

Table of Contents

Intensities of Labour: from Amphetamine to Cocaine 1

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By John Barker

In the '60s 'labour saving' technology was used to sell the promise of infinite leisure. After thirty years of speed ups and lay offs, RSI and dotcom sweatshops, the dream is looking distinctly tarnished. John Barker draws on his personal and theoretical capital to explore the contradictions and possibilities of a hi-tech, low-wage world

1 THE MIRACLE OF SPEED

At the end of the 1960s young and cocky Situationists like myself talked of the Japanese economic miracle – because then it was *the Japanese* miracle – as being fuelled by amphetamine. The evidence was anecdotal, but it was well known that the cheaply-made drug was a major business for the Yakuza. This particular miracle was manufacturing-based; electronics and autos figured prominently. In modern parlance, it was Fordist, that is, large-scale manufacturing dependent on the 'mass-worker'. Amphetamine, known to us then as an all-night dancing drug, was perfect for long hours of work while staying alert. As we saw it, the miracle depended on disposable workers subject to early burn out. A modern version of Marx's picture of capital and labour as the Vampire and its victims.

Since then, in the richest parts of the world, the decline in the relative size of the manufacturing sector is common knowledge. At the same time the shift to a services-based economy has involved what Maurizio Lazzarato has called an anthropo-sociological shift in the organisation of labour, prompting the concept of 'immaterial' labour. In addition, the generic term post-Fordist has come to be used as an umbrella description of these changes. They are real enough, but to see them as forming a discontinuity with what went before is too slick in manipulating theoretical categories, and leapfrogging the realities of global work.

[IMAGE]

The most common global economic model now is the super-exploitation of pre-Fordist sweatshops and a peasantry pressured from all sides. Fordism, where it does exist, is far from played out, though more often today it lacks the associated Keynesian virtue of the producing labour being able to buy what it produces, and so sustain 'effective demand'. In the rich world too, sites of 'primitive accumulation' co-exist with Fordist and post-Fordist labour. As a new form of the organisation of labour, as Lazzarato recognises at an abstract level, post-Fordism itself began in the manufacturing sector. As more subdued Situationists in the '70s we talked of the model of team systems in Swedish car plants as self-exploitation. Since then in the rich world the global rhythm of just-in-time production dependent on computerisation, has created new forms of rational exploitation. At the same time the service sector has been subjected to the deskilling and time-and-motion disciplines of industrial Taylorism. The language of factory discipline has been incorporated even into public services like education and health which are full of 'line managers', while a more Stalinist-type of Taylorism has led to the constant application of goals and targets to be reached.

What remains the common factor globally, is capital's compulsion to accumulate. For individual capitals one has only to read the financial pages of most newspapers to see that the health, or otherwise, of companies is seen through this lens. Since the start of the general capitalist offensive in the mid '70s, the pressure has been on wages, intensity of labour and the length of the working day, while it has made its own compulsion into a natural state of affairs. Much of this pressure is disguised by the mechanisms of the equalisation of rates of profit to make an average rate, whereby surplus value produced by labour-intensive sectors of production are realised by other 'capital-intensive' ones.

But these pressures, despite enormous differences in real wages, are also global, with a universal push for greater intensity of labour, though taking very different forms.

For example, take the privileged sector of immaterial labour as defined by Lazzarato: 'audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities, etc ... activities which tend to define and fix cultural artistic norms, fashions, tastes, consumer standards and, more strategically, public opinion.' Descriptions of this work in the 'immaterial labour' canon, however, do not look at the intensities of labour involved. The widespread use of cocaine in this sector is not accidental. Its availability in the UK obviously has to do with a range of factors – the nature of some Latin American economies and their staggering inequalities, sophisticated criminal organisation, the increasing rise in the worldwide transportation of material goods and so on – but it is also because the demand is there. It has been the perfect drug for this relatively privileged sector; not creative in any real sense, but perfect for generating an indiscriminate intensity of enthusiasm for the projects provided in this sector, and for believing in the great importance of what one is doing at any given time.

2 PRE-DIGITAL INTENSITIES

Just out of prison in the early 1990s and in urgent need of finding a way back into the world and some legitimate income, preferably PAYE, I was lucky to get a job in the small world of overnight news clippings provision with no CV required. At that time the business was pre-digital, and there is still a niche market for Chief Executives and the like who want their clippings neatly cut and pasted on to headed paper, or hard copy photocopies at least. The photocopy machines were the crucial items of equipment (as they are for NHS line managers churning out new targets and organisational charts), and, apart from a hard-working fax machine, they were the only 'fixed' capital in the place. Otherwise it was more than just pre-digital. The building in Tooley Street – old, old London – was mass-produced gothic. The two floors occupied by the agency were covered in stained beige carpeting that turned up at the edges to show the nibbled grey foam underneath. The system demanded not just the photocopy machines, but wall-to-wall pigeon holes. Pigeon holes! Even then they were antique.

Each pigeon hole belonged to individual or collective clients, the odd one that was interesting, but mostly corporate bastards and financial PR bastards with their own client list. Most cuttings would go to more than one pigeonhole, ten or more were possible. Hence the importance of the photocopier. Anywhere between two and four in the morning there could be sharp confrontations about access rights to the two, or sometimes three, machines on the go. And then it might be luck if the bastard you'd got hold of didn't jam somewhere down the line. Sometimes it would clap out altogether and we'd be down to two or just one machine for the night. Things would then get ultra-manic. Other times with luck or skill, down on your knees, heart palpitating, you'd sort it yourself, easing the mashed up A4 out of a roller or gripper without leaving any paper scraps behind.

[IMAGE]

The only guides to help with this extra job were inadequate diagrams stamped somewhere on the copiers' surfaces. They may well have been stamped on by someone like Zhang Guo Hua, a Chinese worker who had entered the UK illegally and died after doing a 24-hour shift doing a similar stamping job. We instead, the Readers, were mostly odd balls, ex-art students, and long term-ex students still paying off debts, and me, getting a foothold back in the 'real world': eclectic, déclassé 'middle class'. The job involved reading a morning paper, or two or three, first editions arriving between 10.30pm and 11pm, and cutting out any article of any interest to any client, and noting the other clients who would be interested in the same piece: the client/subject list ran to many pages. You might say get *The Independent*, *The Mail*, and *The Star*. Or if it was the *Financial Times*, it might just be *The Express* in

addition. Or just *The Mirror*. Whatever, the job required sticking the correct tab, date plus name of paper, on each cutting, and then dividing them into two piles. Some were to be mounted on various types of A4 as originals for big cheese clients with that kind of fetish; the others to be photocopied on re-usable A4 in order that shadow did not appear.

In addition to us oddball 'middle class', there were some oddball 'proletarians', pals of one of two bosses, who did clipping mounting at this stage of the procedure, so that as a reader, one could get to the photocopier with both mounted and unmounted clippings. After that first bout at the machines things got really crazy. You'd read, photocopied, distributed the mass of stuff into umpteen pigeon-holes and then geared up for another fight for photocopier access. From reading plus first stage filtering, the new 'collectively' shared out responsibility was to prepare the packages for the clients. Various bastards at Barclays Bank or Price Waterhouse would like their clippings filtered into sections of interest so that at 6.30 a.m. they were ready for anything; at worst a routine grilling if the news was bad.

Our targets, deadlines, were never met in a wholly relaxed manner. Around 5.30 a.m. the drivers, cabbies and independents, impatient for the packages they were to deliver, were hovering. Other nights as the dawn appeared over the river Thames things got seriously manic. Lou the Taxi driver would be on my earhole to forget everything else and finish the Food and Drink Federation Package first so that he could get away. Other times we'd be dragged into other packages, a Financial PR company wanting photocopy only, but mounted on its headed paper. All this so that some corporate bastard didn't have to read the paper himself. All this with the additional pressure that a 'miss' might mean the end of a contract. A spectacular hit on the other hand, a corporate name mention in a murder mystery story say, would get at most a 'good spot' mention. There were several nights after a bad-sleep day, random car alarms wanting to have their say, I would take a lick of amphetamine powder myself.

3 MORE PRODUCTIVITY, MORE HARD WORK

This was underpaid intensity of labour, which Marx describes plainly enough as 'expenditure of labour in a given time' in *Capital*. (Volume I, Chapters 17 and 21). Increased intensity, and the length of the working day, are contrasted what he calls the 'productiveness' of labour as means of increasing the production of similar units by each worker. It is a contrast because increases caused by the 'productiveness' of labour through the use of improved machinery which has involved a fixed capital outlay, and which he calls 'productive forces', do not increase the value or surplus value of the aggregate units produced, whereas increases in intensity and length of the working day do. This contrast becomes important in Volume III, Chapter 14 in which Marx outlines countervailing phenomena to what he calls The Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall – a tendency caused precisely by the increased weight placed on 'productiveness' in the production mix.

Such distinctions ought to be helpful in deconstructing the notion of 'productivity'. In the 1960s and '70s explicitly named productivity deals were prevalent, and the notion of productivity continues to lurk in nearly all capital-labour negotiations to the degree that there are still such negotiations. There is, however, a problem with this Marxist deconstruction, in that ambiguity hangs over the relationship between intensity and productiveness as Marx describes it. He talks of the relative number of spindles as against the number of people employed in an international comparison: at one end France with one person per 14 spindles, and Britain with one per 78. But this does not tell us about the nature of the spindles. Are the British ones so technically superior that minding 78 does not involve a greater 'expenditure of labour in a given time' than minding 12? More specifically, does technically superior necessarily mean less work per machine? The text here (Volume I, Chapter 22) is not so helpful either: 'In proportion as capitalist production is developed in a country, in the same proportion do the national intensity and productivity there rise above the international labour.'

The notion of the intensity of labour, however, as well as length of the working day, is a valid one absolutely relevant to the present day capitalist offensive with its compulsion to accumulate and the associated aim of social control. Often, and in the Fordist model openly, there have been increases in what might be called 'pure' intensity of labour. What they called speed-up. For a long period this was the area of labour-capital conflict in the car industry. As a measure of intensity, it was said that to work 'on the line' at Ford itself, 15 years was the maximum possible. What has been hidden is the extent to which the development of new types of machinery to increase the productiveness of labour has been dedicated to demanding a greater intensity of labour from those operating it rather than, as we might say, the *machine taking the strain*. A clear example is in the modern world of the logistics of global just-in-time production. Dockers are not just seeing the return of casual labour but, as Brian Ashton has pointed out, 'are subjected to work speeds that are set by automated guided vehicles (AGV's), automated stackers and semi automated cranes.'

[IMAGE]

In the 1960s and '70s there was a recognition (both intellectually and in practice) that, despite the illusions on offer of more and more leisure time for the worker and what was he/she going to do with it, machinery developed under capitalism never had taking the strain as its objective. In the early 1960s in powerful writing for the first issues of *Quaderni Rossi* (at the very beginning of the Italian autonomist movement), Raniero Panzieri used Marx's class analysis to override the notion of 'productive forces' being somehow neutral, let alone reaching the point of making capitalist relations of production untenable. Instead he argued, 'the relations of production are within the productive forces'; that technical development 'presents itself as a development of capitalism ... as an exhibition of the capitalist's authority ... and with new possibilities for the consolidation of its power.'

'Fordism', if looked at as productive processes, was and is shot through with 'Taylorism', with the time and motion study as its analytical tool. Harry Braverman in *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, quite rightly saw both as being aimed at the de-skilling of labour and a consequent reduction of its economic and political power. In the car industry of the 1970s this was aimed at the de-skilling of draughtsmen and factory engineers as punch hole NCs (Numerical Computers which pre-set lathes and milling machines) were introduced on the factory floor. At the same time they increased surveillance and control of jobs done on the line. This had a double impact on worker organisation. It radicalised draughtsmen and engineers in the newly formed TASS trade union. The most radical inside that union formed most famously the alternative plan for Lucas Areospace in which machinery for arms production could be re-jigged into making socially useful products, in particular for the disabled. In the case of Ford itself, 'on the line' workers created an international organisation autonomous from the official trade union set-up. The Ford Workers Combine was capable of co-ordinating solidarity actions internationally at shop steward level. Its imaginative tactics had a precision formed from a clear understanding of the productive process and changes in it.

More generally at this time increases in intensity of labour were met with go-slows, or fights over tea-breaks. These latter were subject to much soggy bourgeois satire: tea breaks, Ho Ho Ho. More often this conflict was fought out in the arena of wages. This tended to disappoint various leftists talking about 'economism' in true Leninist fashion, but the level of sophisticated militancy was enough to provoke a systematic targeting of the pound sterling, as well as the Italian lira, by the new wave ideological US Treasury team of the Ford Administration lead by William Simon. They made explicit speeches to 'the market' to the effect that the lira and the pound were automatically transformed into Mickey Mouse currencies by the effects of labour militancy. In the new era of 'floating' exchange rates brought into being by the Nixon's 1971 decision to break the link between the US dollar and gold (spelling the end of the Bretton Woods consensus), currencies could be targeted in this manner by words in the right ears from the representatives of a dollar massively strengthened

by US control of OPEC's new wealth in the form of the petrodollar. This offensive scared the life out of the Trade Union leadership in both countries. Nevertheless, until the capitalist offensive that had been kicked off in this manner was augmented by a new era of de-skilling, and anti-union legislation, resistance to increases in intensity of labour continued.

4 NEW DRUDGERY

Machinery, the very word has an old-fashioned ring to it, too heavy for economies that are 'light' and 'flexible'. In the mid 1990s when I first dipped my toe into what might loosely be called the digital economy, 'kit' was the favoured word. This dipping the toe involved a part-time removals business (me and my nephew in a clapped-out Luton van) specialising in creative digital office moves – into Soho or out, then into Clerkenwell or out – and some months back in the news clippings business, but this time working the first months of an online service. This required a different intensity of labour to the hard-copy clippings job. The reading of the papers remained the same, as was the size of the reading list, the number of papers per person rather higher, but there was none of that battling with the photocopier or the walks around the pigeon-holes with armfuls of A4. Instead, a template existed on screen where, with the Tab key, you could set up the date and name of the newspaper; then a box for the headline of selected articles; then another box in which to give a one or two sentence summary of what it said; and finally a box in which to key in the codes for all the clients who might, or should, be interested in the relevant article.

Whether any of this work could be said to have created surplus value is dubious, it was by and large an aid to financial PR which creams off a margin of surplus value it has not itself created. Spin they call it these days. The work, however, was profitable, and the company grew even before I left. As an individual I found its intensity less onerous, though night-shift work is bad for your health whatever the job, the evidence is legion. What it shared with the hard-copy business was its dependence on loyalty to fellow workers. Team loyalty, or in our case, shift loyalty was factored into the accounts consciously or not, by the employers. This is hardly special, they say it is how armies work, how even the mass suicides of World War I continued month after month. Don't let down your mates. In the hard-copy job it was absurd, people tottering into work with the flu and giving it to the rest of us simply because they knew that the night's mania would be that much the greater without them. A related similarity was knowing that too many 'misses' would lose contracts, and that lost contracts would mean job losses.

With the online work there were, however, more ways of avoiding the intensity of labour which the process (writing two line summaries of relevant articles) seemed to demand. Very soon I had developed a set of bland summary templates. Underpaid and intensive as it was, though, it bore no relation to the conditions of work in data-processing shitwork in a Jamaican Export Processing Zone. RSI is a reality, ask anyone who has ever suffered, or see how much corporate money has gone into legally proving that it does not exist. Export Processing Zones almost by definition, rule out health and safety considerations or regulations.

[IMAGE]

5 THE LONG DAY CLOSSES IN

More recently it is another of Marx's 'countervailing' phenomena, the length of the working day, that has attracted most attention. It has come from four directions: social-psychological concerns about 'work giving meaning to people's lives'; heroic accounts of how very rich people such as those working for the McKinsey consulting firm or investment banks work very long hours; grasping the material realities of new forms of exploitation – perverted forms like being on call all the time but being paid only for the hours that you work, which is the cruelest manifestation of just-in-time; and

Trade Unions now addressing the matter of overtime. Small attention has also been given to cases like Zhang Guo Hua in Cleveland, UK, mentioned above, and in China itself of He Chun-Mei, a 30-year-old woman, both of whom died after working 24-hour shifts. Such realities can provoke only grim mirth at slobbering accounts of Investment Bankers working 15 hour days in the Business and now the Feature pages of newspapers. Working 15 hours a day to make sure they get their cut of the 24-hour days of super-exploitation.

In the UK this emphasis on the length of the working day is hardly surprising given the long-drawn out resistance to the European Union's 48-hour working directive from the New Labour government and its supposedly 'Old Labour' Chancellor. Figures from Prof Carey Cooper Of Lancaster University showed that:

- the UK has the longest working hours in the Western world after the USA, having now surpassed those of Japan.
- in the last seven years, coinciding with the reign of New Labour, there has been a significant rise in employees working in excess of 48 hours; from 10 in the late 1990s to 26% in 2005.
- since 1992 there has been a leap of 50% in the number of women expected to do a 48 hour week.
- estimates in the 2000-2 period suggest that those doing a 60-hour week has increased by one third to approximately 17% of the total workforce.

Professor Cooper's inquiry determined that if a person worked consistently long hours it would damage their psychological and physical health. Once again, we are talking 'burn-out', and it is here that length of the working day and the intensity of labour (those sure-fire ways of extracting more surplus-value), are likely to have the same effect. Taken in combination, as in the cases of Hu Chen-Mei and Zhang Guo Hua, they are likely to be fatal.

[IMAGE]

That they may be combined at all reflects the defeats of the labour movement that, for the moment, we are having to live with. In 1979, 'the winter of discontent' – as some wisepen had it – I was working as a dustman in South Wales. Our crew had the Swansea areas of Townhill and Mayhill. We had a tough schedule with bins that were always either up or down stairs, and had to be returned when emptied. But the routes, the tasks were fixed, and it was *job and finish*. It was like going to the gym, we worked at speed and with luck I'd be home and washed by midday. Such a life for workers was obviously intolerable for organised capital. If such a person could work at such speed for 5-6 hours, why not make it eight. Two hours of hanging around would have been intolerable enough, the humiliation and boredom so well described in Ed Dorn's novel *By The Sound*, but there was to be none of that. More streets per crew with a small, and conditional pay rise was the result.

If conflict over intensity of labour was often partly transferred into negotiations over wages, this has also been true of the length of the working day, of overtime and how it is paid. If it is unpaid it is a form of increased surplus value as theft. If it is paid at the normal hourly rate, it indicates the relative powerlessness of labour organisation, if it is at time-and-a-quarter or double time, the relative strength. But Unions are now listening to cases of forced overtime even where proper payment has been made. The advantage to a whole range of capitals is obvious. Even if there is a pay incentive, it will be cheaper than hiring new workers or even taking on agency temps. Thus while dockers are 'sped-up' by the machinery, truck drivers are forced to work beyond the legal limits.

6 BURN OUT

In Chapter 10 of a remarkably pragmatic account of the British Economy, Malcolm Sawyer offers an account of intensity of labour that sounds like Marx describing the mechanics of piece-work: 'the flow of work to workers has become steadily more efficient.' We may balk at the neutrality of 'efficiency' in this context, but he goes beyond Marx, however, in nailing down this intensity. 'The immediate factors that have generated harder work are changes in technology and work organisation augmented by information technology.' Intensity is nailed down as working harder, and that this has been increased by developments in the forces of production/ productiveness of labour defined by Marx as somehow separate phenomena. Sawyer cannot nail it down quantitatively, but in some 'extreme' circumstances it has stood out. Salvati describing 'rationalisation without investment' in 1960s Italy reckoned that productivity in the 1964-9 period rose at a very fast rate, as fast as in the 1950s, and yet the rate of increase in industrial investment was zero. And if Sawyer cannot make such a measurement he is clear about its impact: 'Work intensification makes a contribution to growing productivity in the UK economy, although its quantitative influence cannot be measured.' It cannot be measured but he goes on to say but 'there are natural and social limits to the extent that work can be intensified, so it is doubtful whether further intensification is beneficial for long-term economic growth. Moreover, there is evidence of links between work overload and ill health, especially work-related stress, that suggests there are substantial hidden costs even in the short-run.'

Costs to who? Sawyer, like Professor Cooper, is assuming at least some objective interest in worker well-being, but there is no evidence that British business takes much interest in this type of long-term. 'The long-term' on the cheap has been more to its taste. Historically its strategy has been to suck out whatever it has had going for it right down to the last two pence, then whinge. Now it has a government which portrays health and safety regulations as 'red tape' as if they were the whim of pedantic bureaucrats, jobsworths or fanatics. At the same time 'burn-out', the very notion of it, our picture of the speed-fed Japanese worker forty years ago, has been expropriated by the language of genius and management for itself.

It is both far more common and brutal than that. 'Burn-out' is indeed the modern version of Marx's picture of capital as vampire. In a recent report by the V.V. Giri Institute in India on call centres in that country, they talk of graduates as cyber-coolies and note the level of burn out due to the intensity of labour. The Institute has its own concern about the work as de-skilling, but has no difficulty in measuring this intensity: it is the quota of emails and calls to be dealt with in a given time. Sawyer cannot quantify intensity, but we can be sure that those dedicated long-hour McKinsey folk have the templates for doing it. With its slogan that everything can be measured, and what is measured can be managed (Taylorism intact in the post-Fordist world), it could hardly be otherwise. At the same time as the Institute's report, McKinsey did one of its own which warned that, as wages rose in India and the supply of 'skilled' workers tightened, its advantages, English language use for one, relative to China and Eastern Europe would erode.

This threat, and its possible realisation, is a commonplace of globalisation (the globalisation of existing power structures and relations of production), a threat which, by sleight-of-hand, co-exists, in its own rhetoric, with how everyone will benefit from trade liberalisation, privatisation and selective deregulation in the long-run. In the case of Indian call-centres we can see that it is a threat used globally. The McKinsey study highlights the matter of wages which, as described by Marx, and understood by unionised labour, cannot be abstracted from intensity of labour struggles. In the world Marx describes both are also sites of national class struggles, so that he can talk of socially determined benchmarks of intensity and wages in different countries. Despite the dynamics of globalisation of production, these benchmarks, what with the history of colonialism and its impact, remain very different in different parts of the world. In some places there is a refusal of intensity despite wage promises, but mostly it is an involuntary situation.

[IMAGE]

It is then both unreal and unjust to compare global intensities of labour when there are such differences in wage levels. But this not-comparing doesn't preclude a clear-eyed look at some features which are common to both intensity and wage conflicts. In the news clippings business, loyalty to fellow workers was factored in, along with a culture of frenzy that became normal. This was partly due to the time interval between first editions of the newspapers and the dawn delivery time for the packages, but more to the number of workers per shift. The small number, and thus the intensity, was justified by the existence of competition, competitive pricing and the rest.

These same pressures are – despite the huge range of wage difference – becoming globally common. Pricing oneself out of a job is a threat made even to the lowest-paid, and this 'pricing' factors in the level of intensity. It takes different forms and comes to the same thing, speed-up, downsizing, it all comes down to working harder in a given time. At the same time the most primitive imaginable Taylorism has been given a new lease of life by technologies of surveillance. Call Centres have gained some notoriety for the policing of toilet breaks, the random listening in to check performance and so on, but it goes far wider than that. Modern technologies allow capital to check where each worker is at any given time and, in many cases, what he/she has been doing at any given moment.

7 FIT IN OR STAND UP FOR YOURSELF

Milan Kundera has described, how post the 1968 invasion, many Czech dissidents managed to get certain 'manual jobs', and found them liberating. You could stay out of trouble without compromising your integrity, and the work by its very repetition without the intensity, allowed a freedom to think. Such jobs, I suspect, are thin on the ground these days, especially in the modern Czech Republic, still less in Slovakia which is taking on a China-like bogeyman image for Western workers and perhaps even Indian ones too. There is no freedom to think in a call centre.

Instead we get management gurus talking of how 'passionate employees get better results' as quoted by Madeleine Bunting in *Willing Slaves*. Passionate?! As young English Situationists we found stories of Company mass prayers or mass exhortations, mainly Japanese, both funny and scary, and imagined dissident workers taking the piss. Now such things are just plain scary and have a strong whiff of fundamentalism. There is no room for dissidents at Asda or Orange, Bunting tells us. Their managements and others like them aim to use the concepts of brand loyalty and teamwork to give meaning to peoples' lives, she says. Various opinion polls like that from the Penna Consultancy, purport to show the general success of such strategies: that there is greater 'loyalty, creativity and productivity' from employees who find 'meaning' in their work. Meaning?! All this, while it is also a commonplace that there are no jobs for life, there being no reciprocal loyalty.

This characteristic at least is equally true of the privileged sector of immaterial labour described by Lazzarato. Privileged it is, but often working on short-term contracts. It is the privileged version of the outrageous super-exploitation of workers permanently on call but paid only for the hours worked. At the BBC, six-month contracts are common; at *The Guardian's* small film documentary offshoot, two months, though this is better at least than month-by-month contracts being enforced by Group4 Securicor in South Africa. For people with special talents in this privileged sector and with very high earning-power, such a system is not stressful, but further down the production chain of even such privileged labour, the next job is not guaranteed.

Instead, on each job the mantra that 'passionate employees get the best results' is the norm even when this is not true. It is not enough to produce a graphic in which a globe spins round to show Bob Geldof's face on one side and a map of Africa on the other competently and without fuss. No, you are required also to believe that it is of the greatest importance. There is an intensity of labour in this

sector that requires of you that you believe it, and show that you believe it. And in this small world word gets around. You have to 'fit in' as McKinsey says of its people: you can be as clever as clever can be, work those heroic long hours, but you've also got to fit in.

In the privileged sector of commodified cultural production, cocaine has proved to be the ideal drug in that it produces an intensity of importance, of 'passion' about whatever is in front of it, and the long hours of concentration needed to make something of it, and a likely disregard of the length of the working day and how it may continue into your officially not-working time. It may be losing its exclusive cachet as news comes in of Derbyshire commuters snorting the stuff, but it does have these qualities. Amphetamine, with its tendency to endless digression would be quite unsuitable for such work, whereas its cheapness in comparison to cocaine (of the order of 1:12), and its chemical qualities make it ideal for long hours of low-paid repetitive factory work.

The disparities in wages and incomes, and the consumption possibilities they afford (drugs and otherwise), make proclamations of the unity of labour resistance to the dictates of capital facile. This does not mean that international solidarities are not, nor can not, be forged. At the same time in many parts of the Western world unity is undermined by increasing inequality, and this rise in inequality is in large part due to the weakening of trade unions. This weakening has been caused not just by rapid technological change and globalisation, but by persistent government legislation to this end. Its impact was clearly seen in the UK in last year's Gate Gourmet strike. Everyone working for a wage should be in a Trade Union. Easy to say, and made very difficult in practice, but there is a greater chance of success if certain cultural/ideological battles are fought with vigour.

[IMAGE]

At its most general the claims of neo-liberalism and governments ideologically committed to it, to be modern or modernising (something especially important in the UK where each move New Labour makes to the most archaic view of the world is presented as modernising) has to be challenged on that ground. Its presentation of trade unions as dinosaurs is laughable. Compare the Respect festivals (not the Galloway/SWP party) initiated by the unions, which did reflect modern multiracial London, with New Labour's Dome and its risible Cool Britannia. For the more privileged sectors of immaterial labour such a challenge demands the *re-creation of proletarian values, most of all that, whatever else, you go to work for the wage, and never mind the flim-flam*. Despite a failure to unionise, this at least was a shared point-of-view of news clippings workers, and we forced the introduction of a new shift system that greatly reduced the length of the working month.

More recently an example has been given by scriptwriters working for Fox TV on reality TV shows in the USA. It may be hard to have much sympathy for the writers on reality TV shows (or with workers for Group4 Securicor) but that is beside the point. We don't know if cocaine was part of their diet, but it is said they were being forced to skip meals, submit fake time cards and work more than 80 hours a week. Now with the backing of the Writers Guild they are taking legal action as are other writers against other TV companies. Zachary Isenberg, one of the plaintiffs in the Fox lawsuit complied with much of this because he was keen to get on in television. But, he said: 'I spend almost my entire waking time at work. I enjoy my job and want to keep doing it, but I also know there comes a certain point where you have to stand up for yourself.'