrimination brings them, this will reinforce such patterns of recruitment and the restrictions on opportunities for others which they create.*  
(56)

More generally, if labour markets are segmented to any extent in some of the ways that have been mooted (internal labour markets, for example), then this has further obvious implications for the degree of choice that can be freely exercised by an individual seeking a job. Those workers who find themselves in what can be broadly categorised as the secondary

sector of the labour market (as opposed to the 'independent' or 'subordinate' primary sectors) may well find it very difficult to escape from the vicious circle of low skills and an unsuitable employment record leading to low pay in insecure employment. Such labour market segmentation can be seen as a source of division amongst the 'working class' and as a means of reducing the likelihood of collective action to improve the lot of workers in low-paid, insecure employment, because those in the primary sectors depend, to a large extent, upon the very existence of the secondary sector for the relative privileges they are able to enjoy in work.

According to Brown, the workings of labour markets under capitalism bear little resemblance to the neo-classical conception outlined above. Employees certainly do not compete equally for the more desirable and well-rewarded jobs.

*'Choice' is restricted by barriers to geographical and occupational mobility and by highly imperfect information about opportunities. Employers can and do discriminate against certain categories of worker. Initial qualifications and point of entry into a highly fragmented labour market are important influences on future opportunities, and the relative advantages and disadvantages so acquired are likely to be reinforced rather than mitigated as further work experience is gained. Inequality of rewards and conditions is part of the structure of a highly fragmented, segmented labour market; chance may partly determine allocation within it; and movement from more deprived to more highly rewarded sectors can be difficult if not impossible, so that further inequalities are created by the operation of the labour market itself. British society is not closed, but nor is it completely open, and whatever other justifications may be offered for the existing patterns of work-related inequalities, they cannot be defended as being rewards to those who are successful in a competition in which all have equal chances (57).*

## Employment and Unemployment

Just as the rewards and deprivations of paid employment and access to labour market shelters are disproportionately distributed amongst the working population, so too is non-work, or rather unemployment disproportionately borne by certain social groups. These groups are in the main the very same ones that also suffer the greatest deprivation in work, and enjoy least access to labour market shelters. In Britain, male unskilled manual workers and semi-skilled/personal service workers and female semi-skilled personal service workers, for example, are greatly over-represented among the unemployed. Those groups substantially under-represented in the ranks of the unemployed are, conversely, those at the top of the occupational status hierarchy; professionals and top management, for example.

Unsurprisingly, unemployment is not experienced uniformly throughout the occupational hierarchy. To a very real extent, the ways unemployment is experienced relates to the ways that work itself is experienced. Yet in the public discussion of work and unemployment, only one definition of work, what Ashton terms the 'middle-class work ethic'(58) (and what has been referred to elsewhere in this chapter as the 'dominant social meaning'), predominates. The perpetuated dominance of this one definition tends to militate against the validity of different experiences and definitions. It is hardly surprising, as Kelvin and Jarrett indicate, that

*In a society whose socio-economic structure is still predominantly defined in terms of its division of labour, the unemployed are defined by what they are not, namely not part of, not integrated within that structure (59).*

Ashton, for example, suggests that due to the actual 'contested nature' of

the meaning of work, certain myths function to maintain the commitment of the working population to the legitimacy of the system of distributing work and allocating rewards. By degrading or stigmatising those out of work these myths serve to reinforce the commitment of those in work to the existing values (60).

There is, for example, the myth of the 'welfare scrounger' or 'workshy' individual. People allotted to this category are portrayed as living a life of ease 'on the dole' while the rest of the working population slaves away in order to earn a living. As Ashton indicates, there is little evidence available to support this claim. Indeed, as he says, a significantly larger sum is spent on tracking down the comparatively small numbers of fraudulent claims than is spent on the more costly problem of tax evasion, where the returns from successful convictions would be greater.

Similarly, the unemployed are often berated as lazy and unmotivated. Again, little hard evidence exists to support this claim. Instead, Ashton sees this particular myth as seeking to justify the rewards and security of those in work by deflecting blame or 'guilt' about the low level of resources available to those out of work onto the unemployed themselves.

These and other such mythical constructs can be seen to function ideologically for the benefit of the established order, denying, in essence, any sense of injustice or conflict within the workings of that order. Given the importance of paid employment that these myths serve to emphasise, and the huge increase in the numbers of unemployed in our society since the late 1970s, a large amount of work has been carried out by social psychologists into the effects of unemployment on the unemployed. This in turn has led to the postulation of some six main functions of employment in our type of society.

Firstly, paid employment provides financial rewards, the loss of which restricts access to resources of all kinds. Secondly, employment provides an outlet for energy and may permit the development and practice of skills and competences. Employment also provides a temporal structure; the rhythm of work imposes structure and goals on the working day. Unemployment can kill this and replace it with boredom. Fourthly, employment enhances the range of behaviour open to people away from their restricted domestic surroundings and permits access to new experiences. Paid employment also provides the individual with a sense of purpose, of shared activity. Obviously, unemployment will tend to reverse this process to some extent. Lastly, employment offers (to varying extents, however) the chance for the individual to gain a sense of self from the work he/she is engaged in. Paid work is often used as a measure of a person's contribution to society (61).

However, it needs to be remembered that all the above will differ in their effects upon the unemployed individual depending upon his/her previous position in the labour market. The six factors are not value-free and universal in their impact; nor indeed is their impact always entirely negative.

The problem of unemployment is central to recent debates concerning the very future of work in western societies. Levels of unemployment have been on the increase in these societies since the maintenance of full employment began to appear as a less realisable goal of economic policy during the 1970s. A very wide range of factors have contributed to this pattern, central among them being the world recession, global economic restructuring and the growing 'new international division of labour'. Different western economies have experienced these changes to varying



extents and Britain has been particularly harshly affected, in part as a result of its relatively high rate of decline in manufacturing capacity (62).

Between 1975 and 1985, the rate of job creation in Britain not only failed to meet the rate of growth of the labour force, but the number of jobs actually declined. Between 1979 and 1982, the world recession led to a dramatic net loss in employment of almost two million jobs. Moreover, in the recovery from the recession in '83/84 the creation of additional jobs was not sufficient to offset the increase in the labour force, and unemployment continued to rise (63).

Faced with such economic 'facts of life' it is no surprise to learn that the early eighties were not a period in which self-actualisation at work was a concern high on the political agenda. It began increasingly to look as if quality of working life was an issue tied to a particular set of circumstances, and that in the newly emerging order of things such concerns were, at best, marginal. As one union leader commented

*With things as they are, we've found the points to do with the quality of life in the plants have tended to get forgotten. It's now a question of "jobs" rather than "what sort of jobs" (64).*

At the same time as employment declined in the manufacturing sector, the jobs that were created, tended to be in the service sector.

This shift from manufacturing to service sector employment involves the creation of different types of job. In general, these changes in the social organisation of work have led to the loss of full-time, higher paid jobs, and often those which, in addition, offered their incumbents a sense of occupational identity. Correspondingly, there has been a growth in part-time, lower paid, often insecure employment, offering those doing

the jobs in question little in the way of occupational identity. Associated particularly with this expansion of the service sector, there has been an absolute and relative increase in the number of women who are 'economically active'.

Ashton quotes Ginzberg's 1977 article, 'The Job Problem', to indicate that many of the jobs being lost can perhaps be loosely categorised as 'good jobs': ie. those jobs with relatively high earnings, opportunities for promotion, regularity of employment etc, in contrast with the jobs being created, which are, mainly, using this categorisation, 'bad jobs: ie. those not containing the above mentioned factors.

With regard to the U.S.A. , Ginzberg concludes that during the period 1950-1976 about 2½ times as many new jobs were added in industries with below average weekly earnings (ie. 'bad jobs'), as were added in industries that provided above average earnings.

*more than three out of every five new jobs created in the past twenty-six years have been in the retail trade or services where many jobs are part-time and wages are traditionally low (65).*

Ashton notes a similar process occurring in the U.K.(66).

It can therefore be suggested that, in general, a large number of the new jobs being created in the service sector are ones unlikely to offer their occupants either a significant degree of 'self-actualisation', or any strong sense of occupational identity.

Clearly, these and other changes, represent major shifts in the nature of work in our society. Today, as Brown has suggested,

*paid work is more likely to involve manipulating symbols or processing people than dealing with things; it is much more likely to be providing a service than making a product; it is increasingly likely to be done by a woman rather than a man (though there is still clear segregation between most*

*men's and women's work); and whereas paid employment was readily available for nearly thirty years to all who wanted it, except a small residual minority, it has now become scarce (67).*

Combined with this, temporary work, part-time work, work under short-term contracts (perhaps interspersed with periods of unemployment), work (for pay) outside the formal economy (68), home-based work (ie. 'homework' etc), job-sharing, and households with multiple breadwinners all seem likely to increase (69). Patterns of employment are likely to become all the more complex and varied, and this, in turn, will continue to have unforeseen and often contradictory affects upon certain institutions and organisations (such as trade unions) and upon the dominant social meaning of work.

#### New Technology and the Future of Work

One factor most likely to affect employment prospects is the development and application of microelectronic technology. This issue arouses extreme hopes and fears to such a degree that two polar positions can be said to have formed concerning it - with a suitable range of alternatives in between (70).

Firstly, some argue that, as with previous major technological innovations, there may well be serious dislocation, structural unemployment and hardship for a time (though, by now, it can be strongly suggested that this process will not be experienced uniformly either within or between societies), but that in the longer term the productivity and wealth creation made possible by the new technology will generate increased demands for goods and services which will eventually lead to the creation of new jobs.

On the other hand, some suggest that the changes taking place are qualitatively different from those of the past and that nowhere near enough new jobs will be generated to replace those lost. Instead, we will witness the 'collapse of work'. The new technology, being labour-intensive, will be used to produce the new goods and services. All in all, demand can be met with lower levels of employment and with maintained or increased average standards of living.

At this point, as Brown notes, views diverge once again. Some, the prophets of hope, envisage a future where everyone can spend a much smaller proportion of their lifetime in paid employment, with a consequent increase in 'leisure time' and the means to enjoy it. Others, the prophets of doom, fear that the necessary changes in the social organisation of work and the re-distribution of incomes will not take place

*instead a proportion of the population may have well-paid jobs requiring education and skills, a proportion low-paid jobs which cannot be automated, and the remainder, possibly even a majority, would be more or less permanently unemployed and without the resources, either material or cultural, to utilise their 'leisure'. In such a divided society there are clearly prospects of considerable social conflict and disorder, and of authoritarian solutions being adopted to deal with them (71).*

It is impossible to be certain which, if any, of these possibilities is likely to be realised, but it is important to note that these alternatives would have to be carved out of the present state of things (ie. from a stratified society where gross inequalities of wealth, opportunity etc. exist), in time, and that the critical analysis contained within this present chapter would therefore tend to favour the latter pessimistic outcome as a more realistic possibility. Bearing this in mind, and given that these alternatives in no way explicitly seek to modify or transform

the underlying structure of our type of industrial capitalist society (despite all the talk of post-industrialism, post-capitalism and post-bourgeois society), it seems difficult to enthuse actively about the quality of the civilization likely to be created as an outcome of these processes of change. It also needs to be remembered that any future based on continued economic growth should take into account the fact there are only finite resources available for material exploitation by man. There are limits to continued economic growth, as well as mounting ecological and social costs (72).

Given the changing patterns of employment outlined above, it should come as no surprise to learn that issues relating to the quality of working life are, presently, not held to be matters of great public concern. Indeed, 'Quality' at work is now more likely than ever to refer to the development of employer initiated economic schemes such as 'quality control' and 'total quality' programmes rather than to measures designed to increase the experiential quality of people's working lives. There are signs, however, that, in some quarters, these issues are being considered as elements of proposed political party policy (73).

If QWL does again become as fashionable an issue as it was in the era of the 'Work in America' and 'On the Quality of Working Life' reports, it will be interesting to see whether, at that time, it is treated in a more 'holistic' and potentially more radical manner, or, as in the past, is once again the domain of piecemeal and partial analysis and 'reform'.

### Conclusion

The basic aim of this chapter has been to suggest that issues relating to

the quality of working life need to be, but all too frequently are not, placed in sociological perspective.

As has been previously mentioned, many, if not most, commentators on QWL approach the subject without any theoretical conception of the nature of work in our society, or of the interests that determine the design of work and of work organisations or of the the forces in society at large which encourage the development of appropriate and realistic expectations. Studies in this vein embody piecemeal approaches devoid of what C.W. Mills called 'The Sociological Imagination'. Such partial analyses fail, in general, at the task of comprehending (let alone attempting to solve), what are in essence, basic societal problems.

*.. they do not address underlying structures and processes in a society which cut across institutional areas, shaping problems in different spheres of social life. At the same time, piecemeal problem-solving efforts generate their own problems. Efforts on different levels or in different areas of social life, such as work life and politics, interact and aggregate to produce unintended and unregulated problems. These evoke, in turn, further problem-solving efforts. If the same basic problem-solving approach continues to be used, the result is a vicious spiral of problem-solving attempts generating problems. The approach itself becomes more and more the problem (73).*

It needs to be remembered that the various aspects of social life do not exist in a vacuum, nor do they consist of a chance aggregation of elements, but rather make up an interconnected system. Such a system develops, to a very substantial degree, as a social totality.

Ideally, what is required is an approach utilising the 'sociological imagination', one that is aware of the interplay of both action and structure as processes occurring in time (75).

One consequence of the dominance of piecemeal, as opposed to more

holistic, approaches to 'work' and to QWL has been the neglect of matters of political power (76) (though often concomitant with a plethora of 'political' values being espoused as natural fact by those involved in promoting their piecemeal positions). Throughout this present chapter, however, it has been stressed that political and power relations are central to an understanding of the nature of 'work' in our society; that the existing design of work organisations rests on a given distribution of power in society and that power superiority has lain, and indeed still lies, with those whose interests or objectives led them to impose a wholly instrumental criterion.

Any attempt, therefore, to increase significantly the level of self-actualisation in paid employment available to those in the lower reaches of the occupational hierarchy, or to alter the objectives of most employing organisations so as to increase the social and ecological usefulness of the products of employment activity, or to break the link between work and paid employment by paying everyone a minimum wage (77), would involve a major challenge to existing power dispositions in society and to the associated values, structures and relationships of that society. Mainstream approaches to QWL are fundamentally flawed because they fail to see the truth of these assertions.

Notes

1. BROWN, R.K. 1987 'Work, Industry and Organizations' in P. Worsley (ed) The New Introducing Sociology London, Penguin Books. (pp.273-322) pp. 273-274.
2. KUMAR, K. 1984 'The Social Culture of Work' in K. Thompson (ed) Work, Employment and Unemployment Milton Keynes, The Open University Press. pp.2-17. See also Anthony, P.D. 1977 The Ideology of Work London, Tavistock.
3. KUMAR ibid p.3.
4. BROWN, R.K. 1984 'Work' in P. Abrams and R.K. Brown (eds) U.K. Society: Work, Urbanism and Inequality London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson. p.131.
5. SAHLINS, M. 1972 Stone Age Economics, Chap.1., Aldine-Atherton.

*Work is intermittent, sporadic, discontinuous, ceasing for the moment when not required for the moment... Nor is tribal labour alienated from man himself, detachable from his social being and transactable as so many units of depersonalized labour-power. A man works, produces, in his capacity as a social person, as a husband and father, brother and lineage mate, member of a clan, a village. 'Worker' is not a status in itself, nor 'labour' a true category of tribal economics. Said differently, work is organised by relations 'non-economic' in the conventional sense... Work is an expression of pre-existing kin and community relations, the exercise of these relations.*

From SAHLINS, M. 1968 Tribesmen quoted in GODELIER, M. 'Work and its Representations: A Research proposal.' p.167. History Workshop Journal Issue 10 Autumn 1980 (164-174).

6. BROWN, R.K. 1984 op.cit p.132.
7. FOX, A. 1980 'The Meaning of Work' in G. Esland & G. Salaman (eds) The Politics of Work and Occupations, Milton Keynes, The Open University Press. p.141. See also by the same author: A Sociology of Work in Industry 1971,



Macmillan,London.Chap.1. and Beyond Contract,1974, London, Faber & Faber.

8. op.cit.p.143.

9. ibid.

10. ibid.

11. BROWN, R.K. 1984 p.129.

12. op.cit. p.133.

13. HUGHES, E.C. 1975 'Work and the Self' in G. Esland et al (eds) People and Work, Edinburgh, The Open University Press p.209.

14. GOLDTHORPE, J.H., LOCKWOOD,D.,BECHHOFFER,F. and PLATT,J. 1968 The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour, Cambridge University Press.

15. For a discussion of 'orientations to work' see, for example, WATSON,T.J.

1987 Sociology, Work and Industry RKP,London. Chap.4., and BROWN, R.K. et al

1983. Changing Attitudes to Employment? Dept. of Employment Research Paper, No. 40 .

16. For the ILO, for example,

*The phrase "quality of working life" has come to be used in recent years to evoke a broad range of working conditions and the related aspirations and expectations of workers. It also encompasses a wide variety of programmes, techniques and theories that have been developed in an endeavour to reconcile the twin goals of efficiency and an improved social environment in modern workplaces. (my emphasis)*

quoted in DELLAMOTTE, Y. & TAKEZAWA, S. 1984 Quality of Working Life in International Perspective, Geneva, ILO 1984. For a brief description of the origins and development of the QWL movement see ROSE,M. 1985 Re-Working the Work Ethic, London, Batsford Academic. Chap.8.

17. R. Miliband, quoted in Fox, A. 1974 op.cit. p.270. See also Chap.6 of the same work for a thorough critique of pluralist ideology. As already mentioned, a great majority of QWL theory and practice can be termed

pluralist, though some QWL advocates, such as the ILO and the Department of Employment Group's Work Research Unit (WRU), are inclined towards a more committed variant of pluralism than are others.

18. I refer here to the use of these two terms by Marx and Durkheim respectively. See, for example, LUKES, S. 1967 'Alienation and Anomie' in P. Laslett and W.G. Runciman (eds) Philosophy, Politics and Society, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

19. BROWN, R.K. 1984 op.cit. p.187.

20. FOX, A. 1980 op.cit. p.149.

21. LITTLER, C. & SALAMAN, G. 1984 Class at Work London, Batsford Academic. p.80.

22. WILSON, N.A.B. 1973 On the Quality of Working Life, London, HMSO.

23. FOX, A. 1980 op.cit.

24. op.cit. p.149.

25. FOX, A. 1971 op.cit. pp.4-5.

26. BROWN, R.K. et al 1983 op.cit p.5. See also ANTHONY, P.D. 1977. op. cit.

27. FOX, A. 1980 op.cit. p.153.

28. BLAUNER, R 1960 'Work Satisfaction and Industrial Trends' in W. Galenson and S.M.Lipset (eds) Labor and Trade Unions, New York, Wiley. p.341.

29. *ibid.*

30. *ibid.*

31. BROWN, R.K. et al p.12.

32. FOX, A. 1980 p.174.

33. *ibid.* p.156.

34. There are a number of works which stress this point. See, for example, OAKLEY, A. 1981 Subject Women London, Martin Robertson.

35. BROWN, R.K. 1984 op.cit p.183.
36. See, for example, BROWN, R.K. 1984; FOX, A. 1974 & 1980; LITTLER & SALAMAN 1984 and BALDAMUS, W. 1961 Efficiency and Effort, London, Tavistock. Especially Chap.8.
37. BROWN, R.K. 1984 pp.178-179.
38. KUMAR, K.1984 op.cit. p.10.
39. BERGER, P. 1975 'The Human Shape of Work' in G.Esland et al (eds) People and Work, op.cit p.167.
40. DUBIN, R. 1956 'Industrial Workers' Worlds: a study of the central life interests of industrial workers', Social Problems, 3: 131-142, & FAUNCE, W.A. & DUBIN, R. 1975 'Individual Investment in Working and Living' in L. Davis and A. Cherns (eds.) The Quality of Working Life New York, The Free Press; and STRAUSS, G. 1963 'Some notes on power equalisation' in H.J. Leavitt (ed) The Social Science of Organisations, New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
41. CLAYRE, A. 1976. 'Improving the Quality of Work' in New Universities Quarterly 30,4. p.441. With respect to this point, in his study of 407 auto workers in the U.S.A., Kornhauser found that workers with low job-satisfaction
- were often escapist or passive in their non-work activities: they watched television; did not vote; and did not participate in community organisations.*
- Quoted in ZIMBALIST, A. 'The Limits of Work Humanisation' Review of Radical Political Economics 7.2. 1975. p.53.
42. BURNS, T. 'Leisure in Industrial Britain' pp.45-46, quoted in KUMAR, K. 1984 p.10.
43. DUBIN, R. op.cit.
44. FOX, A. 1980. p.174.

45. ANTHONY, P.D.1977.
46. FOX, A. 1980 *ibid.*
47. MILLS, C.W. 1956 White Collar Oxford University Press. p.228.
48. FOX, A. *ibid.*
49. MOORE, B. 1966 The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy Penguin, London.p.506
50. BROWN, R.K. 1984 p.184.
51. ASHTON, D. 1986 Unemployment under Capitalism , Brighton, Wheatsheaf. p.52.
52. See ASHTON, D. *op.cit* and FREEDMAN, M 1984 'The Search for Shelters' in K. Thompson (ed) *op.cit* pp. 55-66.
53. See, for example, SPEAKMAN, M.A. 1980 'Occupational Choice and Placement' in G. Esland & G. Salaman The Politics of Work and Occupations *op.cit* pp.107-138.
54. BROWN, R.K. 1984 (b) 'Work: Past,Present and Future' in K.Thompson (ed) *op.cit.* pp. 260-275. Brown mentions that continuing high levels of unemployment are leading to a re-interpretation of the period 1940s - 1960s and the relatively full-employment enjoyed during this time. Increasingly this period looks more like the exception rather than the rule.
- a time when a fortunate conjunction of circumstances permitted successful full employment policies, rather than regarding three million unemployed as a temporary phenomenon which will soon go away. (p.270).*
55. ASHTON *op.cit.* Chap.3.
56. BROWN 1984 *op.cit.* p.185.
57. *op.cit.* pp.186-87.
58. *op.cit.* p.115.

59. KELVIN, P. & JARRETT, J.E. 1985 Unemployment: Its Social Psychological Effects, Cambridge University Press. p.43.
60. See: ASHTON, op.cit. pp120-122. See also KELVIN & JARRETT, op.cit. Chap.6.
61. JAHODA, M. summarized in KUMAR, K. op.cit. p.15.
62. Between 1961-1981, the numbers employed in the manufacturing sector fell by 2½ million, from just over 38% of the occupied population to just over 28%; and the numbers have continued to fall since then. This decline was perhaps especially notable in those industries which had been of greatest importance during the earlier years of industrialisation: clothing and textiles, metal manufacture etc.
63. ASHTON, op.cit. Chap.4.
64. Ron Todd of the T.G.W.U. quoted in BEYNON, H. 1984 Working for Ford, London, Penguin Books. p.383. Just as processes of 'de-industrialisation' have not affected all western economies to the same extent, neither has the decline in interest in issues relating to the quality of working life been a uniform one. Some countries, particularly in Scandinavia, have invested a significant amount of time and money in QWL schemes, much to the chagrin of some of the British pioneers of QWL, who bemoan the current lack of interest in these issues in the U.K. See HELLER, F. 'Working Models after Taylor on the Shop Floor', Times Higher Education Supplement for 29/1/1988. p.15.
65. Ginzberg p.46 quoted in ASHTON, op.cit. p.90.
66. *ibid.*
67. 1984 (b) p.268.
68. See, for example, PAHL, R. 1984 'Employment, Work and the Domestic Division of Labour' in K.Thompson (ed) op.cit. pp.179-193.

69. BROWN,R.K. 1984 (b) p.270.
70. The arguments presented here draw on, for example, BROWN, R.K. 1984 (b) pp.266-273.
71. 1987 op.cit.p322.
72. See for example, HIRSCH,F. 1977 The Social Limits of Growth London, RKP. and JONES,A. 1987 'The Violence of Materialism in Advanced Industrial Societies: an Eco-Sociological Approach' American Sociological Review 35,1,pp.19-47.
73. A confidential Labour Party draft report (due for publication later in 1988) recommends putting QWL "onto the political agenda".See the article 'Labour plead for a better working life' in The Guardian 9/4/1988.
74. BURNS,T. et al 1979 Work and Power , London, Sage. pp.2-3.
75. See MILLS, C.W 1970 The Sociological Imagination ,London, Penguin. and ABRAMS,P. 1982 Historical Sociology Somerset, Open Books.
76. See BURNS et al op.cit and Fox, A. 1980 op.cit.
77. See ASHTON,op.cit.pp.172-173.

Participation is a key concept in almost any discussion concerning improving the quality of working life. References to 'participation' are littered throughout a great deal of the literature on QWL, though the concept is not used in a particularly uniform way, sometimes being promoted as a means to an end, and at other times as an end in itself.

Indeed, whether it be in the form of workplace job redesign or the instigation of worker director schemes, as a means to enhance economic efficiency or as a clarion call for workers' ownership of the means of production, 'participation' (often mistakenly seen as synonymous with industrial democracy) has been an enduring issue within the practice of economic life, and the discussion of this practice, in our type of industrial capitalist society.

*Issues of participation and industrial democracy are not new. They have been articulated, fought over, conceded and rejected since the earliest years of industrial society (1).*

Basically, participation (as the various uses of the term above allude to) is an essentially contestable concept, available for everyone's idiosyncratic meaning and nobody's property (2). It is the essence of such concepts that actual or potential debate arises over their application. What counts as a central case exemplifying the concept, and what as a marginal case, is always open to question.

Participation is, therefore, a value dependent concept. A particular conception of participation arises out of, and operates within, a particular

moral and political perspective. As a concept that can involve endless disputes about its proper use on the part of those using it, to engage in such disputes about participation is to engage in politics.

There is, however, as William Connolly has indicated,

*no contradiction in first affirming the essential contestability of a concept and then making the strongest case available for one of the positions within that range. That's politics (3).*

In so far as the arguments presented in this chapter will be seen to criticise certain conceptions of participation rather more than others, the author can be accused of being 'political' in the broadest sense of the term.

Often, as has been indicated in the previous chapter of this thesis, essentially political statements are presented as fact, as unopen to question. This was seen to be the case in debates concerning the nature of work and issues relating to the quality of working life. The Department of Employment report 'On the Quality of Working Life', for example, contains a preface written by the then Secretary of State, in which it is stressed that all employees should be entitled to a sense of job satisfaction but only as 'far as is practicable'; in other words as far as is compatible with efficiency or profits (4).

The actual success of this type of political closure is alluded to by Fox (5) who remarks that anyone wishing to contribute to public policy on the issue of QWL, for example, will only be considered a responsible participant by those wielding power if she/he accepts the criteria of economic growth and technological advance; in other words if one is prepared to limit the terms of political inquiry and submit to definitions



of what is, as if 'what is ' is what should be or must be.

This desire to expunge contestability from the terms of political and sociological inquiry expresses a wish to escape politics.

*It emerges as a desire to rationalize public life, placing a set of ambiguities and contestable orientations under the control of a settled system of understandings and priorities, or as a quest to moralize public life thoroughly, bringing all citizens under the control of a consensus which makes politics marginal and unimportant. Since neither of these orientations is easy to support explicitly today, they typically emerge as methodological themes disconnected from an account of their political implications. By depreciating politics at the level of theory, a politics of depoliticization is covertly endorsed in public life (6).*

MacIntyre suggests that when a social theory serves this form of social practice it functions as an ideology. According to him, ideology works

*to conceal the features of particular conflicts, of particular contestable concepts and situations, of particular unpredictabilities; and it does this by working to conceal conflict, contestability and unpredictability as such. Ideology is the mask worn by particular dominant orders and by order itself. But it is also the mask worn by those critics of social orders who equally with its conservative defenders wish to deny any ultimacy to conflict, contestability and unpredictability (7).*

It will be argued throughout this chapter that many conceptions of participation in economic life in our type of society seek to depoliticise the essentially evaluative nature of the concept, and are, therefore, by espousing their political positions in terms of natural or moral fact, engaging in the promotion of ideologies, using MacIntyre's application of

that contested concept.

This argument will be seen to be applicable to the participatory schemes and ideas advanced by both members of the QWL movement and by many others involved in promoting QWL initiatives (including, of course, practising managers).

#### Worker Participation: an introduction

During the last two decades increasing interest has been expressed by politicians, industrial relations practitioners and many others in the issues of worker participation and industrial democracy. Indeed, all the main political parties in Britain currently favour industrial democracy or participation of some sort. However the meanings they attach to these terms have changed over time and each party's ideas are, by and large, incompatible with the others (8).

Historically also, though under a variety of labels, the subject of participation has been a major intellectual preoccupation for social theorists and analysts, and a major practical one for workers of all kinds, and for those who organise and control their labour.

Brannen testifies to the contested nature of the concept of participation by indicating that the term 'worker participation' has enjoyed a variety of meanings both over time and at any one time. This term, he suggests, implies

*that individuals or groups may influence, control, be involved in, exercise power within, or be able to intervene in decision-making within organisations. Each of these indicates varying degrees of intensity; for example, the term 'influence' indicates a lower degree of intensity of participation than the term 'control'; sometimes the degree*

*of intensity is not indicated. 'Participation' is also used to imply interaction at different organisational levels from the workgroup to the boardroom, by differing groups of actors, workers or sometimes management, over different issue areas (pace of work, capital investment programmes), and through different institutional structures (work group meetings, collective bargaining). It is also used to indicate different objectives with different underpinnings; thus for some writers and analysts the purposes of participation are related to economic or organisational efficiency, for others to workplace humanisation, for yet others to self-determination. All these usages relate to participation in organisational management. 'Economic' participation relates to worker involvement in the ownership of organisations (9).*

Another writer who has attempted with varying degrees of success to cut a path through the multifarious conceptions of participation is Carol Patemen. She stresses that for participation to be meaningful it must be 'participation in something' (10). She also suggests that to use the term 'participation' to cover management techniques for keeping their employees informed or persuading them to accept particular decisions is to misuse it. In the context of industry, she continues, 'participation' should mean participation in decision-making. Those activities which involve one-way information passing or discussions for managerially-manipulative purposes are examples of, in her words, 'pseudo-participation' (11). She mentions at the same time that 'pseudo-participation' is implicit in the work of the human relations and neo-human relations schools. Indeed, although the latter schools have often been severely criticised by luminaries of the QWL movement, and were in essence more 'managerialist' than the QWL movement, they both often, in fact, shared similar concerns and similar

terms and frames of reference as the QWL movement.

The notion of participation in decision-making is also not unproblematic, as Brannen has indicated. It can include, for example, both the ability to influence something and the ability to determine the outcome. Needless to say, these are not one and the same thing.

Pateman refers to a situation where one party can influence a decision but does not have equal power to decide the outcome as 'partial participation'. In contrast, 'full participation' is 'the process by which each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (12). This particular notion need not of course be limited to an individualistic perspective but can be used with reference to groups and collectivities as well.

Participation can indeed take place over different issues and at different points in the structure of the organisation. Participation can either be 'upper level', as Pateman terms it (Brannen refers to 'political participation', following on from Abrahamsson) ie. involvement in higher management decision-making etc, or 'lower level' (Brannen's 'socio-technical participation') ie. extending the employee's involvement in more localised workplace decision-making.

Participation at these two levels can either be full or partial in Pateman's terms. However

*Not only is it possible for partial participation at both management levels to take place without a democratisation of authority structures, but it is also possible for full participation to be introduced within the context of a non-democratic authority structure overall (13).*

Pateman points out that it is therefore not possible to use the terms

'participation' and 'democracy' interchangeably in the industrial context, and goes on to reserve the term 'industrial democracy' for full participation by employees at the political level of the enterprise.

Brannen notes that Pateman tends to use the terms 'power' and 'authority' synonymously (14). As Weber indicated, however, this only leads to conceptual confusion. Power will be defined here, (contestably), following Lukes, as the notion that A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's real interests. Authority is a subset of power, whereby obedience is produced because B accepts A's right to command as legitimate.

Lukes notes a number of other subsets of power. 'Coercion' refers to a situation where compliance is gained through threat of deprivation. 'Influence' refers to a situation where one person causes another to change their action without recourse to command or overt, or tacit, threat; and 'manipulation' refers to a category in which one actor complies without recognising either the source or the exact nature of the demand made upon him/her. Again, all these categories are defined in individualistic terms but can apply equally to collective action. The definitions refer to the active production of compliance; but power can also be exercised by preventing something from happening, as Lukes stresses (15).

For Brannen, as for many other writers, workers' participation essentially concerns

*the distribution and exercise of power, in all its manifestations, between the owners and managers of organisations and those employed by them (16).*

However, most practitioners and theorists of job redesign pay little attention to issues of power, as Kelly has indicated (Job redesign was one

facet of the upsurge in interest in worker participation in the developed industrial capitalist societies dating from the second half of the 1960s')(17). This is one aspect of the fact that many of those engaged in QWL initiatives, whether practically or theoretically, have lacked sociological perspective.

The failure of job redesign theory to describe and analyse the structural antagonisms inherent in employment relationships permits the theory to 'overlook' economic determinants of conflict and alienation, to underestimate the significance of economic and structural determinants of job performance, and to over-estimate the possibility of reconciling the interests of workers and employers via job redesign.

As Baldamus, for example, has noted, the employment relationship in industrial capitalist society is inherently antagonistic (18). To say this is not to imply a belief in structural determinism per se. Nor is it to imply that the employment contract is solely antagonistic; both parties to the employment contract have an interest in co-operating to produce the goods whose sale is essential to their economic gains. Nor does it follow that this structural economic antagonism will necessarily be expressed in overt conflict: the relation between structure and action is, as has been previously mentioned, considerably more complex and mediated by many factors.

To ignore these points, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as those engaged in job redesign initiatives have frequently so done, has unfortunate consequences for the analysis then offered. All too often job redesign theory and practice offers only partial and ideological analyses of, and solutions to, the problems at hand. Indeed, the more the piecemeal initiative prevails, the greater the problems will tend to

become, as Burns has noted (19).

Another criticism frequently levelled at such piecemeal approaches to issues of worker participation is their lack of historical perspective (20). Participation as an issue is frequently 'rediscovered' and paraded as a new find and/or abstracted from 'real' time. But, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, participation and the exercise of control by workers in the enterprises in which they work has been a major ideological and practical issue throughout the development of industrial capitalist societies.

It is not proposed here to engage in a detailed historical survey of the phenomenon in question, but rather to show briefly that interest in the issue of participation in industry is not a uniquely recent event but has arisen as an important issue at frequent intervals and in various ways in the course of Britain's industrial development (21).

#### Some History, Some Trends

Worker participation is an issue intimately bound up with labour/management relations. Over time, there have been a number of forms of worker challenge to managerial authority.

On occasion workers have denied the legitimacy of the principles of ownership and control embodied within industrial capitalism (22). This was, for example, the position of the Syndicalist and Guild Socialist movements in the early twentieth century. More often there has been a challenge to the degree of authority exercised by management but not to the actual right of management to manage. This manifested itself in the attempt by labour to organise itself, and collectively to resist and modify the exercise of authority by individual owners, and also in the exercise

of political methods in order to persuade the state to grant both rights and status to organised labour.

As Brannen, for example, has mentioned, there have been two differing thrusts within this latter challenge; one questioning the management right to decide in the sphere of production, the other 'distributionalist', with the aim of enhancing the wages and conditions of labour ie. altering the allocation between wages and profits (23).

Both Ramsay and Brannen suggest that there have been 'cycles of control' over time; in other words that challenges to management control have taken place in waves, for example in the periods 1939-50, 1910-20, the 1890s, 1870 and the 1830s. These periods were ones of economic expansion following depression; they were characterised by labour scarcity, and by rising confidence amongst the 'working classes'. These two writers conclude that management interest in participation has been essentially reactive; that management has come forward with participative schemes when labour was in a strong bargaining position, or it has reacted to pressure from the labour movement and the state.

*When the market situation of labour strengthens and the balance of power changes in its favour, participation becomes important as an attempt to come to terms with this. Demands are made by labour in relation both to ownership and control and to the exercise of managerial authority; some accommodation to these demands is made by the state and some interest in participation is expressed by some sectors of management. When their market position weakens workers' demands revert back to distributionalist issues, the state withdraws and management reasserts its authority and control (24).*



Brannen goes on to argue that the cycle doesn't stop where it started however.

*Firstly there is an ever increasing richness and awareness of a variety of ways of modifying relationships. Second, institutional mechanisms and awareness of these do not totally die away. The Owenite ideas of co-operative production revived in a modified form in the mid-1860s and again in the twentieth century, though always on the fringes and out of the mainstream of the production process. The early industrial collectivist ideas of the 1830s re-emerged in the Syndicalist movement of 1910-20. The financial share ownership schemes of the 1860s continue to reappear... Whilst there are ebbs and flows, the general process [re: participation] is more akin to a ratchet effect: the fall back after the surge always stops at a higher level than before (25).*

Historically, management has been less than enamoured with any participatory schemes the implementation of which could lead to a loss of management authority and status. Indeed, participation is really only considered a worthwhile project by management as long as it provides no threat to its authority in industry; and indeed is often seen as a means of protecting or enhancing that authority. Participation has been seen, and is still regarded by management, as of no worth in itself; it can only be of use if it helps further the process of wealth creation in some way (whilst at the same time protecting or enhancing management's 'expertise') (26). The uninhibited development of political participation within the enterprise would in this view be construed as grossly inefficient, and participatory schemes must therefore be subordinated to the mainly managerially defined organisational goals and objectives.

It is clear, therefore, that in the past, management has been less than enthusiastic about any form of participation. Both the philosophy of private enterprise, the high value put on formal efficiency and on a structure of hierarchic authority are likely to incline them in this direction. Participation is likely to be considered only when there are threats to managerial authority and paradoxically in order to maintain it. Indeed, given the structural power superiority of capital over labour (as noted in the previous chapter), the stratified nature of, and perpetuated inequalities within, our type of society, and the hegemony of industrial capitalism to which the worker is exposed, it is on the whole unsurprising that there has been no lasting thrust towards economic participation from the ranks of labour.

Fears that just such a thrust might develop were voiced during the 1960s and 1970s, when increasing public concern was expressed about the industrial relations system as cracks began to appear in the economic system. The post-war 'affluent' bubble was in the process of bursting.

Whilst the Donovan Commission sought to formalise the exercise of trade union power through collective bargaining, within the trade unions there was a movement towards challenging managerial rights in the sphere of production and constraining the exercise of management authority. The public manifestations of this appeared in a change of stance towards the possibility of being involved in the authority structures of the enterprise and in demands for individual and collective rights for workers in the sphere of employment. Government made some concession to these demands through legislation and the setting up of the Bullock committee to consider the issue of boardroom participation. Although British management in the private sector, as represented by their various

associations, was vehemently opposed to the Bullock proposals and the subsequent white paper (27), it did however respond to developments through an increased willingness to engage in public discussion of participation (though, as ever, only in tandem with discussions about improving wealth creation) and by setting up a variety of consultative and participative mechanisms at the workplace (28).

By the 1970s therefore a new wave of interest in participation was underway. The birth of the QWL movement and its particular concerns can be seen to form part of this general wave (29).

#### QWL Initiatives and Participation

In Britain, the main official body engaged in promoting QWL initiatives is the Department of Employment Group's Work Research Unit (WRU) (now subsumed under ACAS). This organisation came into being as part of the general wave of interest in QWL and industrial participation, as mentioned above, that occurred in the 1970s.

In a recent WRU publication on 'Quality Circles' (one of the more topical schemes grouped under the QWL banner), QWL was defined as

*a broad expression covering a wide variety of programmes, techniques, relationships and work practices which are being increasingly introduced by participative means. In broad terms, the general objective is to arrange organisations, work procedures and jobs for the maximum deployment of individual talents and skills in order to create more challenging and satisfying work and improve organisational effectiveness (30).*

This particular definition is no different, in essence, from others already mentioned elsewhere in this thesis and as such is open to similar

criticisms; the ever-familiar juxtaposition of individual satisfaction and organisational efficiency can be noted, for example.

What the definition does allude to however, is the variety of ideas and initiatives that are considered to be essentially concerned with QWL (the diversity of QWL will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.). As Bradley and Hill mention,

*The current Quality of Working Life Movement includes various initiatives; no single form of QWL is representative of the entire genus (31).*

They also indicate, however, that the objectives of QWL programmes according to the luminaries of the movement

*are not solely extrinsic and tangible, but include a climate of participation that is conducive to employee satisfaction and high-trust relations (32). (my emphasis)*

The use of the term 'climate of participation' could of course refer to nothing more than a management engendered atmosphere, a chimera of participation, and is as nebulous as the WRU use of the term 'participative' above. There is no overt indication here of what sort of participation is actually meant, and so it is proposed here to take a closer look at some of the schemes in question in order to perceive the levels and types of participation involved, and their likely consequences for the distribution of power within organisations (though it is of course not impossible to guess both). Three different participatory schemes which have an impact on QWL will be briefly examined, namely Autonomous Work Groups (AWGs) (often, and perhaps more aptly, termed semi-autonomous, and 'flexible', work groups); Quality Circles (QCs), and Worker Director schemes. Although it may seem unusual to include the latter under the auspices of a QWL

initiative, it was a scheme born of the general wave of interest in worker participation and QWL that occurred in the 1970s and was one of the very few such schemes instigated ostensibly at the political level of the enterprise. As such, it therefore provides valuable insights which the other two socio-technically based QWL initiatives are unable to do.

Both AWGs and the Worker Director programmes can be said to have enjoyed their zenith in the 1970s since when (Worker Director schemes especially) they have fallen from grace somewhat to be replaced in the 1980s by QCs as the employee involvement scheme "extraordinaire". It is not proposed here, however, to deal with the schemes in question chronologically but rather locationally, starting with AWGs and QCs as examples of socio-technically based schemes.

#### Autonomous Work Groups

Initial formal expression of the idea of Autonomous Work Groups was given by Trist and Bamforth, of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, in their paper 'Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal Getting' in 1951 and the concept was later applied, most notably, it has been argued, in Sweden at Volvo's Kalmar plant, and at Saab-Scania, in the 1970s. These Swedish experiments helped to focus global attention upon the idea of AWGs and caused them to receive increasing attention in the press, as well as in social science publications (33).

Briefly, the AWG concept is of a small self-selected and self-organising group of workers. The group makes a contract with management in the organisation and method of working. Each of the group members possesses the 'skills' of the others, that is they are 'multiskilled' workmen, and group members share equally a common paynote.

*In the more formal presentation of the idea, the central notions are those of responsible autonomy for a whole work task, freedom from close external supervision, interdependence of group members, the importance of the group being self-selected, sharing a common paynote and of group members being multiskilled (34).*

Rarely, however, has the application of the idea mirrored the formal concept and the frequent use of the prefix 'semi' to the phrase autonomous work group is much more than a mere semiotic device.

By concentrating on some of the central notions inherent in the formal concept of the AWG clues can perhaps be offered as to the popularity and significance of this technique for enhancing employee involvement and 'flexibility', and to its limitations.

#### (1) The Whole Task

One of the main aims of the AWG project was to reverse the trend towards specialisation at work, a process which was seen to be producing increasingly greater economic and human costs. Instead of performing one operation the worker was to perform a number of operations which together make up a 'whole task' or a 'complete cycle of operations'. Each member of the group was to be able, potentially, to carry out all the tasks undertaken by the group as a whole so that each worker would in effect become 'multiskilled' (a nebulous term in the context of its use). Trist and Bamforth saw the flexibility that this process would engender as creating 'craft pride and independence' among workers. However, although the creation of AWGs undoubtedly led to the abandonment of certain features of classical Scientific Management (individual allocation of work, accountability and payment) this process occurred only to the extent that limiting industrial conditions had been encountered beyond which scientific

management principles became less effective in achieving their stated goals. The goals themselves were not usurped. The reason for work being allocated on a group basis, rather than to individuals in particular roles, had less to do with a managerial commitment to group autonomy and decision-making and more to do with a key characteristic of the industries, or sectors, using AWGs. The industries in which the major socio-technical studies have been conducted include the following: coal mining, textiles, fertilizers, paper-making, light assembly and public transport. With the exception of assembly work, these processes have one feature in common, that of high process variability. The creation of AWGs is intended to allow such variances to be controlled as near to the point of occurrence as possible, this being deemed both efficient for the company and satisfying for the worker. But the existence of 'variance' in these cases renders the precise allocation of workloads on an individual basis very problematic. The solution thus advocated by socio-technical theorists is to effect a transition from the individual to the group as the crucial unit of analysis and action, for then, variances in production can be evenly distributed among its members. Group working creates a situation whereby a much greater general increase in productivity is possible. However, the practical result of much 'whole task' job redesign of this variety has been merely the creation of qualitatively inferior 'job enrichment' and 'job rotation' schemes, with little in the way of increased autonomy for those doing the tasks. The addition of tasks which others have previously found boring is hardly likely substantially to reduce boredom and monotony (35).

Indeed, one of the main results of workers being so 'multiskilled' is interchangeability of employees. In other words, decreasing specialisation

entails diminishing irreplaceability; the easily replaceable worker has a weaker position in the organisation, his/her bargaining strength is reduced by the presence of others able to do his/her job.

'Flexible' is a more suitable prefix than 'autonomous' for these groups (however qualified), since autonomy has often been limited and subordinated to managerial objectives, and since flexibility denotes that feature of the groups that is most closely linked to productivity improvements.

Given the context of high labour turnover and absenteeism, for example, which companies faced at the time when AWGs began to grow in popularity, the advantages of labour flexibility for those controlling the organisation are obvious. This flexibility also has implications for the role of trade unions in companies operating AWGs, with regard to demarcation for example, and a common criticism of AWGs and other socio-technical participatory schemes is their implicit anti-union potential.

According to AWG theory the group would organise its own division of labour to meet its contractual obligations to management. As with older forms of the sub-contract system of labour management, the onus of absenteeism, for example, now rested squarely on the shoulders of the workers themselves, in this case the group (hence the importance of the common paynote). The individual member of the group, instead of bearing pressure directly from management, is now more likely to suffer pressure from her/his workgroup, which may well be less easy to resist. Of course it may also be that allowing the group some degree of autonomy could have deleterious effects for management, but its potential for enhancing organisational commitment through self-discipline and peer-group pressure is obvious.

It is with regard to this latter point that a Foucauldian approach to the



work of the Tavistock and QWL luminaries provides some useful insights. As Miller and Rose have commented, whilst utilising such an approach,

*Tavistock expertise should be understood in terms of the new possibilities for the regulation of economic life in which it was involved. A vast new territory was opened up for exploration and analysis. This was not simply a matter of a new language being fabricated for speaking about the internal world of the factory or the enterprise. Rather, it was that the minutiae of the relations of group life within the enterprise were opened up to systematic analysis and intervention in the name of a psychological principle of health which was at the same time a managerial principle of efficiency. Through such inventions as the notion of the autonomous working group, a possibility was provided for conjoining technical requirements, managerial imperatives and psychological mechanisms. The group provided the means for creating the technical forms through which the subjectivity of the individual might be integrated into the objectives of the organisation (36).*

A more flexible and psychologically adjusted workforce could provide management with a seemingly more controllable and more fully utilisable human resource.

#### (ii) Responsible Autonomy

A distinguishing feature of formal AWG theory is the notion of responsible autonomy. It is this notion which provides the key to the proclaimed participatory potential of autonomous work groups.

The concept of responsible autonomy refers to the ability of the work group autonomously to organise and perform its work and to have responsibility for the group's production (and responsibility to other

group members in this respect). Being free from close external supervision and undertaking a whole task, the group is therefore more likely to exude the confidence, psychological health and professionalism of the traditional craft worker.

In reality, however, there are considerable checks on the degree of autonomy that can be enjoyed by AWGs. It is very unlikely, for example, that certain levels of management would always be willing to accept the potential loss of control that the notion of responsible autonomy implies (hence one aspect of the ambiguities in theory and practice re: AWGs). It is unsurprising, therefore, that the proclamations of significant increases in the ability of workers to participate are, with regard to the actual practice of AWGs, largely illusory. Participation is firmly located at the workplace, and worktask, and its emancipatory potential significantly bounded by management.

Given the frequent 'enriched' and 'enlarged' reality of the 'whole task' concept, it seems likely that any one AWG would still be dependent on the work and skills of others within the enterprise to maintain its production. A group does not, for example, exercise autonomy in deciding what it produces, where it produces and the technology used. Even if it is (and it very rarely is) a self-selected group, the population out of which it can select members is initially chosen by management. Similarly, decisions on future production, type, amount, markets, investment etc are all decided by managements. These, and other, factors suggest the low-level of autonomy, and hence potential for participation, that can be enjoyed by members of AWGs. Indeed, classic socio-technical studies, such as those in the Durham mines and at Ahmedabad in India, suggest that the prefix 'responsible' before 'autonomy' is very apt, because where autonomy clashed

with the employer's economic demands (as in Durham and India) or where it was giving them no concrete advantages (as in Norway), it was curtailed. In these cases, it was work group flexibility, rather than autonomy, that was instrumental in achieving higher levels of productivity.

It needs to be remembered that more often than not, the setting up of AWG schemes is a reactive ploy by management. 'Responsible Autonomy' is 'given' to the workforce by management (for example, as a mode of response to a crisis); it is an illusion of management preferring shared control. At base, the institution of 'responsible autonomy' entails no fundamental alteration in the distribution of power within the enterprise.

### (iii) A Brief Evaluation

The above are but a very small selection of the elements of AWG theory and their ramifications (there being neither time nor space enough here to cover the material in the detail it deserves). There are benefits for both workers and management, but the weight of advantage is firmly anchored on the latter's side: the erosion of demarcation lines, increased predictability, a more flexible workforce, declining absenteeism and labour turnover, and many others. Despite the benefits which the workforce may enjoy: greater use of abilities, greater freedom in work organisation etc. (all of which are of course relative), there has been no fundamental change in the distribution of power within the organisation in their favour. That is, they are still employees, they do not participate in any decisions, other than the organisation of work tasks, and they have not substantially altered the amount of control at the disposal of management; their autonomy is within well-defined limits acceptable to management. Indeed, given the propensity of AWG schemes to lead both to labour

intensification and labour elimination in the process of their implementation, it can be argued that the benefits accruing to the workforce from such schemes are, at the very best, highly ambiguous. Nevertheless, by implementing changes based on autonomy, management may, it is often argued (37), be instigating radical changes insofar as autonomy becomes a dimension of relevance to the workforce. Thus the idea is potentially radical. Blackler has argued, for example, that the ideas of Emery and Trist were radical rather than overtly managerialist.

*Emery and Trist believed it was very important that people should begin to become more self directing in their lives and that once they had experienced the pleasure of increased self-determination through new forms of job design (usually semi-autonomous work groups as it happened), they would begin to demand increased self-management opportunities in other walks of life also. In this it is quite clear that, in aims and ideology, Emery and Trist were far removed from the charges of managerialism that have subsequently been levelled at them (38).*

If, in theory, the idea of socio-technical systems was not overtly managerialist, in practice it was hardly radical or, indeed, impartial, as was also claimed. Amongst other things, the theory lacked sociological perspective, and in practice failed to bear the fruits of social change anticipated by its advocates.

This lack of success, however, lay significantly with the theory itself, failing as it does, for example, to take account of the conflicting interests and power bases of different interest groups within the organisation, or to comprehend the nature of management in our type of industrial capitalist society.

With regard to the latter point, Nichols has noted that

*Managers' thinking may be ideological in that they assume capitalism is a 'natural' system, is necessarily here to stay, and in that the truths it expresses are partial truths only. But what others call their 'ideology' managers call 'common sense'. And 'common sense' tells them that they must not forfeit control; that the business of business is profit; and that, whatever enriching or participatory ventures they may institute, there are limits - not of their own making - to what they can sensibly do. This is why it is not sufficient to dismiss their espousal of the new human relations as a 'con' and why, also, their words are likely to be only a poor guide to their practice (39).*

In practice AWGs can be seen as yet another attempt to deal with the contradiction at the heart of the managerial problem namely that between 'the need to exercise control and the need to achieve commitment' (40).

The participatory potential of AWGs is firmly located at the socio-technical level of the enterprise and the instigation and running of such schemes involves no significant shift in the distribution of power within the organisation as a whole. The main participatory significance of AWGs is as an employee involvement scheme offering some, managerially bounded, opportunities for low level decision-making.

### Quality Circles

Although at one point during the 1970s it appeared possible 'that trade unions would achieve a right to parity representation on the boards of large private companies' (41), such a development proved increasingly untenable as the decade reached its conclusion and the economic and political climate changed. The very possibility of such an outcome did

however, as already mentioned, stimulate a variety of moves on the part of many companies first, to extend union-based systems of consultation, and, subsequently, to direct their efforts increasingly towards employees as well as, or instead of, their representatives. As Batstone has argued,

*This steady shift from 'industrial democracy' to 'participation' and 'involvement' was stimulated by the changing economic and political environment... (42)*

At the political level, the change of government saw a strong shift in attitude towards trade unions, which manifested itself in legislation designed to curb union power significantly. This was combined with powerful support for a unitarist perspective within the company. At the same time, the deterioration in the economy and in the fortunes of many companies meant that there was a need to change working practices and shed labour. While these clearly reduced union power, in many instances worker and union opposition might have seriously obstructed the achievement of profitability. Companies which were making losses had a strong incentive to highlight their problems to workers, and to seek their cooperation in overcoming them. Hence not only was there greater disclosure of (certain) information, but also moves towards tapping worker skills and knowledge. The rapid increase in the use of Quality Circles in the early 1980s can be seen to form part of the shifts outlined above. These schemes had their part to play in the attempt by employers, now holding the initiative in industrial relations, to cope with the 'management of uncertainty' (43). Whereas only an extreme minority of companies operated QCs before 1978, by 1982 well over a hundred firms had experimented with them, including, for example, such names as Rolls Royce and Wedgewood (44).

Quality Circles (QCs) are small groups of workers (about 5-20), usually led by a foreman, or supervisor, who meet regularly (membership should be voluntary according to most theory) to study, and solve job-related problems. Circles aim to improve quality, reduce production costs, raise productivity and improve safety. In addition, such groups are intended to stimulate motivation and involvement on the shopfloor. Unlike earlier human relations ideas, QCs should normally involve systematic training of shopfloor workers and access to technical assistance to solve problems.

The original idea of QCs was American: the basis being the notion of improved worker motivation through employee participation in the decision-making process. The concept was transplanted to Japan in the 1950s, where it was adopted and reworked by several management theorists. The ideas gained popularity in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s and were re-exported to the West, surrounded by the aura of the Japanese economic miracle (what has become known as the 'After Japan' effect) in the late 1970s (45).

Western management literature on the subject has largely focussed on the economic effectiveness of QCs at reducing production costs (46), with its explicit QWL potential coming, on the whole, a poor second (more often than not discussed in terms of improved 'communications', heightened employee morale, and 'more harmonious labour relations').

In their study of the introduction and running of QCs in a number of companies in the U.K. and U.S.A., Bradley and Hill conclude that

*in no case were quality circles introduced primarily to improve the quality of working life for employees. The initial impetus in each company came from senior managers responsible for production and/or quality. Their primary motives were to improve product quality and lower costs, and they had been impressed by reports in the press concerning*

*the effectiveness of quality circles... In sum, the senior executives in both the British and U.S. firms were predominantly concerned with the tangible improvements that participation might bring to the bottom line (and in every company they reported some success here) and to a lesser degree with intangible benefits (47).*

Manwaring and Wood (48) derive more general implications about the nature of the capitalist labour process from the introduction of QC schemes. For them QC initiatives reflect

*both the collectivism of production and the need to harness the tacit skills of workers. Managements are developing techniques by which they 'are able to manage both the workers and their work as an integrated whole' and with specific methods like quality circles are attempting to intensify the cooperation of workers so that it contributes to 'the development of standards for managerial control'. They acknowledge the need to create jointly aspects of the labour process. As such participative schemes are not necessarily cosmetic or necessarily manipulative. The issue as Elger has said is that they are minimal joint creations within the context of capital's domination... (49).*

As was mentioned earlier in the present chapter, workers do have an interest in the success of their enterprises and this explains, at least in the British context, as Bradley and Hill indicate, the way in which the use of QCs has led to the utilisation of workers' knowledge and expertise successfully to improve productive efficiency. Equally, the contradictions surrounding this interest (as well as the contradictions within, and between, various levels of management within the enterprise) would help to explain their failure in many situations where management have tried to introduce them, and the conflict which undoubtedly surrounds them in many



plants.

### Quality Circles and Participation

As Bradley and Hill have indicated, 'one way of assessing the nature of the participation fostered by quality circles is to see what they do not do (50). With this in mind, these authors go on to suggest that

*A small number of QWL innovations establish real employee decision-making over a wide range of work-related issues either on a group basis, as in the case of the semi-autonomous work groups that are favoured by the Tavistock Institute... In comparison, quality circles are quite limited... Indeed, quality circles make and implement few decisions of any sort (51) (my emphasis).*

It seems then that QCs allow even less scope for participation in decision-making than AWGs. As Batstone has written

*Whereas in the quality circle management retains control over the implementation of ideas and work organisation, workers - at least to some degree - enjoy greater discretion under a system of autonomous work groups (52).*

Middle managers, in essence, view QCs as having no rights in decision-making, which remain the prerogative of management, and instead see QCs as merely confined to doing some research and putting forward suggestions (53). Circles deal, therefore, with issues that companies regard as minor and often as peripheral to managers' main concerns. Management's right simply to reject recommendations means that effective participation takes place on grounds chosen by management itself. Despite the theory, then, that QCs are self-regulating bodies which decide their own agenda, in practice, managers, more often than not, guide their circles to consider certain issues and ignore others.

There is, of course, the possibility that over time QCs could become more confident of their abilities or exhaust the range of minor problems and wish to move onto more ambitious issues that have greater organisational impact. However, as Bradley and Hill have mentioned, where this has occurred it is customary for managers to refuse to implement any change requiring any substantial expenditures on the restructuring of some part of the organisation. In general, companies can fairly easily absorb QCs, and the nature of the participation involved in QCs also facilitates this absorption (54).

Little evidence exists, however, to suggest that the benefits more usually assumed to follow from participative QWL schemes, namely substantial attitudinal and relational changes that presage a new era of high motivation and trust, are actually forthcoming in practice. For individual workers, the main benefits in the quality of worklife flowing from the introduction of QCs seem to be in the areas of health and safety (which are, of course, improvements that should not be ignored). Overall, however, neither Batstone, MacInnes nor Bradley and Hill found much evidence to support the contention that QCs are in the vanguard of major changes that will significantly influence workplace industrial relations (55).

#### A Brief Evaluation

Quality circles possess, both in theory and practice, a much smaller participatory potential than autonomous work groups. Indeed, QCs make and implement few decisions of any sort; placing them, in effect, somewhere between the pseudo and the (very) partial participatory at the socio-technical level of the enterprise. According to Batstone, the main significance of QCs as an employee involvement technique lies in three areas

*first, it draws upon and uses for management purposes the detailed knowledge and skills of those immediately involved in the production process; second, it may thereby foster worker identity with management goals and interests; and third, it may thereby reduce worker and union controls and may even weaken the role of the union within the workplace (56).*

The popularity of the scheme cannot be divorced from the economic and political circumstances in which it has been increasingly introduced (in Britain the latter includes, for example, extremely high levels of unemployment, the need to cope with an unprecedented degree of economic uncertainty, and the political ascendancy of the 'New Right' ) (57). And the spread of the idea in combination with governmental fostering of a unitarist frame of reference in the private and public sectors, and the rhetoric of 'There is no Alternative', and 'New Realism', forfeits any claim to ideological neutrality on behalf of Quality Circles.

At base, it seems that this form of worker participation does not transform or undermine management power or authority in any significant way.

#### Worker Director Schemes

The idea of worker directors is not new. They were introduced into a number of gas companies, for example, at the end of the nineteenth century as part of profit sharing schemes (58), and these schemes continued up until the second world war. Worker directors also, of course, existed in cooperatives and co-ownership schemes. However, the notion of having workers on the board of companies as employees, rather than as owners or

shareholders, began to emerge in the U.K. for the first time in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Brannen has mentioned

*In Britain over this period the idea of worker directors became to a large extent synonymous in public discussion with that of worker participation (59).*

The interest in worker directors in Britain was part of a broader movement which saw the introduction or amendment of legislation on worker directors, or similar schemes, in seven European countries in the years following 1970, and serious discussion about the launching of worker director schemes in several others. It also formed part of the general wave of interest in worker participation and QWL initiatives that was occurring at the time, as has been mentioned previously (The experience of worker participation schemes in West Germany was particularly influential). The two most significant worker director programmes in Britain took place during the 1970s in the British Steel Corporation and within the Post Office, both public sector organisations (60). These two examples have provided much of the material around which discussion and critique of worker director programmes in Britain has taken place. What now follows will not be breaking with this tradition as the analysis presented is drawn largely from the discussion of the schemes by Brannen et al (1975) and Batstone et al (1983).

#### Some General Points Concerning the Functioning of Worker Director Schemes

These worker director schemes involved giving ordinary members of the workforce seats and full membership of the Board of Directors as elected representatives of their fellow workers. The introduction of such schemes

involves the creation of new organisational roles which invert traditional hierarchical forms by moving individuals from subordinate positions within the authority structure of the enterprise into roles within the formal locus of authority in the organisation. Such schemes consequently cut across, and may prove a threat to, other established organisational roles. The notion of a worker director implicitly poses questions of control and authority not only at the top and the bottom of the organisation, but also at intervening levels in between. The creation of worker director roles, and the development of such roles, are therefore likely to be problematic. There may well be a variety of perspectives within the organisation concerning the legitimacy of the role and what forms of social action it is appropriate for worker directors to engage in. These perspectives will be derived from general values about stratification within the enterprise and society more generally, from the micro-politics surrounding the creation of the role and the effect the role is perceived as having on the distribution of power and resources in the organisation. They will also be derived from the degree of organisational visibility the role has, and the degree and direction of change in the operation of the organisation which is seen as following from the introduction of the role.

As Brannen has indicated, those appointed to be worker directors will have a view of what the role is about, which will be formed by a variety of factors, including their attitudes towards, and the values they hold about worker participation. However, their views

*will also be affected by the views and behaviour of 'significant others' and through their experience in the role. In its turn the experience of worker directors will be a function of the expectations that they and others have*

*of the role, the mobilisation of organisational resources by themselves and others to prevent or carry through various forms of action and the patterns of cooperation and conflict, of coercion and persuasion, of failure and success in pursuit of goals that ensue, the organisational structure in which the role is performed and the location of that structure within the wider systems of community, class and market (61).*

### A Brief Evaluation

The idea of worker directors which emerged into the arena of public discussion and debate in the 1970s was forcibly rejected by management and by much of the formal union structure, despite the TUC's sponsorship of it. Why was this?

In the case of management, the hostility engendered over the issue of worker directors was couched formally in terms of the deleterious effects of such participative schemes on organisational efficiency, but also clearly owes much to management's interest in the organisation as both a political and a career system (62). The board is, after all, the embodiment of corporate authority, the apex of a managerial career structure and a source of management power. The introduction of worker directors to the board may well be seen to pose a threat to all three of these elements.

The hostility to the schemes from trade unions and their officials also stems from similar sources. Boardroom participation is seen as compromising the independence of trade unions and thus weakening their oppositional power (trade union hostility to worker director schemes repeats their earlier opposition to being represented on the Boards of nationalised industries).

In so far as appointments to the board are from the trade union within the firm, the authority of the shop-stewards over and against that of full-time officials is enhanced. As a result, the organisational career of full-time trade union officials, which depends on wielding authority over shop-stewards and collective power over employers is threatened. As both ordinary workers and shop-stewards have little to lose in these terms and perhaps something to gain they tend to be more sympathetic to the idea of worker directors (63).

Whilst acknowledging that the worker director role has a potent symbolic significance, both Brannen et al and Batstone et al have indicated that, in practice, worker director schemes have posed little threat to the organisation as a working system. In the private sector such schemes have been few in number, and in design and operation are best regarded as examples of 'pseudo-participation'. The public sector schemes were more clearly set up to provide some form of representation of worker interests and in the Post Office scheme, where there was both union involvement and support as well as parity of numbers with employer board representatives, they succeeded, in limited areas, in pursuing these interests. Even within the Post Office, however, the areas where the worker directors were most active, personnel and industrial relations, were not seen by the rest of the board as crucial. The boardroom, moreover, is often not where decision-making takes place; both external constraints and the activities of internal management interest groups can limit the board's scope for decision-making. In addition, the full-time executive board members can operate to structure the nature of the information and decisions coming to the board.

The rationalities of capital, both private and public, and labour are

different and often competing. Within the boardroom in a market society the dominance of market over other forms of discourse is already established and constantly reinforced by organisational practice (64). It is necessary for worker directors to learn the language of economic accounting in order to perform a boardroom role; but the language itself involves limitations in the possible forms that role can take. Not to learn the language is to be excluded from the action. Worker directors, of necessity, enter into worlds already established in terms of both formal roles and processes, of custom and practice, of values and language. The social dynamics of those worlds strongly favour the encapsulation of worker directors within the pre-existing boardroom ethos and organisation, and within, though in a limited way, the pre-existing organisational categories of information and analysis.

*The paradox of boardroom participation is that if worker representatives are strong enough and willing to put forward competing rationalities they are likely to create conflict in the boardroom and ensure that the real centres of decision-making move elsewhere, thus rendering themselves impotent in the director role; but if they adopt the director role then their raison d'etre from the perspective of the workforce disappears. This is not to suggest that worker directors do not have effects within organisations which may be seen as beneficial by some groups of actors; nor that the way the scheme is structured is unrelated to its impact. What the evidence does seem to indicate is that this form of worker participation does not seem to transform or undermine management authority in any significant way (65).*



## Conclusions

It was argued earlier in the present chapter that participation is a key concept in almost any discussion concerning QWL. However, insofar as participatory schemes are seen as one means of improving the QWL, the failure to analyse constraints on the introduction of such schemes, by those promoting them, highlights, once again, a lack of sociological perspective. All three types of employee involvement scheme outlined above, for example, seem to offer only a limited opportunity for worker participation in organisational decision-making. They seem maximally to offer partial employee participation and are often, in practice, only pseudo-participatory (unsurprisingly, economic participation is nowhere to be seen). The instigation of such schemes entails no fundamental alteration in the balance of power within the organisation.

The approaches that these schemes embody fail, in general, at the task of comprehending the problems they attempt to solve and, contrary to the views of those promoting them and using them, these participatory schemes have both political and ideological significance. For, in essence, the issue of worker participation is one of control.

The common denominator concerning the introduction of participatory schemes is a need felt by management (or a powerful segment of it) to do something that would maintain or improve control of the 'existing situation' (66) in the enterprise. Indeed, the fundamental contradiction facing management, as has been previously mentioned, is that between the need to control and the need to obtain commitment from the workforce. The use of participatory schemes is but one way of attempting to square this circle.

The pervasive pluralism of organisational life (67) which makes the concept of meaningful industrial democracy possible at the same time suggests why managers refuse to accept it. Once it is understood that there can be not only divergent interests in organisations, but that these can also be accommodated in different ways, the contradiction between managerial prerogative and managerial accountability becomes irreconcilable.

*Managers do not offer to 'share control' for the same reasons that worker representatives do not make open commitments to abandon their defensive measures (say over job controls, manning arrangements, flexibility) in a non-negotiating forum. They have no guarantee about what purposes will be pursued by the other side with their increased freedom of manoeuvre. In fact, in an environment of heterogeneous criss-crossing of ends and means there is every reason to suppose it will not serve their particular priorities (68).*

This helps explain why managements remain, on the whole, completely attached to a unitarist and hierarchical concept of how business enterprises should be organised; why they reject the arguments of social scientists about the simplistic nature of such models; and why they accept the costs of waste and inefficiency involved in over-reliance on hierarchy, or reluctance to delegate authority to the shopfloor. It also serves to highlight the ideological and political character of most QWL worker participation schemes.

These schemes are political, in the sense suggested by Connolly earlier, in that they seek to bring workers under the control of a consensus which makes politics marginal and unimportant; which, in essence, seeks the

eradication of contestability. And they are ideological in MacIntyre's sense of that contested term in that they attempt to 'conceal the features of particular conflicts' and contradictions, and deny the reality of unpredictability. However,

*Instability is the norm not the deviation from the norm. Managers may or may not recognise this. They may try to hide this reality from themselves or their employees. They may emphasise the need for consensus and team spirit, for cooperation and harmony. But reality will keep on breaking through (69).*

Thus, QWL participatory schemes, as introduced by managements, are only palliatives instigated to enhance or maintain control of the 'existing situation' (involving as part of this process attempts to erase contestability) without, however, curing the basic ailment that creates the need for palliatives in the first place.

## Notes

1. BRANNEN, P 1983 Authority and Participation in Industry London, Batsford Academic. p.33.
2. William Connolly sees the essential contestability thesis as claiming:  
(i) that a conceptual contest involves rival parties who accept some elements of the concept in common. (ii) that the common resources of reason and evidence available can illuminate these debates but are insufficient to reduce the number of interpretations rationally defensible to one; (iii) that a strong case can sometimes be made within this remaining area of contestability in support of a particular reading. See CONNOLLY, W. 1985 'The Politics of Discourse' in M. Shapiro (ed) Language and Politics Oxford, Basil Blackwell. p.150. and MacINTYRE, A. 'The essential Contestability of some Social Concepts' in ETHICS Vol.84, 1973-1974 .pp.1-9.
3. op.cit. p.158.
4. WILSON, N.A.B. 1973 On the Quality of Working Life HMSO London p.iii.
5. FOX, A. 1980 'The Meaning of Work' in G. Esland & G. Salaman (eds) The Politics of Work and Occupations Milton Keynes Open University Press. p.187.
6. op.cit. p.139. For an example of this phenomenon one need look no further than the Conservative government's early eighties rallying cry of 'There is no alternative' and the related propagation of 'Victorian Values'.
7. MacINTYRE, A. 1979 'Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority' in M.J. Faka (ed) Through the Looking Glass: Epistemology and the Conduct of Enquiry. An Anthology p.50.
8. See for example: CRESSEY, P. et al 1985 Just Managing: Authority and Democracy in Industry. Milton Keynes, Open University Press. Especially

Chapters 1 & 10.

9. op.cit. p.14.

10. PATEMAN, C. 1970 Participation and Democratic Theory. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

11. op.cit. pp56-60.

12. ibid.

13. PATEMAN, C. op.cit. p.73.

14. op.cit. p.15.

15. LUKES, S. 1974 Power: A Radical View London, Macmillan.

16. op.cit. p.16.

17. KELLY, J.E. 1982 'Economic and Structural Analysis of Job Redesign.' in J.E. Kelly & C.W. Clegg Autonomy and Control at the Workplace London, Croom Helm. p.48.

18. BALDAMUS, W. 1961 Efficiency and Effort, London, Tavistock Publications.

19. BURNS, T.R. and RUS, V. 1979 'Introduction and Overview' in T.R. Burns et al Work and Power, London, Sage Publications. p.3.

20. See for example, RAMSAY, H.E. 1981 'Participation for Whom? A Critical Review of Worker Participation in Theory and Practice.' Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham. p.110.

21. See for example: RAMSAY, H.E. 1977 'Cycles of Control : Worker Participation in Sociological and Historical Perspective.' in SOCIOLOGY 11/3/ pp 481-506.

22. See for example: CHILD, J. 1969 British Management Thought, London, George Allen & Unwin. Especially Chap.2.

23. op.cit. pp.46-47.

24. ibid. p.47.

25. ibid.

26. RAMSAY, H.E 1981 op.cit. p.82.

27. Criticisms were also voiced by many trade unionists (unsurprisingly, given the contradictory nature of trade unionism under capitalism) who saw their independence of management and their traditional oppositional role being undermined by the Bullock proposals. Thus Bullock was seen, by both management and by sections of organised labour, as a threat to their political interests. See for example: BRANNEN, op.cit. pp. 100-103.

28. The legitimatory rhetoric of British management thought was particularly verbose in the years directly before and after Bullock. Management associations began to express renewed interest in participation from the later years of the 1960s, urging their members to initiate participatory schemes before legislation was enforced upon them. In 1968, for example, the British Institute of Management announced that

*in a highly industrialised society forced to undergo technological change and to find new ways of holding if not raising the standard of living people feel that democratic processes work badly. It creates unrest and tension; radical relief will be required to avoid an explosion. We need not look far abroad to see the dangers. Soon we must take new measures to realise the main ideals of industrial democracy whilst safeguarding the wealth producing industrial framework.*

By 1973 the CBI had produced a report which, whilst firmly underlining the need to retain managerial prerogative, argued that there was a need to develop a wide degree of participation in the process of decision-making throughout British Industry. This was to be done by establishing joint consultation at plant level and company councils at company level.

Nowhere here is there any real sense of power changing hands. That

power is in fact not meant to be redistributed is exposed by Ramsay who quotes part of the CBI's evidence to the Bullock Committee in March 1976, in which the CBI defined participation as

*... a means of achieving a more competitive, more efficient industry through improved employer-employee relationships.*

From this and other such management statements on the subject, Ramsay formulates five standard objectives of participation as Management see it.

1. Job involvement. 2. Employee understanding of how they fit into the process of wealth creation. 3. Employee understanding of why decisions are taken. 4. Employee understanding of the business situation of their firm. & 5. Employee understanding of its future objectives.

See RAMSAY 1981 op.cit. pp.79-80 & also CRESSEY et al 1985 op.cit. esp. Chaps. 8-10.

29. The theme of the international symposium on work problems, where the term QWL was coined was 'democratising the workplace.'

30. RUSSELL, S. 1983 'Quality Circles in Perspective' Work Research Unit, London. Occasional Paper No.24 p.1.

31. BRADLEY, K. & HILL, S. 1987 'Quality Circles and Managerial Interests' in BRITISH JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS 26/1 pp.68-82. p.62.

32. *ibid.*

33. TRIST, E.L. & BAMFORTH, K.W. 1951 'Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal-Getting' reprinted in an edited form in T. Burns (ed) 1969 Industrial Man Penguin Books pp.331-358.

See also: TRIST, E. et al 1963 Organisational Choice London, Tavistock; RICE, A.K. 1958 Productivity and Social Organisation London, Tavistock; GYLLENHAMMAR, P. 1977 People at Work Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley; and

EMERY, F. & THORSRUD, E. 1964 Form and Content in Industrial Democracy  
London, Tavistock.

34. MACKAY, L.E 1982 'Sociology for Industry? A Study of the Diffusion and Use of Industrial Sociology in Industry.' Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham.p.80.

35. One is tempted to deploy the well-worn Nichols and Beynon chestnut. See NICHOLS,T. AND BEYNON,H. 1977 Living with Capitalism, London, RKP. p.16. See also: KELLY, J. 1982 Scientific Management, Job Redesign and Work Performance London, Academic Pres, especially Chapter.6.

36. MILLER,P. & ROSE, N. 1988 'The Tavistock Programme: The Government of Subjectivity and Social Life.' in SOCIOLOGY 22/2 pp.171-192. p.186. See also, MILLER,P. 1986. 'Psychotherapy of Work and Unemployment.' in P.Miller & N.Rose (eds) The Power of Psychiatry, Cambridge, Polity Press.

37. See for example MACKAY, L.E. op.cit p.94.

38. BLACKLER, F. 1982 'Job Redesign and Social Policies' in J.E.Kelly & C.W.Clegg (eds) Autonomy and Control at the Workplace pp.157-180. p.162.

39. NICHOLS, T. 1980 'Management, Ideology and Practice.' in G.Esland and G.Salaman (eds) op.cit. p.300.

40. ANTHONY,P.D. 1986 The Foundation of Management Tavistock Publications, London. p.170.

41. BATSTONE, E. 1984 Working Order Basil Blackwell, Oxford. p.261.

42. *ibid.*

43. See STREECK,W. 1987 'The Uncertainties of Management in the Management of Uncertainty: Employers, Labor Relations and Industrial Adjustment in the 1980s.' in WORK, EMPLOYMENT & SOCIETY 1/3 pp.281-308.

Streeck sees the main problem facing management as that of finding ways of



*managing an unprecedented degree of economic uncertainty deriving from a need for continuous rapid adjustment to a market environment that seems to have become permanently more turbulent than in the past. This requires an increasingly close (re-) integration of industrial relations and industrial strategy in the context of a comprehensive manufacturing policy. Institutional barriers which insulate industrial relations from concerns for, and changes in, economic performance need to be dismantled, and 'flexibility' is a key concept. However, the management of uncertainty remains incomplete and beset with contradictions due to profound uncertainties of management regarding the structure and function of a flexible industrial relations system. These uncertainties are linked to wider problems of industrial strategy whose resolution partly depends on the strategic decisions of other actors, in particular trade unions.'* p.281.

44. BRADLEY, K. & HILL, S. 1983 'After Japan: The Quality Circle Transplant and Productive Efficiency' in BRITISH JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS 21/3 pp.291-311. p.292.
45. LITTLER, C. 1985. 'Taylorism, Fordism and Job Design' in D. Knights et al. (eds) Job Redesign Aldershot, Gower pp.10-29.
46. 1987. pp.71-72.
47. BRADLEY & HILL 1983 op.cit. p.292
48. MANWARING, T. & WOODS, S. 1985 'The Ghost in the Labour Process' in D. Knights et al (eds) op.cit. p.187.
49. op.cit. pp.186-187.
50. 1987 op.cit. p.77.
51. ibid.
52. op.cit. p.267.
53. BRADLEY & HILL 1987.

54. *ibid.*
55. 1984. *op.cit.* pp.266-267., 1987. *op.cit.* MacINNES, J. 1987 Thatcherism at Work, Milton Keynes, The Open University Press. p.104. These authors found little evidence to support the contention that QCs were being introduced explicitly as an anti-union device, or that in practice they were having this effect. To say this, however, is not to suggest that the introduction of QCs cannot have deleterious effects upon trade union organisation within the enterprise.
56. *op.cit.* p.266.
57. For a discussion and critique of New Right democratic theory see HELD, D. 1987 Models of Democracy, Oxford, Polity Press. Esp. Chap.8 'The New Polarisation of Democratic Ideals.'
58. See for example, RAMSAY 1977 pp.484-485 and BRANNEN 1983 Chaps. 2 & 6.
59. *op.cit.* p.98.
60. For the B.S.C. scheme see BRANNEN, P. et al 1975 The Worker Directors, London, Hutchinson. For the Post Office scheme see BATSTONE,E et al 1983 Unions on the Board-A Case Study of Industrial Democracy in the Post Office, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
61. 1983. *op.cit.* p.104.
62. See BURNS,T 1969 *op.cit.* especially Chap.11 T.Burns 'On the Plurality of Social Systems.'and Chap.13. M.Dalton 'Conflicts between Staff and Line Managers.' See also CRESSEY, P. et al 1985 *op.cit.*
63. With regard to this latter point see for example BRANNEN 1983 *op.cit.* Chap.6.
64. The importance of the language of accounting in organisational life is discussed in BATSTONE,E. 1984 *op.cit.* and in EARL,M.J. 'Accounting and

Management' in M.J. Earl (ed) 1983 Perspectives on Management Oxford OUP.

65. op.cit. p.114.

66. CRESSEY,P. et al op.cit. refer to the 'existing situation' as both the social relations existing in the enterprise and to the enterprise itself considered as an economic organisation. p.126.

67. Tom Burns for example has suggested that

*In practice working organisations seem to be makeshift assemblies of relationships and activities which operate inaccordamce with several quite different sets of principles and assumptions and different rationales. They are, to use Levi-Strauss' useful word, bricolages, composed out of second-hand bits and pieces of rather general notions and traditions of how to go about things, each having its own semblance of legitimacy. (Quoted in CRESSEY et al op.cit.*

p.130.)

68. CRESSEY et al op.cit. p.172.

69. op.cit. p.141.

#### CHAPTER 4 QWL : ITS HOMOGENEITY & DIVERSITY

Throughout the preceding chapters of this thesis it has been argued that most approaches to QWL have lacked any real sense of sociological perspective. They have ignored, for example, the role of structural contradiction in the relations between capital and labour, managements and employees, and have failed to provide any detailed theoretical conception of the nature of work in modern industrial capitalist societies, of the interests that determine the design of work and work organisation, or of the forces in society at large which encourage the development of "appropriate and realistic expectations".

However, the variety of ideas and diversity of practical initiatives covered by the term QWL have also been acknowledged. All too often, radical critics have paid scant attention to this diversity and variability tending instead to equate one particular type of QWL initiative or theory with QWL as a whole (1).

What needs to be remembered is that although the general perspective of QWL can be outlined and criticised, QWL theory and practice taken as a whole contain a diversity of initiatives and a plurality of ideological assumptions about organisations. The present chapter will therefore attempt to map out and criticise both the homogeneity and diversity of QWL theory and practice (At the same time, it will also be argued that the weaknesses already analysed are not avoided by the acknowledgement of the diversity of QWL).

### The General Perspective of QWL

The term perspective will be used here to designate a set of assumptions and objectives, as well as significant absences, which together constitute the ideological-theoretical terrain occupied by several QWL theories and practices. No single theory is likely to embrace all the components of this terrain: some indeed explicitly reject particular assumptions, and there have of course been significant developments within the theories.

Following Kelly (1982) these assumptions can be located in four areas: social values, individual needs, relations between workers and employers and organisational change (2).

### Social Values

One of the most pervasive and significant features of QWL job redesign is its inherent anti-materialism. This is manifested in a number of ways.

Firstly, QWL theory pays very little, and often no, attention to the economic character of the employment relationship in industrial capitalist societies. Early theorists, such as Herzberg, for example, stressed that modern man's material needs were being effectively met in the increasingly 'affluent' society and therefore that extrinsic determinants of motivation were no longer important. Consequently, it was intrinsic determinants that were associated with effective work performance and considered highly motivating and satisfying to the individual- such as feelings of responsibility, recognition etc; other theorists posit other sets of attributes. The socio-technical theorists, for example, tended to stress autonomy, variety, discretion, and task-wholeness, as well as responsibility (3).

Secondly, implicit in the views that material needs had largely been

satisfied or that material factors, even if manipulated, could produce relatively little change in job performance, was a new theory of industrial conflict.

*The conflicts between workers (or unions) and employers once fuelled by wages are seen as less significant than the new conflict between 'the individual' and 'the organisation' (4).*

Such a view is prevalent in the work of the neo-human relations school of Argyris, MacGregor et al. These authors conceive of the individual as having various needs for independent thought and action, stimulation and challenge, which are frustrated by the monolithic organisation that regulates the most minute details of job performance (5).

Thirdly, QWL is often seen as a response to 'personnel problems' engendered by a too detailed division of labour (More often than not, Taylor is named). It is assumed that labour turnover, absenteeism and high employee job dissatisfaction are unproblematically spawned by a detailed division of labour in the form of simple, routine, non-challenging jobs. Little attention is paid, for example, to the strains placed on division of labour because of changes in product and labour markets outside of the enterprise (6).

#### Individual Needs

The assumptions of MacGregor's Theory Y (themselves derived from Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' schema) have informed, in different ways, the most significant QWL work. Hackman and Oldham, for example, whose work Rose sees as exemplifying that of the QWL movement as a whole, argue that higher-order needs are becoming more salient as motivators, and that these include needs for personal growth, and for feelings of worthwhile

accomplishment (7).

Within socio-technical systems theory, as Blackler mentions, human 'requirements' of work are also posited, consisting in opportunities for learning, for satisfaction of social needs, for involvement in decision-making, and for the creation of links to the outside world of a desirable future (8).

*In short, the subject of enquiry was no longer conceived purely as a passive commodity, as a potentially recalcitrant element of production, or as a rational economic man, but as an active and complex subject whose abilities could be harnessed to the goals of the organisation (9).*

Both Davis and Cherns and the Work Resesarch Unit (WRU), for example, stress the importance of treating the worker as an agent rather than as an object (10).

#### Relations between Workers and Employers

There exists within most of the literature on QWL an implicit, and more often than not explicit, assumption that employer and worker interests can somehow be reconciled. By building into jobs variety, autonomy, responsibility and other 'desirable' characteristics, it is suggested that the motivation of job holders will be increased, thus resulting in higher performance levels for the employer. At the same time, the performance of such a redesigned job will be a source of greater satisfaction to the person doing that job, and the interests of both parties will thus be catered for.

However, this 'mutual-benefits' thesis rests on an implicit, asymmetrical analysis of worker and employer interests. Although employers continue to be concerned with economic matters such as productivity, costs, and

profitability, workers needs (or interests - the terms are rarely delineated clearly) are said to centre almost exclusively in the psychological sphere because their material needs have been largely satisfied. By advancing a new conception of worker interests, QWL job redesign writers have been able, theoretically, to circumvent the obstacles to interest reconciliation and social integration arising from the employment relationship, and to provide the foundation for a very much greater degree of unity of purpose within organisations. The other central component of this view is that attitudes and behaviour can be aligned: job satisfaction and job performance can both be increased.

#### Organisational Change

Like the earlier human-relations movement, the QWL job redesign perspective is both optimistic and normative. Its proponents believe that given sufficient support and encouragement by top management, lower-level managers can successfully embark on a radical reorganisation of the division of labour. QWL job redesign involves both technique and theory, and the link between them is predicated on the close ties between QWL theorists and their 'designated principle change agents', managers. Many well known QWL advocates were, or still are, managers themselves: P. Gyllemhammer (Volvo) and O. Tynan ( ex-BL and ex-director of the Work Research Unit), for example. Links with trade unions and trade unionists are, by comparison, few and far between (WRU being an exception).

As Anthony, amongst others, has pointed out, QWL job redesign theory presupposes the manager of an organisation to hold almost unlimited power to change an existing division of labour, notwithstanding market, finance, corporate or other constraints (11).



Obstacles to change are invariably located within the organisation, in particular social groups for example, such as supervisors or trade unions representatives, or are thought to be embodied in outdated philosophies such as Theory X (12). The implication of the latter analysis is that education and enlightenment by intellectuals is a significant element in the process of social change: structural contradictions or wider social forces are rarely discussed.

It is also assumed that work in employment ought to be a major source of need satisfaction and fulfilment for individuals (13). In part, this assumption derives from a universal theory of human needs coupled with the premise that lower-order, material needs have been satisfied. The narrative would seem to preclude the notion of relative rather than absolute deprivation, according to which 'needs' are socially defined using specific significant reference groups. It does, nevertheless, entail the possibility of differences in attitudes to work, even if, as with Herzberg, those continuing to display an instrumental orientation to work are thought to be suffering from an 'illness of motivation' (14).

It needs to be stressed again that no single theory of QWL is likely to embrace all aspects of the general perspective outlined above; and indeed, as will be indicated in due course, some explicitly reject particular assumptions. However, charting the general perspective of QWL does, amongst other things, help to provide a focus for criticisms of QWL.

#### Criticisms of the general perspective of QWL

The principle intellectual discipline at the heart of most approaches to QWL is psychology. Indeed, throughout this present century organisational life has increasingly become the object of psychological and psychiatric

'expertise' (15). QWL forms part of this process.

An overriding concern with psychological analysis and prescription helps to explain the lack of sociological perspective inherent within most QWL literature (16). However, the definition of organisational problems as principally psychological in character does, it must be admitted, capture part of the 'reality' of post-war industrial and service organisations. Full employment did, after all, allow many people an unprecedented degree of choice in the labour market. At the same time, it is crucial to recognise that the problems of employing organisations do not derive simply from the labour force (17): an industrial organisation in a capitalist economy normally competes with other firms and may be faced with a series of problems stemming from its product market. Companies may also have to update their products, or even to introduce new designs; they may have to reorganise their management structure along product lines or may face difficulties in investment programmes.

*In short, even where company managements identify their problems in terms of labour productivity or labour costs, it does not follow that the solution lies in a reorganisation of labour even less in a strategy aimed specifically at morale or motivation. Labour productivity is contingent on a range of factors - psychological, social, technical - of which motivation is but one (18).*

Integral to the discourse of individual psychological 'needs', are arguments deployed for improvements in the quality of working life on the basis of perceived social changes. Rising levels of education and falling levels of unemployment, for example, were said to have generated rising aspirations especially amongst young people and that this in turn was causing the personnel problem at the core of QWL concerns (19). These higher demands of work were thought to be reflected in such diverse phenomena as calls

for participation in enterprise decision-making and, when frustrated, in job-quitting, absenteeism and strikes. Such arguments were frequently deployed by socio-technical theorists such as Davis and Trist alongside the espousal of a 'second Industrial Revolution' in the making. With the growth of service employment and of automated and semi-automated technologies, it was argued that the dissatisfying, repetitive jobs engineered by scientific management were gradually being eliminated, and replaced by more challenging tasks.

These interpretations of social change and the prescriptions founded upon them have been the focus of a number of criticisms.

Rose, and others, have deconstructed the myths at the heart of what Rose terms the 'General Disenculturation' thesis of work commitment (20). This latter theory is prevalent throughout the Work in America (WIA) report, for example, where numerous manifestations of decreased commitment to work are cited: strikes, labour turnover, reduced productivity and other assorted presumed evils. These manifestations are presented, some critics have argued, to illustrate, amongst other things, the threat that dissatisfied workers pose to the status quo (21).

*The emphasis on such grim eventualities, although studies do not generally support the conclusion that they are more widespread than previously, suggests that an objective of the report was to create the impression of an impending threat to the existing social order (22).*

On the basis of their interpretations the WIA team proceed to prescribe what they consider to be the essential antidote to the crisis: namely, to make people more committed to their jobs through QWL initiatives (and, it must be added, through other less savoury techniques (23)).

*Not only can work be redesigned to make it more satisfying but...significant increases in productivity can also be*

*obtained. In other words, workers can be healthier, happier in their work, and better contributors to family and community life than they are now, without a loss of goods and services and without inflating prices (24).*

Here within the space of a few lines some of the basic assumptions underlying the QWL perspective can be found: the overriding importance and significance attributed to work for the individual's health and happiness, and the mutual benefits thesis, for example. And although WIA has come in for a colossal amount of criticism, and can therefore be considered a 'soft' target, its assumptions and prescriptions are still utilised by QWL institutions today (by the ILO and the WRU for example, despite their more 'committed pluralism' (25)).

Kelly has provided one of the most salient economic and structural critiques of QWL job redesign theory and practice, and his comments echo many of the concerns of the present thesis (26). In particular he focusses on the overemphasis on theoretically and empirically weak psychological models of QWL job redesign: their obsession with individual motivation (which they rarely define and regularly confuse with 'needs' and 'interests'), personnel problems and job dissatisfaction; on the neglect of organisational environments; and, most importantly, on the neglect of the employment relationship in industrial capitalist societies (27). It is this latter point that Kelly sees as central to the theoretical drawbacks of most QWL initiatives. The failure to describe and analyse the structural antagonisms inherent in employment relations permits QWL job redesign theory to neglect the economic determinants of conflict and alienation, to underestimate the significance of economic and structural determinants of job performance, and to overestimate the possibility of reconciling the

evidence suggesting both that some firms are using QWL initiatives as a response to the uncertainties faced by management and that QWL institutions are tailoring their services towards the requirements of organisations in the search for 'flexibility' (31).

Other writers have tended to stress the continuities within modern western industrial capitalist societies, where dislocation and discontinuity are structured into the economic system, where change is the norm and where 'all that is solid' periodically 'melts into air', in opposition to those who regularly prophesy seminal systemic breaks with the past whether in the form of a 'Second Industrial Revolution', the 'end of ideology' or the coming of 'post-industrial society' (32). QWL advocates can be seen to have engaged in such futurological discourse, positing, for example, as was mentioned earlier, a 'second industrial revolution' thesis and incorporating the basic assumptions of other futurological works into their own perspectives (33). Indeed, the current 'flexibility debate' in which WRU, for example, is broadly involved, is, as Pollert has mentioned, 'notable for its futurological discourse' (34).

The above, albeit brief, critical examination of the general perspective of QWL has emphasized both the lack of sociological and historical perspective in much of the work of those involved in promoting QWL, and the needs for such perspectives to be utilised if the claims made for QWL are to be more judiciously assessed, and the genealogies, ideological assumptions and inherent limitations of QWL theory and practice exposed (35).

#### The Diversity of QWL

Having outlined the homogeneity of QWL in the form of its general perspective, it is now proposed to sketch out the diversity of theories and

practical initiatives that are subsumed under the blanket term QWL.

It has already been mentioned that radical critiques of QWL often neglect the variability and variety of QWL and that this represents one of the most serious flaws in much radical criticism (36).

The conventional picture of unity and coherence presented by both mainstream advocates of QWL and their radical critics requires some qualification. However, the intention is not simply to list and describe different theories and practical examples of QWL, but to analyse these different theories and practical initiatives in terms of their ideological assumptions about organisations. Hopefully, this will serve both as a corrective to oversimplified views of QWL and permit some assessment of the varying costs and benefits accruing to management and workers from the ideological presuppositions embodied within these different QWL initiatives. The ordering of ideological assumptions is based on Fox's 'frames of reference' ideal typical schema, with modifications as utilised by Kelly (37).

Fox produced an extremely influential analysis of three major ideological views of work organisations. The first of these is the unitarist perspective, which presents the work organisation in terms of unity, harmony, trust and teamwork.

*Emphasis is placed on the common objectives said to unite all participants. Arising logically from this firm foundation is said to be the need for a unified structure of authority, leadership, and loyalty, with full managerial prerogative legitimized by all members of the organisation. From this view, the failure of some groups of lower, and sometimes even of middle, rank participants fully to acknowledge management's prerogative and its call for obedience, loyalty and trust is seen as springing from responses of doubtful validity and legitimacy. Employees should stop defining their situation in conflict terms of divergent goals, repose trust in their superordinates,*

*accept their leadership, and legitimize their discretionary role. It follows from all this that conflict generated by organised - or even unorganised - oppositional behaviour on the part of employees tends to be seen as lacking full legitimacy as do the trade unions or unionised workgroups which organise it (38).*

Second, the pluralist view portrays the organisation as a site of several competing interest groups, who are sometimes, though not necessarily, in conflict. Conflict, however, is considered a legitimate phenomenon within certain limits, and it may be either destructive or constructive. Employees may be loyal primarily to an employer, or, alternatively, to a trade union, or indeed to both. Managerial prerogative can be challenged and trade union (albeit bounded) involvement in decision-making through bargaining and consultation is regarded as legitimate. At the heart of the pluralist philosophy the assumption is being made that

*while, to be sure, conflicts arise over the terms of economic cooperation, values and norms are not so divergent that workable compromises cannot be achieved. Underlying the cut and thrust of market-place and organizational encounters, in other words, lies the firm foundation of an agreed social system. Men may disagree about the distribution of the social product and other terms of their collaboration-and it is healthy and desirable that they should-but their disagreements are not so great and lasting that they seek to destroy the system or even put it under serious hazard (39).*

Lastly, the radical view concentrates on the basic inequalities and power differentials characterising modern industrial capitalist society and relates organisational conflicts back to these structural patterns, particularly to some of its inherent inconsistencies or contradictions.

In examining QWL it is possible to order the many schools, writers and theories into these three ideal typical groups. Following Kelly this will be done on the basis of six dimensions of organisational structure and

objectives. Insofar as QWL is a technique of organisational change it must, like any other technique, possess a certain set of properties.

*first there must be a set of objectives associated with the techniques, and knowledge or assumptions about the focus of the technique, in this case a view of the employee. The unit of analysis should be specified, whether it be the individual, group or organisational levels. Next, the context of implementation, namely the wider organisation requires examination, as do the mode of implementation (whether employees should participate in the process, and if so, through what channels), and the mode of diffusion across intra - or - extra - organisational barriers (40).*

In terms of Fox's trichotomy, a great many QWL writers and theories would fall into the pluralist camp, and because this category is so broad and includes so many perspectives, it is therefore proposed, again following Kelly's lead, to distinguish between two types of pluralist perspective: pragmatic and committed. At the same time it is not proposed to investigate radical QWL job redesign initiatives, for they are few and far between in comparison with their 'mainstream' and more (in)famous counterparts, but rather to utilise the radical frame of reference as a sociological tool with which to analyse the alternative perspectives and expose their inherent limitations (41).

#### The unitarist variant of QWL

In terms of objectives, although they are committed to the mutual-benefits thesis, unitarists place greater emphasis on motivation than on satisfaction (this is particularly true of the work of Herzberg, who is perhaps the unitarist *par excellence* (42)). Associated with this Kelly notes several related themes running through most unitarist literature, these include: labour utilisation, productivity and, more generally,



organisational effectiveness (43).

The unitarist view of the employee is of someone highly motivated to perform a challenging job without the additional attraction of higher pay. Herzberg, for example, as was mentioned earlier, described the 'hygiene seeker' as a victim of 'motivational illness'. For the most part unitarist writings completely ignore the issue of pay and earnings. However these unitarist concerns are not peculiar to Herzbergians or other American 'organisational psycho-technologists', for some socio-technical theorists also have such inclinations. Rice, for example, reported that workers simply had to get on with their jobs, and attached little importance to adjustments in pay systems and levels (44). Consistent also with the unitarist denial of conflicting interests is their explanation of failure in terms of inadequate techniques (45).

The individual is invariably the unit of analysis for unitarists and this is reflected in their preferred methods of improving the quality of working life, most notably job enrichment. For some, such as Herzberg, individualism is not an expedient device but rather a philosophical principle. However, the classic Herzbergian job enrichment exercises involved independent, white-collar job roles and were thus more amenable to their author's individualist orientations.

The unitarists have focussed on worker-task relationships and, on the whole, reveal no awareness or consideration of the reciprocal relationship between QWL changes and the wider organisation (46).

*Typically, case studies describe one or more 'problems', outline the changes introduced in job content, and present various results as if the reorganized section, department or office existed in a vacuum (47).*

The unitarist view of the mode of implementation is one of its most

distinctive features. It is often argued by critics of this approach that unitarist QWL schemes are anti-union, and, indeed, evidence from the USA, where unitarist consultants flaunt their anti-union credentials more explicitly, tends in general to support this view. It goes without saying that for unitarists trade union involvement in the process of change is a danger to be avoided. Indeed, worker participation or influence over job redesign has been strongly opposed by Herzberg and his followers for a variety of highly dubious reasons (48). At the heart of this dismissal of worker participation, however, is the issue of managerial authority and power.

*Defence of managerial prerogatives is consistent with unitarism per se, and with the unitarist job redesigners' limited economic objectives, and their lack of interest in organisational ramifications of job redesign (49).*

Most prominent unitarist advocates of QWL are consultants who make money through assisting organisations to improve, for example, their productivity and effectiveness. For the very most part, unitarist initiatives are diffused by self-interest in the service of self-interest.

The unitarist frame of reference, taken as a whole, is remarkably coherent:

*Its goals are primarily those of organisational management, whose authority is upheld by a firm opposition to worker participation and trade unionism, and by an insistence on studying and changing workers and their jobs individually rather than collectively (50).*

#### The pragmatic pluralists

Although pragmatic pluralists and their unitarist counterparts share ostensibly similar objectives in that they both attempt to promote motivation and job satisfaction, the former group place a much greater

emphasis on the inter-relatedness of these objectives, and relatively more importance on the notion of job satisfaction. For this group, the improvement of job satisfaction is an integral part of economic improvement (or, to put this conception in socio-technical terms, both social systems and technical systems are to be 'jointly optimized'.) (51).

Pragmatic pluralists view the employee in anti-universalist terms, placing an insistence instead on variation and contingency. They also place a great deal of weight on the findings of pieces of empirical research. This step-by-step pragmatism and anti-universalism also helps to define both their approach to the unit of analysis and their view of the wider organisation.

With regard to the unit of analysis some adherents of the pragmatic pluralist ideology argue that individualist approaches are suitable for small tasks, but that group redesign may be more appropriate for larger tasks. In respect of the view of the organisation, the key again is variation. In other words, there is evidence of 'a strong emphasis on pragmatism and clear signs of incremental, empirical learning' (52).

Pragmatic pluralists possess unsurprisingly, no commitment to the extension of worker participation *per se*, but, rather, judge the merits of such a process on a pragmatic approach to the problem at hand. Pragmatism (and its corollary, flexibility) is yet again the principal organising principle.

In so far as the members of this particular group have addressed themselves to the diffusion of QWL, their suggestions seem to owe more to the unitarist emphasis on communication as a panacea for many organisational ills. Wilson, for example, suggests that it is a lack of knowledge and insufficient research that is holding up the process of

diffusion (Wilson's recommendations led to the creation of the WRU administered Job Satisfaction Research Programme, the principle aim of which was 'the improvement of jobs and work organisation'.) (53).

Overall, the pragmatic pluralist perspective seems to lack coherence. However, as Kelly has indicated, the appearance of incoherence is superficial.

*The unity of this position is not predicated on a given set of detailed, or substantive themes, but on a procedural principle. Given the objectives of jointly improving organisational performance and individual satisfaction, the means required are based solely on research evidence and practical experience. If evidence suggests participation is necessary in unionized plants, but not in others, this will inform practices in the respective plants. The pragmatic pluralists, in short, are technocrats whose goals are taken as given, and who concern themselves with the most effective means of achieving and evaluating them. It is therefore no accident that it is pragmatic pluralists who have produced more precise and detailed measuring instruments than anyone else, although it should also be said that several of them might better be called reluctant pluralists as their awareness of conflicts of interest was until recently, quite limited (54).*

#### The committed pluralists

For this group the term QWL has a much wider meaning than that attributed to it by unitarists and pragmatic pluralists. The International Labour Organisation, for example, uses the term QWL to denote changes in working conditions, participation, reward systems, health and safety as well as job content (55).

From this perspective the outcomes of QWL initiatives must be bargained over to ensure that the workers' separate and (sometimes conflicting) interests are adequately met. With regard to employee participation

Gregory, for example, refutes the oft-made claim that employees and their trade unions have been uninterested in QWL initiatives. Contrary to this received wisdom, he suggests that trade unions have played a key role in calling for improvements in the quality of working life in the post-war period, and sees QWL initiatives, in their broadest sense, as one route by which worker participation in organisational decision-making (at all levels) can be extended (56). However, this is not to suggest that committed pluralists envisage an extension in worker's participation as benefitting workers alone. The mutual benefits thesis is still at large. Emery and Thorsrud, for example, make it clear that they believe 'industrial democracy' can assist firms to become 'stronger and more competitive' (57). A number of committed pluralists take a more economic view of employee's needs and interests and have been known to criticize other more 'intrinsically' oriented theories for their naivete. A concern with material explanation does not, however, necessarily indicate, or lead, to a thorough appreciation of the nature of the employment relationship in industrial capitalist societies. Those working within this perspective are, after all, still pluralists in Fox's terms (58).

The unit of analysis has been taken a little further by committed pluralists, compared with their unitarist and pragmatic pluralist counterparts, who have moved to the organisation and sometimes beyond. ILO documents often locate QWL initiatives in their social, economic and political setting, for example, (although the analysis offered may be conducted in simple structural-functional terms and therefore leave rather a lot to be desired (59).) and WRU emphasises the benefits of an organisation-wide approach to change that includes, but is not confined to, analysis at the level of the individual and the group (60).

Coupled with this more comprehensive perspective is a correspondingly more positive appraisal of the connection between QWL initiatives and changes in other parts of the organisation. Mention has already been made of WRU's appreciation of the 'shunt and ripple' effect, for example (61) and Clegg has analysed the impact of job redesign on other organisational departments and systems in the context of conflicting interests and objectives, and has stressed that such conflicts can be managed but not eliminated altogether (62).

Committed pluralists also stress that organisational change should take place in the context of collective bargaining and they share the view that where applicable trade union involvement is vital for success. WRU, for example, views participation by those whose jobs are to be redesigned as both an end in itself and as a means to an end (63).

Diffusion is a more complex process for those sharing this perspective. Once it is acknowledged that the effects of a particular initiative are contingent on changes elsewhere within the organisation, diffusion becomes a difficult problem. As Kelly has suggested

*where job redesign has been linked, empirically or theoretically to industrial democracy, as in Scandinavia, there is more optimism on the part of writers and practitioners about its future than in countries where the technique remains the preserve of unitarists or pragmatic pluralists (64).*

Davis and Cherns, for example, stress the need for an 'institutional' approach to the diffusion of QWL and the Arden House conference on QWL in 1972 (the papers presented to this conference make up the bulk of Davis and Cherns' two volume edited collection 'The Quality of Working Life.') resulted in the formation of the International Council for the Quality of Working Life, a network of academic proponents of QWL. It was argued that

knowledge and research were insufficient in themselves to promote change, and that an integrated approach was therefore required in order to influence those in power (65).

Overall, as Kelly has written,

*Whereas the unitarists are managerial technicians firmly wedded to the 'status quo', and the pragmatic pluralists are technocrats, clear about their objectives, but flexible on means, the committed pluralists have a wider set of objectives and value the process of their attainment in its own right. But more than this they have some grasp, however variable and unarticulated, of organisations as sites of interest groups and therefore as political entities (66).*

#### Criticisms of unitarist and pluralist variants of QWL

Of these alternative frames of reference the unitarist perspective is the most explicitly 'ideological' in that it is most significantly at variance with the realities of economic life in our type of industrial capitalist society, tending, for example, to promote managerial goals as the only legitimate goals within the life of an organisation. Managerial authority is upheld by a firm opposition to worker participation and trade unionism and by an insistence on studying and changing workers and their jobs individually, rather than collectively.

At base, the essential plurality of organisational life is denied by advocates of this perspective. Unitarists at heart are 'managerial technicians' engaged in helping to improve or maintain the 'existing situation' within the organisation (67).

Both pluralist frames of reference can be defended as more realistic perspectives in comparison with the unitarist ideology.

*From this perspective the enterprise is seen not as a unitary structure but as a coalition of individuals and groups with their own aspirations and perceptions which they*

*naturally see as valid and which they seek to express in action if such is required (68).*

However, pluralists do assume that the conflicts of interest inherent within organisations are not so fundamental or so wide as to be unopen to compromise or new syntheses which allow collaboration to continue. Also implicit within this perspective is an assumption that there exists between the various parties within the organisation something approximating to a balance of power.

*The normal pluralist stress on the moral obligation to observe agreements... implies a belief that power is not so unevenly matched as to introduce the extenuating concept of duress (69).*

Both pluralist frames of reference outlined above tend to contain this assumption: that power in industrial capitalist society, as represented within the organisation, is competitive, fragmented and diffused. Everybody has some, but no-one has too much for their own (and hence the general) good. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, this assumption is fundamentally flawed (70). Pluralism is a political ideal still to be achieved, not an already existing political reality. The pluralist views, like QWL generally, lack sociological perspective.

Perhaps the most crucial sociological limitation of the pluralist perspectives is their failure to recognise the extent and persistence of 'marked inequalities of condition and opportunity' (71) within modern industrial capitalist societies. Hence, pluralist initiatives, in practice, tend merely to help preserve the status quo. They help prevent radical changes taking place which would reduce or eliminate altogether the inequalities of economic resources, power and status, and thus be in the real interests of subordinate groupings.



Rather than the pluralist perspective, for Fox it is the radical alternative which has the greatest validity intellectually, as well as offering the best guide to the pursuit of more fundamental change. The radical alternative embodies sociological perspective, indicating that the various manifestations of industrial conflict which arise in industrial capitalist societies can best be understood if they are related back to basic characteristics of the overall societal structure and, particularly, to some of its inherent inconsistencies or contradictions (72).

Although both pluralist views are more 'realistic' than their unitarist counterpart, they are still 'ideological', in the perjorative sense of that contested term, in that their perspectives ultimately serve the interests of the dominant groups or classes in our type of industrial capitalist society to a much greater extent than they do the interests of other less privileged groups.

Within the pluralist variant taken as a whole, however, the committed pluralists are less amenable to these criticisms than are their pragmatic colleagues, being, in essence, more 'radical' in their objectives and more sociological in their reasoning. However, a more essentially sociological perspective, such as that provided by the radical variant, exposes the inherent weaknesses and limitations of all the other frames of reference outlined above, and therefore suggests itself to be both a more useful analytical tool with which to examine 'the realities' of 'economic life' in modern industrial capitalist societies, and a potentially better guide to the pursuit of more fundamental change.

### Conclusion

The present chapter has attempted to map out and criticise both the

homogeneity and diversity of QWL theory and practice.

Firstly, the homogeneity of QWL was outlined through the construction of an ideal-typical 'general perspective' of QWL. This perspective was used to designate a set of assumptions and objectives, as well as significant absences, which together constitute the ideological-theoretical terrain occupied by several QWL theories and practical initiatives.

Following a brief critical examination of this perspective, it was concluded that much of the work of those involved in the mainstream promotion of QWL lacked sociological and historical perspective. It was further stressed that such perspectives needed to be utilised if the positive claims made for QWL were to be considered more judiciously and the genealogies, ideological assumptions and inherent limitations of QWL theory and practice exposed.

Secondly, having outlined and criticised the 'general perspective' of QWL, the diversity of theories and practical initiatives subsumed under the blanket term 'QWL' were sketched out. This was felt necessary both in order to correct the oversimplified views of QWL often presented by radical critics, and also to permit some assessment of the varying patterns of costs and benefits accruing to managements and workers from the ideological assumptions embodied in the different approaches to QWL.

The various QWL theories and practices were grouped in terms of their ideological assumptions about organisations, and, subsequently, using Fox's 'frames of reference' ideal types, with modifications derived from Kelly, labelled either 'unitarist', 'pragmatic pluralist' or 'committed pluralist'. These three groupings were then examined on the basis of various dimensions of organisational structures and objectives. Predicated on this analysis a number of criticisms were then levelled.

It was suggested that the unitarist perspective was the most explicitly managerialist, and least sociologically satisfactory, frame of reference. In contrast, 'Pluralism presents itself as an altogether more "realistic" and sophisticated frame of reference than the unitary' (73). However, this does not

*save it... from the continued resistance of those still wedded to unitary beliefs, values and assumptions, nor from criticism from a very different direction which entertains serious doubts, in its turn, about the realism and sophistication of the pluralist analysis (74).*

Using Fox's 'radical frame of reference' as an analytical tool it was shown that, taken as a whole, the pluralist ideology was implicitly managerialist because it ultimately bolstered the preservation of the status quo. However, the two pluralist perspectives were shown to vary in the degree to which they were amenable to such criticisms, with 'committed pluralists' showing a greater degree of sociological awareness and edging in some ways towards a more 'radical' pluralism, (and hence putting more insistence on a broad (sometimes political) range of benefits that should accrue to employees) in contrast to the 'pragmatic pluralists'.

Overall, this chapter has attempted, firstly, to indicate that, whether analysed in terms of its 'diversity' or 'homogeneity', QWL theory and practice lacks adequate sociological perspective, and, secondly, that both sociological and historical perspective are required if, for example, the positive claims made for QWL approaches are to be more carefully assessed and the genealogies, ideological assumptions and inherent limitations of QWL theory and practice are to be traced and exposed.

## NOTES

1. Giordano, for example, in an otherwise interesting piece, tends to use the term QWL interchangeably with Quality Circles, despite acknowledging that QWL includes a diversity of approaches. GIORDANO, L. 1988. ' Beyond Taylorism: Computerisation and QWL programmes in the production process ' in D. Knights and H. Willmott (eds) New Technology and the Labour Process, London, Macmillan. pp. 163-196.

2. KELLY, J. 1982. Scientific Management, Job Redesign and Work Performance London, Academic Press pp.37-43. See also: KELLY, J. 1981 'Economic and structural analysis of job redesign' in J. Kelly and C. Clegg (eds) Autonomy and Control at the Workplace London, Croom Helm pp.21-50.

3. See for example HERZBERG, F. et al 1959 The Motivation to Work New York, Wiley.

4. KELLY, J. 1982. op.cit.

5. See, for example, ARGYRIS, C. 1965 Personality and Organisation, Harper and Row and John Weatherill, and MACGREGOR, D. 1960 The Human Side of Enterprise New York, MacGraw-Hill.

It needs to be remembered that QWL theory grew up in the intellectual climate of the 'Affluent Worker', 'End of Ideology' and 'Post-Industrial Society' theses, and its early formulations were stamped with the ideas of burgeoning anti-materialism and anti-class concern for 'the individual' characteristic of this climate.

6. See, for example, DAVIS, L.E. & TAYLOR, J.C. 1979 Design of Jobs (2nd Edition) Santa Monica, Goodyear Publishing Inc. , and Work in America : Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. 1973 Cambridge Mass. MIT Press.

7. See for example HACKMAN, J.R. & OLDMAN, G.R. 1980 Work Redesign Reading Mass., Addison-Wesley., and ROSE, M. 1985 Reworking the Work Ethic London, Batsford Academic. Especially Chapter 8.

8. BLACKLER, F. 1981 'Job Redesign and Social Policies' in J. Kelly and C. Clegg (eds) op.cit. pp.157-180.

9. KELLY, J. 1982 op.cit.

10. See, for example, DAVIS, L.E. & CHERNS, A.B (eds) 1975 The Quality of Working Life (2 vols.) Volume 1. New York, The Free Press and WRU leaflet Alternative Views of People at Work London, 1981.

A large amount of the material concerning the work of WRU used in this chapter comes from an interview by the author in August 1988 with Auriol Blandy, a senior WRU advisor. Henceforth, material from this source will be identified in the following manner: \* WRU Interview 1988.

11. ANTHONY, P.D. 1977 The Ideology of Work London, Tavistock.

12. This latter point helps to explain, for example, the enthusiasm certain advocates of QWL have for persuading their clients to fashion a 'statement of philosophy' prior to the implementation of change.

13. For Anthony, the Marxist stress on the problem of alienation is precisely equivalent to the stress on self-actualisation in the work of QWL theorists. Both of the ideas, or rather how they are used, serve to close off certain human options: to suggest that, whatever we do in the future, our work must be centrally important to us both psychologically and materially. See ANTHONY, P.D. op.cit.

14. HERZBERG, F. 1966 Work and the Nature of Man London, Staples Press. p.80.

*The hygiene seekers have not reached a stage of personality development at which self-actualizing needs are active. From this point of view, they are fixated at a less mature*

*level of personal adjustment*

15. See, for example, ROSE, M. 1975 Industrial Behaviour London, Allen Lane, and MILLER, P. & ROSE, N. 1988 'The Tavistock Programme: The government of subjectivity and social life.' Sociology 22.2 pp.171-192.

16. In many respects QWL suffers from a number of similar drawbacks to its Human Relations predecessors. The latter movement saw the individual worker, for example, as in need of 'belongingness' within a social workgroup; located its analysis (psychologically) on the factory floor, abstracting face-to-face relations from their wider social context; failed to perceive, chose to ignore, or played down the importance of financial incentives to group productivity; equated the individual worker's degree of 'belongingness' with her/his work performance and envisaged the immanent downfall of industrial society should its psychological prescriptions be ignored.

Similarly, QWL sees labour absenteeism and turnover as a product of unsatisfied 'higher needs' and like its predecessor launches what is assumed to be a devastating attack on the edifice of Taylorism; QWL analysis is located mainly, though not exclusively, within the confines of the organisation (principally at a psychological level); it fails to perceive, or again, chooses to ignore the importance of financial incentives to group productivity and also expresses worries about the future well-being of industrial society should its prescriptions fail to be implemented.

See, for example, ROSE, M. 1975 op.cit, especially parts 3 and 4, KELLY, J. 1981 & 1982 op.cit and 'Review Symposium on Work in America' in Sociology of Work and Occupations Vol.2. No.2 1975 pp.182-198.

17. See, for example, HYMAN, R. 1987 'Strategy or Structure?' in Work,

Employment and Society 1.1. pp.25-55. , and POLLERT, A. 'The Flexible Firm: Fixation or Fact? ' in Work, Employment and Society 2.3. pp.281-316.

18. KELLY 1982 op.cit. pp. 43-44. As Kelly himself points out, these comments do not apply so strongly to the socio-technical systems theorists who have conceptualised the organisation as an 'open system' engaged in a symbiotic relationship with its external environment.

19. See KELLY, J. 1981. op.cit. for details.

20. ROSE, M. 1985 op.cit. and review symposium on Work in America op.cit.

21. Review symposium on WIA op.cit.

22. *ibid.* p.190. The similarities between this view and Mayo's career-long campaign to conquer 'anomie' in industrial society should be noted.

23. The report laments, for example, the decline of good business education and experience amongst young people and advocates the widespread regeneration of an entrepreneurial culture (where, one wonders, has this been heard recently?).

*Except for those young Americans who take part in Junior Achievement, knowledge about self-employment in this country is a quite well-kept secret. Young people might benefit from learning what it means to keep books, to accumulate capital, to borrow and to invest, to buy and to sell, to take risks, to wholesale, to retail, to provide services or to manufacture and sell a good by oneself.*

WIA op.cit. p.147.

24. *ibid.* p.94.

25. A relatively recent ILO report on the international state of QWL seems as dominated by a structural-functional perspective in its 'sociology' as was the earlier WIA. Such a systemic orientation led the latter report to examine ways of making changes within the system rather than of the system. The report was thus oriented toward reforming the

current structure of work rather than making major changes in its basic character. Aspects of WIA should be compared with DELAMOTTE, Y. & TAKEZAWA, S. 1984 Quality of Working Life in International Perspective Geneva, ILO.

With regard to the mutual-benefits thesis it is worth comparing the following comments taken from WRU Interview 1988 with the WIA comment on the mutual-benefits thesis in Note.24 above.

*People who are interested in, and satisfied with, their work are going to be more effective; and if they are more effective then the organisation will be more effective; and it does also help to build commitment. And certainly the government is very keen that people should be committed to their organisations and working to make the organisation more profitable and more competitive and more of those things. So if quality of working life is good, you're more likely to get that [though] it's not an absolute guarantee.*

The term 'committed pluralism' comes from KELLY, J. 1982. op.cit. and will be outlined in more detail later in the present chapter in connection with discussion of the diversity of QWL theory and practice.

26. op.cit. 1981 & 1982.

27. *ibid.*

28. KELLY 1981 op.cit. pp.47-50.

29. *ibid.* p.49.

30. See, for example, KELLY 1982 op.cit Chapters 3 & 8. Kelly uses a table ( reproduced below) to show that in a survey of job redesign cases in which information was provided on the provision of pay rises, the elimination of labour or the type of payment system used, labour elimination occurred in 68% of cases.

*Table 4.1 Incidence of extrinsic and structural mechanisms for raising job performance in cases of job redesign (taken from KELLY 1982 op.cit. p.48.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Incidence</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
Pay rises	65%	93
Incentive pay systems	63%	45
Labour elimination	68%	121



31. With regard to the former point see KELLY 1982 op.cit. pp.218-219 and GIORDANO op.cit.

With regard to the latter point see, for example, WORK RESEARCH UNIT 1980 Future Programme 1980 & 1981 London, Department of Employment.

This document illustrates WRU's changing concerns in line with perceived changes in the needs of industry. For example, the particular issues of concern in 1974 were 'morale, absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, low quality, low output', whilst the issues of concern in the years 1980 and 1981 are 'introducing and managing changes, particularly technological innovation, [and] increasing employee involvement at work.' p.16.

Indeed, in tune with the times, WRU has become more concerned with 'the bottom line' in recent years, a fact attested to in \* WRU Interview 1988

*...the previous leaflets of the Work Research Unit did not stress in the same way the bottom line aspect. It has come up much more upfront, that is absolutely true. And we say our role... [is to] improve organisational performance through improving the quality of working life.*

32. See, for example, KUMAR, K. 1978 Prophecy and Progress Harmondsworth, Penguin.

33. See, for example, DAVIS, L.E. 1979 'The coming crisis for production management: technology and organisation.' in DAVIS & TAYLOR (eds) op.cit. pp.94-103. See also DAVIS & CHERNS 1975 op.cit.

34. See, for example, POLLERT, A. 1988 'Dismantling Flexibility' in Capital & Class No. 34 Spring. pp.42-75.

*A body of futurological writing based on a post-industrial conception of a 'radical break' in 'industrial society' and a largely technically determinist prophecy of the 'collapse of work' and 'discovery of leisure' has meshed with a dualist construction of the economy. In essence, a demise of regular wage labour, indeed of wage labour itself, is given a libertarian legitimation, because it is both*

*inevitable and progressive.*

See also TYNAN, O. 1980 'Improving the Quality of Working Life in the 1980s.' WRU Occasional Paper No.16, London. The involvement of WRU in the search for flexibility (broadly defined) as part of a QWL approach was also attested to in \* WRU Interview 1988.

35. All too often, however, as Blackler has mentioned, even when limitations have been exposed by critics outside of the mainstream QWL 'networks', QWL theorists and practitioners have carried on their business largely oblivious. In other words, the QWL 'networks', as espoused, for example, by Davis & Cherns (1975), have tended to become 'old boy networks' whose members mainly read and quote the works of other like-minded individuals. See BLACKLER 1981 op.cit. p.166.

36. Kelly makes this point. 1982 op.cit. pp.188-192.

37. FOX, A. 1974 Beyond Contract London, Faber & Faber pp.248-296 and KELLY, J. 1982 op.cit. Chapter. 8.

38. FOX op.cit. p.249.

39. op.cit. p.269.

40. KELLY. 1982 pp.171-172.

41. The radical approach is the only inherently sociological of these three broad frames of reference, going, as it does, beneath the surface phenomena to investigate the roots of issues.

42. See, for example, HERZBERG, F. 1978 'One more time: How do you motivate employees?' in M. Gruneberg (ed) Job Satisfaction London, Macmillan pp.17-32.

43. KELLY, J. 1982 p.173.

44. RICE, A.K. 1958 Productivity and Social Organisation London, Tavistock quoted in Kelly 1982 ibid.

Other socio-technical writers are more obviously pragmatic, and even committed, pluralists, and this point serves to highlight the diversity inherent within individual approaches. It needs to be remembered that particular individuals and institutions do not always occupy an unambiguous ideological position, and their work may, and often does, straddle different positions.

45. Kelly 1982 op.cit.

46. WRU was initially concerned with focussing on the content of individual jobs as the main area of attention. This concern gradually altered as the so-called 'shunt and ripple' effect became more widely known, so that now WRU analyses the content of jobs in their organisational environment. \* WRU Interview 1988. See also WRU Future Programme 1980 & 1981 op.cit p.16.

47. Kelly 1982 op.cit p.175.

48. ibid.

49. ibid.

50. ~~ibid. p.177.~~

51. For two classic works in this vein see Work in America op.cit and WILSON, N.A.B. 1973 On the Quality of working Life Dept. of Employment Manpower papers No. 7.

52. Kelly 1982 op.cit. p.178.

53. Wilson 1973 op.cit. See also WRU Future Programme op.cit. p.1.

54. Kelly 1982 p.180.

55. See, for example, DELAMOTTE & TAKEZAWA (eds) op.cit p.88.

*Dimensions of quality of working life problems are equated with the length, breadth and depth of the problems faced by working men and women. The issues that flesh out the dimensions are-*

*(a) those arising from traditional working conditions (eg,*

*working time, occupational safety);*  
*(b) those connected with fair treatment of the individual worker or group of workers (eg, equity and social justice for the individual and for minority groups);*  
*(c) those involving workers' influence on decisions in the enterprise;*  
*(d) those relating to the workers' career development; and*  
*(e) the developments which focus on working life as a lifelong process involving workers, their families and society at large.*

56. GREGORY, D. 1981 'Job redesign and trade union responses: past problems and future prospects.' in Kelly and Clegg (eds) op.cit. pp.51-62.

57. EMERY, F.E. & THORSRUD, E. 1964 Form and Content in Industrial Democracy London, Tavistock p.14

58. Delamotte and Takezawa, for example, pay some (often ill conceived) attention to what are broadly termed 'economic factors' and their influence on the development of 'labour problems' (at the heart of the need for QWL) but they reject in true pluralist fashion 'an excessive preoccupation with the capital-labour model' which they see as 'a carry over from the historical development in western europe'. Instead, 'we should always be alert to detecting the most serious infringements of social justice in each society. To be precise, each and every category of participant in the economic process has some interest in conflict with other participants. Among workers, investors, employers, public servants, farmers and consumers, economic roles are differentiated and hence interests are in conflict.' op. cit. p.59 & 48.

59. See, for example, Delamotte and Takezawa op. cit.

60. WRU, 1980 Future Programme op.cit. & # WRU Interview 1988.

61. See note 46.

62. CLEGG, C. 1981 'Modelling the practice of job design' in Kelly &

Clegg(eds.) op. cit. pp 105 - 127.

63. See for example: TYNAN, O. 1980 op. cit. p.4.

*The participative option is both a means towards improving the quality of working life and an end in itself.*

Also see: WRU 1980 op.cit. & Gregory 1981 op. cit.

64. Kelly 1982 p. 183

65. Davis & Cherns (eds.) 1975 op. cit. pp17 - 21. p. 17.

*Any expectation of truly enhancing quality of working life, calls for the development of institutions rather than programs, since the crucial missing elements are focus, credibility and competence*

See also pp28 - 31.

As was mentioned earlier these networks advocated by Davis & Cherns became rather closed to external criticism. See note 35

66. Kelly 1982 p. 184.

67. See for example: FOX, A. 1973 'Industrial Relations: a social critique of pluralist ideology' in J. Child (ed.) Man and Organisation London, Allen & Unwin (pp185 -233) pp186 - 192.

68. Fox 1974 p. 260. Fox outlines the pluralist ideology pp260 - 270.

69. *ibid.* p267.

70. See Chapter 2.

71. BROWN, R.K. 1988 'The employment relationship in sociological theory' in D. Gallie (ed.) Employment in Britain Oxford, Basil Blackwell (forthcoming).

72. See Chapter 2.

73. Fox 1973 p. 205.

74. *ibid.*

## CONCLUSION

*Sooner or later in life everyone discovers that perfect happiness is unrealizable, but there are few who pause to consider the antithesis: that perfect unhappiness is equally unattainable. The obstacles preventing the realization of both these extreme states are of the same nature: they derive from our human condition which is opposed to everything infinite. Our ever-insufficient knowledge of the future opposes it; and this is called, in the one instance, hope, and in the other, uncertainty of the following day. The certainty of death opposes it: for it places a limit on every joy, but also on every grief. The inevitable material cares oppose it: for as they poison every lasting happiness, they equally assiduously distract us from our misfortunes and make our consciousness of them intermittent and hence supportable (1).*

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It has been argued throughout this thesis that the work of mainstream QWL theorists and practitioners lacks sociological perspective. In essence, these advocates of QWL have rarely recognised the nature of the problems at the heart of their own project. As QWL is both theory and technique, this lack of sociological perspective has detrimental consequences not only for the intellectual validity but also for the practical utility of QWL initiatives.

These weaknesses have been traced and exposed by locating QWL within a broad sociological context provided by four key areas of analysis and debate in industrial sociology: QWL was discussed in relation to the role of structural contradiction in management-labour relations; the development, practical activity and ideology of modern management; the nature and meanings of work; and finally in relation to the theory and

practice of worker participation.

With regard to the first of these areas, for example, it was concluded that, for a number of reasons, those promoting QWL initiatives 'overlook' the role of structural contradiction in management-labour relations. This was illustrated by the importance invested in the 'mutual benefits' thesis by QWL theorists and practitioners. The central assumption inherent in this thesis is that the interests of workers and employers can somehow be reconciled, thereby providing the foundation for a very much greater degree of unity of purpose within organisations. However, this notion is propounded by QWL theorists and practitioners without any consideration of the wider contexts within which this reconciliation is to be brought about. No attention is paid to the power disparity existing between workers and employers, for example, nor to the implicitly conflictual nature of the employment relationship.

By overlooking the role of structural contradiction in relations between management and labour in industrial capitalist societies, QWL theorists have, in effect, failed to locate an issue of vital importance to their own chosen area of 'expertise'.

The significant absence of the notion of structural contradiction within QWL theory also partly helps to explain the inadequate conceptualisation and treatment of managers and management by QWL theorists. In QWL theory, managers are accorded a pivotal role, being conceived of, in essence, as having almost unlimited power to alter an existing division of labour, other factors, such as financial and market constraints, notwithstanding. Indeed, the degree of power and status attributed to management by QWL theorists is comparable to the omnipotence vested in the 'magic brotherhood' by some of those in the labour process 'camp'.

However, as has been indicated, management is not an unproblematic, homogeneous and monolithic social entity able everywhere, and at all times to achieve the objectives of its supposedly collective will. Management is not a single occupational role, but rather a range of separate specialisms which deal with different aspects of the managerial function. Such differentiation has led to a distinction between line and specialist managerial roles, for example, and also to problems of control within the managerial group itself. As Burns has written

*Members of a business concern are at one and the same time co-operators in a common enterprise and rivals for the material and intangible rewards of successful competition with each other. The hierarchical order of rank and power, realised in the organisational chart, which prevails in all organisations, is both a control system and career ladder (2).*

Consequently, the internal coherence of management cannot be assumed *a priori*.

Despite the prominence of a pluralist frame of reference amongst advocates of QWL, there is no acknowledgement in QWL theory of the essential plurality of management as a group, or indeed, of the pervasive plurality of organisational life as a whole. The power and status invested in management by QWL theorists is therefore not only unwarranted, for the reasons outlined above, but also serves to highlight the political and ideological significance of the QWL project. For once it is realised that there can be not only divergent interests in organisations, but that these can also, in reality, be accommodated in different ways, the contradiction between managerial prerogative and managerial accountability becomes irreconcilable. Instead of being 'scrupulously neutral' (3) to both parties in industry, as its advocates have claimed it should, QWL theory and



practice in effect helps to bolster managerial prerogative and maintain the fiction of managerial expertise.

Despite its obvious centrality to the QWL project, 'work' was found to be another area inadequately conceptualised and treated by QWL theorists. In comparison to the sociological analysis of work offered in Chapter 2, it was argued that the views of work held by QWL theorists and practitioners were both theoretically and empirically weak. Far too often, QWL had been discussed by its advocates without providing any theoretical conception of the nature of work in our type of society, or of the interests that determine the organisation and design of work, or of the forces in society at large which encourage the development of suitable and realistic expectations.

It was argued that, lacking as they do any 'sociological imagination', the analyses offered by QWL theorists failed at the task of comprehending what are, in essence, basic societal problems. One consequence of the dominance of such partial analyses of the problems of work inherent in QWL theory and practice, has been the neglect of matters of power. Throughout the present thesis, it has been stressed that power relations are central to an understanding of work in our society; that the existing design of work organisations rests on a given distribution of power in society and that power superiority has lain, and indeed still lies, with those whose interests or objectives led them to impose a wholly instrumental criterion. Paradoxically, the neglect of power relations inherent in psychologically based QWL theory and practice allows it to function as a support for already existing power distributions in industry. It was indicated, for example, that QWL theory and practice can be seen to act as a vehicle for the maintenance or improvement of management control of an 'existing

situation' within the enterprise.

This notion also came across very strongly when discussion shifted to the subject of worker participation and QWL. Here, again, it was stressed that although worker participation is an issue concerned essentially with the distribution and exercise of power in all its manifestations, between employers and managers of organisations, on the one hand, and those employed by them, on the other, discussions of participation by QWL theorists have in fact paid little attention to the issue of power.

This pretermission by QWL theorists of the power disparity existing between management and labour is reflected in the benefits accruing to each grouping from the introduction of QWL participatory initiatives. Schemes such as those analysed in Chapter 3, seem to offer workers the opportunity for only partial participation in organisational decision-making, mainly at the socio-technical level of the enterprise (worker director schemes, located at the political level, being the exception), or were in effect pseudo-participatory. For management, the introduction of such schemes offered an opportunity for the maintenance or improvement of their control of the 'existing situation' within the enterprise. Indeed, it was argued that participatory schemes were likely to be considered by management only when there were threats to managerial authority and paradoxically in order to maintain that authority. In other words the introduction of QWL participatory initiatives by management could be seen as an attempt to deal with the contradiction at the heart of the managerial problem, namely that between 'the need to exercise control and the need to achieve commitment'.

Although participation was found to be a concept frequently propounded by QWL theorists, the conceptions of participation embodied in QWL initiatives

contained both ideological and political implications, rather than being 'scrupulously neutral'.

These schemes functioned ideologically in that they effectively attempted to conceal features of particular conflicts and contradictions, and denied the reality of unpredictability, for example by 'overlooking' the implicitly conflictual nature of the employment relationship and the impossibility of reconciling the interests of workers and employers without destroying the present form of the economy. They also practised a 'politics of depoliticisation' in that they sought to bring workers under control of a consensus which would make politics marginal and unimportant, and which, in essence, sought the eradication of contestability, for example, through the use of the discourse of individual psychological 'needs', and the dissemination of the 'mutual benefits' thesis.

Overall, having located QWL theory and practice within a broad sociological context in the first three chapters of the thesis, it was argued that QWL theorists and practitioners have rarely recognised the nature of the ~~problems at the heart of their own project, neither have they traced~~ thoroughly the genealogies of their own ideas and concepts. In essence, QWL theory and practice is fundamentally flawed because it lacks sociological perspective.

It was noted in Chapter 4, however, that attention needed to be paid to the diversity of theories and practical initiatives that are subsumed under the blanket term 'QWL', in order that the conventional picture of unity and coherence presented by both mainstream advocates of QWL and their radical critics could be qualified. At the same time an ideal-typical 'general perspective' of QWL could also be constructed. This perspective would be used to designate a set of assumptions and objectives, as well as

significant absences, which together constitute the ideological-theoretical terrain occupied by several QWL theories and practical initiatives. In effect, an attempt was made to map out and criticise both the 'homogeneity' and 'diversity' of QWL theory and practice.

As a result of this attempt, it was concluded, firstly, that whether analysed in terms of its 'diversity' or 'homogeneity', QWL theory and practice was deficient because it lacked sociological perspective, and, secondly, that both sociological and historical perspective were required if, for example, the positive claims made by QWL theorists and practitioners for QWL initiatives were to be more judiciously assessed and the genealogies, ideological assumptions, and inherent limitations of QWL theory and practice were to be traced and exposed.

Having briefly summarised the principal concerns of the thesis and offered some conclusions in the process, it is now proposed to advance some final tentative conclusions on the nature of the QWL project.

~~The development of QWL theory and practice can be seen to form part of~~ the general process running through, and specific to, the twentieth century whereby the reasons why workers deviate from norms of productivity have come to be posed in psychological and psychiatric terms. Common to this ongoing process, is an attempt to reconcile the 'needs' of the individual worker, whether for 'belongingness', as in the case of Mayoite Human Relations, or for 'satisfying' work, as in the case of QWL, with the 'needs' of industry.

The discourse of individual psychological needs utilised by QWL perceives the essentially political nature of industrial conflict in what are still basically pathological terms. Harmony is seen as both the most

fundamentally 'natural', and certainly the most desirable, state of affairs for labour-management relations. Consequently, the pervasive instability and plurality of organisational life, and indeed of life in general, is neglected.

However, there is no conspiracy at work to intentionally 'overlook' or wilfully 'ignore' this unpredictability, rather this omission is structured into the discourse utilised. It is, in effect, an essential component of the discourse. For within this discourse there are literally some things that cannot be said or thought, and therefore certain human possibilities are closed off.

Once this is realised, it can then be appreciated that QWL theory and practice does not set out to provide explicit support for managerial authority in industry. Rather, the inherent limitations of its discourse ensure that, through ruling out alternative ways of thinking and doing, QWL theory and practice helps preserve a particular distribution of power in industry. In effect, QWL helps to maintain or improve management control of the 'existing situation' within the enterprise. As such, QWL can be seen to function ideologically, using MacIntyre's definition of that contested term, and to implicitly endorse a 'politics of depoliticisation'.

Indeed, it can be argued that, by virtue of the discourses utilised, both QWL and British Management Thought share some significant underlying concerns and similar drawbacks.

Management ideology, and, indeed, many individual practising managers, may deny the inescapability of uncertainty and unpredictability because its acceptance would undermine the basis of management authority in industry. At the same time, the reality of this instability also helps to explain why the construction of management ideology continues to take place.

Similarly, the neglect of discontinuity, instability and uncertainty inherent within the discourse utilised by QWL ensures the ultimate failure of the QWL project, and , again, simultaneously provides an explanation as to why it will continue to be utilised. As such, both discourses have a Sisyphean quality.

To reiterate: the inherent limitations of the discourse utilised by QWL precludes deployment of the 'Sociological Imagination'. However, without the deployment of such a perspective, attempts to comprehend the nature of the problems which, it has been argued throughout this thesis, lie at the heart of the QWL project, are doomed to failure.

NOTES

1. LEVI, PRIMO. If This is a Man London, Sphere Books (Translated from the Italian *Se Questo e un Uomo* by S. Woolf).
2. BURNS, T. 1969 'On the Plurality of Social Systems' in T. Burns (ed.) Industrial Man, Harmondsworth, Penguin (pp. 232-249) p.232.
3. See, for example, CHERNS, A. & DAVIS, L. 1975 'Assessment of the State of the Art' in L. Davis & A. Cherno (eds.) The Quality of Working Life New York, Free Press (pp. 12-54.) p.18.

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