Social and Socialist Musings on the Sector Skills Agreement

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Introduction

This ‘work in progress paper’ is an attempt to draw together threads from various theoretical sources loosely configured around socialism and social science ideas with reference to the Sector Skills Agreements (SSA) produced by Sector Skills Councils (SSC) as a result of Government Policy. This paper needs must therefore as a work in progress piece be ‘messy’ and disjointed, as through the collection of jumbled ideas, the author wishes to begin to develop an understanding and critique of a Government policy, that he has been intimately associated with the development of, for one of the sectors of the UK economy in his professional life.

This paper is in essence a collection of ideas and themes that will underpin the final substantive work, initially a PhD submission, and possible further academic publications. It is postulated that an analysis of a piece of work such as the Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) as a Government driven initiative as well as being in essence research on the Post Compulsory Education system, must encompass a theoretical framework. This paper has concentrated as the title suggests on socialist thinking incorporating Marxism and ‘Gramscian Marxism’ as well as an analysis of class. The need to consider the middle class as a force less likely to need to engage with the SSA or the SSCs is stated as the beginnings of a ‘class based framework’ from where the SSA can be considered.

This paper also seeks to respond to justifiable criticism from within my University on my previous work in relation to ‘third way’ analysis published in education-line that suggested that my use of the concept of socialism was weak in relation to analysis of the work of Anthony Giddens. There was therefore a need to ‘firm up’ these concepts, as they needs must fit into the substantive work, when that occurs, and therefore I have endeavoured to rectify this deficiency here.

Socialism

Not having at undergraduate or postgraduate (till now) studies been a student of political or indeed social philosophies, I needs must ask the first question in relation to Socialism of what is it? Berki (1975)in his analysis of socialism concludes:

“In company with other ideological concepts, socialism has a double reference. On the one hand, it refers to ideals, values, properties of what is often called the socialist ‘vision’. On the other hand, it refers to empirical features of social and political institutions which are supposed concretely to embody the vision. On the level of values, adherents to socialism (who usually concentrate on values) will usually give a prompt answer: socialism stands for the values of freedom, equality, community, brotherhood, social justice, the classless society, co-operation, progress, peace, prosperity, abundance, happiness- to mention just the important ones. Sometimes the value component of socialism is stated negatively: socialists are opposed to oppression, exploitation, inequality, strife, war, injustice, poverty, misery and dehumanization. On the level of institutions, the answer appears even easier.
Here adherents and opponents alike (opponents being more interested in institutions than in values) would say that socialism is opposed to the capitalist enterprise system which it seeks to replace by a system of control over wealth and property and the social supervision or organisation of economic activity; this is often summarized in the formula, the ‘common’ or ‘public ownership of the means of production’. (Berki, 1975, p9).

But even this concept of public ownership (which is implicitly rejected by Giddens in his ‘third way’ writings (Hammond, 2008)) has a multiplicity of sub-meanings Berki (1975) continues:

“‘Public ownership’ as a general formula is too indefinite, too indiscriminate to have any concrete meaning. It can refer to central planning with complete state ownership of resources; to the nationalization of large industrial and financial concerns only; to state shareholding in private enterprise; to co-determination; to public corporations; to decentralized economies; to workers’ control; to producers’ co-operatives; and so on and so forth. All these and many others have been advocated under the name of ‘socialism’ (Berki, 1975, p10).

Berki (1975) concludes that there is no real definition of ‘socialism’ that would satisfy the various groups of people that adhere to it (p10); with many famous adherents taking rather intriguing stands on it. For example John Ruskin who called himself a ‘communist’ but rejected socialism, republicanism and democracy, and H.M. Hyndman who believed that the term socialism referred to ‘denoted mild, wishy-washy, Christian-liberal do-goodery, while the much beloved term of ‘social democracy’ meant militant Marxism! (p12). One can only imagine the face of Mr. Blair the former Labour Prime Minister if this were to be found to be true, given the attempts of that gentleman to write out socialism in favour of third way social democracy from the lexicon of the Labour Party in the UK.

Socialism can be seen to oscillate between individualism and collectivism, and the value of diversity and uniformity. At times it can be ‘utopian’ while also at times showing a pragmatic realism and concentration on the tasks in hand. At times socialism promotes self sufficiency of individual human reason, while also demanding radical and forcible re-education. Socialism has recognised the need for wealth creation but repudiated its use. In the economic field, socialists have proclaimed the values of organisational control, discipline, hierarchy, leadership by experts, even compulsion, while at the same time seeking to come to terms with incentives and the profit motive. In the political field, socialism has advocated mass-spontaneity and tight organisation, gradualism and revolution, bloodshed and pacifism, patriotism and cosmopolitanism (Berki, p19-20).

Socialism might however be argued to have four tendencies. The first is ‘Egalitarianism’, with the notion of ‘equality’ being the most important. This is not to say that the term ‘equality’ does not itself have many different definitions, but at its strongest it leads to a concept of ‘community’, where the total is of more value than the individuals that make it up. This view of course is antithetical to that of Margaret Thatchers declaration in the Woman’s Own magazine, that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families, and therefore can be seen as a clear demarcation between socialism and neo-liberal conservatism. Thus to the egalitarian, the common ownership of goods and possessions becomes almost paramount, as society is divided into rich and poor, with constant struggle occurring between these two groups. It is from this concept that that ideas of revolution endemic in much socialist thought credited to Marxism occurs. Berki (1975, p26) declares that this concept is the harshest of concepts, but also the most noble of socialism (p26).
Moralism stemming from adherents of the Christian religion (although it has also been espoused by those of other and no religion) is another tenant upon which it might be argued that much socialism is built. Moralism is essentially a critique of the ‘selfish’ individualism of capitalism, the exploitation of people by capitalists and the misery and suffering that has created to those who produce society’s wealth, and the use of competition to ‘pit man against man’ in the pursuit of profit. Unlike egalitarianism, it is not in favour of revolution, preferring persuasion and pacifism (Berki, 1975, p26-27).

Rationalism is a further tenant of socialism that emanates from the enlightenment, and argues that man has grown up and ‘come of age’ removed the age old superstitions enshrined in religion, and presumably the deference that went with them. Capitalism is wasteful and chaotic as man run around competing with each other for profit, whereas a society convened on rational lines would harness the powers of mankind through science to improve and enhance life for everyone (Berki, 1975, p27-28).

Finally there is libertarianism, which Berki (1975, p28) defines as the reduction ad absurdum of socialist thought in that libertarianism is the demand for total liberty and the absence of restraints both internal and external. The nearest doctrine to libertarianism in its pure form is ‘anarchism’, although the concepts of libertarianism is not encompassed within anarchism. Like moralism, libertarianism repudiates revolution as a concept, preferring the obtaining of inner enlightenment. Ultimately though, Berki (1975) concludes that libertarianism is the most unstable and unproductive of the four tendencies of socialism, although theoretically it proposes the most (non-violent) revolutionary change in society, leading if taken to extreme a moral and conceptual nihilism (Berki, 1975, p29).

Berki, 1975, p14) though offers a pertinent warning to would be scholars delving into socialism about falling into the trap of ‘academic reductionism’ whereby one seeks to create a definition of socialism that works for the writer. Although Berki (1975, p14) concludes that this in itself denotes serious scholarship it will per se reduce the overall richness and diversity of thought found under and within the definition of ‘socialism’. The second error that Berki (1975) refers to is that of ‘inessentialism’ which might be defined as the study of a certain type of socialism surrounding one individual such as Marx (p14).

What is the response to be then to these warnings of Berki (1975)? Ultimately in the substantive piece of work I may be guilty of both ‘academic reductionism’ and ‘inessentialism’, but for now I will be content to be knowingly guilty in this paper of only ‘inessentialism’ in that I will seek to identify the ideas of Marx, as they might facilitate an analysis of the Sector Skills Agreement, as well as ideas surrounding class and the development of social capital.

Przeworski (1985) points out that one of the first tasks of socialism per se, is how it is going to operate within a capitalist system. Przeworski (1985) concludes:

“the movement for socialism developed within capitalist societies and faced definite choices that arise from this particular organization of society. These choices have been threefold: (1) whether to seek the advancement of socialism within the existing institutions of the capitalist society or outside of them; (2) whether to seek the agent of socialist transformation exclusively in the working class or to rely on multi-or even non-class support; and (3) whether to seek reforms, partial improvements, or to dedicate all efforts and energies to the complete abolition of capitalism” (Przeworski, 1985, p3).

As much of this work surrounds the Labour party and the Labour Party in Government, and the political will behind the Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) then it should be pointed out, that
the Labour party has always sought to promote a socialist future through the ‘ballot box’. As J. MMcGurk the chairman of the Labour Party put it in 1919:

“We are either constitutionalists or we are not constitutionalists. If we are constitutionalists, if we believe in the efficacy of the political weapon (and we do, or why do we have a Labour Party?) then it is both unwise and undemocratic because we fail to get a majority at the polls to turn around and demand that we should substitute industrial action” (Miliband, 1975, p69)

As Przeworski (1985) points out, this presents its own problems for the Labour party both in opposition and in government:

“To win votes of people other than workers, particularly the petite bourgeoisie, to form alliances and coalitions, to administer the government in the interests of the workers, a party cannot appear to be “irresponsible,” to give any indication of being less than whole-hearted about its commitment to the rules and the limits of the parliamentary game. At times the party must even restrain its own followers from actions that would jeopardize electoral progress. Moreover, a party orientated toward partial improvements, a party in which leaders-representatives lead a petty-bourgeoisie life-style, a party that for years has shied away from the streets cannot “pour through the holes in the trenches,” as Gramsci put it, even when this opening is forged by crisis. “The trouble about the revolutionary left in stable industrial societies”, observed Eric Hobsawm (1973, p14-15), “is not that its opportunities never came, but that the normal conditions in which it must operate prevent it from developing the movements likely to seize the rare moments when they are called upon to behave as revolutionaries...Being a revolutionary in countries such as ours just happens to be difficult”” (Przeworski, 1985, p15).

Although not located to the UK alone, the Marxist class contention (see below) is in itself difficult, as many of the proletariat do not see themselves as socialists, and therefore would not align themselves with a party bearing that name (Hill, 1974, p83). In the 1979 general election which brought Margaret Thatcher to power, 49% of the working class vote did not go to the Labour party, making it inevitable that Blair and ‘New Labour’ would seek to expand its class base (Przeworski, 1985, p26-27). For socialist parties (and particularly New Labour) it appears that there is a ‘Hobsonian’ choice for those wishing to obtain power:

“Leaders of class-based parties must choose between a party homogeneous in its class appeal but sentenced to perpetual electoral defeats or a party that struggles for electoral success at the cost of diluting its class orientation. This is the alternative presented to socialist, social democratic, labour, communist, and other parties by the particular combination of class structure and political institutions in democratic capitalist societies.”(Przeworski, 1985, p102)

Marxist Socialism

While being guilty of ‘inessentialism’ in that I now seek to refine my socialist analysis to the thoughts and philosophies of Karl Marx and Gramscian Marxism, although in relation to class (discussed later within this paper, and more relevant to the final analysis of the Sector Skills Agreement (SSA)) some digression from the virtuous paths of pure Marxism (assuming there is such a thing) is desirable. Ipso facto this section is discursive and unrelated generally to the broader themes of the SSA. Under this heading therefore I seek only to
explore Marx’s main ideas. A key theme in Marxism is the concept of the ‘alienated’ Labour. Marx (1975) states:

“The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien.” (Marx, 1975, p324)

This statement appears to argue that the worker is involved in the development of the means of their own destruction. In that the ‘thing’ that the worker produces is the property of his employer, and therefore the proceeds from the utilisation of the ‘thing’ that the worker produces can be used by the employer to purchase machinery to improve productivity, thus raising the spectre of unemployment for the worker as his job is mechanised. For Marx, the concept of overproduction was also relevant as the glut of products in the market could also lead to unemployment for some workers, and probably a reduction in wage for others, which precipitated a crisis in the working class in his lifetime. Collier (2004) also conjures up a further meaning from this text in that he argues that like the sorcerer’s apprentice capitalism has let the ‘genie out of the jar’ and has loosed forces that it cannot control, with environmental pollution as a by-product of capitalism being cited as an example by Collier (2004, p23) although this by-product in its existing form is unlikely to have been envisaged by Marx. From this concept of labour alienation, Marx begins to talk about workers alienation from work, and the theft of his time (Marx, 1975, p326). This leads Collier (2004) to conclude:

“Yet the experience of alienation as defined by Marx- of one’s time being stolen from one, of one’s product turning against one, or work being only an undesirable means to an external end- seems widespread. Perhaps, while material conditions have improved, alienation has taken over even areas of life that escaped it in Marx’s day. The defining cases of unalienated work (artistic production, cooking a meal for one’s family or friends)- work in which one has no boss, possesses the means of labour, and works for the sake of the finished product and the pleasure it will give others, not the money it will bring in- have increasingly been edged out of that position. Art becomes the design market, cooking is replaced by working extra alienated time to pay for ready meal. Education is increasingly dominated by assessment and reduced to uncreative cramming. Even in university, to suggest that learning may have value in itself is to invite derision. To use a distinction made recently by the French Socialist Party, we have not just a market economy, but a market society. Even marriage has come to be seen as a contract. In this ideological climate where the spirit of commerce pervades every sphere of life, the indignation of the young Marx against the prostitution of humanity is as appropriate as ever.” (Collier, 2004, p37-38).

A major theme within Marxism is the development of a ‘science of history’, for Marx this development was important as “The Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point is to change it.” (Marx, 1975, p423). For Marx though the study of history was not in any kind to produce an overview, but what within a mode of production makes history develop in the way that it does. Collier (2004) states that the key issue in this context is the relation of humankind to the means of labour, which can be defined in relation to horizontal and vertical aspects (p40). Horizontally our relations with the means of labour alter through history as quintessentially technology and knowledge advances, from stone knives to

1 Following Collier (2004) I use the term alienated labour, although Collier (2004) states that ‘estranged labour’ is probably more accurate (p22).
metal ones etc. The message of this analysis is that history is a development in which each stage presupposes the last and makes possible the next, not just ‘one damned thing after another’ (p41).

From a vertical perspective, then history can be seen as a class struggle, where the classes are constituted precisely by their relations to the means of labour. From this society has developed (and here I use the term very loosely, as there is still within the world examples of slavery and feudalism still to be found, albeit in the case of slavery theoretically illegal) from slavery and feudalism through to capitalism, where the proletarian (worker) is legally free, that is, he possesses ownership of his labour power, he does not own the means of labour, and therefore he is forced to sell his labour to the capitalist who does own these means. The capitalist class as the owners of the means of production exploit the workers creating a class struggle between workers, the proletarian and the capitalist (bourgeoisie) (Collier, 2004, p41).

Weber (1930) argues that a further historical and theological development in capitalism was the development of the protestant religion, which as a by-product (I use this word, as the main thrust of the protestant reformation was theological and a refutation of the corruption of the papacy, and papal power and authority) encouraged hard work and abstinence. The rejection of the adoration of saints in the protestant religion reduced significantly the number of high feast days, which were essentially holidays (the word holiday is of course derived from holy day) giving the capitalist more labour time without an increase in labour cost. Tawney (1938) argues that early protestants were not in favour of capitalism in the way argued by Weber (1930). Marx (1976) cites Martin Luther’s robust denunciation of the practice of usury by some adherents of the protestant religion (p740).

Marx spoke of his brand of socialism as scientific socialism to differentiate it from the utopian brands of socialism that existed at that time. Marx though did not apparently see science as being in any way a statement of absolute truth, as can be evidence from his quotation of Feuerbach in Marx (1968):

“Science...mounts from lower to ever higher levels of knowledge without ever reaching, by discovering so-called absolute truth, a point at which it can proceed no further...Just as knowledge is unable to reach a complete conclusion in a perfect, ideal condition of humanity, so is history unable to do so; a perfect society, a perfect state, are things which can exist only in imagination” (Ludwig Feuerbach in Marx (1968), p598)

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx argues that the abolition of private property would not adversely affect the freedom of the individual per se, only the power of some to exercise power over others. Marx (1968) concludes:

“Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society: all that it does is deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation. It has been objected that upon the abolition of private property all work will cease, and universal laziness will overtake us. According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work” (Marx, 1968, p49).

For Collier (2004) therefore Marxist socialism is not about equality it is more about certain equalities, equal power over the means of production (common ownership), equal access to the means of production (right to work), and equal access to health care and education, while being against the equal right to won or acquire property, equal opportunities to become an
exploiter, even equal pay for equal work, since this ignores differences of need (Collier, 2004, p66-67).

The SSA is all about the development of skills within the labour component of the UK economy, and at first glance Marx’s analysis of use value and exchange value seems to have little relevance. Though as will be developed further in other papers, and it is expected the substantive work on the SSA, the rhetoric behind the SSA, and the marketing of skills to the populace is that increased skills will lead to increased wages for those workers who acquire increased skills. An analysis of Marx’s theory on use-value might challenge this, as the use value will ultimately determine the value of a product or service, which increased training may not be able to increase beyond a fixed value, thus reducing if the capitalist is to make a profit space for the worker to receive a pay rise.

The productivity increase through this supposed training precipitated by the SSA may lead to the surplus production and exploitation of the worker through redundancy discussed earlier in this section, as the capitalist seeks to maximise profitability through bringing supply and demand into equilibrium. I base this argument on the fact that supply outstripping demand through productivity improvements leading to overproduction would lead to a downward pressure on prices, lead to worker redundancies and lower profits, such that some firms may decide to leave the business or transfer production overseas (although this is not likely in the particular sector that I work in, and will be the focus of the substantive work) and thus reduce labour costs; a common enough occurrence in the last few years.

While demand outstrips supply, this it is argued is of benefit to the capitalist in that he is able to increase prices and thus profits within impunity, ultimately though, high profits will attract in an open market (hence the aversion by Government to monopoly or oligopoly market price fixing) new entrants to the market, which should have the effect of driving prices down. It is this effect that with emerging developing economies in India and China to name but two, who have lower labour rates than the UK when entering a market have an immediate price advantage, which can only be assuaged by ‘added value’ of products and services being created in the UK, achieved through increased training and creativity of workers.

The market therefore ultimately determines the use value of the products and services created by workers and capitalists and assign them a value for exchange for money. In a totally open market it is argued, discipline is maintain and prices controlled, not only as Marx argues by the ability of labour to afford necessary goods, but also competition entering the market lowering the price to gain a market share/ hold (Porter, 1980). It is argued that it follows from this that although increased skills within the production of a good or service may increase productivity, it will not per se add significant value to the labour of the worker such that will be reflected in increased wages, as ultimately the ‘use value’ will not increase significantly as a result, particularly if the market in the product is susceptible to cheaper imports of similar quality. It is perhaps doing the Government a disservice to suggest that this is the thrust of the argument in Leitch (2007) or any other Government driven skills policy document and this argument must be seen as very tentative, as there is a need to contextualise this further with Government documentation.

Gorz (1982) makes an interesting aberration from what I would define classic interpretation of Marxism when he makes the following theoretical argument, which in essence clarifies my own thoughts on the subject:

“The difference between wage labour and self-determined activity is the same as the difference between use-value and exchange value. Work is carried out essentially for a wage- which serves to sanction the social utility of the activity
in question and entitles its recipient to a quantity of social labour equivalent to
that which he or she has sold. Working for a wage amounts to working in order
to purchase as much time from society as a whole as it has previously
received.” Gorz (1982, p2)

I would argue that only by being skilled in a skill where there is a shortage of supply and
‘mobility of demand’ (for the area of work that I will be looking at in detail, the plumber is a
case in point) can the worker agitate for higher wages, through mobility of labour. For
example a skilled plumber is able to move from site to site in a geographical area to increase
his hourly rate. I would tentatively suggest that a theory could be stated that suggested that
increased training could be used by capitalists to prevent labour from acting in this way, by
training all plumbers to the same level, then there is not the scope for the labour to move in
search of increased wage rates built on skills as all plumbers would be equally skilled, with
any specialist advantages cancelled out quickly with constantly upskilling.

Marx’s theory of Labour value is now rejected by modern economists, as the value of
something is not necessarily determined by the amount of labour that goes into it (Collier,
community might operate, and compares this with the capitalist market force, and concludes:

“So society, when united either in one individual or one community governing
its own economic life, ‘exchanges' units of one commodity for those of another
only by apportioning a greater proportion of the total social labour from one
commodity to another. Ultimately, this is what must happen in a market
economy too. But the apportioning is not done by individual or collective
decision, but by the constraints of the market. Hence, while it is natural to
express exchange value in money terms, its essence, value, is strictly expressed
as a fraction: a unit of a commodity represents a given fraction of the total
social labour, and exchanges with units of other commodities that represent the
same fraction. Thus there can be no concept of growth in value terms, since the
total value produced by a community is the sum of all its fractions, which by
definition= 1. There can of course be growth in use-value terms and, given
humankind’s tendency to advance technologically, there usually is. But since
this spans qualitatively different use values, it cannot be measured by a
common measure.” (Collier, 2004, p88)

The concept of value as a critique of what is an implicit assumption of much Government
literature, that training the work force for the worker will mean promotion and more money.
Whereas for some it is argued that it might, for others it may mean more productive working
for the same wages that releases other workers through redundancy into the labour market,
but reduces the costs of the capitalists. As will be seen in subsequent work, Government
rhetoric encouraging employers to train is to improve the bottom line of the business.

Another argument which Gorz (1982) announces, is a rejection of any ‘utopian’ idea about
work, which he perceives is present in some socialist thought, and it might be argued can be
found in some of the ideas oscillating around the SSA, that through work a worker may/ must
obtain personal fulfilment is interesting dismissed as a bourgeoisie tendency.

“Above all, it must be recognised that there can never be a complete identity
between individuals and their socialised work, and, inversely, that socialised
work cannot always be a form of personal activity in which individuals find
complete fulfilment. ‘Socialist morality’ - with its injunction that each
individual be completely committed to his or her work and equate it with
personal fulfilment-is oppressive and totalitarian at root. It is a morality of
accumulation, which mirrors the morality of the bourgeoisie in the heroic age of capitalism. It equates morality with love of work, while at the same time depersonalising through the processes of industrialisation and socialisation. In other words, it calls for love of depersonalisation- or self sacrifice. It rejects the very idea of the ‘free development of each individual as the goal and precondition of the free development of all’ (Marx). It sets itself against the ethic of the liberation of time which originally dominated the working-class movement.” (Gorz, 1982, p10).

The rhetoric of ‘New Labour’ and the purpose of the SSA will be considered further in subsequent work, where it is proposed to refer back to this concept in relation to the SSA, which as already stated is related to developing an employer led education and training offer, through which the UK economy will be able to compete successfully in international markets for goods and services, without submitting to a low wage economy.

Marx and the State

In relation to the state Marx in ‘The Communist Manifesto’ says two things about the state. The first is that political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another, and secondly, that the executive of the modern state is a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie (Collier, 2004, p115). In relation to the first statement, then this is a general statement about all forms of state from feudal monarchies to bourgeois democracies and bourgeois dictatorships. The second statement refers to the modern democratic state that Marx saw in exile in London. In Marxist thought therefore as an oppressor of the workers in any form, the bourgeoisie state must be smashed through revolution, to be replaced by the workers state, which in a truly socialist state would ‘wither away’. Engels (1969) describes it in the following way:

“The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society-the taking possession of production in the name of society-this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then withers away of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished’. ” (Engels, 1969, p120).

The Communist Manifesto makes a similar point related more to class:

“When in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated into the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character... In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is condition for the free development of all.” (Marx, 1973, p87)

Through the abolition of class, and the social control of property and capital, the state and Government moves to a mere administrative function.

“To all socialists anarchy means this: the aim of the proletarian movement- that is to say the abolition of social classes-once achieved, the power of the state, which now serves only to keep the vast majority of producers under the yoke of a small minority of exploiters, will vanish, and the functions of government become purely administrative” (Marx, 1976, p314).
There is an interesting corollary to this discourse found within the Critique of the Gotha Programme, where Marx (1942) opposes the state control of education, though he accepts that the state should finance it and inspect it! (Collier, 2004, p125). If the state is inspecting education, what is it inspecting it for? If it is for doctrinal purity, is this evidence that Marx accepts that the stateless classless society proposed, might not create a utopian satisfaction that would lead to the contentment of all the people?

From Marxist thought comes a major influence in the development of the concept of central and large scale planning, a factor that will be influential in the substantive work of analysing and critiquing the SSA, as since the Learning and Skills Act (2001), there has been a thrust to undertake planning to a greater or lesser extent. One of the major objections to planning is argued by Von Hayek is that large scale planning is always inefficient, as the knowledge that is needed for economic decision making is scattered local knowledge, and cannot be concentrated into a central planning agency. This concept will be explored more fully in subsequent work.

The Philosophy of Marx was highly influenced by Hegelian dialectic. Collier (2004) defines the concept of dialectic. He states:

“ This root meaning of dialectic lies behind the special sense given it by Hegel, and partly taken over by Marx. Suppose a group of people, all with different experiences of the world, are engaged in a dialogue to seriously attempt to find the truth about something. Typically one will put forward one view, which will have some truth in it, but be one sided. Another will contradict by putting forward an alternative idea, which will also be part of the truth, but one sided in a different way. If all goes well, they will between them arrive at a fuller view, which incorporates the element of truth in both their views. This will still only be a partial truth however, but fuller than the two views it replaces. It will form the starting point of a new dialogue, in which a contrary view will be counter posed to it, and a fuller view still arrived at by dialogue between the two. Thus knowledge progresses from partial, one-sided truths to fuller truths, without ever arriving at the final, complete truth.” (Collier, 2004, p137)

This concept is sometimes described as thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis, and Collier (2004,p138) uses it to effect to describe the prescribed Marxist development from Feudalism to Capitalism, and onwards to Socialism:

“There is a similar pattern to Marx’s account of the development of the capitalist economy and its supersession by socialism. The thesis might be individual craft production, where the workers are free because they own their own means of labour, but productivity is low. The antithesis is capitalism, which expropriates the craftworkers and replaces them with large scale production, in which many co-operate, that has a high technology and therefore productivity, but leaves the workers unfree because they are compelled to sell their labour-power as they own no means of labour. The synthesis is socialism, retaining from capitalism the highly productive technology and the large scale co-operation which is essential to it, but freeing the workers by making them the collective owners of their means of labour” (Collier, 2004, p138)
Class and the role of class impact on the SSA.

Class and class war have a strong position in the socialist lexicon, and here it is proposed to build on the ‘broader’ concepts of class that have been developed in previous sections, as it is perceived that through ‘class war’ the proletariat are perceived to bring in socialism in Marxist thought. In education and choices of career, it is assumed that ‘class’ plays an important part, and so this section moves from theories of class, and the effect of policies and social history from the 1980’s onwards, to the way that the ‘middle class’ are developing ‘social capital’ to forward their success in their children and protect their class advantage.

Przeworski, (1985, p3) makes an interesting general comment about the difficulties of defining class:

“Classes are organized and disorganized as outcomes of continuous struggles. Parties defining themselves as representing interests of various classes and parties purporting to represent the general interest, unions, newspapers, schools, public bureaucracies, civic and cultural associations, factories, armies, and churches- all participate in the process of class formation in the course of struggles that fundamentally concern the very vision of society. Is the society composed of classes or of individuals with harmonious interests? Are classes the fundamental source of social cleavage or are they to be placed alongside any other social distinction? Are interests of classes antagonistic or do they encourage cooperation? What are the classes? Which class represents interests more general than its own? Which constitute a majority? Which are capable of leading the entire society? These are fundamental issues of ideological struggle. The ideological struggle is a struggle about class before it is a struggle among classes” (Przeworski, 1985, p70).

In future work around the SSA, it will be seen that work and employment is a fundamental part of the Government drive for skills, as enunciated in the Leitch (2007) report. Leitch (2007) makes skills improvements in the workforce the wealth generator for the UK economy. Skills are the panacea for the problems of the UK economy, the obtaining of which will maintain competitiveness in a globalised economy. Global uncertainties mean that the ‘job for life’ is a thing of yesteryear, and workers can expect to enjoy a portfolio of careers over their working lives. Gorz (1982) writing in the early 1980’s effectively points out that this process had begun long before ‘New Labour’ and the SSA:

“A society based on mass unemployment is coming into being before our eyes. It consists of a growing mass of permanently unemployed on one hand, an aristocracy of tenured workers on the other, and, between them, a proletariat of temporary workers carrying out the least skilled and most unpleasant types of work.” Gorz (1982,p3).

What therefore are the proletariat, what are the ‘working class’? The first point to make, is that the proletariat are! It therefore does not matter what they think that they are, or what they think that their role in society is, even as Gorz (1982) says their current behaviour appears mystifying to revolutionary Marxist in relation to their perceived role as the instruments in Socialist revolution. Gorz (1982, p16) states that eventually through a process of Hegelian dialectic the role of the proletariat will happen almost externally to the view of the proletariat itself. Gorz (1982) concludes:

“Marx’s theory of the proletariat is a striking syncretism of the three major ideological currents that informed European thought during the heroic age of
bourgeois revolutions: Christianity, Hegelianism and scientism. The linchpin of the system was Hegelianism. Hegel had set out to show that history was a dialectical process whereby spirit (Geist), initially estranged from itself, becomes aware and takes possession of the world (which is only spirit existing outside and in separation from itself) and, in doing so, becomes world itself. History was seen by Hegel as a succession of stages, each one of which, because of its internal contradictions, inevitably gives birth to the following one until the whole process culminates in a synthesis which is at once the meaning of all previous history and the end of all history, its consummation."

(Gorz, 1982, p17).

He continues:

“[Marx] retained the principal characteristic of the Hegelian dialectic: that history has a meaning that is independent of the consciousness of individuals and realises itself, whatever they may think, in their actions. But this meaning, instead of ‘walking on its head’ as spirit does in Hegel, is seen by Marx as marching on the feet of the proletariat. The labour of spirit raising the world to consciousness and ultimately unity with itself with itself was no more than the idealist delirium of a theologian wedded to rationalism. For Marx, it is the workers, not spirit, who perform the labour of history: history is not the dialectical process of spirit taking possession of the world, but the progressive appropriation of nature by human labour”. (Gorz, 1982, p18).

The irony of the ‘New Labour ’ rhetoric may be that unconsciously there is an acceptance by many who would call themselves social democrats or even socialists that with the demise of the job for life, there is a need for labour to develop a range of generic and specialist skills to meet changing job needs would create a range of ‘interchangeable’ workers, that would lose individualistic self interest, as they struggle to remain in employment (the alternative being a twilight world with a neo-liberal ‘safety net’ of welfare preventing starvation but adding little to quality of life) to support family aspirations. This ironically is what Gorz (1982,p19) identifies with Marxist thought, although not how in a factory type context in the way he envisaged.

“Capitalism according to Marx...As its productive forces developed, the mysteriour forces of the natural world would give way to the technicised environment and manufactured wealth of the automatic factory. In its turn, this industrial universe would call forth a class whose members no longer worked with tools for their own for narrow self-interest as individuals. They would be divested of all particular individuality and made into interchangeable workers, bringing into play a totality of immediately social capacities and technical powers in pursuance of immediately social effects.” (Gorz, 1982, p19)

To Marx, the de-professionalisation of the skilled artisan (which to Marx was going on as a result of the factory development at the time of the industrial revolution) would create the proletariat which in turn would in time become aware of its own ‘omnipotence’ and from that comes the revolutionary context.

“In other words, proletarianisation would replacepparticular producers and their ‘limited interests’ by a class of producers in general who would be immediately aware of their power over the world and conscious of their capacity to produce and recreate that world and humanity itself. With the advent of the proletariat, the supreme poverty of indeterminate power would be the seed of virtual omnipotence. Since proletarians have no trades, they are
 capable of any kind of work; since they have no particular skills, they have a universal social capacity to acquire them all; since they have nothing, they are able to want everything and be satisfied with nothing less than the complete appropriation of all riches.” (Gorz, 1982, p24)

It is interesting that many of the ideas ‘swimming’ around the SSA do involve the creation of a proletariat workforce, although the emphasis it might be argued is significantly different. The creation is not as Marx perceived it, of an unskilled proletariat being created, but that a general ‘skilled’ proletariat might be the ultimate achievement coming out of the SSA. The creation of a high skill proletariat, with a range of transferable skills moving from job to job, or indeed contract to contract, with no specific trade or profession, might have the same effect ultimately as that perceived by Marx, although there is no definable sense where this could be said to have happened either in the pre skill model, or the model of a high skill proletariat prescribed here.

Marx (1973) in Grundrisse appears to have also foreseen this argument in part as Gorz (1982) concludes:

“[Marx] in the Grundrisse, think[s] it possible to discover the material foundation of the proletarian capacity of self-emancipation and self management. He anticipated a process in which the development of the productive forces would result in the replacement of the army of unskilled workers and labourers- and the conditions of military discipline in which they worked- by a class of polytechnic, manually and intellectually skilled workers who would have a comprehensive understanding of the work process, control complex technical systems and move with ease from one type of work to another. The despotism of the factory, the officers and sergeants of production would disappear. Even the bosses would come to be seen as superfluous parasites and the moment would come when ‘the associated producers’ would run both the factories and society” (Gorz, 1982, p27)

The Leitch report (2007) has indicated the need to develop this ‘polytechnic worker’ to meet the needs of the economy while also conceding that there was still a capacity for the economy to produce a large amount of ‘low-skill’ jobs particularly in the services sector, predominantly part time and more suitable for women than men, although unless skill levels increase it is unlikely that the economy will produce sufficient jobs to meet the needs for unskilled work made by the skill set currently existing in the working population of the UK. I would therefore in part disagree with Gorz (1982,p28) (although in fairness, his argument is probably historically constructed, writing at the beginning of the 1980’s, as a lot has changed) where he states:

“Marx took up this theme on several occasions, notably in the Critique of the Gotha Programme. He was convinced that the figure of the polytechnic worker embodied the reconciliation of the individual proletarian with the proletariat, a flesh and blood incarnation of a historical subject. He was wrong. So too have been all those who have thought that the refinement and automation of production technology would lead to the elimination of unskilled work, leaving only a mass of relatively highly skilled technical workers, capable by their comprehensive understanding of technico-economic processes of taking production under their own control” (Gorz, 1982, p28)

Marx would appear to have been right about the development of a highly skilled proletariat, with more general than specific skills, if the Leitch (2007) report is correct in its analysis, but wrong in that this has not per se lead to an end to low skill. Given that the Marxist proletarian
class of high skilled workers is coming into being and the Government are helping it by creating a demand lead model by developing a general high skill general proletariat, does not in my view mean that this class will discover its revolutionary class consciousness and throw over the capitalist system, which Gorz (1982) argues is because the ‘flesh and blood’ worker does not see himself as the holder of proletarian power identified by Marx and Marxism generally (p29). Discussions by Gramsci (1971) on hegemony are also relevant here (see later).

An interesting argument developed by Gorz (1982) which is worthy of comment in a ‘work in progress’ paper is his view that Lenin was in favour of ‘Taylorism’ in the division of labour, an interesting fact, given that Taylor was credited with the development of the capitalist success in the USA, through the division of labour into specialisms, although the idea originated of course with Adam Smith (1776) and his famous work on the ‘wealth of Nations’.

Interestingly, Gorz (1982) argues that this very adoption of Taylorism and the division of labour destroyed the power of the proletariat to identify its own revolutionary power does this explain why Lenin used it in Soviet Russia? It is an interesting argument, as if the creation of the unskilled multi-job worker creates the proletariat, and facilitates their revolutionary consciousness, then Lenin after the revolution in Soviet Russia created the proletariat through Taylorism, presumably to ensure the withering away of the state, assuming this would make the workers aware of their revolutionary power, although according to Gorz (1982), ultimately this had the opposite effect, so that in Soviet Russia revolutionary power was effectively transferred to the centralist Communist party.

“The reason may be found in the fact that the bourgeoisie succeeded in destroying at root what consciousness the proletariat might have had of its sovereign creativeness. For this purpose, eighteenth-century bosses and present-day scientific management have been applying the same recipe: they organised the work process in such a way as to make it impossible for the worker to experience work as a potentially creative activity. The fragmentation of work, taylorism, scientific-management and, finally, automation have succeeded in abolishing the trades and the skilled workers whose pride in a job well done’ was indicative of a certain consciousness of their practical sovereignty.” (Gorz, 1982, p46).

Around power, there is the concept that Gorz(1982) claims is clear to the working movement of power being ‘personal’ and functional. Personal power is exercised by a person with superior skills/abilities/knowledge etc over other workers, for example a craftsman over labourers. Functional power however emanates from the concept that the bourgeoisie exercise over the proletariat through owning the means of production, as it is not earned, as any fool can inherit a business. As a capitalist society matures however, notions of power become meshed around ‘positions of power’, rather than ‘people of power’, as individuals become incapable of appropriating power to themselves. Gorz (1982) concludes:

“This institutional sclerosis is inseparable from the bureaucratisation of power. No one is allowed to conquer power by and for her or himself. All she or he can do is to rise to one of the positions conferring a modicum of power on its holders. Consequently, it’s no longer people who have power; it’s the positions of power which have their people. These positions are no longer tailored by powerful individualities to fit and exalt their ego. Instead they tailor the individuals to make them fit their function. Such a society leaves no room for adventurers, Schumpeterian entrepreneurs or conquerors. Success belongs to careerists, to those who have followed the paths and attended the schools
that equip them with the personality, accent, manners and social skills fitting the functions that look for people to fill them.” (Gorz, 1982, p57)

The power of the bureaucracy is such that the dominated masses look to a leader for whom they can make responsible for the problems encountered within the system, and to whom they can make their demands and petitions. Gorz (1982) makes the point that it is not just the ‘petty bourgeoisie’, but extend across all areas of society including the proletariat. The need for this saviour is the ‘seedbed’ of fascism (p58-60).

“Such is the language of fascism. It has the capacity to transcend class division and draw upon the frustrated needs generated by a system of impersonal domination based upon the impotence of each and all. An indispensable condition for the emergence of fascism is the existence of a leader with a mass following, both prestigious and plebeian, capable of embodying the majesty of the stage and the individuality of the ‘common’ person, endowed with unlimited power. In the absence of this type of charismatic leader of totalitarian state may take the shape of military dictatorship, plebiscitary monarchy or police state, but not of fascism.” (Gorz, 1982, p60)

The personal will and power of the (dictator) leader therefore leads to an even more centralised and bureaucratic system than that the leader was created to defend the populace against (Gorz, 1982, p62). Gorz (1982) concludes:

“Thus the personal of the Fuhrer functions as a sort of ideological cover for the total bureaucratization of public life. Consequently fascist states tend to present the worst failings and perversions of the bureaucratic capitalist state in exaggerated form. Moreover, it is no longer possible to point them out. Official propaganda insists upon their disappearance and there are no means of opposing the official line. The Fuhrer and entourage are presented as the heroes of the historic epic in progress and the authors of every decision that has been taken. The implementation of decisions requires the militarization of both economic and administrative activities with all its ensuring waste, corruption, nepotism, black marketeering and unaccountability. Hitler’s and Stalin’s police states were remarkably similar in this respect. Thus in modern societies, the abolition of functional in favour of personal power finally results in dictatorship by the holders of functional power and personification of the machinery of domination.” (Gorz, 1982, p63)

The role of class therefore for Gorz (1982) in the creation of a socialist revolution and the obtaining of power might be different to that arrived at by other ‘revolutionary’ Marxist thinkers. He concludes:

“By its nature the proletariat is incapable of becoming the subject of power. If its representatives take over the machinery of domination deployed by capital, they will succeed only in producing the very same type of domination and, in their turn, become a functional bourgeoisie. A class cannot overthrow another class merely by taking its place within the system of domination. All it will thereby achieve will be a permutation of office-holders and by no means a transfer of power. The notion that the domination of capital can be transferred to the proletariat and thereby ‘collectivised’ is as farcical as the ideal of making nuclear power stations ‘democratic’ by transferring their management to the control of trade-union hierarchies. The concept of seizure of power needs to be fundamentally revised. Power can only be seized by an already existing dominant class. Taking power implies taking it away from its holders, not by occupying their posts, but by making it permanently impossible for them
to keep their machinery of domination running. Revolution is first and foremost the irrevocable destruction of this machinery. It implies a form of collective practice capable of bypassing and superseding it through the development of an alternative network of relations. The day a new machinery of domination conferring functional powers on the rulers is generated by these practices, the revolution will have come to an end. A new institutional order will have been established.” (Gorz, 1982, p64)

As already intimated within this paper, the historical role defined by Marxists is that the working class, the proletariat will fulfil the role of bringing in the revolution. But as early as 1982, Gorz (1982) was identifying the development of non-class deriving from the end of quintessentially the ‘job for life’, and not forming part of a traditional proletariat or bourgeoisie (p66-69).

“That traditional working class is now no more than a privileged minority. The majority of the population now belong to the post-industrial neo-proletariat which, with no job security or definite class identity, fills the area of probationary, contracted, temporary and part time employment.” (Gorz, 1982,p69)

“The only certainty, as far as [this non class] are concerned, is that they do not feel that they belong to the working class, or to any other class. They do not recognise themselves in the term ‘worker’ or in its symmetrical opposite ‘unemployed’. Whether they work in a bank, the civil service, a cleaning agency or a factory, neo-proletarians are basically non-workers temporarily doing something that means nothing to them. They do ‘any old thing’ which ‘anyone’ could do, provisionally engaged in temporary and nameless work. For them work is no longer an individual contribution to the total production of society made up of countless individual activities. Social production is now given first, and work is merely the mass of insecure, short-term activities to which it gives rise. Workers no longer ‘produce’ society through the mediation of the relations of production; instead, the machinery of social production as a whole produces ‘work’ and imposes it in a random way upon random, interchangeable individuals. Work in other words, does not belong to the individuals who perform it, nor can it be termed their own activity.” (Gorz, 1982, p70-71)

Discussion of these concepts in relation to the Sector Skills Agreement might lead to an argument that the ‘classless’ class is now here, and although the SSA is meant to encompass the whole of ‘society’, as will be seen in relation to discussions related to the middle class, tends to be situated around apprenticeships and ‘adult learners increasing / learning new skills’, a definition more related to people who would be perceived, whether they themselves would perceive it or not, as being part of the former traditional working class, and by virtue of this, members of the proletariat. It might be argued that the SSA is a mechanism by which (probably not deliberately) the proletariat can be skilful to move from one job to another in response to the needs of the owners of capital, thus enforcing the capitalist structure.

There is within socialist thought, the need for a planned system of the means of production, a facet of socialist thought that has been declared unnecessary within ‘third way ‘thinking of social democrats (Hammond, 2008).The need for the ‘state’ to plan for the needs of all in the ‘struggle for life’ is stated by Gorz (1982) as the justification for the development of planning, he continues:

“Socially planned production of what is needed by everyone is a basic prerequisite for the pacification of social relations. This was seen by Marx. The
existence of a centrally planned sector of production and distribution, able both to provide the necessities of life for everyone and to define the amount of socially necessary labour required for each individual in order to be free of need, makes the sphere of necessity a distinct and clearly circumscribed area in which trivialised technical behaviour is the norm. The area of complete autonomy lies outside this area. Only rigorous delimitation of this centrally planned, trivialised sphere makes it possible to establish a sphere of the fullest autonomy, in which individuals are free to associate according to their desires in order to create what is beyond necessity. If social planning is extended to all activities and transaction, the sphere of autonomy is negated and asphyxiated. But if, through the absence of centralised social planning, production and distribution are left to the interests of those in possession of the means of production and distribution, then inequality and the fear of scarcity ensure that the struggle for both necessities and non-necessities continues to mark social relations. Society continues to be divided into an entirely dependant class and a class whose control of the means of production and exchange guarantees its domination of the entire society.” (Gorz, 1982, p114)

Planning therefore remains part of the lexicon of socialism, and its concept will form part of the discussion that forms part of the substantive narrative, although it is not proposed to take this any further here, just to note its existence.

Hegemony

A hegemonic system as defined by Gramsci (1971) is a capitalist society in which capitalists exploit with the consent of the exploited, although for Gramsci (1971) consent does not imply an absence of force, as this force is permanently organised always underlines the consent, and this would be through police, a permanent standing armed forces etc. A hegemonic system therefore is a system in which force is not apparent or manifest, because its use is not needed to maintain the capitalists control and organisation of society (Przeworski, 1985, p137). Gramsci (1971) states:

“Undoubtedly, the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed- in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity” (Gramsci, 1971, p161)

He continues:

“The development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the ‘national’ energies. In other words, the dominant group is co-ordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and suspending of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane)between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups-equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain
point. i.e., stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest” (Gramsci, 1971, p182).

From these two paragraphs from Gramsci (1971) hegemony must be economic in the sense that it can be maintained only by a group that occupies a definite place within the system of production: the ‘decisive function’ in the ‘decisive nucleus’. Hegemony in this context therefore implies that the interest of this group is ‘correctly co-ordinated’ with the interests of groups over which hegemony is exercised: concrete coordination means here that interests of the subordinate are to some extend realised, although the mechanism by which these groups realize their interests is not completely clear. So in the first of Gramsci’s (1971) passages reference is made to ‘sacrifices’, ‘compromises’ and ‘concessions’ which are made by the bourgeoisie, while in the second passage appears to imply that politics (the life of the state) is organized in such a manner that groups struggle for the realization of their interests within the established institutions (“on the judicial plane”). Finally hegemony can be maintained only if compromise outcomes can be found within well-defined limits; profits cannot fall below the level which is “essential” for accumulation, yet they cannot be so large as to make capitalists appear to be defending particularistic (“narrowly corporate economic”) interest (Przeworski, 1985, p137).

In what sense does the capitalist system of production provide the economic foundations for the hegemony of the capitalist class or a segment of it? To answer this question, Przeworski (1985) argues that capitalism is a form of social organisation in which the entire society is dependent upon actions of capitalists. The sources of this dependence are first, that capitalism is a system in which production is orientated toward the satisfaction of the needs of others, also towards exchange, which implies that in this system, the immediate producers cannot survive on their own. Secondly, capitalism is a system in which part of the total societal product is withheld from immediate producers in the form of profit which accrues to the owners of the means of production, with those who do not own the means of production being forced to sell their labour to the capitalists for a wage (Przeworski, 1985, p138).

Hegemony presupposes Gramsci (1971) states that the interests of some of the groups, other than the dominant one must be to some degree satisfied. Therefore if the interests of the bourgeoisie are to be ‘concretely coordinated’ with others classes with the interests of other classes or their factions then some mechanisms must be organised through which these interests could find some realization. The “Concessions” could constitute one of these mechanisms, if the bourgeoisie could indeed decide as a unified actor what degree of compromise is necessary for hegemony, and if it could impose the self-discipline upon individual capitalists (Przeworski, 1985, p140).

A system of governance led by an autonomous dictatorship could also force capitalists into concessions. Although Gramsci (1971) uses the terms concessions or sacrifices in his work, in a Western democracy, it is the democratic process which constitutes this mechanism. Przeworski (1985) concludes:

“Hegemony becomes organized as institutional conditions which permit those whose labour is extracted at any moment in the social form of profit to struggle in some particular ways for the distribution of the product, the increase of which was made possible by this profit. Specifically, hegemony becomes institutionalized when struggles over the realization of material interests become indeterminate with regard to positions which groups occupy within the system of production. It is this kind of organisation of social relations which constitutes ‘democracy’. Capitalist democracy is a particular form of organisation of political relations in which outcomes of conflicts are within
limits uncertain, and in particular, in which these outcomes are not uniquely determined by class positions.” (Przeworski, 1985, p140).

Gramsci (1971) in his work persistently emphasised that economic crises do not lead automatically to a “fundamental historical crises” precipitating a revolution. Gramsci (1971, p235) argues that society has become such a complex structure, that it has become resistant to catastrophic ‘incursion’ of the immediate economic element of crises, depressions etc. Thus, a breakdown of ether the material or political basis of consent does not manifest itself in a revolutionary upsurge of the dominated classes, such that a breakdown of consent is not a sufficient condition to break down capitalism, since its effect is first to bring to the fore the coercive mechanisms which underlie the reproduction of capitalist relations. Hegemony is protected by the “armour of coercion” and when consent breaks down then coercion can still hold the system together (Przeworski, 1985, p164).

“When writing about hegemony, Gramsci typically attributed the coercive function to the “superstructures”, either the state or the “civil society”, where the latter does not include the system of production. Nevertheless, his analysis of capitalist economic relations imply that elements of coercion are to be found even at this level. Economic relations are of themselves coercive, in the sense that, regardless of individual states of mind, anyone who does not own the means of production must subject him or herself to the wage relation as a condition of physical survival. Counterhegemony cannot be exclusively ideological, for as long as coercion operates at the level of the economic structure, individual actions must express this structure. But even at the collective level, the economic structure of capitalism has a coercive effect upon wage-earners’ organisations” (Przeworski, 1985, p164).

Ultimately however, it is not in the interests of workers for capitalism to fail, as ultimately the crises falls on their shoulders, which with the potential loss of job and home can be substantial. There appears to be dichotomy in thinking here, as the crises is a mechanism from which it would appear some (particularly some Marxist thinkers) appear to think will create the revolution, however Chiaramonte (1975) argues that ‘the fundamental forces of the working-class and popular movement do not stake their fortunes on a worsening of the crisis, in fact they work for a positive democratic solution to the crisis. Conditions for the hegemony of capital cannot be abolished unless the system of production is transformed, until the creation of a new political hegemonic social group, which has founded the new type of state (socialist) which will be economic in nature (Przeworski, 1985, p165).

Indeed, as Przeworski (1985) argues, the collapse of the capitalist system, if the structures are not in place, can lead to the creation of a fascist state, as capitalists use force to suppress the workers. Thus, permanently organised physical force is for Gramsci (1971) a constitutive element of consent, in the sense that any breakdown of consent activates the mechanisms of coercion which are present in all realms of social life and which remain latent, as long as consent is sufficient to reproduce capitalist relations. When consent breaks down, then coercion, which is hiding beneath it, is ready to rise to the fore, to maintain the capitalist structures (Przeworski, 1985, p166).

Gramsci (1971) describes the relation between the state and the civil society in the following terms:

“Every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes. The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative
educative function, are the most important state activities in this sense: but, in reality, a multitude of other so-called private initiatives and activities tend to the same end-initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes.” (Gramsci, 1971, p258)

Gramsci’s (1971) definition is exclusively function, such that any and every institution which participates in the production of capitalist relations is a part of the state! This is a crucial point in analysis of the SSA and the role of the SSCs, as in creating a demand led system, this is the creation of the production of capitalists, bringing into the state (according to Gramsci (1971)) both the SSA as a concept and the SSCs. This is probably accepted in any case, the difference in this argument is that through Gramsci the SSA and the SSCs enter the state as organs of capitalism, rather than bureaucracies of state function. This is a particularly interesting way to look at the SSA process, and I propose to visit it again in subsequent work, but to leave it here, although it is conceivable that from a Gramscian Marxist perspective, that the SSA is an organ for cementing the capitalist system.

Educational Failure and the Working Class within the context of the SSA

As alluded to in a previous section, the SSA is about affecting the lives of workers of all levels and allegedly all classes within UK society, through creating a deal, between employers and providers to provide curriculum that meets the needs of the various twenty-five sectors of economic activity represented by the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). However as suggested above, as much of the work of the SSC network (known as the Skills for Business Network) oscillates around apprenticeships and ‘adult learners’ often seeking to enter or return to the ‘job market’, then the work of the SSA, is related predominantly to where traditionally the proletariat was to be found, in ‘working class’ professions.

In the next section, the performance of the ‘middle class’ and their ability to commandeer social capital and advantage through educational opportunities is considered, as this tends to replicate current class structures and reduce or restrict potential mobility for many people. The creation of the classless society identified in part by Gorz (1982) and discussed in a previous section is considered as being an important part of this process of retaining this process, as the SSA in part creates a skilled mobile classless group, who move from job to job in the way that is perceived to be the way of things by many politicians, an argument that will be developed in subsequent work. Evans (2007) makes the same point, and in referring to the controversy which surrounded her work stated:

“Some right of centre Conservative commentators were angered because they like to believe that opportunity is equally available to all, that there is no such thing as the working class in Britain anymore and that overcoming the limitations of poverty is all about taking ‘individual responsibility’. The problems with this point of view are threefold: firstly it is assumed that the institutions which deliver opportunity to the people of Britain function equally well at all times and in all places, an idea which this study of educational failure completely undermines. Secondly it is assumed that all people have the necessary educational, financial and emotional resources to stand alone as individuals (who have no need of society)...Finally, this ‘individual responsibility’ perspective ignores children completely. An analysis of social class is meaningless without an in-depth account of what childhood is like because if opportunity were equally available to all, children would no longer
be constrained by the social and economic position of their parents””. (Evans, 2007, pxiv)

A second point raised by Evans (2007) that may have some resonance to the ideas behind the SSA in that the assumption of Leitch (2007) and the ‘New Labour’ Government since 1997, that the road out of poverty and degradation, is through education, education, education.

“Take the naïve middle class assumption we began with as an example: working class people are relatively poor because they are relatively uneducated. This assumption leads those middle class people who are concerned to do something about the limitations associated with working class life to ask: ‘Why are working class people relatively uneducated?’ and to support as their remedy to this deficiency a policy commitment to ‘education, education, education.’ This focus on education as a cure-all solution to the problems of poverty obscures, however, the other half of the social class equation and prevents the question from being asked with a different emphasis: ‘Why are working class people relatively poor?’ Once education is put in brackets for a moment the focus shifts onto the question of employment and onto the history of what working class people in Britain have had to endure in order to make even a meagre living out of the most badly paid routine or physically demanding kinds of jobs. This forces us to begin to have to think not just about what is going on culturally in contemporary white working class communities but also about what has happened in them historically.” (Evans, 2007, pxv1)

It is argued therefore that working class proletariat workers are likely to be more likely to fall within the remit of the SSA and SSCs where some influence is going to impact on their working lives, as universities are less likely (particularly the older traditional universities, the post 1992 universities with their more vocational bent may be more amenable) to feel the need to take much notice (aside from lip service) of the SSAs or their SSCs and change their curriculum to meet the needs of industry. But returning to the working class, it is known in Government that social class does appear to be a determiner of performance. Bell (2005) concludes:

“One [problem] is the variability in the performance of otherwise similar schools [for example, those schools with similar levels of free school meals] and colleges and the extent to which social class still appears to play a role in defining the success of our young people…There are no simple solutions to deep-seated problems of social, educational and economic inequality. But in these early years of the twenty-first century, we cannot accept the fact that too many young people fail to achieve their potential. The consequences are not just educational: they impact much more widely and for that reason alone, we should continue to be concerned about too much variation in our education system.” (Bell, 2005,p1).

To Evans (2007) therefore class and class consciousness are bound up in the education process, with education being a determinant of class. She states:

“Not surprisingly, since middle class people value education above all else, the comparatively low level of average educational attainment amongst the working classes is a source of middle class prejudice against working class people. To a certain extent the same prejudice also exists among working class people against themselves, which is not astonishing either, since the education system works to legitimate success at school as a dominant form of merit and therefore self worth. The logic of that prejudice works as follows;
working class people have low status in society because they haven’t got ‘good’ jobs; they haven’t got good jobs because they didn’t do well in school; and they didn’t do well at school because they weren’t clever enough. The central premise of this logic rests on the assumption that people are either naturally clever or they are not and it follows from this that those people who are clever should naturally occupy the best positions in society and feel fortunate.” (Evans, 2007, p10)

Evans (2007) continues:

“Once the unequal form of relations between young people at school becomes substantiated and objectified in educational qualifications, the trajectory of education, as a specific kind of structuring force, is established. For young people, the end result is a relatively higher or lower position in a social structure, which is based on the various kinds of employment that different educational qualifications can secure. This is how social class in Britain works; it is about an ongoing relationship between people grouped according to occupational status, in which the relative value of each group is worked out on the basis of a continuous differentiation of value and consequent reward. The basis for differentiation is established at school, consolidated in the workplace and finally symbolised by relative wealth.” (Evans, 2007, p10)

Because of a general middle class Exodus from many schools where ‘working class’ children congregate, discussed in the next section, Evans (2007) throughout her book describes ‘sink schools’ in working class areas, which suffer from disruptive pupils, poor and dysfunctional parenting, and numerous ‘supply teachers’ and changes of staff generally (p94-98 et al).

There is noted by Willis (1977) that within working class communities there is an hostility to ‘being educated’ with those learners being keen on work being described as ‘ear oles’. Harris (1995) and Epstein (1998) point to many ‘lads’ equating doing well at school with being feminine.

Where academic achievement is portrayed as masculine, then it revolves around what Connell (1989, p295) determines as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ based around social power emanating from entering the professions and senior position in the civil service, industry and commerce. Compensation for academic failure for many ‘lads’ then revolving around ‘physical prowess’ and being good at sport (Connell, 1996, p81). Entry to the professions and the higher reaches of the civil service, business and commerce are not usually within the ‘abilities’ and ambitions of working class people, and indeed this form of masculinity is most engendered in the ‘public school’ arena (Heward, 1988).

Those young people coming into the ‘orbit’ of the SSC particularly at apprenticeship level, are likely therefore to be young people who are not educated in the ‘educational’ sense, but are following a more ‘vocational route, which is perceived as working class, rather than middle class. This may not look at first glance to be an important point, but, realistically, may indicate the leverage that SSCs can have in negotiating with Government, as the constituency they represent are not powerful in this sense.

What I am exploring is the proposition, that SSCs may represent the views of employers, but that if they are to get any currency then they are not likely to be representative of the worker/learner as the learners and workers are low status generally to the power of the employers. As will be explored more in subsequent work, the ‘balancing’ power emanating comes not from the workers/learners, but from the providers of learning, the FE colleges, who it might be
argued are actually exerting their right to provide programmes, rather than the learners
generic right to study them for learning’s sake.

Middle Class Educational Behaviour and the Creation of ‘Social Capital’

Evans (2007) cites the statement of the former Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair that ‘we are all
middle class now’, with disapproval, and it may seem strange to continue a debate about
class, by looking at the role of the middle class in using education as a way of ‘shoring up’
their status in the increasingly uncertain world that is currently subsisting. It seems stranger
still if the SSA is now accepted (at least in this paper) to be a tool for the education or fitting
of the proletariat working class, rather than the petty bourgeoisie middle class.

The reason for considering this subject, is that it is argued that an analysis of the behaviour of
the middle class, which it is accepted is growing in size and number, is ipso facto an analysis
of the potential impact of the SSA, and ergo the ability of the SSCs to actually impact on
policy. The author believes that the SSCs per se are too small to be able to influence the
larger universities, unless the messages that the SSCs produce suit the purpose of the
universities, and therefore there is a possibility that generally the SSA and the
SSC will be of
little relevance to the middle class, and thus of little political influence.

Traditional white collar industries such as the financial sector which are covered by SSCs
might ultimately ‘thwart’ because of challenges to traditional educational methods and entry
routes into the professions the best intentions of both SSCs and possibly Government. It
therefore is important to consider how the middle classes ‘solidify’ the advantages identified
by Evans (2007) through education.

Butler and Savage (1995) argue that traditionally, studies in education around class had
tended to look only at the very wealthy or the working class, rather than the more fragmented
middle class (pvi). The burgeoning middle class has however brought the subject of middle
class nesses and their use of education to develop and maintain social capital and influence.

Ball (2003) argues that the middle class get things done in their lives through talk. Ehrenreich
(1989,p15) argues that as a class, the middle class are an extremely insecure one, as they seek
to maintain the class advantage that they have experienced and pass this on unchanged to
their children. This has however been the case for some time:

“The attitude of the middle classes towards the future is much what the attitude
of the individual breadwinner always is: an amalgam of dread and
confidence” (Lewis and Maude, 1950, p273).

Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall (2003) develop how education has developed for the
middle class, from the use of the ‘public school’ system to the development of a mass
grammar school system post the 1944 Education Act. Those children from working class
families, who were clever enough to pass the ‘eleven plus’ and attend a grammar school,
were then on the path to social mobility into middle class work and status (Jackson and
Marsden , 1966, p25). The demise of grammar schools and concerns about the quality of
state comprehensives, has led to the middle class decamping into the private sector in
significant numbers (Adonis and Pollard, 1998, p24). Ball (2003, p60-62) gives examples of
the reasons given by parents for seeking to avoid the state system, and these revolve around
educational standards, the appearance and perceived behaviour of learners in the state system,
and a feeling that their child wouldn’t fit in.

all argue that society has created a ‘risk culture’ where the certainties of the middle classes
has broken down, and fear of failure is very real. Ehrenreich (1989, p83) points out that ‘barriers that the middle class erected to protect itself make it painfully difficult to reproduce itself’. Ball (2003) argues that the individualist mode of social reproduction is fraught with anxiety and the ‘fear of falling’ (p149). Berking (1996, p191) argues that ‘Utterly dependant on market and state, the social fate of many is becoming the particular fate of each individual.’ Ball (2003) continues by suggesting that regime of choice and individualism generated by neo-liberalism threatens an equality that was unthinkable within collectivist modes of social reproduction. Thus demarcations cannot be taken for granted, they have to be maintained and achieved, and although middle class parents enter the ‘fray’ with better resources for success, this success is not guaranteed (Ball, 2003, p149; Crook, 1999, p186).

Ball (2003) concludes:

“Peversely then, given my argument that the market form privileges middle-class families, the sense of risk and uncertainty experienced by the middle classes is almost certainly heightened by the market. The market has a degree of openness and unplaneness which constantly threatens to overwhelm the orderliness, planning and futurity that denotes many middle-class house holds. It is often not clear what the right choice is. Choice of school is often for these families, a matter of uneasy compromise. That is to say, there is ‘risk’ anxiety inherent in neo-liberal over-production and under control of risk’ (Crook, 1999, p181). Risks in the achievement of educational success and accumulation of credentials, as a result of a combination of neo-liberal policies and the concomitant individualization and privatization of social reproduction that results in part at least from this, have increased significantly. Indeed there is a kind of moral panic around schooling and school choice, particularly in metropolitan setting.” (Ball, 2003, p150)

Bourdieu (1998) in what might be described as stating the obvious, concludes that only in ‘educated homes’ and good schools is the competence to access the best ‘qualifications’ and curses, and how to ‘read the system’ in relation to entry to higher education. Adonis and Pollard (1998, p24) argue that this ability to ‘play the system’ makes those with the competence more able to access and believe that they can obtain places at ‘top’ universities. Social and educational exclusiveness declines with the status of the Universities, with ‘new universities’ having higher numbers of working class entrants than the more prestigious old universities. Interestingly the Sutton Trust (2000) report showed that even academic children from working class homes were under-represented in the top five universities.

Robson and Butler (2001) argue that the groups that compose the middle class, ‘skilfully, assiduously and strategically use the sphere of education to their advantage in the process of class formation and maintenance’ (p10). The move precipitated by neo-liberal Governments in the 1980’s and 1990’s to move from a meritocracy to a market form of education has in many cases facilitated the control of the middle classes over the education process. Brown (2000) concludes:

“Meritocratic rules of exclusion are based on the ideology of individual achievement in an ‘open’ and ‘equal’ contest...However, meritocratic rules do not assume equality of outcome, only that inequalities are distributed more fairly...The importance of market rules reflects the political ascendancy of neo-liberalism since the late 1970s in Britain and the United States...The Right were able to claim a moral legitimacy for the market system in education dressed in the language of ‘choice’, ‘freedom’, ‘competition’ and ‘standards’”(Brown, 2000, p639)
Evans (2007) takes issue with a Labour Government (dedicated at its inception as the Labour Party was) created to represent the working class in parliament, could describe all people as ‘middle class’. This thinking however, explains why the Labour Government has maintained and expanded many neo-liberal projects within education.

“State powers can…be harnessed in support of many forms of exclusionary closure, not only those that promote and sustain class exploitation. The closure model conceptualises the state as an agency that buttresses and consolidates the rules and institutions of exclusion…Indeed a class, race or ethnic group only accomplishes domination to the extent that its exclusionary prerogatives are backed up by the persuasive instruments of the state” (Parkin, 1974, p138)

Ball (2003,p31) points the influence of the USA dominated ‘World Bank’ and ‘World Trade Association’ as being committed to ‘spreading the gospel’ of neo-liberalism around the world. Within education, this has created the development of ‘quasi markets’. Weiss (2000) concluded that these markets had done little to improve the equality of quality of provision.

“The insights provided by international educational research into the way quasi-markets in schooling function and the effects they have suggest that the fictionalisation of competition and decentralisation as not achieved any convincing success in attaining efficiency goals anywhere…The findings produced so far rather imply that quasi-markets tend to increase existing disparities in school performance and in inequalities of opportunity.” (Weiss, 2000, p14).

Ball (2003) concludes:

“The politics of choice were central to the popularist appeal of the UK Conservative governments of 1979-97. They were part of a more generic privileging of the role of the market form as an instrument of social change. Thus it is important to recognize that political support for and the political effects of the market do not simply rest on simple economism. The market form carries with it a political vision which articulates a very individualistic conception of democracy and citizenship. This is captured very powerfully in Margaret Thatcher’s oft quoted dictum: ‘There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and families’ (Woman’s Own, 31st October 1987). Morrell (1989,p17) suggests that this remark is ‘an expression of the Hayekian view in epigrammatic form’. Morrell goes on to note that ‘Hayek is particularly concerned to argue against the involvement of the Government in the life of the citizen’. The new market citizenry is animated and articulated by Hayekian conceptions of liberty, freedom from’ rather than ‘freedom to’, and the right to choice. Consumer democracy is thus both the means and end in neo-liberal social and economic change. In effect these policies bring about an alignment of the social with the economic. It is assumed that active choice will ensure a more responsive, efficient public sector and release the natural enterprising and competitive tendencies of citizens, deploying the so-called dependency culture and dependence on the help and self responsibility (see Deem, Brehony and Heath 1995, Chapter 3). This is the constitutive of a new moral economy” (Ball, 2003, p38).

Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall (2003) argue that those parents who had an ‘higher education’ background themselves were likely to go to University, even in the comprehensive sector, this was 89% of the total, suggesting that an expectation of higher education, leads to
a perpetuation of higher education, (p85). This conclusion supports the work of Ball et al
(2002) who came up with a similar argument (p87).

In relation to employment then perhaps not surprisingly, Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall
(2003) in their research found that those people who had attended prestigious schools, and
subsequently gone on to equally prestigious universities, had begun to target ‘high paying’
(or at least they were before ‘meltdown Monday’ see later) in ‘the City’ and large
corporations (p127).

Earlier in this paper the concept of the ‘end of the job/ career for life’ was discussed. Savage
(2000) argues that the seeing of a career as being a ‘life project’ over the traditional notion of
the middle class as being upward progression in a career through increments is a new
challenge for the middle class. Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall (2003) point out that
only 32% of their survey sample thought that they would be in the same field after five years
(p138).

Brown (1990,1997, 2000) points to the effects that the global economic condition has had on
the middle class, and middle class employment. Ball (2003) argues that the result of Brown’s
work is that the economic restructuring and the globalization of economic relations has
effects on the jobs and security of workers. The most important factor identified by Ball
(2003) is that the global economic conditions have reduced the expansion of the middle class
post the Second World War (p19).

Social Capital and Social Class

Social capital is a very difficult thing to define, with Ball (2003,p78) stating that it has three
distinct points of origin and arenas of application. Wall, Ferrazi and Schryer (1998, p301)
state that the concept of social capital is ‘subject to a variety of interpretations reflecting
different trends in dominant thinking.’ Morrow (1999, p745-6) points to the use of the term as
being problematic, due to poor specification of meaning.

Ball (2003,p80) defines the work of Colman(1988) in relation to social capital as being
embedded in families, and the relationship between parents and children, and the way that the
family was structured. To Coleman (1988) the ‘two-income’ family is deficient in social
capital, with things such as ‘church attendance’ and embeddedness within the community
being more important. Putman (1993) however, social capital inheres in three aspects of
social and institutional relationships: networks, knowledge and shared norms. Bordieu (1993)
however, social capital plays a key part in his development of a general science of the
economy of practices (p242). Thus social capital works within social groups and networks in
the form of exchanges, social obligations and symbols, to define group membership, fix
boundaries and create a sense of belonging. Different social capitals are brought into play, as
part of a struggles between classes and class fractions to maintain or improve their social
position or advance and defend their individual class interests (Ball, 1993, p80-81).As may be
inferred from the paragraph above, the amount of social capital that the ‘middle class’ can
call upon is likely to be greater than that of the working class.

“[Social capital has to be worked at] the network of relationships[and] is the
product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or
unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that
are directly usable in the short or long term.” (Bourdieu, 1986b, p249)

Ball (2003) shows in his work that ‘middle class’ learners were able to use a network of
social contacts through family and friends to gain knowledge on their choice of career and
even which universities and which courses were considered good by the professions. Some
learners from ‘middle class’ families were able to arrange ‘work placements’ with friends and
relatives (p82-92). Ball (2003) also points to preparation that private schools engage in, when
preparing their learners for interviews at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Through
Bourdieu’s social networks, people in the (upper) middle class progress from good school, to
good university and from their through relationship connections to ‘top jobs’ in the city. Even
where there are issues with the progression of their offspring through the route to good
employment, then parents of middle class children are able to support through remedial
measures (private tutors, cramming courses, and re-take colleges) to facilitate their offspring
in obtaining their goals, which would be totally cost prohibitive to working class children
(Ball, 2003, p92).

As Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001, p126) point out, ‘fighting for your child’ is
something that middle class parents are far more emotionally and materially equipped to do,
coupled with the impregnation of ideas about what life is like, and what should be aspired to.
Ball (2003, p109) concludes:

“The use of and investment in social capital requires and produces cultural
and emotional capital. Social capital requires emotional work and emotional
capital can be supplemented by economic capital and so on. Any deployment of
these concepts must involve some heurism; they are a way of simplifying and
formalizing class practices and the work of achieving class advantage of the
purpose of analysis. Nonetheless, they do useful analytic work and begin to fill
in some of the multi-faceted ways in which social reproduction is achieved by
agency and application and the adept deployment of relevant capitals by

Berstein (1975,p126) as long ago as the 1970’s makes the point that if the middle class is
‘to repeat its position in the class structure then appropriate secondary socialisation into
privileged education becomes crucial- ‘your child’s education, way of life…are on the line.’
Bourdieu and Boltanski (2000, p917) argue, ‘The education market has become one of the
most important loci of class struggle’. Ball (2003) argues that the education policies of
Thatcherism and Blairism have supported a classed base education system that seeks to
facilitate and maintain the middle class. McCraig (2001) states:

“After the Conservative interregnum, the aspirational middle class is now
attracted to individualist forms of organisation and signals of opportunity and
excellence. New Labour’s electoral success has been built on creating an
association with such individualist responses to aspirational demand.” (McCraig,
2001, p201)

Bauman (1998) offers a different answer to the politics of individualism that has been
subsumed so successfully by the middle class, he concludes:

“The welfare state come nowhere near the fulfilment of its founding fathers’
dream of exterminating once and for all poverty, humiliation and despondency;
yet it did produce a large enough generation of well educated, healthy, self
assured, self-reliant, self-confident people, jealous of their freshly acquired
independence, willing to cut the ground from beneath the popular support for
the idea that it is the duty of those who have succeeded to assist those who
continue to fail.” (Bauman,1998, p61).

The ‘classless’ society envisaged by Major has never come to pass, and high modern post
welfare societies are simply marked by new forms of class relations and new modalities of
class struggle, what Parkin (1979, p112) defines as a ‘distributive struggle’. Involving collectives, group and individual actions, which are in and around policies and institutions (Ball, 2003, p172)

From these writings therefore it might be argued that the middle class (petty bourgeoisie) has appropriated the power of education to maintain class differentials and class structure. Current education systems do not support the development per se of the proletariat, as is argued in Evans (2007) whose subjects all go to failing schools.

Crisis and the ‘Credit Crunch’

‘Capitalism in need of radical repair’, not a slogan from a socialist periodical, but the ‘Daily Mail’ Comment on Tuesday 16 September 2008, in relation to what has become known as ‘meltdown’ Monday (Daily Mail, 2008, p12). Having castigated the banks and bankers for their follies, which caused the collapse of one of Wall Streets main banks a ‘fire sale’ merger of another and a large bank/insurance company which had to be ‘bailed out’ by the US government. In the UK, the Halifax Bank of Scotland (HBOS) company had to merge with Lloyds TSB, to become the largest mortgage lender in the UK, after HBOS shares collapsed.

The latest ‘capitalist crisis’ came to a head on Monday 15th September 2008, when massive selling of shares sent the ‘stock market’ crashing, the reason for the fall is blamed on the failure of the sub-prime market in the USA. Banks in the USA were lending money to people to buy homes, who would not have been eligible for loans before, because for example they were unemployed. These loans were ‘sourced’ by bundling these loans with tens of thousands of others in an instrument known as a ‘Collateralised Debt Obligation (CDO). These CDO’s were then sold for cash to other banks, who then received the right to collect the mortgage payments. Amazingly, banks ten traded these CDOs around with each other, or used them as collateral from which to borrow further money. The whole exercise seems to be predicated on the grounds that the housing market will rise indefinitely, thus making the CDOs more valuable.

When the property bubble burst however in the USA (followed by a similar story in the UK) and many of the people that had received loans through the CDO were falling behind with their payments, leading to them having their homes repossessed by the banks that the problem arose. The problem then is that it is not possible to know how many of the mortgagors within the CDOs will default, thus the value of the CDO are unknown and could in theory be practically worthless. Nobody therefore wanted to buy them, so the value of CDOs dropped to nothing. Many banks had raised collateral against CDOs as assets, with the result that banks became unwilling to lend money to each other without increasing interest rates for inter-bank loans, against what could be financially worthless securities. Banks with the CDOs still had loans to pay. With no available money, they suffered liquidity problems, and were unable to meet their debts and thus effectively were ‘bust’. In the end the problem is resolved only by selling the banks in trouble cheap to a competitor as in the Lloyds/TSB fiasco, or as in the USA, the Government effectively buys up the ‘toxic’ CDO’s, at the cost of billions of dollars to the US government, and ultimately the tax payer both in the UK and the USA (Laurance, 2008, p14-15).

While the problems with the banking system have toppled banks, the fiasco has also damaged the financial markets, which underpin the ability of industry and commerce as well as individual home owners to borrow money cheaply. Those companies who have floated on the ‘stock exchange’ have seen the value of their assets devalued by billions of pounds. The failure of the banking industry therefore percolates down to the ordinary person in the street,
causing them to have less disposable money, or confidence to invest, creating a recession, unemployment and financial problems for workers.

As already discussed within this paper, the decline of ‘the job for life’ may have much to do with an acceptance by policy makers, that within a capitalist economy, cycles of boom and bust may change people’s careers either where for technological (in the way envisaged by Marx) reasons, jobs in industries may decline, or as in the case of the credit crunch, where the whole economy is declining due to a recession.

The role of skills therefore becomes very important if one accepts the scenario above, as to remain productive, a worker needs to move between industries and jobs as the economy moves. The development of generic skills becomes as important as general skills, although realistically absolute labour mobility is probably more illusory than may at times be assumed.

Although tangential to the main arguments of this paper, it is necessary to look at least from a Marxist perspective on the theory of crisis to see why Marx felt that crisis in the capitalist system happens, and how is or how might the SSA and SSCs be seen as in part a capitalist response to this enduring phenomenon within capitalism. Although it is suggested that Marx could not have foreseen the symptoms of the ‘credit crunch’ it is argued that this advanced form of capitalism does not prohibit an examination of what he has to say on the crisis within capitalism.

Marx in Capital (Marx, 1975) discusses the ways that a boom turns into a slump. First when there is a boom, the economy moves towards full employment, the wage rates are forced up and the rate of exploitation is reduced, as labour is free to sell itself to the highest bidder. Ultimately, this forces the least profitable firms out of business. The second is the disproportion that can arise out of the blind competitive accumulation of different sections of the economy, so leading to ‘partial’ overproduction as some industries produce goods for which there is no demand. Thus they were unable to sell these goods, or get funds to cover their investments. The third element in Marx’s explanation was the role of credit and interest. Capital investment is not a continual process; it involves the buying or building of large material objects, which embody large amounts of value (in the case of the sub-prime crash, mortgages against houses). When these are put to work they pass their value on to products. In a traditional economy, where the investment is in plant and equipment, the return to the capitalist does not return all at once, but slowly over time, and then the investment recommences (Harman, 1999, p59).

Interpreting Marx, Harman (1999) argues that what determines the rate of interest that a capitalist pays on loans that he makes to invest in capital, is the conflictting pressures of supply and demand for loans. The supply of loanable capital to the banks will be highest when the rate of profit in industry is highest- when expansion is proceeding, but before wages have risen and before any serious disproportions have occurred within the economy. Harman (1999, p60) argues that the rate of profits in part of the economy falls, then the supply of loanable capital will begin to fall also. This however creates a problem, because reasons Harman (1999) when loans are needed most by capitalists to cover them for short term debt, then they are hardest to come by. The banks then either grant the loans by making credit available, or as is the case currently with the credit crunch, they can push the companies into bankruptcy by refusing the loans. This creates a knock on effect throughout the economy, as companies that supplied a company going into bankruptcy (aside of probably not getting paid) are left to find new business in a receding market, and are therefore themselves likely to face liquidity problems and also struggle to get loans (Harman, 1999, p60). It is argued that it is this effect that the credit crunch is having on the economy now, as loans become more expensive, and people already in significant amounts of debt are being pushed into insolvency.
The economic slowdown will however impact on the effectiveness of the SSA and SSCs as training budgets, seen as a soft target for a company wanting to make cuts will be hit hardest, which is contrary to what Leitch (2007) would appear to recommend. In a ‘tight’ labour market, then the workers with highest skills will (so the Leitch argument goes) be able to find and retain work (Leitch, 2007).

New Labour, Governance and Policy

In this section, it is proposed to look at the effects of ‘New Labour’ (which was a socialist party once, even if it is not one now) governance and policy within that ‘New Labour’ perspective. Newman (2001) dismisses the ‘bald’ statement that ‘New Labour’ is simply a neo-liberal concept. She argues that ‘New Labour’ has sort to create a new set of political alliances, with a modernising agenda to tackle some of the perceived deep seated problems in UK society, which include among them poor schooling. This has entailed a watering down of neo-liberal solutions to public sector reform, with an emphasis on ‘joined up Government’, ‘public participation and partnership. The ‘Third Way’ was an attempt to retain the economic gains made by Thatcherism, while seeking to invoke moral and civic values to re-shape society; while at the same time recognising that Government was restrained in a new way by the perceived forces of globalisation (Newman, 2001, p1-2).

Rhodes (1994) argues that globalisation has impacted in two ways, through the ‘hollowing out of the nation state’ with some power going to the financial markets, who are able to move capital and other resources around, and to supra-national entities such as the World Bank or the European Union. Coupled with that however power has shifted down to regional level in the UK, all while being carried out in a climate of hostility to big Government (Newman, 2001, p12). Hirst (2000) shows where SSCs and other relevant bodies fit within new form of governance under ‘New Labour’ arguing that rather than being ‘hollowed out’ governance has become merged with non-state and non-public bodies, which Newman (2001) defines as public agencies and quangos, and it is through these organs that power and control are exercised, which is likely to have an impact on accountability and democratic control (Newman, 2001, p19).

Peters (2000, p45) concludes:

“If the old governance approach creates a straw person of the unitary state as motivator of the action, the decentralised, fragmented approach of the new governance appears to have little to force the action. Something may emerge from the rather unguided interactions within all the networks, but it is not clear how this will happen, and there is perhaps too much faith in the self-organising and self-coordinating capacities of people”(Peters, 2000, p45)

What therefore appears to be taking place is that government, rather than being reduced is merely being dissipated among a number of bodies, and residing therefore within a pluralistic context, an argument made previously by this author in relation to the SSA (Hammond, 2008).

Barnes et al (1999) state:

“[The state] emerges as one segment of a much broader play of power relations involving professionals, bureaucracies, schools, families, leisure organisations and so forth. In Foucault’s terms, the various institutions and practices of the state operate as part of a ‘capillary’ of relations in which power continually circulates and re-circulates. Accordingly, post-structural
interest is as much directed to the local dole office as the central policy-making bureau and the doctor’s surgery or social worker’s office as the Department of Health and Welfare (Barnes et al, 1999, p8)

The Thatcher and Regan era challenged the Keynesian orthodoxy to transform the state around market forces, this was achieved through partial displacement of professional forms of knowledge and power, by managerial forms of rationality and control (Newman, 2001, p21). Dean (1999) using post-structuralist theory illustrates the phenomenon in which new forms of knowledge and power become linked to individual subjectivities (Newman, 2001, p21):

“Government concerns not only practices of government but also practices of the self. To analyse government is to analyse those processes that try to shape, sculpt, mobilise and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and group...One of the points that is most interesting about this type of approach is the way it provides a language and a framework for thinking about the linkages between questions of government, authority and politics, and questions of identity, self and person (Dean, 1999, p12-13).

A pertinent analysis of this pluralism is Stoker’s (1999) contention that the state now seeks to steer rather than exert direct forms of control on government.

“...argues for the development of longer-term, non-hierarchical relationships which bring together service providers and users on the basis of trust, mutual understanding and a shared ethical or moral commitment. The emphasis is on empowering both providers and users so that they can work effectively in partnership to achieve shared goals. Quality in service delivery is a key goal. An interest in longer-term relational contracting is characteristic” (Stoker, 1999, p3-4).

The issues raised by the author in previous work on the SSA, has suggested that one of the most difficult things for SSCs to do, has been to work for agreement with defuse partners and stakeholders, all of whom want to place their agenda alongside as equal or superior to that of the proposals put forward in the SSA. The lack of government pressure to intervene or to give the SSC power to intervene makes it difficult in practice for the SSA to work.

Newman (2001) seeks to analyse government through models of governance: there are four models, the self governance model, the open systems model, the hierarchy model and the rational goal model. The hierarchical model is orientated towards predictability, control and accountability, as one might expect in a hierarchy and is to do with state control of policy development through hierarchies. Change is slow, but this model offers the strongest possibility of accountability. This model values security, order, standardisation and minimal risk (Newman, 2001, p33-34)

The rational goal model seeks shorter time lines and the attempt to maximise outputs. Power is dispersed across a wide range of agencies, rather than concentrated in hierarchies, and this model is characterised by managerial rather than bureaucratic power. Change is achieved through incentives, and although delivery is located down through targets to individual teams, there is still a centralist approach, as directives emanate from government. Policy is based on the assumption that organisations will behave as rational actors, responding to incentives, such as special funding, light touch inspection, or publication of league tables (Newman, 2001, p34-35).

In the ‘open systems model’, power is dispersed and fluid, based on the interdependence of actors and on the resources of others to pursue their goals. Relationships are dynamic and are
constantly being reshaped to respond to new challenges or demands. Experimentation and innovation are important facets within this model. In this model, Government might attempt to steer or influence action, but is unable to exert direct control. Power is decentralised, to create differentiation, experimentation and innovation. The boundary between policy and implementation becomes fluid, allowing feedback and learning during the policy cycle. Accountability is low, with change being accomplished by autopoiesis, through self-organisation and self-steering, rather than as a result of external intervention (Newman, 2001, p35; Kickert, 1993; Kooiman, 2000).

The self-governance model is orientated along long time lines, and focuses on building sustainability by fostering relationships of interdependence and reciprocity. It emphasises the role of the civil society, highlighting the relationship between citizen and the state, rather than seeing governance as being the actions of the state. Governments under this model may seek to work in partnership with citizens, as well as seeking to create social integration by fostering civic, familial and communitarian values that emphasise mutual responsibility. This model spans a number of conceptions related to the state, from the state producing social integration and cohesion, to a focus on citizens and communities as agents of political change (Newman, 2001, p35-36).

Newman (2001, p39) makes the point however, that while New Labour appears through devolution, partnership, policy evaluation, long term capacity building, public participation and democratic renewal to favours open and self governing models, other behaviour suggests a move back to more traditional control models.

The ‘Modernising Government White Paper set out by the Labour Government put forward three aims for modern Government. First, the white paper claimed that Government was to be more joined-up in its thinking and more strategic. Secondly there was an impetus to make public service users, not the providers the focus of public service policy, a species of this can be found in the attempt to create a demand led system around employers needs in the content of vocational education. Services are also supposed to oscillate around peoples’ lives, and be high quality and efficient (Newman, 2001, p58).

A further difference that possibly marked out ‘New Labour’ from its Conservative predecessor was the fundamental role that the public sector was deemed to have in the delivery of policy. The White Paper identified ‘five key principles’ related to policy. These are:

First, designing policy around shared objectives and carefully designed results, not around organisational structures or existing functions, an indication by ‘New Labour’ of attempting to break out of departmental silos. Secondly, making sure that policies are inclusive through taking account of the needs of all people, both individually and collectively, likely to be effected by them. Thirdly, involving others in policy making, through developing relations with the devolved nations, local Government and the private and public sectors and voluntary organisations etc. It is argued though, that it is this commitment that has produced the rather stagnant pluralism, identified by Hammond (2008). Fourthly, becoming more forward and outward looking, which involves improving and extending contingency planning, learning lessons from other countries and integrating the EU and wide international dimensions into the policy making process. Finally, learning from experience, which involves seeing policy making as a continuous process, which is learned from and improved upon; it also involves the use of more research to underpin policy decisions. (Cabinet Office, 1999a, Chapter 2, para 6).

A further document, ‘Professional Policy Making in the Twenty-first Century’ was based on a number of core competencies, which are as follows: Forward looking- taking a long view,
based on statistical trends and informed predications of the likely impact of policy. Given the obsession with statistics that accompanies the SSA and subsequent re-licensing of SSCs, it is not surprising that this is a general ‘key competence’ of Government policy. Secondly, ‘outward looking’, by taking into account factors in the national, European and International context, which are effectively communicated. Thirdly, using ‘innovative and creative thinking’, to question existing methodologies in policy making, and also looking for new way to do things differently in relation to the creation and implementation of policy. Fourthly, Using evidence, from a range of sources, including significant amounts of information as stated above from statistical sources. Joined-up, this involves breaking down the institutional barriers discussed above. Fifthly, ‘evaluation’, which involves the building up of a systematic evaluation of early policy outcomes into the policy process. Sixthly, reviews, which keep established policy under review to ensure that it continues to deal with the problems that it was designed to tackle. Finally there is ‘Learns lessons’ which learns from experience of what things work, and which don’t (Cabinet Office, 1999b: para 2.11).

Jervis and Richards(1997) argue that the ‘public management theories of the Conservatives had created a ‘democratic deficit’, which had resulted from the fragmentation of the ‘public realm’ and the creation of Government through ‘quangos’. The proliferation of quangos, led to arguments of a lack of legitimacy related to public policy decision making. The second deficit identified is the design deficit, which is argued to be a failure of policy to address the complexity of ‘wicked’ issues, such as crime, the environment, public health, transport, poverty, community safety etc (Newman, 2001, p59).

‘New Labour’ can be conceived to have brought a change to how policy is arrived at as a former permanent secretary at the Department of Employment explained:

“The thing which surprises me is the way in which-over the past 20 years- the development of policy has not received much attention. Within Whitehall and beyond, all the focus has been on the way we manage executive agencies. I think the way we develop policy now needs a radical rethink. In the old days we said good policy is politically safe and intellectually clever. This government is now saying: No it’s a lot more than that’. It focuses on issues not bounded by bureaucracy. It should be research based and properly evaluated. It is about including more people…in the development of that policy. That takes you towards social inclusion rather than away from it, as many current government policies tend to. More seriously, Whitehall has not been nearly as creative as it needs to be (Bichard, 1999, p7).

Wicks (1994) writing before the election of ‘New Labour’ argued that the machinery of Government, the departmental structures, even the select committees in the House of Commons, in fact Government itself, was riddled with ‘specialisms’ and departmentalism, which negated against ‘joined up’ solutions, and where civil servants develop reputations by safeguarding their budgets, and ‘driving’ people off their departmental turf (p22).

Despite all the proposals on how to make policy, and the extension of policy outside traditional boundaries to include disparate groups from the public and private sector, there are some detractors as to how actually policy is being created, Marr (2000) concludes:

“Policy is made by professionals in London, behind closed doors; sold and attacked through the national media and debated on chat shows. A whole tradition of political participation, based around direct argument in school halls, trade union offices or front rooms, plus annual pilgrimages to seaside resorts to vote on policies, is dying away (Marr, 2000, p28).
Newman (2001) also shows that Whitehall has invested a significant amount of money on research in recent years, with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) being one way that the Government has sought to bring researchers, ministers and civil servants into direct contact, through research fora and seminars (Newman, 2001, p70). Newman (2001,p72-73) points to the creation of multi-layered level of governance in the UK by New Labour, through the creation of Regional Development Agencies and the Devolved Nations. The behaviour of these tiers of regional and devolved national government, and their impact on the implementation of the SSA, will be considered in subsequent work, however it will be seen that it is the obtaining of agreement from these various bodies that is difficult to achieve.

As already discussed however, there is a dichotomy within the governance philosophies of New Labour, and this is emphasised well by Newman (2001).

“Two conflicting discourses are in play in the Labour government’s programme of public service modernisation. One is that of ‘partnership’, the other of ‘principals and agents’. A partnership discourse was associated with the attempt by government to learn from and draw on developments arising within the public sector, to consult with its staff and include them in the development of policy, and to influence their actions through communication and persuasion rather than the exercise of direct control...A rather different contractually based set of discourses ran alongside these, which was designed to ensure that local notion of a principal-agent relationship arises where one party (the agent) carries out work on behalf of another (the principal), where the interests of the principals and agents may not coincide (Ross, 1973; Walsh, 1995). This principal-agent form of relationship captures the way in which local services were mandated to deliver government policy but under conditions of tight monitoring and control” (Newman, 2001, p84-85)

The concept of contracting will have a significant amount of influence in later studies in the evaluation of the Sector Needs Analysis (SNA), which was carried out by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and how this impacted on SSCs. The tension between the needs of the SSCs to represent their employers in a way that the employers could understand, and the requirements that were laid down by the SSDA were significant. As Newman (2001) identified (p87) this phenomenon emanating from a Civil Service body (SSDA) created professional tensions that were difficult to reconcile for SSCs seeking to develop a SSA.

In relation to partnership, then Newman (2001, p105) states:

“The idea of partnership as an emerging form of governance is rather different. It is associated with the ‘hollowing out’ of the state and the increasing fragmentation and complexity of the public realm. These developments it is argued have led to changes in the way in which the state seeks to govern public services, with an emphasis on governing by steering rather than by direct forms of control (see Jessop, 2000; Kooiman, 2000; Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1997; Rhodes, 1999; Stoker, 1991; Stoker, 1999). Jessop locates the rise of the new governance in the realisation that the market reforms of neo-liberalism had not delivered all that had been promised: ‘market failures and inadequacies had not been eliminated, yet an explicit return to the state was ideologically and politically unacceptable’ (2000,p11). The idea of networks as a form of governance was linked to the growing interest of governments in public/private, and other forms of partnership.” (Newman, 2001, p105).

Jessop (2000, p11) the expansion of partnership is not an attempt to return the UK back to corporatism, but to address the real limitations of the market, state and mixed economy as a
means of dealing with various complex economic, political and social issues. Richards et al (1999, p10) argue that what partnership represents is the emergence of a new paradigm which is:

“…outcomes-focussed, in that the design must be based on the best available evidence of ‘what works’: it is holistic, the assumption being that many policy problems will be found not within the boundaries of single organisations, but on the interface between them, and the nature of the problem, rather than existing structural forms, should determine the delivery systems- ‘form follows function’; prevention, or early intervention, is preferable and cheaper than cure or late intervention; and culture change highlights the notion that with many wicked issues, only the active involvement of the citizens trapped within the problem will secure a solution.” (Richards et al, 1999, p10)

Newman (2001, p109) identifies seven objectives that flow from partnerships and joint working for the government: first, using partnership and joint working creates an integrated, holistic approach to the development and delivery of public policy. Secondly (as part of joined-up government) to overcome the ‘Whitehall mentality’ of departmental barriers and silo management, and thirdly to reduce the transaction costs resulting from overlapping policies and initiatives, through co-ordination and integration. Fourthly, to deliver better policy outcomes by eliciting the contribution of multiple players at central, regional, local and community tiers of governance, and fifthly to improve coordination and integration of the service delivery among providers. Sixthly (and this has already been discussed in some detail) to develop new innovative approaches to policy development or service provision, through bringing together the contributions and expertise of different partners, and seventhly, to increase the financial resources available for investment by developing partnerships and joint ventures between the public, private and not for profit sectors (Newman, 2001, p109).

As already suggested though there still remains this dichotomy in this partnership arrangement, between devolution of power down, and Ministers still keeping control, as identified by Stewart (2000):

“The difficulty confronting the Blair government in managing this complex vertical/horizontal system is that whilst in principle the aim is to devolve downwards to regions and local government, in practice the centre (ministers and officials) retains tight control. Whilst integration and joining up is embodied in the rhetoric of policy, in practice few of the interests are willing or able to concede the flexibility across programmes which genuine action requires (Stewart, 2000, p4).

Another detriment to the partnership model (although operating outside of it) is that partnership can take along time, whereas modern government needs results fast to present to the electorate. Mottram (2000) (a senior Civil servant) pondered on this dilemma:

“The government has a number of desirable aims for improving our system of governance...They include-in the jargon-seeking cross-cutting approaches with a long-term, outcome-based focus. The Government wants, and has developed, better patterns of co-operation with other levels of government and is seeking with them to build capacity at the community level. At the same time, as for all governments, there is compelling need for (quick) results, the emphasis, wholly reasonably, is on delivery, delivery, delivery. These goals are not necessarily incompatible but nor are they without potential conflict. Thus the quickest way confidently to get results may be seen to be through top down command with the familiar plans, zones, targets and money coming down in tubes to match the various Whitehall silos. Some of the people at the centre can, in my
experience, be just as keen on this sort of approach as some in departments and, if pressed on why, can point out - entirely correctly - that looser, more involving, less standardised and directed approaches have been tried in the past and found wanting. The ultimate test which will be applied with particular rigour is: ‘What works?’ Those keen-like me - for partnership working of various kinds and for more freedom of manoeuvre for those on the ground must show that it delivers more than the alternative.” (Mottsam, 2000, p2)

The use of targets to monitor the performance of professionals is a key part of New Labour’s strategy of public sector governance, and relies heavily on localised planning such as Best Value performance plans, Health Improvement plans, School Development plans etc. From the planning process, which is mandatory, there flow audits and inspections, such as OfSTED. Newman (2001, p88) argues that these targets and inspections can be viewed as strategies to focus professional effort and managerial activity around Government proprieties. In commenting further on the principal-agent model of governance, Newman (2001), makes the following point:

“However, the dominance of the ‘principal-agent’ in Labour’s approach to delivering change tended to produce a calculative form of trust based on compliance to a set of contractual relations. The modernisation agenda was implemented through a range of implicit or explicit contracts. These often took the form of exchange relationships such as the linking of the release of money for modernisation to delivery against staged targets as in education: ‘We are proposing money for modernisation-serious investment in return for necessary reform. The Government, supported by the wide public, cannot and will not proceed without this fair exchange’ (Blunkett, 1999, p11). More personal and constitutive forms of contractual relationship - what might be termed new psychological contracts were also set out by government in place of the enforced restructurings of the past: ‘I want to make sure that the people in the NHS have up-to-date and authoritative guidance, training and advice. In turn, they must be willing to change and be open to new ideas’ (Dobson, 1999, p18)” (Newman, 2001, p117)

Leadership and its role within the partnership process is a vital part of the process, but in discussions on partnership is often marginalised (Huxham and Vangen, 1999) Luke (1998) talks about leadership in relation to partnership as being a need for emergent, participative and power-sharing. Newman (2001, p117) concludes however, that this stands in contradiction to the views of many public sector practitioners of the reality of partnership working, and the need for stronger, more directive leadership to bid for funding within short timescales or deliver the outputs desired by government performance requirements. Ultimately, Newman (2001, p119) suggests that the tensions described above, have led the government to adopt more hierarchical and prescriptive methods of partnering, which has presented difficulties for sustaining collaborative activity. Clarence (1999) identifies the tensions of the collaborative discourse of government with the continuation of performance management regimes, which are based on economic rationalism developed by the previous Conservative governments:

“These two approaches run counter to each other and have created tensions in government policy and programmes. The tensions evident in the Labour government’s agenda have had an effect on networking and partnership working at the local level and impacted upon ways in which local authorities
have responded to the opportunities offered by the expectations of central government.” (Clarence, 1999, p2).

Ultimately Hudson et al (1999) argue that as early as 1999 (only two years into their tenure) the ‘New Labour’ Government had resorted to more ‘realistic’ (which I interpret to mean more public management focussed) images of partnership.

“Exhortations to be decent about joint working have been replaced by a panoply of incentives and threats…and amount to a very different model- the realistic model. The basic assumption here is that individual and group interests are multiple and divergent, and that the net result is competition, bargaining and conflict” (Hudson et al, 1999, p199)

Within the SSA material, there are significant amounts of control and principal-agent relationships that need to be identified, and this will be considered in further work within these work in progress papers, as well as the final substantive piece of work. There is much therefore that can be said on this issue, and in a further piece of work, I intend to develop this theoretical analysis, by looking more specifically at the principal-agent relationship between the SSCs and the SSDA.

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