Thatcher's civilising offensive: The Ridley Plan to decivilise the working class

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Abstract: *Central to the agenda of the 1979 UK Government of Margaret Thatcher was the necessity to degrade the level of organisation and sense of well-being enjoyed by British Trade Union members. I argue that this represented a reversal of the civilising process – rather a civilising offensive conducted against one of the industrial classes, the working class, in order to strengthen the other, the bourgeoisie. This article discusses how this objective was realised, and evaluates its role in shaping the contemporary context.*

Keywords: *Thatcherism; labour movement; civilising offensive; migration; labelling.*

Introduction

The starting point for this sociological analysis is the present – the severe civilising offensive being waged in the UK against those figurations reliant on welfare, those groups of religious followers adhering to a stigmatised doctrine, and those migrating to the UK. Although Ryan Powell has written 'the concept is still in its relative infancy within the UK and it is difficult to imagine its prescription as an explicit policy mechanism' (Powell 2013); 2013 witnessed several mosques being bombed in UK cities, the electoral rise of the explicitly anti-immigrant UK Independence Party (UKIP) and a government mantra, endlessly repeated, about their absolute commitment to 'hard working families' that blatantly 'others' millions of the working age population – particularly those receiving welfare benefits, Muslims and migrants. One example that illustrates these dimensions was the Home Office initiative in summer 2013 where the government funded an advertising van being driven around multicultural areas of London carrying a billboard telling unauthorised migrants to leave the country. This promulgated a clear racist message towards a larger figuration and was much resented by legal migrants, British-born Muslims and indeed much of the wider population, as Powell points out 'civilising offensives do not necessarily have to rely on the receptiveness of recipients for "goals" to be achieved but can exhibit more barbaric practices' (ibid.). Barbarism in the name of civilisation is a common sociological analogy [1][#N1] and is aptly captured in Chancellor Osborne's disrespectful and stigmatising remarks about how the actions of the Philpotts, an unemployed couple found guilty of setting their house on fire and killing their children, told us something about the iniquities of living in a 'welfare culture'. This neo-Victorianism – a pious mission of the elite to moralise the poor whom they believe inferior – is a contemporary civilising offensive. [2][#N2]

The Civilising Offensive in post-war Britain: Creating Established and Outsider Groups

Before extending this example of a Tory offensive, in the interests of political impartiality I should mention that veterans of the last Labour government such as David Blunkett and Frank Field have recently been at the forefront of other related offensives – against the Roma in Sheffield and welfare claimants respectively, and we should not forget that Labour's anti-social behaviour programme was a classic example of a civilising offensive (see Powell & Flint 2009). In 2014, UK television station Channel 4 broadcast a sensationalist series *Benefit Street,* which invited the audience to be scandalised by the lifestyles of a group of welfare claimants and migrants living in Birmingham. Growing political figurations such as the UKIP are, of course, the quintessential scapegoating phenomenon – built on putting 'native' Britons first in status above all others.

Half a century earlier, Norbert Elias analysed this process of norms, deviance, labelling and stigmatisation and described the sociology of the established in the following terms:

> The self-enhancing quality of a high power ratio flatters the collective self-love which is also the reward for submission to group-specific norms, to patterns of affect restraint characteristic of that group and believed to be lacking in less powerful 'inferior' groups, outsiders and outcasts (Elias 2008: 30).

This field was being heavily researched by US sociologists of deviance at the time, from Cohen (1955), Sykes and Matza (1967), through to Lemert (1967) and Howard Becker's highly influential *Outsiders* (1963). Elias's work can be seen as a useful compliment to Becker, emphasising the interdependence of the two groups. Elias points out that this division between established and so-called outsiders can occur within the working class, as illustrated by his research describing how an 'established' figuration of 'villagers' labelled an incoming figuration as 'outsiders' – despite both groups sharing very similar socio-economic and cultural characteristics – in an industrial suburb of Leicester, UK, in the 1960s.

Thirty miles away, during the 1964 general election, in a similar industrial suburb – Smethwick, near Birmingham – the sitting Labour MP and shadow Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker lost his seat to the Conservatives who 'publicly endorsed one of the racist slogans circulating in the town at the time: 'If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour' (Virdee 2014: 111). In his classic account of the affair, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, Paul Foot described how 'a crucial line between politicians on this issue divides those who seek to provide enough social services for all working people and those who seek to exaggerate tensions between them' (1965: 248). After their defeat, Labour introduced immigration controls themselves once in office, pandering to public fears and fomenting a racist discourse that has legitimised prejudice ever since – the current incarnation of which is behind contemporary civilising offensives against migrant 'outsiders.' Elias is unlikely to have missed this occurrence, not only because it received widespread media coverage but also because Gordon Walker was an old acquaintance, 'the Assistant Director of the BBC's German service, a mild, middle-aged ex-history don' (ibid: 26) who had previously interested British publishers in translating *On the Process of Civilisation* (see Joly 2014; Mennell 1998). [3] [#N3]

The Smethwick affair, then, was a racist version of the sociology of the established and the outsiders; and the precursor to Enoch Powell's notorious 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech which has inspired generations of British racists. Today, despite claiming they are not racist, 'merely' anti-immigrant, UKIP are at the forefront of a campaign to persuade one figuration to blame their situation on the existence of the other. Their apparent electoral success is then pushing other parties, including the Tory-Liberal coalition government, to do the same.

The governmental offensive is clearly promoting a more unequal society which threatens a far wider figuration than simply those explicitly targeted groups. Policies such as the unpopular bedroom tax – which

cuts the housing benefits payable to anyone with a 'spare' room – is sold as an attack on welfare recipients. In fact it affects the incomes of many hard-working families as the government cuts back on benefit payments towards the housing costs of millions, many of whom are in work. Government privatisation programmes of vast swathes of formerly public services in local councils and the National Health Service are leading to the widespread implementation of variations on the notorious 'zero-hours' work contracts that undermine the quality and security of people's reward for their labour. It appears then, that even those 'hard-working families', characterised by government as 'the strivers', in whose name they claim to be implementing these cuts are feeling the impact of this civilising offensive.

Arguably we have had government civilising offensives for as long as it has suited our rulers to govern populations through a process of divide and rule; by according one figuration favoured status through attribution of the civilised or established label, whilst stigmatising another as outsiders. However, many commentators believe this process has intensified during the last near four decades of neoliberalism (see Harvey 2005). I have written elsewhere about how neoliberal economic policy and austerity began under Callaghan's Labour government of 1976–79 (Clement 2010), and here I examine the record of his successor, Thatcher, in carrying forward a civilising offensive against certain well-established figurations whose existence was perceived as a block on the corporate profitability which neoliberals believe is the key to social progress (see Peck & Tickell 2007).

Prelude to the Offensive: Collective Bargaining, 1945–1975

At the British Sociological Association (BSA) conference in 2011, I argued that if Elias had researched the interdependency relations occurring within the industrial workplace figuration of employers and workers in the 1950s and 1960s, he may have described how British Trade Unions – in particular the networks of shop stewards that represented sections or workshops within enterprises – conducted a complex series of compromises, organisational tasks and negotiations in their quest for a degree of relative autonomy for labour (Clement 2011). The goal was 'workers control', or rather a degree of autonomy in working practices, agreed through the process of 'collective bargaining'. Labour jurist Otto Kahn-Freund described it thus:

> Collective bargaining in Great Britain has a special significance – at least 60 per cent have their wages and conditions governed by collective agreements – its beginnings go back at least as far as the eighteenth century [...] we find that informal agreements supplementary to the national agreements concluded by the trade unions are made between shop stewards, that is the representatives of the unions in the workshop, and industrial employers (1965: 21).

If collective bargaining in the engineering plants, mines, docks and factories could be described as the post-war 'advanced world's' process of civilisation, drawing wider figurations into society's entitlements and including them within the framework of civil rights and responsibilities, then it was a process that has since been reversed during forty years of rising neoliberalism. [4] [#N4] Also, as illustrated by the reference to Smethwick and Enoch Powell above, the non-white members of the British working class found themselves excluded from the benefits of the social-democratic 'golden age' of 1945–68; leading some commentators to talk of 'black and brown migrants in Britain in the crosshairs of an unprecedented wave of racist reaction' (Virdee 2014: 107).

This reversal ran counter to the sociological mainstream nostrums of the boom years – that we lived in an 'affluent society', even a 'post-industrial society', where the 'institutionalisation of class conflict' was breeding a new social consensus. So affluent indeed that the skilled worker was becoming 'bourgeoisified' as rising living standards created an 'American Dream' moment. [5] [#N5] Elias would have seen such conceptions as products of the 'tyranny of the present' where social scientists got too caught up describing the current phenomenon and projecting its tendency mechanically into the future. According to these sociologies of the boom years, social democracy would continue to thicken its institutional grip on government, employment relations, education and welfare; with an agenda of ever-wider working class entitlement to equalising levels of income, education, status and expectations.

In the 1950s and 1960s, observers remarked upon the significance of the social figuration comprising those parties who, for Elias, 'have become in the course of the twentieth century the more or less established industrial classes whose representatives are installed institutionally as the ruling or co-ruling groups' (2000: 463). He went on to describe the contradictions and continuities within this figuration in his 1968 postscript to *The Civilizing Process*:

> Partly as partners, partly as opponents, the representatives of the industrial bourgeoisie and the established industrial working-class now form the primary elite in the nations of the first wave of industrialization (ibid: 463).

This reflected how things looked at the time. The French General strike in May 1968 resoundingly reinforced this message, that workers have earned a stake in governing society, and become an interest group who must be accommodated within the system. In Britain, the 1967 Donovan Commission had investigated the shop steward phenomenon in great detail in parliament, which seemed to signify how embedded were the interests of the labour movement in day-to-day living. [6] [#N6] However, this state of affairs was hardly a consensus, rather an arena of struggle. In 1968 the Labour government with its 'In place of strife' legislation, and later Heath's Tory government of 1970 to 1974, attempted to curb trade union power, but to no avail. Trade unions resoundingly defeated these plans, particularly the miners who not only secured rising wages after militant industrial action in 1972, but actually brought down the Tory government following the three day week in 1974 (see Darlington & Lyddon 2001). However, despite Labour famously promising to 'squeeze the rich until the pips squeak', in the words of then Chancellor Denis Healey, once in office they succumbed to the mantra of necessary austerity, and successfully demoralised and demobilised their own supporters in the Trade Unions with living standards falling and Keynesianism declared incapable of reviving the economy in light of 'stagflation' (see Coates 1980).

Thatcherism

In 1979 we could not go on as we were – Max Hastings

In 1979 Britain was ungovernable – Simon Jenkins [7] [#N7]

These are the recollections of two prominent veteran journalists who played their part in blowing up the moral panic that made folk devils of Britain's Trade Unions and their allegedly pernicious influence on social life in the previous decade. They were made upon the death of Margaret Thatcher in April 2013, whose election in 1979 was hailed as the solution to the country's apparent 'ungovernability'. But was society really at such an impasse? Were the unions really to blame? It is still presented as a fact that this large figuration – the

section of the working class organised in associations with their own hierarchy, bureaucracy, customs and practices – 'held the country to ransom' in the 1970s. This paper contends that such an evaluation of the *res publica* tells us much about the holders of power in state and industry and the lengths to which they were prepared to go to wrest control away from those representing the interests of the mass of the population.

The fuel for this myth was the industrial action staged by low-paid public sector workers in 1978–79 that became known as 'the winter of discontent' (see 'The Reckoning' in Beckett 2009) – after Shakespeare's phrase from the unhappy reign of Richard III. This allowed the Tories to publish propaganda such as the famous billboard in their 1979 election campaign showing a dole queue with the strap line, 'Labour isn't working'; a clever play on words that pointed to rising unemployment and the inability of the policies of the Labour government to halt the slide. So, fear for the future and disillusionment with 'their' party combined to encourage millions of trade unionists to vote Tory. This provided Thatcher with a mandate to use all means available to try to break the power and organisation of Britain's army of thirteen million trade unionists through a powerful civilising offensive that sought to undermine their legality and customary working practices.

Thatcher's civilising offensive interrupted the post-war process of welfare reform and rising living standards, accompanied by reductions in inequality. In the words of one leading UK economist: 'incomes became more equally distributed between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s. After the late 1970s, they became more unequal, with particularly rapid increases in inequality in the late 1980s' (Hills 2005: 25). Such inequality could only be achieved by breaking the power that the working class maintained over the conditions and rewards for their labour. A major governmental offensive ensued, backed by the employers, media barons and the physical power of a militarised system of policing: an epochal shift from consensus to confrontation was required.

On 27 May 1978, *The Economist* leaked a secret report drafted for Thatcher by Nicholas Ridley MP on how to deal with a 'political threat' from 'the enemies of the next Tory government'. The enemy was the public sector, particularly the people who worked within it. In the opening paragraphs, subtitled 'Motivation', of his *Final Report of the Policy Group on the Nationalised Industries,* Ridley complains that 'people are rarely dismissed for inefficiency.' Very aware that the scale of economies required to cure these 'uneconomic activities' was vast, Ridley comments: 'There are whole towns dependent on steel works, coal mines and ports, which might be severely deprived if full efficiency policies are carried out' (Conservative Party Research Department (CRD) 1977: 4, 5). A chart on page nine of the report reminds the contemporary reader how much larger the UK public sector used to be. Of the fourteen industries listed only three – education, the civil service and the NHS, remain public. All the rest – water, gas, electricity, coal, the railways, docks, refuse, buses and tubes, telecommunications, airlines and steel – have been privatised.

Ridley pointed out that striking in the public sector was illegal in many other countries, but feared introducing such measures in Britain would be mistaken, noting: 'One can imagine the zest with which such legislation would be opposed.' In 1972, mass demonstrations had freed dockers jailed for illegally striking, so that option was ruled out. Also, Ridley believed we were no longer in a climate where hundreds of thousands of middle-class people could be relied on to fight alongside the government against the sort of General Strike that occurred in 1926, adding 'Equally, the idea must be rejected of a strikebreaking corps of trained volunteers standing by to run the mines, the trains or the power stations' (ibid: 10). In words that are redolent of Thatcher, Ridley complained that for now:

> There seems no alternative in the short run to paying the price of having state monopoly
> industrial unions. Since they have the nation by the jugular vein, the only feasible option is to

pay up (ibid: 11).

Instead, he argued for a restructuring of industry: 'One political objective must be to fragment the public sector' (ibid: 12) – presumably the only way to free the entrepreneurial windpipe from the sturdy grip of the working class. In hindsight we can now see that breaking up the industries was crucial if the private sector was to feasibly take on such large enterprises. In the NHS today, the outer shell remains public but much of the budget flows through to private companies whose presence siphons off public money into their coffers, privatising increasing tranches of the service.

We can see the roots of today's social problems in some of Ridley's other panaceas to cure the economic body. He opined, 'There must be far higher rewards at the top in future' (ibid: 11), demonstrating his belief that enriching management and shareholders makes society healthier. He spelt out the sort of government transformation necessary for these 'new times.' 'Commercially-minded bankers and holding company chairmen are the sort of people government would need to recruit' as they 'should be able to devise bonus and incentive schemes for managers' (ibid: 14). It appears that this civilising offensive against the most organised sections of the working class heralded the dreaded financialisation of the economy which so many hold responsible for today's economic crisis (see Lapavistas 2013).

In 1985 it was noted, 'Thatcher's six years in office have followed with eerie precision the pattern laid out in the Ridley report' (Callinicos & Simons 1985: 36). The plan stressed the need to reduce the power of unions in individual industries one at a time, so as to ensure there was no damaging solidarity action of the sort that had prevented previous Labour and Tory governments defeating them over the past decade. In 1979 a prominent union figure at British Leyland, the state-owned carmaker, was sacked. In 1980 British Steel closures were announced, and the government held out through a thirteen week strike before closing much of the industry. In both cases union leaders could have recognised their associations' interdependency and each called action in support of the other to oppose the offensive. Unfortunately this never went any further than a one-day strike called by the Trade Union Congress in 1983 in support of union rights at the government's surveillance hub, GCHQ in Cheltenham. This was not enough, and with each 'success' in challenging and defeating Trade Unions, their members' fear for their own jobs grew.

The government bolstered their position by passing anti-union legislation that threatened sequestration of funds for any strike action not run according to new legal rules. Furthermore, the 1980 Social Security Act cut welfare payments to strikers' families. Ridley's plan had argued 'to cut off the money supply to the strikers, and make the union finance them' (ibid: 36). Both these measures challenged Trade Union leaders to ensure that they threw all their resources behind any action by their members if they were to succeed in facing down these attacks. The government gambled that the responsible bureaucracy at the top of the unions would be reluctant to take such steps, thus shackling their ability to resist – and they were to be proved right as workers' acts of resistance to this offensive were undermined from the top. In addition, practical preparation would undermine the effectiveness of a miners' strike:

> In accordance with the Ridley Report, the government had arranged, in a pre-emptive move, for the building up of coal stocks at power stations, made preparations to import foreign coal, recruited non-union lorry drivers to convey coal to the power stations, and switched from coal to oil-firing to save coal stocks. The government also appointed Ian MacGregor as chairman of the Coal Board to spearhead the new management offensive. And with the onset of the strike, it was prepared to use unlimited resources and the full wrath of the State against the miners (Darlington 2005: 70). [8] [#N8]

The police – shock troops of the civilising offensive

Ridley also suggested, 'we must be prepared to deal with the problem of violent picketing', and argued for 'a large, mobile squad of police who are equipped and prepared to uphold the law against the likes of the Saltley Coke-works mob' (CRD: 25). The mention of Saltley reminded his readers that mass picketing at this Birmingham coal storage depot in 1972, by miners supported by thousands of engineers, had defeated the law in the sense that police resistance was broken and the chief constable of Birmingham, Sir Derrick Capper was forced to order the Gas Board to 'close the gates' (Beckett 2009: 81–2). Tory Home Secretary Maudling explained in his *Memoirs* (1978) that at the time (that phrase again!) there was no alternative:

> I am sure the decision he took was a wise one, because the number of strikers involved was so great, and feelings were running so high, that any attempt by the relatively small body of police who could be assembled to keep the depot open by force could have led to very grave consequences. Some of my colleagues asked me afterwards, why I had not sent in troops in support of the police, and I remember asking them one single question: 'If they had been sent in, should they have gone in with their rifles loaded or unloaded?' Either course could have been disastrous (Callinicos et al 1985: 29).

The phrase 'the Saltley Coke-works mob' closes Ridley's report, reminding the reader of how governments have for centuries felt most frustrated and liable to use force when they feel unbearably restrained by the power of the people, the mobile proletariat (see Clement 2014a). Fortunately for the government, the riots of 1981 had justified the militarisation of police equipment and, in a way, their mentality: they were now ready to forsake their *Dixon of Dock Green* image of policing by consent for a more continental model of riot squads, climaxing with the full-scale police riot against the miners picketing at another coke-works – Orgreave, South Yorkshire in June 1984 – in hindsight the decisive battle in the civilising offensive to humiliate the British trade union movement. Police historian Clive Emsley describes the scene:

> Police tactics were also new. Lines of men carrying long shields took the brunt of any missiles hurled at the police; the lines then parted to release either squads of men carrying small round shields and batons, or mounted police – the former, according to the new Manual were to 'disperse and/or incapacitate' demonstrators, the latter 'to create fear' (Emsley 1996: 184).

The media coverage of these events notoriously adjusted the audience view so it appeared as if the miners had charged the police – causing their civilised reaction to re-impose order – when in fact later enquiries proved police culpability for the violence that day (see Williams 2009). This was just the most notorious episode in the controversial militaristic policing of the strike which involved the occupation of mining villages and the arresting of 11,312 people, of whom 5,653 were put on trial (Percy-Smith & Hilyard 1985: 345–54).

Powell argues that the concept of the civilising offensive:

> can be seen as a means of addressing Elias' relative neglect of the attempts by elite groups to reframe conduct and steer 'civilisation' in a particular direction [...] given his focus on elite conflicts in *The Civilizing Process,* there was little discussion of conflicts between the lower and upper strata of society (Powell 2013: 4).

In fact, Elias regularly refers to Marxism, class struggle and physical force revolutions in *Studies on the Germans*, *What is Sociology, Reflections on a Life* and the 1990 post-script to *The Established and the Outsiders*, as I discuss elsewhere (Clement 2014b). The case of the miner's year-long resistance highlights the question of what kind of reaction to the civilising offensive may emerge. Can there be a civilising counter-offensive in certain circumstances? For example, in 1976, the Asian women leading the Grunwick strike for equal treatment saw their action as civilising the largely white and male-dominated Trade Unions of their day (Beckett 2009: 363). Their actions were a brilliant foretaste of Britain's multicultural future. These led on to the anti-racist riots of the 1980s which further resisted those oppressive institutions – especially the police – whose acts of violence are still scarring and manufacturing acts of resistance thirty years later (see Clement 2007).

Despite the continuing success of neoliberal ideology in undermining social democracy, the police's reputation as neutral arbiter of law and order has been battered in recent years due to various factors such as: their persistent culpability for deaths in police custody; the institutional racism exposed by the Stephen Lawrence case and many others; and the shocking miscarriage of justice by the highest echelons of South Yorkshire police as they covered up their culpability for the deaths of football fans in the Sheffield Hillsborough stadium tragedy. [9][#N9] Arguably, the police's role in restricting the miners' civil liberties and organising acts of mass violence to intimidate these workers and their supporters throughout the year-long dispute made this 'civilising offensive' particularly brutal in its manner and its legacy in some of Britain's poorest communities (see Fine & Millar 1985).

The forward march of labour halted

Was the bourgeois civilising offensive of the Thatcherites successful? Did she succeed not only in branding the miners 'the enemy within' (see Milne 2014), but also in defeating their efforts to prevent economic marginalisation pushing their communities into outcast status? Should sociology stand aloof from such conflicts or regard their outcome as inevitable? Elias didn't think so, as illustrated by this description of the relations between established and outsiders:

> To bring these connections into the open does not mean that they form an immutable part of human nature. In fact, the greater the awareness of the emotional equation of great power with great human value, the greater is the chance of a critical appraisal and change (Elias 2008: 29).

In the 1980s, many certainly believed that the miners' defeat was a telling 'sign of the times' [10][#N10], but we should interrogate the political assumptions behind such a belief. Post-modernism seemed to break through old paradigms and promise new methods of understanding and analysis, but it led its acolytes away from understanding the world around them – a damaging legacy. For, as one recent commentary noted:

> Seeing changes in the structure of the working class as resulting in a decline of collective consciousness and a reduced capacity for organisation and resistance has a long lineage in the post-war period in Britain, both from academics and some on the left (Hardy & Choonara 2013: 127).

Eric Hobsbawm's essay, although formally about an earlier period, seemed to predict that Trade Union power was on the wane when it was published at the end of the 1970s (Hobsbawm 1978). The next decade saw mass

de-industrialisation (see Martin & Rowthorn 1986) – much of industry, and the communities built around it, suffered a decivilising spurt of closures, privatisation and the much-heralded 'transformation of work' (Doogan 2009) by new technology and new employment relations that are a long way away from the old collective agreements of the 1950s to 1970s. As stated above, I regard these changes as decivilising because they weaken the chains of interdependencies between people, undermining 'pro-social' notions of solidarity and collective interest and substituting them with a more anti-social individualism, as Loïc Wacquant (2004) has explained in his discussion of the decline of poor neighbourhoods in the US. However, many critics have pointed out that such a prognosis – a 'farewell to the working class' [11] [#N11] – has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy for a social democratic party that looked for reasons to justify abandoning its Trade Union founder (see Hay 1999). In fact, despite the halving of Trade Union membership from a peak of 13 million in 1979 to just over 6.5 million in 2012, the unions have not altogether gone away. Labour is not surplus to requirements – it is more intensively exploited than unused. The UK has defied the falling population predictions labelled as a 'demographic time bomb' in the 1990s and has rather absorbed more migrant labour and seen its population rise to well over 60 million.

In fact, as the current government's civilising offensive on workplace relations has strengthened with the growth of work intensification, we are seeing fresh shoots of resistance emerging from places often presumed to be incapable of so doing, such as the successful strike against agency workers and zero hours contracts (Butler 2013) at the Hovis Bread factory in Wigan. More typical up to now are the current actions of intransigent employers determined to undermine working practices in the Post Office, shipyards and oil refineries, where so far workers are being forced into collective bargaining in reverse, as existing working arrangements are scrapped by management order. Where in the 1960s, Elias and others could see interdependence and partnership between workers and their bosses, the dominant relation is currently more one of opposition. However the fact that the few require the labour of the many to maintain their power is undisputable. For all their bluster and apparent hegemony, for the bosses, the fact of their interdependence remains.

Neoliberalism is then far from a spent force. Despite its transparent culpability for the onset and prolongation of the current economic decade of crisis, there remains no alternative strategy proffered by those running corporations and governments. Sociology can aid understanding and solutions to these problems if it can overcome the urge to lock its mindset within the tyrannical barriers of the present, and take a long-term view of society's patterns and tendencies. The danger of much sociological thinking is that it buys into the idea that there is no alternative to the market, thereby obscuring the degree to which previous forms of post-war governance allowed greater room for state intervention to regulate markets, and priority-setting based on models of development that aimed to 'fix' the failures of the previous period of liberal capitalism that had crashed in the West so disastrously in 1929. As Steve Hall explains:

> The fact that for decades after the Second World War some states in Western Europe had at least reached a compromise with capital and shifted partially in the direction of popular democracy, economic management, political education and redistribution, is absent from the popular narrative (Hall 2012: 176).

But it would be a foolish short-term judgement that ruled out the possibility of a significant (and civilising) counteroffensive. Elias summed this up with a warning in 1976:

> [T]he growing interdependence of all sections of humankind has intensified their internecine struggles, and the lesson that in an increasingly interdependent world domination by one

section of humankind over the others is bound to have a boomerang effect has not yet been learned (Elias 2008: 18).

Pietro Basso argues that today a new 'global class' is emerging out of globalised production processes and global migration – a force which can be the carrier of a 'new form of civilisation' (Basso 2010). Therefore, its repression and degradation through four decades of neoliberalism in the West can be viewed as a mighty spurt – a process of decivilisation in so far as it has broken up reforming figurations of interdependent parties after the twenty or thirty years of 'the long boom' – experienced primarily in the US and Britain from 1945.

Conclusion

The Ridley Plan outlined a strategy for a sustained civilising offensive to be waged against the institutions of the British working class by an incoming Conservative government. This was implemented by Margaret Thatcher between 1979 and 1990. The miners represented the most powerful opposition force, and the determination they demonstrated throughout their year long strike from 1984–5 certainly tested the government's mettle, especially when dockworkers went on strike in the summer of 1984 threatening to open a second front that could have fatally weakened the government's ability to defeat the unions. But the docks strike was settled, the government held their nerve, and went on to impose a neoliberal hegemony that there was now no alternative but that argued for by 'the market', and trade unions and their members should accept their marginalisation from having any voice in how the labour market operated.

Thatcher's civilising offensive broke the mould of the post-war welfare state era. Despite the presence of earlier incarnations of austerity and racism in the 1950s and 1960s, it represented a seismic shift away from a social-democratically flavoured consensus of mixed economy and industrial negotiation between two powerful forces, towards a neoliberal polity where the ruling figuration imposed a template for governance that remains to this day.

Notes

1. de Toqueville in his *Journeys to England and Ireland*: 'From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization works its miracles, and civilized man is turned back almost into a savage' (cited in Marcus 1985: 66)*;* and van Krieken: 'Societies are barbaric precisely in their movement towards increasing civilisation' (cited in Powell 2013). [#N1-ptr1]

2. George Osborne insists linking Mick Philpott to welfare reform was right The Guardian [http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian], 7 April 2013. [#N2-ptr1]

3. Gordon Walker also wrote a long-term monograph whose title shows similar interests to Elias. Gordon Walker, P. C. (1939). *An Outline of Man's History*.London [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London] : N.C.L.C. Publishing Society, and (1945) *The Lid Lifts: An Account of the Author's Experiences During Two Visits to Occupied Germany in the Spring of 1945*. London: Victor Gollancz [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Gollancz_Ltd] [#N3-ptr1]

4. This is a rather simplistic statement, but may be taken as generally true in the UK for the purposes of this discussion. There are many other countries, such as South Korea, whose working classes have attained voting rights, living standards and expectations much akin to the West *during* this period. [#N4-ptr1]

5. These buzz words were associated with respectively J.K. Galbraith, Daniel Bell, Ralph Dahrendorf, John Goldthorpe and Robert Merton. Of the American Dream, Elias noted 'the building up of collective praise- and blame-fantasies plays so obvious and vital a part in the conduct of affairs at all levels of balance-of- power relations[...] On the global level, there is, for instance, the American Dream and the Russian dream. There used to be the civilising mission of European countries and the dream of the Third Reich' (Elias 2008: 21). [#N5-ptr1]

6. 'Combine committees linking individual shop stewards' committees are to be found at some time or another in most multi-plant engineering firms in Britain; they have had a sporadic existence in building, linking large sites, on the docks, in shipping' (Kidron 1970: 136). [#N6-ptr1]

7. BBC *Newsnight* 8 April 2013. [#N7-ptr1]

8. Ridley had spelt all this out in detail on page 25 of the CRD Report. [#N8-ptr1]

9. The London Metropolitan police's failure to prosecute Lawrence's killers led a public enquiry in 1999 to dub the force 'institutionally racist'. It took until 2012 before anyone was found guilty of his murder. (Cathcart 2000) The 2014 inquest into the behaviour of the South Yorkshire police – the same force employed at Orgreave – at the 1989 football match in Sheffield where 96 Liverpool fans died through an incredibly incompetent policing operation that prevented supporters from escaping death by suffocation and covered up their role for over twenty years (Scraton 2009). [#N9-ptr1]

10. This was argued by many post-modernists, adapting Gramsci's term 'Fordism' to 'post-Fordism' to express their belief that the miners' defeat proved that industrial class struggle was no longer functional as a weapon for the working class, which was a fundamentally transformed phenomenon in these 'new times', a phrase coined by the late Stuart Hall amongst others (see Amin 1994). [#N10-ptr1]

11. Andre Gorz, in *Farewell to the Working Class* certainly propagated the myth that Doogan's research has disproved; i.e. that workers no longer possess the ability to act 'in support of their vital interests'. This comment was made by Gorz in January 1968, infamously preceded by his prediction that 'in the foreseeable future there will be no crisis of European capitalism so dramatic as to drive the mass of workers to revolutionary general strikes' (Birchall 1987: 6). [#N11-ptr1]

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