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ARE THE UNEMPLOYED AN UNDERCLASS?
SOME EVIDENCE FROM THE SOCIAL
CHANGE AND ECONOMIC LIFE INITIATIVE

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The view that, the long-term unemployed constitute part of a growing underclass in British society has become increasingly popular in both political and academic circles, despite the fact (and perhaps partly because of the fact) that there is no generally shared view about what the concept of an underclass implies. At a very general level one can perhaps detect three common features of most definitions: first, an underclass is a social stratum that suffers from prolonged labour market marginality; second, it experiences greater deprivation than even the manual working class and third it possesses its own distinctive sub-culture. However, the term has come to reflect two quite opposed views about the determinants of membership and the cultural characteristics of the underclass. For the sake of simplicity one could define these as the 'conservative' and the 'radical' conceptions of the underclass. While the term underclass has been applied to the situation of diverse social groups, the differences in these underlying conceptions comes out quite clearly in their treatment of the unemployed, and in particular, of the long-term unemployed.

In the conservative view, unemployment is attributed to the personal characteristics and work attitudes of the unemployed themselves. The distinctive characteristic of the unemployed is that they are people who have failed, either because of innate personality deficiencies or because of a breakdown in the system of primary socialization, to assimilate the work ethic. They are characterized by a degree of behavioural instability that makes it difficult for them to hold any job for long or they are people with low commitment to employment, the 'work shy.' This view has a very long pedigree. It informed much of the thinking that accompanied the changes in the Poor Law in the early 19th century. It was resurrected more recently in theories of the 'culture of poverty' in the United States and of 'cycles of deprivation' in the United Kingdom. It gained particular visibility in Britain through Charles Murray's (1990) essay 'Underclass'. It is a conception of the underclass that has important implications for views about appropriate state policies. In general, it is accompanied by a rather pessimistic view about what can be done for the unemployed. Given that the causes of unemployment are deeply ingrained in long-term, intergenerationally transmitted, sub-cultural characteristics or in

inherited personality traits, policy measures are regarded as unlikely to be effective in helping people to obtain secure jobs. Even state financial assistance for the unemployed is seen as morally suspect, given the 'undeserving' character of those assisted, and as reinforcing rather than alleviating the root sources of the problem. Welfare assistance is thought to contribute directly to the development of a 'dependency' culture.

In contrast, the 'radical' perspective on the underclass perceives the unemployed as largely victims of their circumstances. The evolution of advanced capitalist societies is seen either as generating long-term unemployment due to the implications of rapid technological change for traditional skills and labour requirements or as creating chronic recurrent unemployment, as a result of the emergence of a new type of employment structure. One version of this perspective (Giddens, 1973) merges with theories of the growth of 'dual' or 'segmented' labour markets. In an ever more competitive international economic system, with much higher levels of product market unpredictability, employers are thought to have moved towards a form of labour force organisation that differentiates between a stable core of workers, that benefits from high pay and security, and a periphery of secondary workers who are hired and fired at short notice to meet market fluctuations. Such secondary workers become locked into a position of labour market disadvantage and provide the recruits to the underclass. Labour market marginality is seen as leading to increased resentment about the established institutions of society and to new forms of social radicalism that can no longer be readily channelled by traditional working class organizations.

This paper considers some empirical evidence on the assumptions underlying these two rather different conceptions of the underclass. It draws on data from the surveys of the ESRC's Social Change and Economic Life Initiative, which provide a rare source of good comparative information on the work histories and current attitudes of employed and unemployed people. The surveys were based on six urban labour markets, selected to provide contrasting labour market conditions. Three of the labour markets - Swindon, Aberdeen and Northampton - had known relatively buoyant employment conditions for the better part of the 1980s, while the

other three - Coventry, Rochdale and Kirkcaldy- had experienced prolonged recession through the 1980s. The main part of the data is from the Work Attitudes/Histories survey, conducted in 1986, in which 6111 people were interviewed. Some supplementary information has been drawn from the follow-up Household and Community survey, in which approximately one third of the original respondents (1816) were re-interviewed in 1987.

It should be noted that conceptions of the underclass differ in terms of whether or not they treat the individual or the household as the key unit of analysis. Runciman (1990) and Morris (1992), who argue respectively for and against the usefulness of the concept, consider that it is the individual's own position that is crucial. Smith (1991), on the other hand, regards the fact of being in a household in which both partners are excluded from the labour market as the defining characteristic of underclass status. Most of the theoretical arguments imply that it is individual characteristics or experiences that account for membership of an underclass, and this is the position that has been adopted for the analysis. Where, however, the non-employment of the individual's partner could well reinforce the process in question, the partner's employment status has been included as an additional control variable.

The definition of unemployment that was adopted for these surveys is that people should either have been registered for benefit on grounds of unemployment or have been without work and looking for a job in the previous four weeks. The data can be easily disaggregated, however, into different categories of the unemployed in terms of benefit status, and an earlier paper (Gallie and Vogler, 1990) has shown that whether or not people receive benefits has little effect on their pattern of work attitudes. For present purposes, the major difference of concern is that of the duration of unemployment. It seems rather implausible that those unemployed for a short period would have the characteristics attributed to the underclass (see Gallie, 1988). It is the long-term unemployed that provide the serious test of the assumptions that underly the different theses. The unemployed, then, have been divided into three basic categories: those that have been unemployed for six months or less, those

unemployed for between six and twelve months, and those unemployed for more than twelve months.

The Conservative Perspective

To take first the conservative perspective on the underclass, the core proposition is that the unemployed are in some sense inherently unemployable. If this is the case, it should be evident in a high level of instability in people's work histories, in the inability to sustain any job for very long and in attitudes to work that indicate a much lower degree of commitment to the labour market. How well does the evidence support such a view of the employment experience and work attitudes of the unemployed?

1. Stability and Instability in Work Histories

One sign of the type of behavioural instability that is assumed in this version of the theory should be the tendency of the unemployed to change jobs much more frequently than the employed. This can be examined through a comparison of past work histories.¹ The Sceli data is particularly rich in this respect as it involved the collection of a full account of people's labour market and job experiences from the time that they first left full-time education.

The evidence indicates that there is very little difference in job mobility between the employed and the unemployed overall: the mean number of jobs for the unemployed was the same as for the employed (6.0). It is primarily the long-term unemployed, however, that are held to be members of an underclass. If the data are examined by duration of unemployment, it is clear that the long-term unemployed were no more likely than the employed or other categories of the unemployed to have changed jobs frequently in their past work histories. If anything, they may have been marginally more stable (Table 1). A regression analysis showed that the main determinants of job mobility are age, sex and

industry (Table 2). Older people had held more jobs than younger people; men had changed jobs more frequently than women and people employed in the construction industry showed particularly high levels of job mobility.

Table 1. Number of Jobs in Work History

	T	M	F
SE	6.5	6.6	5.7
Emp	6.0	6.3	5.7
U6	5.6	6.4	5.0
U12	6.6	7.1	5.6
U12+	5.5	6.0	4.1
NA	4.3	5.9	4.1
N	6074	2672	3402

Table 2. Determinants of Number of Jobs Involving a Change in Employer, Employed and Unemployed

Variable	Beta	T	Sig T
Age < 25	-.52	-25.6	.0000
Age 25-34	-.37	-16.2	.0000
Male	.10	7.1	.0000
Age 35-44	.15	-6.7	.0000
Construction	.08	5.9	.0000
Agricultural	.06	4.6	.0000
Age 45-54	-.08	-3.9	.0001
Distribution/Hotel	.05	3.5	.0005
Unemp. 6-12 mths	.04	2.9	.0043
O Levels	-.04	-3.3	.0010
Unemp. 12 mths	-.04	-2.9	.0040
Transport	.03	2.2	.0277
(Constant)	7.66		

R² = 0.22

N = 4548

A second approach is to look at the duration of the longest job that people have held. Both White (1983, 1991) and Daniel (1991) have argued persuasively that the most recent job can be a very a misleading indicator of the potential of an unemployed person. It may merely reflect a process of entry into low-skilled, short-term work when people become unemployed in poor labour market conditions. If the unemployed were in some sense inherently unstable workers, this would be reflected more reliably in a relatively short tenure of their longest job. In practice, while the unemployed were likely to have spent less time in their longest job than the employed, the difference was very small. The average duration of the longest job of the unemployed was 74 months, while that for the employed was 76 months. Again there is no evidence that the long-term unemployed formed a distinct category in this respect. The duration of longest job for the long-term unemployed was 73 months, virtually the same as for those unemployed for six months or less (Table 3). There is a difference in the patterns for men and women. Long-term unemployed men had experienced slightly greater job durations than those currently in employment. Among women, on the other hand, the pattern is reversed, with the long-term unemployed having held their longest job on average thirteen months less than women in employment. Overall, however, there is no evidence that the long-term unemployed were people who had, in the past, found it difficult to stay in a job on a relatively stable basis.

Table 3. Length of Longest Job (Months)

	T	M	F
SE	83	88	74
E	76	83	69
U6	74	92	61
U12	76	91	62
U12+	73	86	56
NA	81	156	71
	5788	2550	3238

In general, then, an examination of the work histories of the unemployed does little to support the view that they were people characterized by a markedly lower level of employability. Rather, in terms of their past experiences, they showed a level of employment stability that was very close indeed to that of people currently in employment.

2. Work Attitudes and Unemployment

It might be argued that past work histories are not necessarily a good guide to current attitudes and that it is the latter which are likely to be the key factor reinforcing exclusion from employment. Is there any evidence that the unemployed, or particular categories of the unemployed, are less interested in long-term participation in the labour market? A well tested measure of work commitment has been developed by the Social and Applied Psychology Unit (SAPU) at Sheffield. This asks people whether or not they would wish to continue working (or, in the case of the unemployed and non-actives, work somewhere) if they were to get enough money to live as comfortably as they would like for the rest of their lives.

What does this measure reveal about the importance of employment for the long-term unemployed? A first point to note is that the unemployed as a whole were actually more committed to employment than those in work. Among employees and the self-employed, 66% would wish to continue working if there were no financial necessity. Among the unemployed, the proportion rises to 77%. Further, the data reveal very little variation by duration of unemployment (Table 4). While the long-term unemployed are a little less committed than the short-term unemployed (72% compared with 76%), they still show a considerably higher level of commitment than the employed. This pattern emerges quite clearly for both men and women. This provides little support for the view that the unemployed have particularly low levels of work commitment.

Table 4. Employment Commitment

	% Committed		
	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
Self-employed	72	75	66
Employed	64	66	61
U/E 6 months	76	78	75
U/E 12 months	75	78	70
U/E 12 months +	72	74	69
Non-Active	68	86	66
	5258	2542	2716

To provide a stronger test of the effects of the duration of unemployment, a logistic regression was carried out controlling for age, qualifications and the employment status of the person's partner. Table 4b presents the relative odds of a person being committed to employment. Two of the control variables were strongly linked to employment commitment. The likelihood that people will be committed declines with age, and this is particularly marked among those aged 55 or over. There is also a strong effect of qualifications; the higher the person's level of qualification, the more likely they were to be committed. Yet, even when such factors have been controlled for, the earlier conclusions still emerge very clearly. While the long-term unemployed are less likely to be committed than the short-term unemployed, they remain considerably more likely to be committed than the employed.

The relationship between type of unemployment and work commitment was explored further through the construction of an index of employment deprivation.² Using a five point scale, those currently unemployed were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about the experience of being without a paid job. Whereas the measure of employment commitment is designed to tap the strength of people's longer-term desire to remain in the labour market, the measure of employment deprivation is concerned with the more immediate distress that results from being without

a job. The nature of these questions made them only applicable to the unemployed and non-actives.

Table 4b Logistic Regression Parameter Estimates for the Odds of Employment Commitment

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Constant Employment Status	1.73	1.88	1.74
Employed	1.00	1.00	1.00
Self-Employed	1.56	1.63	1.26
U/E 6 months	1.79	1.85	1.83
U/E 12 months	1.79	1.95	1.51
U/E 12 months -	1.65	1.60	1.55
Non-Active returners	1.10	3.48	1.10
AGE			
24 or less	1.00	1.00	1.00
25 to 34	0.95	1.17	0.81
35 to 44	0.80	0.99	0.68
45 to 54	0.66	0.77	0.57
55 +	0.37	0.39	0.33
PARTNER'S EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
		ns	ns
Other	1.00	1.00	1.00
Unemployed or Non-Active	1.20	1.17	0.99
QUALIFICATIONS			
None	1.00	1.00	1.00
Vocational/O level	1.61	1.00	1.23
A Level -	1.95	1.45	2.37

To begin with is that the unemployed are quite distinct from the non-actives. Taking the overall scores, the unemployed had an average score of 0.61, whereas the non-employed had an average score of -0.41. Both men and women experienced

employment deprivation as a result of unemployment, although the score was higher for men (0.74) than for women (0.43). Among the non-actives, on the other hand, there was a marked difference in pattern by sex. Satisfaction with the situation of being without paid work was attributable to the women; non-active men (frequently suffering from health problems) clearly felt deprived at being without a job.

Was there any evidence that the long-term unemployed were relatively well adapted to the situation of being without a job, as would be expected if the assumptions of the conservative version of underclass theory were correct? The data indicate that this was not the case. The scoring system for this measure meant that positive scores indicated distress with being without paid work, while negative scores indicated satisfaction. If the scores are examined (Table 5), those with longer periods of unemployment showed even higher levels of deprivation than the short-term unemployed. This was the case for both men and women. When age, qualifications and partner's employment status are controlled for through a multiple classification analysis, the same pattern emerges in the data, but the differences are no longer statistically significant (Table 6). The safest conclusion, then, is that there is little difference in employment deprivation between the long and the shorter term unemployed. There is certainly no evidence that the long-term unemployed have become reconciled with the situation of being without work.

Table 5 Employment Deprivation

	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
U/E 6 months	.50	.66	.39
U/E 12 months	.64	.75	.49
U/E 12 months +	.69	.80	.50
Non-Active	-.41	.20	-.49

Table 6 Employment Deprivation Among the Unemployed
Deviation from Grand Mean adjusted for Independents

	MEN	WOMEN
	Grand Mean 0.74	Grand Mean 0.43
Length of Unemployment		
U/E 6 months	-0.01	-0.03
U/E 12 months	-0.01	0.07
U/E 12 months +	0.01	0.05
	(ns)	(ns)
Age		
24 or less	0.01	0.10
25 to 34	-0.02	0.00
35 to 44	0.07	-0.07
45 to 54	0.19	0.08
55 +	-0.24	-0.40
Qualifications		
None	0.11	0.04
Vocational & O Level	-0.01	-0.04
A Level +	-0.24	-0.04
		(ns)
Partner Employment Status		
Partner Unemployed or Non-Emp	0.14	0.09
Other	-0.10	-0.01
		(ns)

The general argument that the long-term unemployed were brought up with, or have developed, a distinctive set of attitudes towards work gets little support from the data. It was noted earlier, however, that some versions of the underclass argument stress the possible distinctiveness of those unemployed that are in families where both partners are without work. It is argued that this is either indicative of, or tends to produce, a particularly high level of isolation from social interaction with those in employment, which encourages a distinctive culture. However, this thesis also fails to get support from the data.

Among men without work, those whose wives were also without work experienced higher levels of employment deprivation (whereas for unemployed women the employment status of the partner made no significant difference).

3. Work Attitudes and Job Acquisition

While there is no evidence that the unemployed are less committed to work than the employed, there is still a substantial diversity in attitudes among the unemployed. This raises the issue of whether the nature of such attitudes is of importance in determining the likelihood that people will obtain a job. Are those that show relatively high levels of motivation able to escape from unemployment more quickly than those that are less committed to employment?

The answer to this question clearly cannot be obtained through cross-sectional data analysis, since this fails to provide the critical information on temporal sequence needed to establish the direction of causality. For part of the sample, however, it is possible to examine their fortunes in the labour market between the period of the initial collection of information on work attitudes in 1986 and the time of a follow-up survey carried out in 1987. Approximately one third of the original sample was selected for the follow-up survey. Of the total of 1815 respondents that were re-interviewed, 377 had been unemployed at the time of the first survey. The work histories collected in the first survey were updated, providing detailed information on the timing of any change that had occurred in people's employment status between surveys.

In order to examine the relative importance of determinants of labour market outcomes for those unemployed at the time of the first interview, proportional hazard models were estimated of the instantaneous probabilities of obtaining a job for individuals that differed in their patterns of work attitude and in a range of individual and household characteristics (Table 7).

Table 7 Determinants of Job Acquisition (All unemployed)

Log Likelihood	= -737.4155		
Global Chi-squared	= 104.62	DF = 20	p-value = 0.000
Work Attitudes	Estimate	PE/SE	Exp (Coeff)
Employment Commitment	0.2172	0.88	1.24
Employment Deprivation	-0.1961	-1.37	0.72
Occupational Flexibility	-0.4615	-2.52	0.63
Geographical Flexibility	0.2756	1.35	1.32
Gender Traditionalism	-0.0463	-1.64	0.76
Class and Labour Market Characteristics			
Manual	0.6542	3.12	1.92
Unemployed once before ^a	0.5593	2.31	1.75
Unemployed twice before ^a	0.7943	2.75	2.21
Individual Characteristics			
Age under 25	-0.5651	-1.98	0.57
Age 25-34	-0.2447	-0.95	0.78
Age 45+	-0.2881	-1.00	0.75
No Qualifications	-0.6531	-2.13	0.52
Vocational or O/L Quails	0.2075	0.78	1.23
Sex	-0.0296	-0.14	0.97
Type of Unemployed			
Claimant Seeker	0.8960	2.84	2.45
Non-registered	1.5657	4.66	4.79
Type of Locality			
High Unemployment	0.596	0.33	1.06
Household Characteristics			
Partner FT ^a or PT ^a	0.5652	2.40	1.76
Partner UN or Non	-0.1691	-0.70	0.84
Financial Stress	-0.1865	-0.90	0.83

^a (in the last five years)

What factors affected the probabilities of job acquisition and how important were attitudinal factors among them? The first and most notable conclusion to emerge is that for the overall sample neither longer-term employment commitment nor the severity of the more immediate experience of employment deprivation were significant determinants of the likelihood of getting a job. These general conclusions about the unimportance of employment motivation hold for both men and women.

Nor does the evidence suggest that the flexibility of people in their approach to job search was of much importance in helping them to obtain work more rapidly. Geographical flexibility had no significant effect, while a willingness to consider retraining to acquire a different type of skill was associated with a longer duration of unemployment. Presumably those that were seriously considering retraining were people confronted by a particularly bleak labour market situation, in which there were very few jobs for people with the skills they possessed. Those that were more demanding about the pay they expected had very similar chances of obtaining a job to those that were less demanding. The data point to the conclusion that neither employment motivation nor flexibility in attitudes to work have any general significance in improving people's employment chances.

Overall, then, there was little evidence that employment commitment, employment deprivation or flexibility about job choice had any general impact on re-employment chances. Given the explanatory weakness of attitudinal variables, what factors did account more generally for people's labour market experiences?

Among the factors that affected people's chances of finding work, three are particularly notable. First, of the different categories of the unemployed, it was the non-registered that stood by far the best chances of getting a job. This probably reflects the fact that the greater proportion of the non-registered were women and they were more likely to be seeking a type of work that had been growing rapidly, namely part-time work.

A second factor that increased chances was related to the employment structure of the household. Unemployed people with a partner in employment had twice the odds of finding a job of people that were single or whose partner was without employment.

Although the association is statistically significant only for men, it is in the same direction for women. Since motivational factors have been controlled for, it seems likely that this reflects differential job search resources, such as access to informal networks that provide information about available job opportunities and the maintenance of a level of family finance that facilitates job search.

Third, there was evidence of a class effect on the likelihood of finding a job. In particular, manual workers were likely to obtain work more rapidly than non-manual. The greater chances of achieving a job for manual workers may reflect the fact that unemployment has been far more prevalent among manual workers and may be regarded, therefore, as less stigmatic by employers. Higher levels of turnover in such jobs may also ease the path of new entrants.

Finally, the most important factor reducing people's chances of finding a job was that of the absence of qualifications. Those without qualifications had only half the odds of getting work of those with qualifications. Given that motivational factors are controlled for, this would seem to reflect the less favourable opportunities for work available for such workers. The general direction of occupational and technical change has been to raise the skill level of work and the qualifications required of employees. This structural change in the organization of work is then likely to make the reentry problems of those without qualifications particularly severe.

Overall, the examination of the factors that influenced the likelihood of those unemployed in the first wave of our interviews obtaining work suggests that it is factors linked to the structural conditions of the labour market, rather than to the motivational characteristics of the unemployed themselves, that affect their chances. There was no association between either employment commitment or employment deprivation and the chances of finding work within the sample as a whole. For the greater part, the variables that do appear to influence job chances are those that reflect either the structure of opportunities in the labour market (such as the availability of part-time work, the willingness of employers to recruit unqualified workers) or the availability of mechanisms that provide linkages to information networks about job

that provide linkages to information networks about job opportunities (through the contacts and resources of a household member in employment).

The Radical Perspective

The radical perspective on the underclass focuses on the way in which progressive marginalisation from the labour market leads to the creation of a stratum of society that suffers from cumulative disadvantage and that experiences even sharper deprivation than low skilled employed manual workers. Further, it is argued that material deprivation, the psychological costs of exclusion from employment and dependence on state support for income combine to generate a form of consciousness that is markedly different from that of the employed working classes and that can no longer be readily channelled by the traditional institutions of the labour movement. The nature of this consciousness has been a matter of some disagreement. Some stress the tendency of the unemployed to withdraw into a state of apathy and passivity (Jahoda *et al.* 1972). Others have suggested that members of an underclass develop a more radical attitude to social change, which looks to direct action rather than to parliamentary process (Giddens, 1973; Rex and Tomlinson, 1979).

The following sections, then, will first examine the extent to which the long-term unemployed suffer from distinctive disadvantages in terms of material deprivation, psychological well-being and social isolation. It will then turn to consider whether such disadvantages have implications for people's beliefs about legitimate political action and for their attitudes to existing forms of political representation.

1. Material Deprivation

There can be little doubt that the unemployed suffer from a level of material deprivation that is greater than that of the employed working class. For the great majority

unemployment leads to a sharp fall in available income and to severe financial hardship. In the Sceli sample, overall 68% of the registered unemployed had lost 40% or more of the income they had in their last job and 84% had lost 20% or more. The view that welfare benefits provide a level of income that risks to undermine the financial incentives of employment finds little empirical support. At the most some 11% of the unemployed (and 7% of the male unemployed) receive benefits that are of a similar level to their previous earnings and this group is distinctive in that its members came from particularly low paying jobs.

The picture from the Sceli data corresponds with that from other national studies. For instance, in the national longitudinal study 'Living Standards during Unemployment', Heady and Smyth found that, after three months of unemployment, the average disposable income of families whose head had previously been in full-time work was 59% of what it had been before signing on.

The sharp decline in household income is reflected quite directly in people's reports of financial hardship. As can be seen from Table 8, there is a substantial difference in reported financial difficulty between the employed and even those that have been unemployed for less than 6 months. While 23% of the employed said that they found their current financial circumstances very or quite difficult, this was the case for 47% of those unemployed for less than 6 months, 72% of those unemployed for 6 to 12 months and 78% of those unemployed for more than twelve months.

Table 8 Financial Deprivation						
% finding their current financial circumstances:						
	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	Very diff.	Quite diff.	Very diff.	Quite diff.	Very diff.	Quite diff.
Self Employed	4	19	4	18	2	20
Employed	4	19	3	18	5	20
Unemployed < 6 months	24	38	26	32	25	38
Unemployed 6-12 months	38	34	48	36	23	29
Unemployed 12 months +	38	40	40	40	38	30
Non-Active	15	26	21	25	15	25

The disadvantage of the unemployed is still very marked if employed non-skilled manual workers are taken as the comparison group. Further, a logistic regression controlling for sex, age, class, local unemployment and partners' employment status (Table 9) shows, that not only does the disadvantage associated with longer periods of unemployment persist when such controls are introduced, but that there is a sharp rise in the relative odds of experiencing financial deprivation with each duration category.

Table 9 Financial Deprivation
Parameter Estimate for Odds of Experiencing Financial Deprivation

VARIABLE	LEVEL	MULTIPLICATIVE ESTIMATES
Constant		0.20
Labour Market Position		
	Self-Employed	1.00
	Employed	0.89
	U/E (6 months or less)	4.60
	U/E (7-12 months)	6.99
	U/E (over 12 months)	8.64
	Non-active	1.83
Sex		n.s.
Age		
	24 or less	1.00
	25 - 34	1.22
	35 - 44	1.32
	45 - 54	1.12
	55 or over	0.95
Class		
	Non-Manual	1.00
	Skilled Manual	1.25
	Non-Skilled Manual	1.73
Area		
	Low unemployment	1.00
	High unemployment	1.27

2. Psychological Stress.

The evidence of the impact of unemployment on psychological stress is remarkably consistent across studies (Warr, 1987). A reduced version of the GHQ (a measure of anxiety and depression) that was used in Sceli surveys produced the now familiar pattern whereby the unemployed showed significantly higher levels of psychological distress than the employed (Table 10). The pattern remained clear-cut after sex, age, class background and the level of unemployment in the local area have been controlled for. The impact of unemployment would appear to occur relatively early on and there is no significant difference in psychological distress between people with different durations of unemployment. It is also notable that there is no significant difference within the unemployed between men and women. Longitudinal research (Warr and Jackson, 1985; Heady and Smyth, 1990), has now established clearly that it is unemployment that causes psychological distress rather than the reverse.

Table 10 Psychological Stress (GHQ Scores)

	ALL (c)	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Self Employed	3.21	3.11	3.16	3.05
Employed	3.19	3.15	3.03	3.32
Unemployed < 6 months	4.72	4.66	4.59	4.80
Unemployed 6-12 months	4.90	4.69	4.67	5.13
Unemployed 12 months +	4.68	4.64	4.68	4.50
Non-Actives	3.70	3.75	4.15	3.71

Note: All (c) = means estimates by MCA analysis controlling for sex, age, class and area.

There is also evidence that unemployment has a spill-over effect on other members of the family and on social relationships within the family. In the Sceli data, over 90% of both unemployed men and unemployed women felt that unemployment caused tension in the family and over 65% felt strongly that this was the case. Richard Lampard (1990) has used the Sceli work and life history data to examine the relationship between

unemployment and marital dissolution longitudinally, controlling for a range of background factors. His evidence points strongly to the conclusion that unemployment does directly increase the risk of marital dissolution. He estimated that the marriage of an unemployed person was 2.3 times as likely to end in the following year as the marriage of a person that had never been unemployed.

3. Social Segregation and Social Support

In contrast to the picture provided by the inter-war literature of virtually complete social withdrawal, the evidence from these surveys in the mid 1980s indicated that the unemployed continued to participate actively in social networks outside the household. However, the amount of sociability with people outside the household was lower than among the employed. The pattern varied considerably depending on the characteristics of the unemployed person. Unemployment was associated with a particularly low level of sociability among single people, whereas married women were affected much less. There is some sign of a curvilinear trend with duration. Sociability was substantially lower among those unemployed for six months to a year than among those unemployed for less than six months. But the long-term unemployed had a level of sociability that fell between these two groups, possibly indicating some degree of adaptation to unemployment.

However, an emphasis purely on the extensiveness of sociability may conceal important qualitative differences in relationships. In practice, there appeared to be a difference in the extent to which the social networks of the employed and unemployed offered effective social support. The unemployed were less likely than the employed to have somebody that they could rely upon if they felt depressed, if they needed someone to keep an eye on their house while they were away, if they needed financial assistance or if they wanted help in finding a job. If a high support network is defined as one in which a person can rely on help in at least three of these four situations, 74% of the employed, but only 45% of the long-term unemployed, were in high support networks (Table 11a).

Table 11 Social Support

A) % with high support							
	SE	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	T
MEN	73	74	71	55	45	59	70
WOMEN	73	79	79	73	62	72	76
B) % with half or more of their friends unemployed							
	SE	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	
	6	7	37	61	56	21	%
C) % among unemployed with high support by employment composition							
	Proportion of Friends Unemployed						
	None/Few	A Quarter	Half	Three Quarters			
All U/E	77	69	70	54			
N=	111	16	46	52			
Male U/E	70	50	71	56			
Female U/E	81	--	67	51			

This difference in the supportiveness of networks partly reflected differences in their composition. There was a considerable degree of segregation between the social networks of the employed and the unemployed. The unemployed were more likely to find themselves in networks where there was a high proportion of other unemployed people. The cross-sectional evidence suggests that the duration of unemployment may have had a marked effect on the degree of segregation. Whereas only 7% of the employed had half or more of their friends unemployed (Table 11b), this was the case for over a third (37%) of those unemployed for six months or less and for a majority of those unemployed for more than six months.

The nature of people's networks was in turn related to differences in the extent to which they had access to support in times of difficulty. The higher the proportion of unemployed people in a person's network, the less likely they were to be able to count on either material or psychological assistance (Table 11c).

In short, the evidence certainly supports the view that the unemployed experience a particularly high level of cumulative disadvantage. Even when factors such as age and class are controlled for, they are markedly more likely to suffer financial deprivation, to experience psychological distress, and to lack social support. However, the 'radical' thesis that the unemployed constitute an underclass requires more than this. It involves the further postulate of a degree of cultural distinctiveness. This has been mainly conceived in terms of the development of political attitudes that place little trust in the traditional organizations that have claimed to represent working class interests.

4. The Political Attitudes of the Unemployed

There are two rather different views about the distinctiveness of the politics of the unemployed. The first suggests their specificity lies in their political radicalization, leading in particular to a greater belief in the legitimacy and efficacy of direct action (Kornhauser, 1960). The second, in contrast, emphasises their tendency to withdraw into political apathy (Jahoda, 1972).

An indicator of radicalization can be found in the extent to which the unemployed engage in non-conventional forms of political protest. Non-conventional here is defined in terms of types of political action other than voting. People were asked which, if any, of a set of actions they had taken over unemployment or threatened job loss either with respect to themselves or other people. The actions included joining a sit-in or occupying a building, writing to a newspaper, contacting a local councillor or MP, going on a demonstration or march or supporting illegal action. It is immediately apparent that among both the unemployed and the employed, all of these forms of action are exceedingly rare (Table 12a). More of the medium and longer-term unemployed claim to have written to newspapers or to have been on a demonstration or march than is the case among the employed, but the differences are very small indeed. Moreover, there is an almost a complete absence of people that have engaged in the forms of action that most closely represent the normal sense of direct action - sit-ins/occupations and illegal action.

There are certainly more people that declare themselves prepared to engage in non-conventional protest in the future than have done so in the past, but the increase relates primarily to the willingness to write to newspapers, contact politicians and go on demonstrations or marches (Table 12h). Even with future increases in unemployment very few of the unemployed see themselves as likely to undertake direct action.

Table 12 Protest Action Against Unemployment

a) Actual							
Has:	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	T	
Written to a newspaper	2	1	3	2	1	2	%
Contacted politician	3	3	3	3	2	3	
Demonstration or march	5	6	4	7	2	5	
Sit-in/occupy building	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Illegal action	2	1	2	1	-	1	
None of these	83	85	81	84	93	85	
N	3635	423	115	319	1131	5623	
B) Potential							
Would:	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	T	
Write to a newspaper	11	14	11	12	10	11	%
Contact politician	24	26	19	22	22	24	
Demonstration or march	17	24	25	21	12	17	
Sit-in/occupy building	4	5	9	5	3	4	
Illegal action	4	4	5	6	2	4	
None of these	49	45	47	50	63	52	
N							

But if there is little tendency for the unemployed to move towards more direct forms of protest action, there is also little evidence that they are characterized by distinctively higher levels of political apathy. There was little difference between the long-term unemployed and other groups in their propensity to take direct action and there was no significant difference by duration of unemployment.

With respect to people's attitudes towards political issues, the main effect of unemployment would appear to be to heighten awareness of the importance of an adequate

system of state welfare and to increase egalitarianism in people's attitudes to income. In the follow up household survey, people were asked a range of questions about their attitudes to redistributive state expenditure and taxation.³ These were summarized in what could be termed a scale of 'collectivism'.

The unemployed were clearly more collectivist in their social attitudes than any other labour market group and this result persisted when a wide range of other controls were introduced, for instance with respect to previous class position, age and education. Although people's political allegiances and early political socialization were important for their attachment to collectivism, the effect of unemployment was still evident when these had been taken into account (Table 13). Indeed, further analysis showed that the effects of unemployment were evident even after people had returned to employment. Employed people, who had experienced unemployment during the previous five years, were significantly more collectivist than those that had been continuously employed, even when other background characteristics had been controlled for (Gallie and Vogler 1990a). On the other hand, there was no evidence that greater duration of unemployment heightened collectivism. It would seem that the impact of unemployment is felt at a relatively early stage and that long-term unemployment does not lead to further radicalization.

Table 13 Unemployment and Collectivism

Variable	Beta	T	Sig T
Labour	.23	9.5	.0000
Conservative	-.22	-9.4	.0000
Self-Employed	-.09	-4.1	.0000
Parents Labour	.10	4.2	.0000
Unemp. 1-6 months	.10	4.4	.0000
Unemployed 12+	.07	3.3	.0012
Unem. 6-12 months	.05	2.3	.0196
Skilled Manual	.05	2.2	.0281
(Constant)	3.20		

R² = 0.23

N = 1615

A rather similar picture emerges from evidence about voting patterns. Consistently with what has been found about the impact of unemployment on political issues, the distinctive feature of the experience of unemployment for voting would appear to be to strengthen support for the Labour Party. The unemployed were particularly likely to vote for the Labour Party: whereas 41% of the employed said that they would vote Labour if there were a general election, this was the case for 53% of those unemployed for six months or less, 56% of those unemployed for between six and twelve months and 66% of those unemployed for more than a year.

The association between unemployment and Labour voting did not simply reflect the influence of the class background of the unemployed. While the unemployed certainly came from social groups that had unusually high levels of Labour support, further analysis showed that unemployment still affected voting behaviour after class had been controlled. For instance, among non-skilled manual workers, 54% of the employed reported that they would vote Labour, whereas this was the case for 67% of the shorter-term, 78% of the medium-term, and 72% of the long-term unemployed who had been in this type of work before becoming unemployed.

Moreover, when patterns of change in party preference were examined over time, the unemployed showed a different pattern from the employed. If one compares people's party of preference in 1986 with the party they voted for in 1983, 7% of employed people had moved to Labour from other parties (Table 14). Among the shorter term unemployed, this figure rose to 13% and among the medium and longer-term unemployed to 15%. If one takes account of those that had shifted their support away from Labour over this period, there was a net increase of 3% in Labour support among the employed, compared with 9% among the shorter-term unemployed, 14% among the medium-term and 12% among the long-term unemployed.

Table 14 Change in Voting Preference, 1983 - 1986

ALL	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	T	
Shift to Labour	7	13	15	15	10	9	%
Stable Labour	28	29	28	35	32	29	
Shift from Labour	4	4	1	3	4	4	
MEN							
	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	T	
Shift to Labour	7	15	18	15	13	9	%
Stable Labour	27	25	18	39	38	29	
Shift from Labour	4	5	2	3	4	4	
WOMEN							
	E	U6	U12	U12+	NA	T	
Shift to Labour	8	12	12	13	9	9	%
Stable Labour	28	33	42	28	31	30	
Shift from Labour	3	4	-	3	4	4	

In short, the principle electoral effect of unemployment was to consolidate allegiance to the Labour Party. The unemployed were more likely to have been Labour supporters initially and, at least over the period 1983 to 1986, they were more likely to have increased their support for Labour than were people in employment. Far from leading to people to reject traditional Labour allegiances, the experience of unemployment would appear to have led to increased support for Labour.⁴ Such radicalization as occurred, then, was very much within the framework of conventional party politics. In contrast to the expectations from radical versions of underclass theory, there is little evidence of the growth of new political orientations, emphasising direct action rather than democratic procedure.

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the usefulness of the concept of the underclass for understanding the situation of the long-term unemployed. It is clearly not concerned

with the usefulness of the concept of the underclass *per se*. Given that the notion has been used to cover a very heterogeneous set of social situations, it may be the case that it is highly relevant for other social categories, whatever its utility with respect to the unemployed. That is clearly a matter that can only be resolved through further empirical enquiry.

To begin with it was found essential to distinguish between two versions of the underclass thesis: the 'conservative' and the 'radical' thesis. The evidence provided little support for the conservative view of the underclass. Rather it pointed very consistently to the conclusion that the attitudes to work of the long-term unemployed are not distinctive and are not an important factor accounting for people's vulnerability to unemployment. There was very little difference between the employed and the long-term unemployed in terms of indicators of employment stability such as the frequency of changing jobs or the amount of time that people had spent in their longest job. The long-term unemployed were clearly not, on the evidence of their past work histories, inherently unstable members of the workforce. Nor did it seem likely that the position of the unemployed could be explained in terms of their current attitudes to employment. Overall the unemployed (both short and long-term unemployed) were even more likely than the employed to show a strong commitment to employment. While some versions of the underclass thesis have suggested that cultural change is most marked where the partner is also without a job, in practice, this type of situation would appear to be associated with a greater rather than reduced sense of employment deprivation.

But the evidence also failed to fit well with the 'radical' underclass thesis. Certainly, unemployment was strongly associated with the types of material, psychological and social deprivation that are emphasised by this perspective. But there is little evidence that the experience of unemployment produces the type of distinctive sub-culture that would give notions of the underclass some utility. Unemployment leads neither to a propensity to direct action nor to political passivity. Rather the resentments of the unemployed are

channelled into increased support for the traditional political party of the working class-the Labour Party.

Overall, analyses of the long-term unemployed in terms of the emergence of an underclass would appear to obscure rather than to clarify the major determinants and implications of unemployment. Unemployment is very much an aspect of the labour market chances associated with particular class positions within the structure of employment. It affects disproportionately the manual working class and, in particular, non-skilled manual workers. The labour market fates of such employees are heavily affected by the pattern of technological development, by the labour force policies of employers and by the economic and labour market policies of the state. The response of the unemployed to the aggravation of labour market disadvantage lies not in the development of some highly distinctive subculture, but in the reinforcement of more conventional working class beliefs about the importance of collective provision and in greater support for the traditional party of the working class.

Notes

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1. For an analysis of the work characteristics of the unemployed as a whole, see Gallie, D. and Vogler, C. (1990).

2. The nine statements on which the index of employment deprivation was based were:

- I find being at home very satisfying.
- I get bored being at home.
- Not having a paid job doesn't worry me at all.
- Not having a paid job makes me feel rather useless.
- I don't need to go out to work for the money.
- I often get depressed about not having a paid job.
- I miss the daily routine of a paid job.
- It's easier to make new friends when you haven't got a paid job.
- Other people sometimes look down on me because I haven't got a paid job.

For a fuller account of this index, see Gallie and Vogler (1990).

3. The items for the Collectivism scale were:

- Benefits for the unemployed are too low and cause hardship.
- The Government should spend a great deal more on unemployment benefit.
- The government should spend a great deal more on council house building.
- Those with high incomes should pay most towards the cost of the welfare state.
- Increased state expenditure should be paid for by taxing the rich.
- Rich people should pay a greater share of taxes than they do now.

4. Very similar conclusions have also emerged from analyses based on a national data set, see Heath *et al.* (1991).

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