New Labour, Old Functionalism
Simon Prideaux

University of Leeds, UK
S.J.Prideaux@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract

As the title of this paper suggests, the fundamental premise behind this train of thought is that New Labour, when dealing with welfare, utilise functionalist diagnoses and remedies for the perceived ills within British society. However, this is not to suggest that New Labour are either aware of, openly display, or even acknowledge their allegiance to such sociological trains of thought. Nor is it to suggest that functionalism is the only influence behind Labour's policies. More it is an attempt to describe the way in which North American sociological thinking has directly or indirectly made—and still makes—an impact on the interpretations to which Tony Blair and his party attach to past, present and future social relations.

To fully demonstrate this North American influence, the paper briefly looks at the works of Talcott Parsons, Amitai Etzioni and the complementary machinations of Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead. All, it is argued, have led New Labour to adopt similar welfare-to-work policies as those already implemented and operational in the United States: hence the intention of this paper is to explore any shared theoretical foundations in an all-embracing attempt to reveal and explain the origins of the relatively pubescent 'workfare' schemes in Britain today.

Introduction: The Initial connection

Since the so called 'Blair Revolution' (Mandelson & Liddle, 1996), much of the literature published by New Labour had, on the whole, purported generalised ideological propositions aimed at creating a society based on the maxim 'fair is efficient' (Brown, 1994). However, a further examination of the rhetoric used prior to the 1997 election victory helps to give a deeper insight and context to the way in which Blair *et al* were attempting to implement this new social arrangement. Significantly, New Labour's pre-1997 vision of a 'stakeholding economy' based upon competitiveness, efficiency and profitability, entwined with 'freedom' and 'choice' (Thompson, 1996:42), not only revealed a fundamental 'shift' to the political 'right', but actually provided for a critical comparison with the outdated, largely discredited sociological interpretations of society initially formulated by North American functionalist thinkers during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

In this respect, the first indications of any possible comparison between the writings of the early functionalists and the thoughts of New Labour reveal themselves in the similarity of the language they both used. As early as 1945, for instance, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore laid down the foundations of structural functionalism when they proclaimed that stratification was an essential characteristic of modern society (*cf*. Davis. & Moore, 1967). Indeed it was only through such differentiation that society could efficiently 'place' and 'motivate' its individual members (1967:48) and so create a cohesive and ordered set of social relations.

Implicit in New Labour's newfound enthusiasm for competition and the market economy was an open acceptance of the resultant differential inequalities produced in a stratified society. Likewise, this new

direction overtly acknowledged the belief that capitalist stratification reflected the most efficient societal structure possible. As we shall see, one could also argue that Blair's New Labour positively condoned these divisions and viewed, in the manner of Davis and Moore, such strata as being an inescapable norm. Hence New Labour's development of political viewpoints, strategies and policies premised upon a framework of social hierarchy. It is also clear that, contextually, they built upon Davis and Moore's naïve positivistic logic to expound a view of society that echoed many of the sentiments expressed in the redefined pre-1968 functionalist observations of Robert K. Merton who argued that stratification promotes individual aspiration through the provision of opportunities to progress up the social ladder.

Indeed, New Labour's self-styled brand of 'socialism' was noticeably defined as equality of 'opportunity' as opposed to an equality of outcome (wealth, status, living standards *etc*.). Professor Raymond Plant, a leading thinker of the 'Left' and front bench Labour peer, stipulated that "it would be irrational to prefer a more equal distribution of resources which left everyone, including the poor, worse off than they could be under a system in which there would be some inequalities but which would also benefit the poor …we can get a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities" (Plant, 1993:11-12; *cf*. Rawls, 1971). This implicit acceptance of 'inequality'—regardless of any moral belief in the notion that wealth would 'trickle down'—reflected New Labour's willingness to embrace the concept of society as a competitively functional hierarchy motivated by 'aspiration'. In turn, these 'aspirational' politics acted to suppress the more 'radical' policies and principles of the Labour movement past and present.

Nevertheless, given this train of thought it was entirely consistent for 'Shadow Chancellor' Gordon Brown to envisage that his 'mission' was to build "a fair society in which all people, regardless of class, race or gender have available to them the widest choice of options and opportunities to enhance their earning power and fulfil their true potential" (Brown, 1994:3). Plant's redistribution of "resources and opportunities" had now become purely the allocation of those resources in order to provide 'opportunity'. Resources as such would no longer be directly spent on the individual in the form of unconditional benefits. Rather, available resources would be used to provide individuals with an opening back into the labour market.

With this form of logic, Gordon Brown was thus able to postulate that the Welfare State should, and could be reorganised to provide 'pathways' out of unemployment, poverty and, ultimately, crime (1994:4-5). As a result, the disadvantaged and the unemployed would be able to meet their 'aspirational needs' as they pass through these governmental thoroughfares of opportunity and so lighten an apperceived burden upon the Welfare State. In other words, 'Shadow Chancellor' Brown had advocated a welfare reorganisation that appeared to mirror Merton's 'governmental avenue' prescription for the cure of functional failure.

Furthermore, this provision of 'opportunity' was seen in the context of an environment of functional but 'amicable' competition. Consequently, the Labour Frontbench Spokesman for Industry—Kim Howells—was able to appeal for all "[b]rothers and sisters …[to] embrace competition" (Howells, 7th June 1996), while Labour's Economic Policy Commission of 1995 stipulated that "the job of Government is neither to suppress markets nor to surrender to them but to equip people, companies and countries to succeed within them" (Labour's Economic Policy Commission, June 1995:14). Put simply, such success was to be secured through the creation of a "…partnership between the public and private sectors, with neither squeezing out the other" (Grice, & Prescott, 2nd October 1994, section 1:1). Social mobility would be a key component in forging this relationship. Re-training would provide the means out of unemployment and its related conditions, whilst industry would be provided with a new, increasing and highly skilled workforce. The result, it was argued, would be the proliferation of efficient, competitively prosperous companies and workers within the internal and global markets. Yet this would be a benign situation, as success was envisaged to be available for everyone—and not just for the 'lucky few'.

Talcott Parsons, Norms and Values

To begin with, the main concentration of this paper is upon what Richard Kilminster once described as a monopoly phase in British and American sociology. During the years of 1945 to 1965 he identified a "domination of the paradigm of structural functionalism deriving from Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton" (Kilminster, 1998:154). It was the work of these two eminent sociologists that helped to establish a supposed synthesis of the works of Durkheim, Weber, Pareto and Freud that, despite its demise and apparent dismissal in the 1970s, still exerts an influence upon contemporary sociology and social policy. Most notably, it was the continuing work of Parsons that provided the initial platform for Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore (1967) to complete a short, highly influential sociological study of stratification upon which Merton (1968) was able to elaborate and expand. As we shall see in due course, the resultant social model produced has a particular relevance to this paper in that it provides a framework of reference that easily relates to the theoretical underpinnings used to substantiate and justify the British welfare reforms of today.

In its most sophisticated Parsonian form, this structural functionalism

> …stressed that society as a social system of interrelated parts, survived because it evolved institutional structures to fulfil the basic needs of the system, its 'functional prerequisites'. In focusing on social order, integration and the stability of the system achieved via people internalizing commonly held values, functionalism had a reputation …for providing an essentially harmonious, stabilizing model of the whole society (Kilminster, 1998:154).

Arguably, these considerations of the structural-functionalists in the 'Pareto Circle', as they have become known, were an expression of what they saw as the realities of the great 'American dream': a dream in which the 'rags to riches' scenario was made possible and accessible. Yet maintenance of a sense of social equilibrium, or order, could only be established through the presence of strong moral norms and values that were pertinent to the existing social system of capitalism.

In this respect, an integral aspect of Parsons' deliberations was the process of socialization. Of primary importance, was the institution of the family. Indeed, Parsons envisaged kinship as a major functionary in this realm (Parsons, 1952; 1967; 1971; Parsons *et al*, 1953). With regard to his (in)famous AGIL analogy, Parsons placed the activities of the family within the latency sphere (L) of the social structure. Here, family functions were assumed to be latent because the family, as a unit, does not significantly contribute to the economic production of society. Nor was it seen to take political responsibility even though its members as individuals may do so. Instead, it was envisaged that the family only affected the other subsystems of society (such as A [adaptation], G [goal attainment] and I [integration]) indirectly. In other words, it was argued by Parsons *et al* (1953) that the family took responsibility for the development of the personalities of its members. In this respect, the essential focus of the family had to be that of the "ascriptive-expressive" (1953:267) whereby the individual is first treated in terms of their status as family members, and second, in terms of the "diffuse quality patterns of his (sic) 'social personality' of which age and sex are primary foci" (1953:267).

Significantly, it was in this area that Parsons' social conservatism came to the fore: particularly in relation to the family form and the role of women. In spite of a 1971 concern over the strain being placed upon the nuclear family through their growing commitments to work and school, Parsons crystallised his opinions with the statement that such "developments have placed considerable strain upon the house-wife, who must be increasingly self-reliant in fulfilling her obligations to her husband and children" (1971:101). There is little doubt here that Parsons had reified the gender roles of the 1950s and, to make matters worse, had not really anticipated any changes to the contrary (Lidz, 2003).

Clearly, 'housekeeping' and childrearing were, in the mind of Parsons, the principal roles for women to undertake. In an earlier discussion of 'parental roles', Parsons took this subjugation of women a step further with the stipulation that the adult masculine role is less "implicated with detailed child

care than the feminine, and is more implicated with prestige and responsibility in the wider society and beyond the narrow kinship circle" (Parsons, 1952:222). Rather than busy herself outside of the family home, it would seem that Parsons believed it was the duty, or rather the function, of the mother to inculcate and instil the appropriate societal values and norms within their offspring. Markedly, calls for female emancipation and equality had not occupied Parsons thoughts for too long. Nor had the idea that families could be anything other than heterosexual.

Nonetheless, the socialization process was not confined to the family and mother alone. Not surprisingly, Parsons went on to argue that schools and colleges also played a significant role in the transmission of the so-called latent functions. In fact, he had come to the opinion that in modern, complex society it was "the education system, and not kinship, that increasingly determines the distribution of individuals within the …system (1971:101). Like with the family, Parsons saw education in terms of its contribution to the social structure as a whole. Not only did education determine distribution, but it also provided the most salient link with the occupational system (1967). Formal education, he maintained, should be regarded as a series of apprenticeships for adult occupational roles. The school system, was a microcosm of the adult world where, to a much higher degree than in the family, the child learns in school to adjust to a specific "universalistic-achievement system" (1952:240).

Overall, Parsons exhibited a benign optimism when he described the school as being the focal point for the convergence of numerous motivational factors. By accepting the role expectations of the school system (such as the attainment of good marks), the child may become highly interested in the subject matter that he or she is studying. Alternatively, contemplated Parsons, another child could be pursuing the favourable attitude of the teacher or it might be that a child found inspiration in surpassing their classmates. Either way, these different motivations all converge in the common direction of "striving for marks" (1952:240). In sum, Parsons was describing how the children begin to accept the competitive norms and values of a highly stratified society along the lines of the United States of America. Unfortunately, the negative possibility of failure is given little space or time. That, he argued, is simply "another story" (1952:240).

Taking the possibility of failure to one side, the next stage of the socialization process occurs in the paid-labour market or, to be more precise, within the work place. Here, Parsons tended to stress the importance of occupational roles and the contract of employment (Parsons and Smelser, 1957). Besides exploring the benefits of the contract and occupational roles to the organization, or firm, Parsons also argued that individuals entering into the labour market become acclimatised through a six-stage process of institutionalisation. In his words, it amounts to a transition from the pattern-maintenance system to that of the economy with the movement:

> (1) from the most general socialized motivation to 'generalized performance capacity'; (2) form general performance capacity to 'trained capacity'; (3) from trained capacity to membership in the labour force; (4) from membership in the labour force to employment by a specific firm; (5) from employment to specific job or occupational role assignment; and, finally, (6) from specific occupational role to specific 'task' (Parsons and Smelser, 1957:122).

In less technical terms, this amounts to Parsons stipulating that the individual learns how to gain employment (through qualifications); learns to acquire specific skills required by the employer; and, eventually, learns to perform given tasks economically and efficiently. In so doing, the individual also learns how to work effectively alongside other colleagues.

Naturally one of Parsons' principal factors to help facilitate this change was the contract of employment and, of course, the payment of wages. In this respect, argued Parsons, income is a source for facilities for the maintenance of the household outside the firm. As such, then, the relationship constitutes a 'goal attainment' aspect "of the contract-of-employment sub-system of his (sic) larger role system" (Parsons and Smelser, 1957:114).

Finally, however, Parsons also argued that the community was yet another institution that served the function of integration into the social system as a whole. This was the last piece of his jigsaw puzzle. Community, he declared, disseminates shared culture whilst reinforcing that culture with a ritual celebration of its values. Consequently a successful society

> …must constitute a societal *community* that has an adequate level of integration or solidarity and a distinctive membership status …This community must be the 'bearer' of a cultural system sufficiently generalized and integrated to legitimize normative order. Such legitimation requires a system of constitutive symbolism which grounds the identity and solidarity of the community, as well as beliefs, rituals, and other cultural components which embody such symbolism (Parsons, 1966:17).

In plain English, a flourishing community thus enables the disparate parts within a social structure to recognise and reaffirm their solidarity—and so strengthen and support the society as a whole.

Indeed with this exploration of the institutional roles assigned to the family (or more specifically to women), formal education, the working environment and the community, Parsons betrays numerous faults and omissions in his overarching concept of society and how it operates. The stark benevolence behind the thought processes of Parsons is clearly in evidence. Issues of industrial unrest, exploitative employers and unseemly working conditions are not on the agenda for this somewhat positive assessment of American social relations. Yet in spite of the added degradation of women through their subjugation to the 'functional' duties of familial support and socialization—and despite the dismissal of social exclusion, "group prejudice, scapegoating, and class conflicts as mere symptoms of 'strain' produced by technological change" (Gerth, 1997:673)—other theorists, and much later other political activists, have continued to admire and draw upon Parsons' specific brand of 'objective' theory and his benign interpretation of the social world.

R. K. Merton, Aspiration and Dysfunctionality

When taking up the cudgel laid down by Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore provided a more simplified foundation for the functionalist understanding of capitalism and the 'American dream' so to speak. To reiterate, they proclaimed that stratification was a 'normal' characteristic of modern society and that differentiation was an efficient functional necessity since its universal presence not only reflected, but also reinforced, society's attempts at "placing and motivating individuals in the social structure" (Davis and Moore, 1967:47).

Within this scenario, motivation had to operate on two distinct levels. Initially, there would be the need to "instil in the proper individuals the desire to fill certain positions" (1967:47). Yet once these individuals had acquired the aforementioned positions, then, it would be necessary to encourage "the desire to perform the duties attached to them" (1967:47). The "things" (1967:48) that enable an individual to obtain sustenance, comfort, and that contribute to humour, diversion, self-respect and ego-expansion, were seen as providing for a system of rewards—in the form of inducements—through which the desire to perform within the social structure can be impressed upon the individual. Since Davis and Moore viewed some positions (namely those in Government, administration, education etc.) as being more important than others, they argued that such rewards should be, and often are, dispensed differentially according to the merits of the position concerned. In this way social inequality, and therefore stratification, was seen as "an unconsciously evolved device by which societies ensure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons" (1967:48).

Expanding upon this rather basic and naïve exercise in linear thought, stratification in R. K. Merton's eyes reflected the formulation and integration of

> …culturally defined goals …roughly ordered in some hierarchy value. Involving various degrees of sentiment and significance, the prevailing goals comprise a frame of aspirational reference. They were things worth 'striving for' (Merton 1968:186-187).

Competition between individuals, companies and nations was thus viewed as serving, almost in a cordial manner, a twofold purpose. On the one hand, satisfaction could be achieved once a goal had been met, whereas on the other, the constant pursuit for 'betterment' afforded for a dynamic of rivalry through which efficiency, wealth and higher standards of living could be accomplished within and throughout society.

When addressing the problem of non-functions or dysfunctions, such as high unemployment, poverty and crime, Merton saw these as an expression of disequilibrium caused by "a disassociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realising these aspirations" (1968:188). Consequently, the government—Merton's political machine—was seen as having to fulfil "the basic function of providing avenues of social mobility for the otherwise disadvantaged" (1968:131). Disequilibrium, and therefore dysfunctionality, was thus depicted as a symptom of functional—as opposed to systemic—failure. An inconvenient hiccup as it were. Rectification merely became a matter of governmental provision. In this instance to question the basic structure of society was not part of the schema. The existing structures and relations of capital that survived over generations were taken as absolute. Their durability had been taken as a mark of success and, accordingly, they were deemed to be the most effective and efficient means for human liaison and collaboration within any societal framework.

Commensurate with this scenario, 'opportunity' allowed for the pursuit of aspirational 'needs' and, as such, became Merton's nexus of society. It provided the continuity and coherence necessary for a social structure to survive and perpetuate its existence. As a consequence, the availability of 'opportunity' was the epitome of the aforementioned 'American dream'. In sum, it constituted a conception of stratification that completed the Parsonian form of structural-functionalism that this paper bases many of its premises upon. Effectively, a model of social harmony and order could only operate in correlation with a benignly stratified, meritocratic hierarchy that would minimise social disruption by satiating individuals as they grasped the available opportunities and climbed up the 'social ladder' in pursuit of their numerous financial and/or motivational rewards. In turn, the economy and society as a whole would benefit as these responsible, hard working individuals contributed to an increase in productivity that inevitably, in the view of many structural-functionalists, would result in the betterment of society in general. Wealth would be created, but wealth would be fairly distributed down the hierarchical chain according to merit and endeavour.

Amitai Etzioni, Organisational Theory and New Communitarianism

More recently, however, Amitai Etzioni has taken this benign stance of structural-functionalism a step further. When introducing *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (1998), for instance, Etzioni draws upon his formative experiences of organizational theory (a direct derivative of structural-functionalism) to explain how modern society can regain what he sees as a lost cohesion and morality. Elsewhere, Etzioni sees himself as a responsive harbinger of social equilibrium locked in a quest to revitalise society through a unique blending of some elements in "tradition (order based on virtues) with elements of modernity (well protected autonomy)" (Etzioni, 1997:xviii). Indeed, he goes on to argue that he and his new communitarian movement have to concertedly involve themselves in the establishment and maintenance of a "balance between social forces and the person, between community and autonomy, between the common good and liberty, between individual rights and social responsibilities" (1998:x).

All of which represent a declaration of Etzioni's sociological viewpoints and methodology. All deeply reflect his attitude toward modern society and the achievement of a communitarian alternative. Consequently, Amitai Etzioni's vision of a communitarian society is heavily predicated upon what he sees as having gone wrong with present-day social relations. To this end Etzioni has produced two seminal works to outline the situation. One, *The Spirit of Community* (1995), is ostensibly a campaigning book for the communitarian movement in the USA whereas *The New Golden Rule*

(1997) is "more analytical, engaging to some extent with the related academic literature, and claiming legitimacy from social science" (Levitas, 1998:90). Nevertheless, in the pursuit of a clear unequivocal understanding of the new communitarian position, it is the latter work that provides a more detailed and contextualised account of Etzioni's overarching argument.

Almost yearningly, Etzioni talks of the 1950s in America as a social ideal in many respects. Core values, he argues, "were relatively widely shared and strongly endorsed" and so helped to promote a situation where members "of society had a strong sense of duty to their families, communities and society" (1997:61) as a whole. Morality and order during this period were seen by Etzioni to generate stable relations. Christianity was the dominant and guiding religion. Violent crime, drug abuse, alcoholism and incidences of illegitimacy were low, or at least discretely concealed. The law made divorce difficult, abortion illegal throughout the United States and "the roles of men and women were relatively clearly delineated" (1997:61). Men were supposed to be the providers, women the dutiful 'carers', whereas promiscuous women were regarded as 'sluts' and unmarried women were stigmatised as spinsters (1997:62).

Despite a passing acknowledgement that women and ethnic minorities were treated as second-class citizens (1997:63), Etzioni enthuses over this past society. In his eyes low autonomy for certain groupings is not always a bad thing. To this end, Etzioni ambiguously comments upon, but is not overly critical of the fact that college students of the time were expected to take a fair number of 'prescribed' courses which "reflected unabashedly (and often with little self-awareness) the dominant set of values" (1997:63). Granted Etzioni concedes that American society of this yesteryear was characterised by a high level of coercion, nonetheless, he still commends the fact that it was offset with a similarly high presence of moral suasion. Coercion, for Etzioni, is necessary at times but can be overly repressive and destructive if it is too readily and too generously applied. On the other hand, the presence and pervasion of moral suasion is one of his basic foundations for determining social order. An effective balance between the two is, therefore, an integral aspect of Etzioni's communitarian thinking and it is precisely this detection of moral suasion, alongside elements of coercion, which allows him to use 1950s America as a comparative measure of social stability.

In short, Etzioni appears to affectionately embrace many aspects of the ordered way in which American society was conducted in the 1950s. By way of a contrast, though, Etzioni's depiction of events in America from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s tends to paint a very tainted picture which allows him to hark back to what he sees as the positive values of times gone by. Quite simply, "[i]f the hallmark of the 1950s was a strong sense of obligation, from 1960 to 1990 there was a rising sense of entitlement and a growing tendency to shirk social responsibilities" (1997:65). Increasingly Etzioni claims to have witnessed the rise in a counterculture of individualism and instrumental reasoning which "provided a normative seal of approval to a focus on the self rather than on responsibilities to the community" (1997:65). For him, it was a self-interest that was soon to become an unacceptable, if not distasteful base for social disorder and misplaced virtues. A base from which society would be riven by unbridled hedonism and competition over individual entitlements arising out of an increased political obsession with 'rights' at the expense of 'responsibilities'.

To establish the means through which this erosion of society can be reversed, Etzioni re-emphasises the need to amend the existing imbalance within society. Through the use of a rather simplistic and not entirely representative metaphor, Etzioni proceeds to construct a working model upon which to continue his argument. His somewhat pessimistic perspective is remarkably summed up with the stipulation that US—and to a lesser extent British—society is like an uneven three legged stool where the market and government provide two legs longer than the third leg of community and civil society. The solution to this predicament, he argues, is quite straightforward—simply lengthen the third leg through the propagation of a renewed, suitably modernised moral education (Etzioni, 16th March 1995:15). With the necessary revival of the highly functional institutions of family, school, neighbourhood and community, this moral education would start with the reassertion of family values and subsequently continue through the support, and reiteration, given during formal education and future life in a vibrant communal atmosphere.

Only in this way, continues Etzioni, can an ethical basis for politics be rediscovered. In so doing, this will either provide, foster or restore to individuals a sense of mutual responsibility. Ultimately, this would result in the creation and perpetuation of a virtuous cycle where the suasion of communities would be seen to "gently chastise those who violate shared moral norms and express approbation for those who abide by them" (Etzioni, 1995:ix). Moreover, this vision of virtuosity would not confine itself to the sphere of local communities. It would continue to grow and spread nationally or possibly beyond. To underline the point, Etzioni, cites the examples of Scotland and Wales. For him, they are two countries that have already managed to embrace the communitarian ethic. They have demonstrated to all and sundry that it is possible to "combine regional identities with society-wide loyalties" (Etzioni, 20th Feb. 1995). They are Etzioni's proof that new communtarianism is not simply a Utopian dream.

Complementary Debates from Charles Murray

On further examination of Etzioni's belief that society being torn apart by a prevailing obsession with 'rights' at the expense of 'responsibilities', it becomes easier to understand how the provocative thoughts of Charles Murray (1984; 1996a; 1996b) can be brought into the debate. Since the 1980s, Murray has successfully managed to produce a number of accounts about the so-called 'underclass' which easily fit into Etzioni's protestations and, by implication, also satisfy and appeal to New Labour's approach to British politics. Although such ideas are not strictly functionalist (Murray would call himself a libertarian if anything), they do nonetheless provide a more than useful point of reference for New Labour's approach. In relation to structural-functionlism, Murray does not have to declare his allegiance. His very description of the underclass itself does that for him. By implication his description sees the good 'citizens' of this world as having to work hard, be honest and having come from a 'stable' family background. Put simply, they have to follow the functionally prescribed moral norms of society: responsible individuals have to be functional not dysfunctional.

Although Murray, in his book *Losing Ground* (1984), was primarily concerned with the problems of welfare provision in the United States, his highly controversial portrayal of black life in an 'underclass' motivated by the 'perverse incentives' given through social welfare had, nonetheless, fuelled the fires of "a classic right wing moral panic" (Bagguley and Mann, 1992:117) in Britain. It had indicated that members of this 'class' did not want to work, posed a threat to private property through their criminal conduct and would have children without adequate role models to follow. "In popular language they [were portrayed as] …idle thieving bastards" (1992:118) deliberately living an alternative, threatening lifestyle in contradistinction to the functional norms of society as a whole.

Effectively, such propositions represented a theoretical viewpoint which marked "a subtle shift …from the problems faced by the 'underclass' to the problem *of* the 'underclass'" (1992:115). In short, the 'underclass' could be accused of ignoring the orderly norm of the 'work ethic' (Bauman, 1998:83-86). In so doing they appear to be marginalising themselves from the rest of society. They had, therefore, rendered themselves as inappropriate recipients of welfare aid. Accordingly, the logical solution was to withdraw welfare from this 'undeserving' poor altogether in a stark contrast to the 'genuine', 'deserving' poor such as the aged, disabled or infirm. With this retraction, so the argument goes, this 'underclass' would be encouraged, if not forced, back into the 'working' sectors of society. To be fair, New Labour has not, and does not advocate a solution as drastic as Murray's. Nor have they accepted the racist undercurrents of Murray's work. Nevertheless, the basic premise of deliberated welfare dependency and poverty entrapment has influenced New Labour's perceptions. The oft quoted talk "of the duties or obligations of the poor …[suggests] that they [the poor] are in some way responsible for their own condition" (Deacon, A. 1996:61) which, in turn, implies that "some people will remain out of work unnecessarily: that is, that their unemployment is in some sense voluntary" (1996:62).

Manifestations of Functionalism in the New Labour Project

In the light of connection made earlier between New Labour and functionalism, it is entirely consistent for the 'New Deals' put forward by Blair *et al* to actively promote work-based 'opportunities' for individuals to gain more independence—and responsibility—in their 'escape' from poverty and dependency. Moreover, a deeper examination into the details that lay behind the 'New Deal' scenario also reveals that these 'deals' are merely continuations of previously tried schemes in authoritarian welfare. They are not new in the respect that they are premised upon Murray's character assassination of the poor. Likewise Etzioni's communitarian rhetoric can be seen to persist while work is viewed as the obligatory passport back into the accepted norms of society.

As in the earlier functionalist approaches, work continues as the means toward social cohesion and aspirational satisfaction since paid work is "the main means of integration" (Levitas, 1996:13). As such it is explicitly seen as " route to an adequate income, social networks and personal fulfilment". Therefore "[a]ttachment to the labour market …is the key to breaking the vicious cycle of long-term unemployment and social exclusion" (1996:14). Effectively, the 'New Deal' scenario represents a thinly veiled redressing of previously implemented American examples in social engineering and sociological debate whereby the "ethic of work provides the financial rationale to get people 'off welfare and into work', and the moral imperative to turn people into better citizens" (Williams, 2004:28).

The Department of Social Security's Green Paper *New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare* (March 1998) constitutes an ideal example of this redressing of US themes. As with many of the narratives discussed earlier, the constantly reoccurring themes of 'education/re-education', 'obligation', 'mutual responsibility', 'self-reliance' and the concept of 'workfare' have now become unequivocally entwined in the 'New Deal' idiom of the Labour Party. 'Opportunity' is to be paternalistically enforced upon 'dysfunctional' individuals in a graphic demonstration of the positive exercise of functionalist thought and its associated interpretations of human behaviour. To quote this Green Paper:

> The Government's aim is to build the welfare state around work. The skills and energies of the workforce are the UK's biggest economic asset. And for both individuals and families, paid work is the most secure means of averting poverty and dependence (Government Green Paper March 1998, chapter 3:1).

In order to secure this aim, New Labour's solutions lay in: helping people move from welfare to work through the New Deals and Employment Zones; developing personalised services to help people into work; lowering the barriers to work for those who are able to and want to work; and finally by making work pay with the introduction of the national minimum wage and reforming the tax benefit system yet "ensuring that responsibilities and rights are fairly matched" (March 1998, chapter 3:2).

In a self-declared ambition to achieve "nothing less than a change of culture among benefit claimants" (March 1998, chapter 3:2), the first tranche of six New Deals were introduced between 1998 and 1999 in an attempt to steer a variety of non-employed groups through various "'gateways' into the labour market" (Hewitt, 2002:192). Using 'carrot and stick' measures (Driver, 2004; Hewitt, 2002) to coerce or encourage individuals into the paid labour market each of the gateways—now condensed into the single 'ONE' gateway through which all claimants must pass (Hewitt, 2002)—began the process of targeting young unemployed people; the long-term unemployed; lone parents; those with a disability, or long-term illness; those who are partners of the unemployed or disabled people; and, finally, people aged 50 or more (Hewitt, 2002).

With the New Deals the connections with structural-functionalism of the Parsonian kind could not be more apparent. Moreover, New Labour's rhetoric and policy direction in general also allow many commentators to make firm comparisons with the structural-functionalist offshoot of new communitarianism. Markedly, Prideaux (2001) and Heron (2001) independently point to the original but persisting concept of 'stakeholding' and its emphasis on individuals taking an active 'stake' in a

society or community. Powell *et al* (2001) explore the connection with Etzioni through New Labour's *zeitgeist* of a 'partnership' between people, communities and government. Deacon (2002) looks at the moral 'judgementalism' of Etzioni and New Labour (see also Deacon and Mann 1997, 1999; Driver and Martell 2002), whereas Levitas (1998)—as we have previously noted—points to the characteristic centrality that both give to the 'family' and 'community' as theatres for learning and social control. All reinforce Driver and Martell's observation that if communitarianism "is New Labour's answer to Thatcherism; so too is it Blair's rebuff to Old Labour. Community will restore the moral balance to society by setting out duties and obligations as well as rights" (1998:29).

Basically, it is the communitarian emphasis upon family, community, social discipline, obligation and responsibility—as opposed to an indiscriminate conferral of rights—that lies behind New Labour's search for a 'third way' that would go *Beyond Left and Right* (Giddens, 1994). Besides the repeated references to the term 'community', Etzionian influences permeate New Labour's policy drive to reaffirm a sense of community. To reiterate, there is little doubt that New Labour want to reinvigorate the institution of the family (Barlow and Duncan, 1999; Driver and Martell, 2002; Fox Harding, 2000) yet maintain market relations by giving primacy to paid work (Levitas, 1998). Without doubt also, its moral evaluation of the 'irresponsible' welfare claimant has produced a rationale designed to provoke a change of 'culture' (Deacon, 2002; Deacon and Mann, 1997; 1999; Government Green Paper, March 1998). In short, New Labour envisages that its most fundamental task is to instil a sense of responsibility through the welfare principle of 'conditionality' (Dwyer, 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2002; Heron and Dwyer, 1999).

On this basis, it is thus logical and consistent for New Labour to expand the continued existence of the uncompromising Child Support Agency (CSA). Similarly, the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), as part of a National Childcare Strategy, also adheres to this communitarian logic. Equally these measures have a judgemental approach. All include notions of obligation and behavioural change. And all signify the importance New Labour attaches to the traditional role of the family.

With WFTC, the communitarian associations are particularly obvious. Work is inextricably entwined with conceptions of the family. Although WFTC attempts to give better in-work benefits to both lone-parent and two-parent families with children in which there is an adult in full-time (16 hours or more) low-paid employment (Dean and Shah, 2002), there is the real possibility of a rather perverse consequence. By enabling men with limited earning power to support a non-working wife, WFTC could help "re-establish the male breadwinner model among certain low-income households" (Dean, 2002:6). Etzioni would not be too disturbed by such a trend. Nor, one suspects, would New Labour even though their declared aim in this area is to promote the idea that all should be able to combine paid work and family life.

New Labour's plans for the CSA strengthen this suspicion. In keeping faith with the founding Conservative principle that "no father should be able to escape from his responsibility" (Margaret Thatcher quoted in Timmins, 1996:452), the CSA under New Labour still maintains its presence. Moreover, despite the failures of this agency New Labour are determined to link its activities with an effort to get lone parents on benefit back to work through the relevant New Deal scheme on offer. This, in itself, does not appear to question the family structure. Neither does it suggest that women should stay at home. However, the original and little heard of consultation proposal for a male mentoring scheme in the *Sure Start* element of the *New Deal for Communities* (Home Office, 1998) betrays their thinking. The whole idea of a male mentor for a male child undermines the responsibility of a single mother. It suggests a deep mistrust of a single mother's ability to cope alone. Instead, emphasis is placed on paid work and the inevitable involvement of others undertaking the necessary child-caring duties.

Likewise in a follow-up document, New Labour's intention to "improve couples' decision making about getting married, and to enhance services which prevent marriage breakdown" (Driver and Martell, 2002:51) substantiates these misgivings further. In spite of Driver and Martell's belief that

the *Supporting Families: Summary of Responses to the Consultation Document* (Home Office, 1999a) has a largely pragmatic view on family forms, the proposals given send a rather different message. True to maintaining the ideal of traditional family forms, the proposals recommend:

> …an increased role for registrars in marriage guidance; a statement of the rights and responsibilities of marriage and the ceremony; the restructuring of marriage counselling to place greater stress on saving marriages; and funding for marriage advice centres (Driver and Martell, 2002:51).

The wistful tone, content and intent of the document could easily have come from Etzioni's review of relationships in 1950s America. Especially in the light of Etzioni's comments on what he sees as a 'parenting deficit' (Etzioni, 1995).

Inherent Contradictions and Tensions

Up to now, the main purpose of this paper has been to explore the connections between the social deliberations of New Labour and the sociology underpinning functionalism, organizational theory and the US inspired revival of communitarianism. In so doing, it has gradually become apparent that a number of different tensions have been simmering beneath the surface of the social prescriptions advocated and deployed. With regard to New Labour's economic stance, for instance, it is evident New Labour demonstrates a munificence toward capitalism and its entrepreneurs that is strikingly similar to the attitudes of the functionalist thinkers discussed so far. In this respect, Clarke (2004) helps the paper to further explore the wisdom of this benign outlook by revealing some of the profound areas of friction that are being generated by such an approach.

Without directly referring to functionalism or Parsons in the manner of this work, Clarke compatibly argues that the US driven neo-liberal globalisation process of today should be viewed as a mobile, 'Anglophone West' strategy which not only "attempts to install itself as the only, the necessary and the most desirable way …[but also] attempts to 'hegemonise' supra-national institutions" (Clarke, 2004:30). In relation to Britain, contends Clarke, it is a strategy that has demonstrated its mobility by consistently attempting to form and re-form alliances and blocs in order to obtain dominance through the de-mobilisation of alternative possibilities. Accordingly, neo-liberalism (in the more benevolent guise of New Labour's functionalism) has provided an active challenge to public interest with its concerted effort to simultaneously dissolve the public realm and supplant it with the rule of private interests co-ordinated by the 'free market'. Thus for Clarke, neo-liberalism has insisted that

> …the 'monopoly providers' of public services be replaced by efficient suppliers disciplined by the competitive realities of the market. It has disintegrated conceptions of the public as a collective identity, attempting to substitute individualised and economised identities as taxpayers and consumers (2004:31).

As the paper has touched upon on a number of occasions, integral to this challenge to public interests is neo-liberalism's insistence that primacy has to be given to the private. Yet as Clarke demonstrates, the meaning and application of the 'private' in neo-liberal terms is variable. In one sense, the 'private' designates the market as a vehicle of private interests and exchange. Nevertheless, 'private' in this context represents both the interests of the abstract individual (customarily referred to as the 'rational economic man') and the competitive corporation that is treated as a human entity in its own right. Indeed, through this personification both types of individual (real or anthropomorphised) suffer the heavy burden of "taxation, the excesses of regulation, the interference with their freedom and …[the] shackling of …[their] 'entrepreneurial spirit' by big government'" (Clarke, 2004:31).

In another sense, however, neo-liberal usage of the word 'private' is also a point of reference for the familial/domestic sphere. The 'rational economic man' is also a 'family man' aspiring to achieve his own (sic) interests and those of his immediate family (Clarke, 2004). As Kingfisher (2002) points out, this not only reflects an ingrained gender bias but also creates a situation whereby 'independence' and 'self-sufficiency' become inextricably entwined to the extent that

> …'independence' is displayed in the public realm, while 'dependence' is sequestered to the private sphere …the public, civil society generated by means of the social contract is predicated on the simultaneous generation of a private sphere, into which is jettisoned all that is not amenable to contract (Kingfisher, 2002 cited in Clarke, 2004:32).

Certainly, New Labour is of the same mind set to that of the neo-liberal strategy. New Labour sees economic efficiency as an integral, interwoven aspect of both social cohesion and social morality (Duncan, 2000). Like Etzioni, New Labour envisage a 'moral efficiency' tantamount to a neo-liberal 'self-sufficiency' that arises out of a reinvigorated sense of community within which each person has a stake in its future and "each person accepts responsibility to respond, to work to improve themselves" (Blair 1996:64).

Consequently, any so-called 'dysfunctional' or 'insufficiently capable' individuals and families who do not behave in the 'appropriate way' have to be encouraged or cajoled back into the designated parameters of self- and individual- 'responsibility'. When taken in conjunction with New Labour's undoubted promotion of the paid labour market as the prescriptive cure for 'irresponsibility', this immediately indicates that New Labour purport a vision of individuals who exemplify the aforementioned 'rational economic man'. Clearly people are believed to take individualistic and cost-benefit type decisions about how to maximise their own—and of course their families'—gain. As a result, it is believed that the social behaviour of non-conforming individuals can be modified through changes in the financial and legal structure of costs and benefits (Duncan, 2000). Hence the attempt by New Labour "to build the welfare state around work" (Government Green Paper, March 1998: chapter 3, 1) in order to achieve "nothing less than a change of culture among benefit claimants" (1998: chapter 3:2).

Unquestionably this materialistic interpretation is at odds with many aspects of contemporary life. Mason (2004), for example, points out that the decision making process goes beyond the narrow preconceptions of New Labour. Through semi-structured interviews with 57 people currently living in two cities in the North of England, Mason found that people decided where to live through a process of negotiation (whether it be explicit or otherwise) with others. Of pivotal importance to the interviewees were considerations over kinship, proximity and distance. How could a move be legitimised in both one's own eyes and in those of significant others? How would practical support for oneself and other kin be affected? How—if at all—can supportive kin relationships be maintained or afforded and how willing would those concerned be to continue relations over a distance? Such deliberation indicates that decisions are arrived at through interaction. Interaction appears to shape what can and cannot be done. In essence, it is not rational-economic issues alone that provide guidance over life choices.

From this standpoint, it is apparent that New Labour is making false assumptions about human agency, behaviour, rationality and morality. In so doing, New Labour is trying to impose its own blueprint for responsible behaviour at the expense of those who, possibly for good reason, behave in a different manner. Duncan (2000), for instance, underlines this point by turning attention back to New Labour's attitude toward lone motherhood. According to recent research (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Standing, 1999; Van Drenth *et al*, 1999), he argues,

> …practically all lone mothers see their moral and practical responsibility for their children as their primary duty and that for many (although not all) this responsibility to be a 'good mother' is seen as largely incompatible with significant paid work (Duncan, 2000).

Therefore, New Labour's prescriptive insistence upon lone parents attending interviews with job advisors (Home Office, 1998) is largely an irrelevance—if not a direct threat—to the moral rationality of these individuals. To reiterate, it is not solely a question of paid work reflecting moral responsibility. Under these circumstances, to enforce participation in the paid labour market may exacerbate rather than alleviate the tensions and problems facing lone parents: especially if the parent

believes they are neglecting their child or children by leaving them (in the care of others) to go to work elsewhere.

Finally, attention needs to return to New Labour's benevolent attitude toward capitalism, the *laissez-faire* market and the implicit belief that through effective management of the economy and the working environment social cohesion can be extensively created. In this respect, White (2000) argues that one of the preconditions of welfare contractualism (as epitomised by the New Deal conditionality principles) should be the provision of 'real' opportunities for the participants concerned. As Dwyer (2004) points out, the 1.25 million people helped back into work since the New Deals began should not be dismissed lightly. Nevertheless, Dwyer goes on to say that a number of commentators (Grover and Stewart, 2000; Gray, 2001; Peck, 2001; Prideaux, 2001) have cast doubt over the apparent success of the New Deals. By contrast, it could be that capital is the real beneficiary rather than unemployed people or lone parents not participating in the paid labour market.

Certainly it is possible to argue that the specifics of the New Deals can actually help provide lucrative gains for the unscrupulous or, equally, provide a financial 'lifeline' for struggling companies. At the level of unskilled employment, for example, the rewards that an employer would receive for recruiting a 'New Deal' participant obviously encourages the use of 'workfare' recruits rather than full-time employees. When competition is fierce, or during times of economic recession, it hardly makes sense for many entrepreneurs to employ an individual for 36 hours per week at a cost of £151.20 (calculated on the basis of a minimum rate of £4.20 per hour) when they could pay an individual as little as £91.20 with the difference being made up from a £60 per week 'New Deal' subsidy (Government Green Paper, March 1998, chapter 3:3-4). Add to this a further grant for £750 per every welfare-to-work trainee (March 1998, chapter 3:4), and it becomes clear that the use of a subsidised labour force can offer an employer a substantial incentive.

To add to the doubts, Dwyer (2004) and Peck (2001) also remark upon the unassuming job entry rates the New Deal schemes have achieved from their inception to March 2000. Overall, only a third of participants leave to enter paid work, while many of those who do leave the New Deal become trapped in 'contingent employment' in that they continually move from one short-term, low-paid and inevitably insecure job to another. Set against this backdrop, it is hard to argue that New Labour has fulfilled White's (2000) criterion of providing meaningful employment for individuals participating in the New Deal schemes. Nor is it easy to argue that such indications would deter physical or emotional feelings of alienation on behalf of the less successful participants and promote social inclusion through the revival of a sense community and belonging.

In truth, New Labour can only be relying upon its functionalist conviction that employers and managers are inherently responsible members of society who, in the long-term, will create meaningful employment opportunities through their entrepreneurial zeal and activity. Yet this is a strange and incongruous attitude to hold in the light of New Labour's recounted acceptance of the basic premises behind the notion of an irresponsible 'underclass'. Clearly, the government appear to be forwarding two different interpretations of human nature. Or is it that New Labour purports a theory of moral development? Either way the interpretations appear to be fundamentally flawed.

With specific reference to a developmental approach, it would be interesting to find out exactly when New Labour envisages that individuals stop being irresponsible and develop a moral responsibility. What happens to them to change their basic nature? Conversely, New Labour's acceptance of Murray's formative assumptions behind the concept of an 'underclass' also represent an acceptance of welfare dependency as a manifestation of calculated decision making. If it is true that the 'underclass' are capable of making such rational but avaricious decisions, then it must also be true that the rest of society are also capable of the same. In sum, the notion of two facets of human nature dividing themselves along the unemployed-entrepreneur divide simply does not stand up. Consequently, governmental faith in the employer to be responsible and act benevolently in the best interests of its

employees and society as a whole represents an illogical if not a contradictory and possibly disastrous stance to adopt.

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