

Precarious Work

- Ref.: **Beck** (2000)
 - Never before have working people, **irrespective of their talents and educational achievements** been as... **vulnerable**... working in individualised situations without countervailing collective powers
- Post War **Golden Era of Capitalism**
 - Seen as the benchmark
 - **50s/60s first genuine affluent age** in history when workers saw **improvements in wages and working conditions**
- Effects of **Insecurity**
 - **Threat** of unemployment – distance of state working from state of being unemployed part of quality of job
 - **Uncertainty** and ambiguity
 - Stress
 - Impact of insecurity on **well-being** at least as negative as impact of being unemployed
 - Source of ill health, job dissatisfaction, impact on households
 - Social integration through work
 - Ref.: **Durkheim**
 - Potential social exclusion
- Measuring Job Insecurity
 - No consensus on best way
 - **Job tenure**
 - **Temporary Work**
 - **Level of unemployment**
 - **Self-report measures** (surveys)
 - Ref.: **Green, Gallie**
- Has Job Insecurity Risen?
 - Increase in perceived job insecurity in 80s/90s in advanced economies
 - Ref.: **Beck, Castells, Sennett**
 - View of increasing job insecurity due to **changing structure of labour market**
 - **Flexibilisation** due to global economic integration, new technologies, neoliberalism
- Is Insecurity an **Endemic Feature of Capitalism?**
 - Surveys (e.g. “Do you think there is any chance of losing job in the next 12 months?”) show **perceived insecurity rises and falls with unemployment levels**

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- Moving from symbols to political programmes
- Symbol of **Euro May Day demonstrations**
 - **Carnival, fun, atmosphere**
 - Mockery and humour
 - Many actions daredevilish/anarchic rather than strategic/socially threatening
 - Intention to win friends and influence mainstream societies
 - Participants in Euro May Day just tip of the iceberg
 - Much larger element living in **fear and insecurity**
- Globalisation's Child
 - **1970s neoliberalism**
 - **Disliked the state**
 - Saw the **world as increasingly open**
 - Wanted drastic measures to **avoid increased unemployment, decrease in growth and accelerated poverty**
 - Roll back securities, tame trade unions
 - Proved difficult as **soc. Dem. Parties in Gov. had built up system neo-liberals wanted to dismantle**
 - But lamely accepted neo-liberals' prognosis
 - Claimed **need for labour market flexibility**
 - Unless labour markets were made more flexible, labour costs would rise
 - Dimensions to flexibility
 - Speeding up adjustments to changes in demand
 - **Easy, costless** ability of firms to change employment levels (implying reduction in security)
 - Change job structures
 - Move employees around internally
 - In other words, the flexibility advocated by neoliberals increased job insecurity
 - Claimed to be **necessary price for retaining investment and jobs**
 - As **globalisation** proceeded, number of workers in **insecure jobs** increased
 - Not technologically determined
 - **Flexible labour** spread
 - **Inequalities grew**
 - Class structure underpinning industrial society gave way to more complex system (still class based)
 - Policy changes/responses of corporations to globalising market economy never predicted by Neoliberal/political leaders
 - Millions of people entered precariat
 - **Not "middle class"** as didn't know salary from week to week and no status or benefits
 - **Not "working class" or "proletariat"** as no long, fixed hours, consistent shifts with established routes of advancement and connections to unions.
 - More and more with informal job status.
- Defining the Precariat

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her aunt's couch. However, Janette's work schedule became so inconvenient and disruptive that her aunt asked her to leave so Janette and her son mostly stayed on the couches of old work colleagues or friends' houses. Janette was also on the verge of failing her college degree as she could not commit to the class hours. Despite the disruption to her life, Janette feared that if she asked for more stable hours she would simply be given less hours (NY Times, 2014). Janette's situation reflects a common crisis for many workers in the Global Economy whose jobs control their lives. Sophisticated workplace technology such as that used by Starbucks in Janette's case, is inhibiting people from leading normal, structured lives. Many retail changes are using software that choreographs workers in dance routines to maximise productivity. This may lead to increased efficiency for these companies, but it creates turmoil in workers' lives.

The increase in precarious work is not only taking place at bottom of the skills hierarchy, but also at the top. Beck (2000) examines the increase in precarious jobs in academia. By 1982, Keith Hoeller held a doctorate in philosophy, had contributed to 10 academic publications, worked for one year as visiting professor at the University of Seattle and was on the advisory board of a renowned specialist journal. However, the decisive break through in Hoeller's career failed to come. He spent 16 years stumbling from one fixed term contract to the next. Now in his fifties, Hoeller suspects his dream of obtaining a chair in a university will never be fulfilled. Beck states that roughly 45% of University lecturers share Hoeller's fate. By increasing the number of contract or part time lecturers they hire each year, colleges save in several ways at once. The pay for a fixed term contract lecturer is only 40% of a regular professor. The sizeable pensions and health contributions of regular professors do not apply to temporary employees. Finally, part timers can be hired and fired easily, but professors with tenure cannot. A common theme appears to be emerging for many workers. As we have seen from the case of both Keith Hoeller and Janette Navaro, their flexible working hours may increase the productivity or profits of their employers but it has had a hugely negative impact on both the structure of the day to day lives and the overall career paths of these precarious employees.

The increase in precarious work in recent decades has in many ways facilitated the entry of certain groups in society into the workforce, groups who many not have been able to commit to set working hours before. An extreme form of flexibility is the seasonal employment of migrants in agriculture. Here, seasonal migrant farmworkers come from the poorest East European countries such as Bulgaria, Romania as Northern European farmers hire them for the summer to work on their farms. Similar patterns are found in North America where fruit growers employ workers from Haiti, Guatemala, Mexico to work on their plantations (Doogan, 2009). Female labour force participation can also be facilitated by the increase in flexible work arrangements. Now women with children can work on a part time basis or work temporarily for short durations at a time. In 2011, female workers accounted for the majority of those in temporary work in Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2012). The increase in the availability of flexible working arrangements has also facilitated the employment of many students. In the last two decades, there has been an increase in the number of young people completing secondary education and higher education. However, higher education not funded by State, so students rely on their own funding. Therefore students increasingly need to combine work and study. Part time work can facilitate this need (Doogan, 2009).

In today's globalised economy, work has become increasingly precarious. The advancement of digital technologies, increased individualisation of work, neoliberalist values and globalisation have led to the emergence of a "Risk Regime" in which employees are faced with increased uncertainty and insecurity. This precarious work has had both advantages and