SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The problem of social exclusion is a central concern within the European Union, it is a key term in the policies of New Labour and, although less frequently used in North America, parallel discourses are present in the major arenas of social policy. It is a term which is flexible and somewhat amorphous in use, yet there are core features which separate it out from previous notions such as poverty or marginalisation. Firstly, it is multi-dimensional: social exclusion can involve economic, political, and spatial exclusion as well as lack of access to specific areas such as information, medical provision, housing, policing, security, etc. These dimensions are seen to interrelate and reinforce each other: overall they involve exclusion in what are seen as the 'normal' areas of participation of full citizenship (Percy-Smith, 2000). Secondly, that social exclusion is a social not an individual problem. It contrasts with earlier post-war notions which viewed marginality as a problem of isolated dysfunctional individuals. Rather it is a collective phenomenon, hence its association with a posited underclass. Indeed it has more in common with the dangerous classes of Victorian times than the dysfunctional families of the Welfare State of the fifties and sixties. Thirdly, that such exclusion has global roots rather than being a restricted local problem. It is a function of the impact of the rapid changes in the labour market, the decline of manufacturing industries, the rise in a more fragmented service sector, the creation of structural unemployment in particular areas where industry has shut down. It is thus a *systemic* problem: global in its causes, local in its impact (see Byrne, 1999). Fourthly, the concept of social exclusion carries with it the imperative of inclusion, it is not happy with the excluded being outside of the ranks of citizenship and seeks to generate opportunities, whether by changing the motivation, capacity or available openings for the socially excluded.

This being said there are important differences and political divergent interpretations of social exclusion. There would seem to be three basic positions on agency:

1. That which basically blames the individuals concerned for their lack of motivation, their self-exclusion from society as a whole although the ultimate responsibility for this is placed at the doors of the Welfare State which is seen as engendering a state of 'dependency' where, for example, even if the jobs are available out there the

underclass does not want to take them. The classic example of this position is the work of Charles Murray (1984).

2. That which sees the problems as a sort of hydraulic failure of the system to provide jobs which leads to a situation of 'social isolation' wherein people lose not the motive to work but the capacity to find work because of lack of positive role models. Direct exclusion, for example, because of racism, is explicitly ruled out as a primary reason for social exclusion. The classic texts here are the work of William Julius Wilson: *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) and *When Work Disappears* (1996).

3. Finally there is a commentary which stresses the active rejection of the underclass by society: through the downsizing of industry, the stigmatisation of the workless, and the stereotyping of an underclass which is criminogenic, drug ridden with images which are frequently racialised and prejudiced. The work of Foucauldians such as Nikolas Rose (1999) fits this bill, as does *Lockdown America*, the neo-Marxist account of Christian Parenti (2000), as does the prolific critical work of Zygmunt Bauman (see particularly 1998; 2000).

Let me say at this juncture that the first position smacks of the ideology of blaming the poor for their poverty (see Bauman, 2000; Colley and Hodgkinson, 2001) whilst the second ignores the active process of exclusion inherent in late modern societies (see Young, 2003). Furthermore, the inclusionary policies of parties such as New Labour tend to be constructed around a fusion of the first two positions (see Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, 2001, and critique in Young and Matthews, 2003).

Substantially, the concept of social exclusion has been criticised for its dualistic nature and for the loss of the dimension of class. Thus, the discourse of social exclusion has encapsulated within it a notion of a dualism of the included over and against the excluded. The chief flaws of this conception are: i) *Homogeneity.* It suggests a homogenous group of people in the category of excluded, whereas in fact the socially excluded incorporate the young, the old, the temporarily poor, etc. (see Gans, 1995); ii) *Social Immobility.* The presumption of a fairly static underclass is misleading. There is in fact a great deal of social mobility across categories (see Hills *et al*, 2002); iii) *Fixed*

Locality and Separate Morality. The concept harbours the notion of a group of people outcast, spatially cut-off from the rest of society, with perhaps different values and motivations. In fact, no such spatial segregation occurs (physical mobility in and out of the ghetto, for example, is frequent) and values are shared with the wider society (see Young, 1999; Nightingale, 1993); and the areas themselves have a mixed population many of whom are in work (Hagedorn, J, 1991; Newman, K, 1999); iv) *Focus on Poverty and Deprivation.* The notion of a socially excluded underclass gives the false notion that the majority of social problems are located in these areas. In fact, problems exist across the city, the majority outside of the poorest areas (see Mooney and Danson, 1997). Thus the opposition of, say, 20% of those excluded to a wider society of included massively underestimates the economic and social problems of those in the wider society. It suggests that the included do not suffer the problem of class - indeed that if they make the transition from the zones of exclusion to the inclusive world of mainstream society, the rest of their problems would vanish. Most importantly the suggestion is that the notion of social exclusion carries with it the implication that the problem is a Durkheimian one of a failure of integration, rather than a socialist approach which would emphasise problems of class. That is, globalisation is seen as having resulted in problems of social cohesion - those left behind by change - rather than an exacerbation of existing class divisions (Levitas, 1996). Indeed, John Andersen argues that this notion of social exclusion involves a major conceptual transformation:

> 'a change of focus in the poverty and inequality discourse from a vertical to a horizontal perspective. The shift of focus can to some extent also be described as a shift from Marxist and Weberian tradition of class and status analysis to a Durkheimian "anomie-integration" discourse.' (1999, p.129)

This widely accepted assertion is incorrect on two levels. Firstly, that it exaggerates the extent to which class-oriented redistributive policies are absent in policy documents. For example, both the Scottish policy paper, *Three Nations* (Scottish Council Foundation, 1998), and the *English Preventing Social Exclusion* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) contain amongst their desired outcomes reduction of income inequality and childhood poverty and an emphasis on working family credit and the minimum wage. Further, it is unwise to dismiss a concern for integration and citizenship. This has formed the basis of French social inclusion policies (see Pitts, 2003) and is directly

aimed at reducing the problems of racism, 'othering' and active social exclusion both within civil society and by the criminal justice system which, as we have noted, is neglected in the majority of accounts of social exclusion. What is necessary therefore is policies which *both* address the problems of economic exclusion, on the one hand, and social and political exclusion on the other (Young and Matthews, 2003).

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