

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKING PRISONS: TRANSFORMING INMATES FROM THE LUMPENPROLETARIAT TO THE CONTINGENT WORKFORCE?**

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**Abstract** *Policy-makers are currently seeking to transform prison regimes so that they prepare prisoners for the labour market. However, this article shows that the alleged poor work ethic of prisoners has traditionally been viewed as a key element in their classification as the 'undeserving poor' and that economic transformation has relegated many to the margins of the labour force. This raises important questions about the role of prison in the post-industrial labour market. The author argues that prison simultaneously houses the growing surplus population resulting from capital's unceasing drive for profit and becomes a lucrative new market which has transformed some prisoners into an economic resource.*

**Keywords** *Prisons, inmates, employment.*

### **Introduction**

The 2010 Green Paper 'Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders' seeks to transform prison regimes so that they prepare prisoners for the labour market. This is a key part of a package of sentencing and rehabilitation measures which promise a 'rehabilitation revolution'. 'Prison should be a place where work itself is central to the regime, where offenders learn vocational skills in environments organised to replicate as far as practical and appropriate, real working conditions' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 15). The development of a new type of prison - the 'working prison'- is signalled to achieve this transformation. The defining features of which will include:

- the regime and core day will be focused around enabling work;
- prisoners will work a full working week of up to 40 hours;
- education will be geared primarily to providing skills to perform work effectively and will increase the ability to get a job on release.

However, the present article shows that the alleged poor work ethic of prisoners has traditionally been viewed as a key element in their classification as the 'undeserving poor'. It then draws upon a series of in-depth interviews undertaken by the author with male prisoners at HMP Lindholme and HMP & YOI Doncaster to discuss the impact of economic transformation on their employment prospects and financial behaviour. The findings do not relate to women prisoners, whose work is often predominantly in the home in a variety of caring roles. The author argues that many male ex-prisoners have been relegated to the margins of the labour force where they spend much of their working lives in the underground economy undertaking both illegal (criminal) and otherwise legal (but undeclared) activity. The remoteness of many from the formal labour market is mirrored by their alienation from mainstream financial services. It is salient to note that most interviewees were white and that those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds may be further disadvantaged in the labour market.

This raises important questions about the role of prison in the post-industrial labour market and how the renewed efforts of policy-makers to develop working prisons should be conceptualised. The author argues that the development of working prisons allows policy-makers to simultaneously demonstrate that they are serious about both rehabilitating and punishing offenders. Moreover, the prison performs two key roles in the post-industrial labour market. First, it houses the growing surplus population resulting from capital's unceasing drive for profit and the ascendancy of neoliberalism. Second, prison has become a lucrative new market which has transformed some prisoners into an economic resource.

### **Prisoners and the work ethic**

The perceived poor work ethic of prisoners and their potential to contaminate the 'respectable working class' has meant that they have been classified as the 'undeserving' poor. Marx & Engels (1970) regarded unemployable workers, paupers and criminals as constituting the lumpenproletariat or 'rabble proletariat'. Members lacked class identity and could act as 'bribed tools of reactionary intrigue'. Mayhew (1861; cited in Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992) defined the 'non-working class' as comprising individuals with physical defects, mental/intellectual defects, and moral defects. The 'dishonest poor' included criminals whose behaviour, values and rejection of work were distinguishing features. Similarly, Booth (1887; cited in Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992) divided the residuum into 'loafers' or the 'vicious and semi-criminal' and the 'feckless' and improvident.

The rediscovery of poverty as a social problem in the 1960s led to the resurrection of notions such as the 'residuum' or 'underclass', which were again negatively defined according to the criteria of productive work. 'If illegitimate births are the leading indicator of an underclass and violent crimes a proxy measure of its development, the definitive proof that an underclass has arrived is that large numbers of young, healthy, low-income males choose not to take jobs' (Murray, 1990: 17). Yet Myrdal (1963) originally coined the term to describe the social impact of the development of the post-industrial economy, which would require fewer workers. Gans (1996) has also highlighted the risk that offenders may be transformed into an 'undercaste'. The latter being defined as 'a

population of such low status as to be shunned by the rest of society, with opportunities for[...]upward mobility even more limited than those of the people today described as a underclass' (Gans, 1996: 151). It is the acquisition of a criminal record that 'can be used to assign them to a 'criminal undercaste' (Gans, 1996: 151).

However, the concept was rapidly transformed into a behavioural one. It came to refer to the poor who behaved in deviant ways. Theorists such as Auletta, Banfield and Murray identified the existence of a culturally deprived minority of the dependant and the delinquent. Auletta's (1982) taxonomy of the poor included both the dependant in the guise of the 'passive poor' and the delinquent, including 'hostile street criminals' and 'hustlers', who earned their livelihood in the underground economy. Similarly, Murray (1990) has argued that the criminal is the classic member of the underclass. Drug taking, illegitimacy, inability to hold down a job, truancy and casual violence are seen as key defining features. Parenti (1999) has argued that a brutalising US prison regime helps create a 'predator class', which drives poor communities into the arms of the state, seeking protection.

### **The transformation of the employment prospects and financial behaviour of ex-prisoners**

The advent of the post-industrial economy has led to profound changes in the nature of work. Every developed country has seen changes in the amount and type of employment, notably the rise in low-paid work, in part-time and flexible employment, and in the growth of the informal economy (Gans, 1996). The present article explores the impact of economic transformation on male ex-prisoners. It draws upon a series of in-depth interviews conducted by the author with prisoners as part of the evaluation of two pre-release interventions (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Key details of the prison-based interventions**

<b>Vocational training project</b>	<b>Financial capability training</b>
Category C prison located in South Yorkshire.	Category B privately managed local prison located in South Yorkshire.
The intervention sought to prepare participants for construction work.	A short course that sought to improve financial capability skills.
Seven pre-release interviews and five post-release interviews were undertaken.	Five pre-release interviews were conducted face-to-face.
All interviewees were white and aged between 23 and 40 years. They were serving custodial sentences ranging from two to four years.	All, except one interviewee, were white and aged between 18 and 21 years. They were serving custodial sentences which ranged from six months to two years.

N.B. Category B - suitable for closed but not high security conditions; Category C - not yet suitable for open conditions.

Deindustrialisation and the growing service intensity of the economy have led to the demise of the male dominated, low-skilled manual work traditionally sought by offenders. Those released from prison into the UK labour market of the late 1960s could, for example, expect to find stable employment in manufacturing and construction. Martin & Webster (1971: 147) found that the possession of a criminal record was an 'inconvenience, but not a major obstacle to finding a job'. A third of offenders found their first post-release job in the civil engineering and building industry and a further one fifth in manufacturing and extraction. Most undertook manual work. Martin & Webster (1971) established that nearly four in ten and one in four had experience in semi-skilled or unskilled manual and casual work respectively. Similarly, Soothill (1974) found that just four of the 190 individuals who had interviews arranged by a job-placing service for ex-prisoners were in non-manual occupations.

Many of those seeking such jobs in the post-industrial labour market have had to adjust to the new realities of stagnant wages, underemployment and generalised insecurity. The spread of day labour and other forms of low-wage contingent employment has been a key development. In the US, 60% of all new jobs were contingent by 1995, i.e. part-time, temporary or home-work (Harris, 1999: 28). Theodore (2003: 1,812) describes the situation in Chicago: 'each day, tens of thousands of workers are dispatched by day labour agencies[...]where they are employed as assemblers, hand packers, material movers, machine operators, meat packers and in other manual-labour occupations'. They are predominantly drawn from segments of the labour force where low-wage employment has been the norm, i.e. inner-city residents, recent immigrants and welfare recipients. The spread of contingent work has pursued a path of least resistance, destabilising and undermining the already difficult conditions in low-wage labour markets (Theodore, 2003).

Low-level service jobs present another route into work, yet the skills required are fundamentally different from those demanded for manufacturing employment. Hogarth & Wilson (2001) have found that the demand for physical and technical skills has been superseded by the requirement for interpersonal and customer handling skills. This is because the service sector involves the exchange of intangibles, such as information, and is dependant on a social relationship between the producer and consumer of the service (McDowell, 2003). 'Interactive service work', which involves face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact, makes use of the workers' looks personalities and emotions as well as their physical and intellectual capacities. Consequently, the embodied performance is effectively part of the 'product' that is 'sold' to the customer (Lash & Urry, 1994). Tyler & Taylor (1998) have shown that this is a gendered form of labour, with employers preferring women in service roles.

Prisoners have a number of characteristics which place them at a distinct disadvantage in the post-industrial labour market. They are much more likely than the general population to have been excluded from school, suffer from mental illness, have drug or alcohol problems, and possess few educational and vocational qualifications (see Table 2). Virtually all of those interviewed at the two prisons had drug problems prior to custody and some were former drug dealers. A 39-year old confided that: 'all I knew before

[participating in the vocational training project] was how to sell drugs'. Several were former heroin users and were being prescribed replacement medication during their incarceration. Drug taking often extended to family and friends.

**Table 2: The social characteristics of prisoners**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>General population</b>	<b>Prison population</b>
Regular truant from school	3%	30%
Excluded from school	1%	49%
Reading at or below Level 1 (level expected of an 11-year old)	16%	37%
No qualifications	15%	52% men and 71% of women
Suffer from two or more mental disorders	5% of men and 2% of women	72% of men and 70% of women
Drug use in previous year	13% of men and 8% of women	66% of men and 55% of women
Hazardous drinking	38% of men and 15% of women	63% of men and 39% of women
Homeless	0.9%	32%
Unemployed before imprisonment	5%	67%

Sources: HM Government (2005) 'Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment'; and Social Exclusion Unit (2002) 'Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners'.

Imprisonment further worsens the position of ex-prisoners in the labour market. Prison may socialise individuals into an inmate subculture that is a 'school for crime' (Abbott, 1981). Similarly, Donziger (1996) suggests that overcrowded prisons may produce attitudes and behaviours that enhance survival on 'the inside' but are not compatible with success in the conventional job market. Stigmatisation may change their long-term relation to the labour market. Consequently, Western & Beckett (1999) argue that the penal system deepens existing labour market inequalities. Furthermore, studies have drawn attention to the 'collateral damage' of imprisonment on deprived communities (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002). This may create cycles of disadvantage and crime by undermining informal social controls and lead to neighbourhood disinvestment.

Many ex-prisoners return to deprived urban communities which have few employment opportunities. All of those interviewed by the author were returning to deprived neighbourhoods in the North of England and Midlands. In the US context, Peck & Theodore (2005: 1) argue that: 'going home very often means returning to impoverished, central-city neighbourhoods, many of which are practically devoid of living-wage jobs'. The omnipresence of the drugs economy in such communities makes it difficult for those newly released from prison to stay out of trouble. A 35-year old with 23 previous convictions, including major drug offences, explained that: 'I will know at least six people [drug dealers] from stepping off the train'. All his friends were users. He went on: 'people find it hard to stay off [drugs] - all my mates are on it. What do you do, write off all your mates?'. Drug dealers may possess some of the traits needed for self-employment. However, Fletcher (2005) argues that UK offender enterprise support is characterised by a number of weaknesses, which risk perpetuating the myth that offenders are natural risk takers capable of turning small amounts of financial capital into thriving businesses.

The result is that many male ex-prisoners have been thrown to the margins of the labour force, with many spending the majority of their working lives in the informal labour market. This was so routine that prisoners at HMP Lindholme often failed to make a distinction between formal and informal work. Careful questioning revealed that three had no formal labour market experience but a succession of 'cash-in-hand' jobs secured through friends and acquaintances. The work histories of the remainder were mainly comprised of informal work, interspersed with spells of economic inactivity and imprisonment. A 35-year old had worked, for example, as a painter and decorator and joiner on building sites. However, he ruefully noted: 'but not proper jobs on building sites. Employers want three years' minimum experience and a good CV'. Another had 10 years experience in the building trades but mostly undertaking cash-in-hand work.

All of those interviewed at HMP Lindholme had worked prior to incarceration, albeit in male dominated, low-skilled manual jobs, such as labouring, erecting scaffolding, gardening, warehousing, roofing, carpet laying, joinery, painting and decorating, and excavating ground works. None had any experience of service work or any intention of seeking it. Four interviewees were former labourers, three had been painters and decorators, two had been employed in warehouses, and two had undertaken gardening work. A few listed four or more types of employment. One individual had, for example, been a roofer, window fitter, painter and decorator, carpet layer, and had excavated ground works.

The growth of subcontracting, particularly in construction, has provided offenders with rich opportunities to undertake informal work. It has also underpinned the growth of informal recruitment. It is against this background that Sassen (1996) suggests that economic restructuring has shifted labour market functions such as recruitment to the household or community. All of those interviewed consulted family, friends and acquaintances in order to find work. Most were returning to the same community that facilitated this reliance on local social networks. The post-release interviews showed that all were continuing to search for work in this way. A 25-year old was, for instance, able to secure some short-term plastering work from an uncle. Most had also made direct



contact with employers. A 35-year old had personally approached site supervisors on 12 major construction sites in Leeds.

The remoteness of many ex-prisoners from the formal labour market is mirrored by their alienation from mainstream financial services. All, except one, of those interviewed at HMP & YOI Doncaster had never had a bank account. Yet it is widely recognised that this engenders a sense of belonging to society and supports formal employment and accommodation opportunities. They all expressed a preference for dealing in cash. A 21-year old spoke for many: 'I know where I am with money'. Many would find it hard to choose financial products, complete forms, provide acceptable identification and give full address histories. It is interesting to note that Meadows *et al.* (2010) found that, in spite of the barriers that prisoners highlighted in opening bank accounts, most of those who tried to do so were successful.

None of those interviewed would approach mainstream agencies for free financial advice on their release. One individual, however, mentioned the possibility of contacting the Citizens Advice Bureau. A black 20-year old was openly hostile to the banks: 'the banks are not good - you get into debt'. He singled out the excessive charges levied for unauthorised overdrafts. The majority would rely on family and friends. A 21-year old responded: 'my dad, he knows a lot. And there is a Community Youth Worker where I live'. Another 19-year old reported: 'I would go to those that know what to do[...]mates and family'. There was also a general anticipation that family and friends would provide any necessary financial support. However, limited resources were often available through this route because many were also struggling to get by on low incomes.

Most had poor financial capability skills, which further compromised their ability to secure and maintain formal work. They also lacked the experience and confidence in using financial products. Furthermore, many were not responsible for paying household bills because they lived at home or with girlfriends who often bore the primary responsibility for budgeting. A 21-year old male was adamant: 'I don't pay bills'. This meant that most took an extremely short-term view when it came to the management of their finances. A 19-year old admitted that: 'my own mind comes into it - willpower and stuff. If I've got money I blow it. You see money burns a hole in my hand'. Another 19-year old reported: 'I'm a young man, if you know what I mean, and it's hard to save'.

Prisoners are amongst the most vulnerable to illegal sources of debt, such as drug debts and loan sharks (H.M. Treasury, 2007). None of the prisoners interviewed by the author felt inclined to indicate that they had drug debts. However, some were more forthcoming about loan sharks. Two individuals felt, for example, that the course would have been significantly improved by a focus on dealing with unlicensed credit providers: 'they should have more stuff[...]summat on loan sharks' (18-year old). Similarly, a 19-year old felt that: 'there should be more on the perils of loan sharks'.

### **The role of prison in the post-industrial labour market**

The prison population in England and Wales has more than doubled since 1992 and stands at record levels. During November 2010, it was 85,393 (Prison Reform Trust, 2010). This

has taken place against a background of economic transformation that has swelled the ranks of the surplus population and led many offenders to participate in the underground economy. Prison may serve six roles in relation to the post-industrial labour market:

- It may absorb marginalised groups unable to compete effectively.
- It can bolster the reserve labour pool during economic expansion.
- The prison may become a new opportunity for capital accumulation.
- Prison and welfare institutions may comprise a single system of social control.
- Prison can reinforce divisions between the 'respectable' and 'non-respectable' working class by pointing to the dangers of non-participation in the labour market.
- It can increase the incentives to participate in legitimate work, even at low rates.

Prison may act as an institution for absorbing and recycling those who are unable or unwilling to work. Rusche & Kirchheimer's (1939) seminal work argued that the form and severity of punishments are shaped by the economic context, especially the size of the available labour pool. A key proposition was that the character and use of penal sanctions will reflect the value of labour. This is reflected in the size and condition of the surplus population, since it is the group that represents the primary target of penal sanctions. Consequently, during periods of widespread labour, surplus 'cruel penalties' are preferred: 'if penal sanctions are supposed to deter these strata from crime in an effective manner they must appear even worse than that strata's present living conditions' (Rusche, 1933: 4). Whereas less severe punishments, designed to make the 'unwilling work', predominate during periods of labour scarcity.

Recent studies have confirmed that rates of imprisonment rise when surplus populations (measured as official rates of unemployment) are high (see Melossi, 1985). Chiricos & DeLone (1992) also found that a strong relationship existed between unemployment and imprisonment. Western & Beckett (1999) view the high US prison population as a kind of 'hidden worklessness'. They argue that high rates of imprisonment depress conventional unemployment in the short-run but raise it in the long-term by damaging job prospects. 'High incarceration rates lower conventional unemployment statistics by hiding joblessness but create pressure for rising unemployment once inmates are released' (Western & Beckett, 1999: 1,053).

Weiss (2001) suggests that prison can also be effective in bolstering the reserve labour pool during economic expansions. He points out that since 1990, 30 US states have legalised the 'contracting out' of prison labour to private companies, with 100 profit-making businesses from telemarketing to light manufacturing (Weiss, 2001). From this perspective, prisoners are viewed as members of a low wage labour pool. The social forces that led to millions of young men entering US prisons are now increasing their utility as prison labour for capital accumulation. 'The "discards" of an old industrial and



political order have become a potential resource, as a contingent workforce, for the new post-industrial system of production' (Weiss, 2001: 255).

The role of prison as a new opportunity for capital accumulation has been highlighted by the exploitation of convict labour and the privatisation of establishments. Schlosser (1998) argues that a 'prison-industrial complex' has arisen, which is a set of bureaucratic, political and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment.

*It is composed of politicians[...]who have used the fear of crime to gain votes; impoverished rural areas where prisons have become a cornerstone of economic development; private companies that regard the roughly \$35 billion spent each year on corrections[...]as a lucrative market; and government officials whose fiefdoms have expanded along with the inmate population. (Schlosser, 1998: 3)*

He argues that the drive for higher profits is replacing notions of public service.

*What was once a niche market for a handful of companies has become a multi-billion dollar industry[...]The prison-industrial complex now includes some of the nation's largest architecture and construction firms, Wall Street investment banks[...]companies that sell everything from bullet-resistant security cameras to padded cells. (Schlosser, 1998: 10)*

Wilkinson & Pickett (2010) show that Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and US states that spend the least on social welfare have the highest rates of imprisonment. In the UK context, Grover (2008) argues that social inequality is the key to understanding offending behaviour and policy responses. The fundamental causes of such inequalities lie in the operation of capitalism. However, the state contributes to the deepening of inequality by punishing people who are already poor and by promoting insecure, low-paid work as a panacea for assorted social problems. Downes & Hansen (2006) have also found that 'penal expansion and welfare contraction' have become more pronounced over the last 20 years. It is in this context that Beckett & Western (2001) have advanced the 'transcarceration' thesis. 'Penal and welfare institutions have come to form a single policy regime aimed at the governance of social marginality' (Beckett & Western, 2001: 55). Furthermore, 'reduced welfare expenditures are not indicative of a shift toward reduced government intervention in social life but rather a shift toward a more exclusionary and punitive approach to the regulation of social marginality' (Beckett & Western, 2001: 55).

Foucault (1979) argues that prison produces a manageable population of recidivists. From this perspective, high levels of recidivism are not a failure but a method of producing an 'enclosed illegality' of petty crimes that can be held up to the responsible working class as an example of the dangers of non-conformity. Wacquant (1999) talks of a 'new penal common sense', which seeks to criminalise poverty and normalise insecure, low-paid employment. From this perspective, neoliberal societies rely on the police and penal institutions to contain the disorders produced by mass unemployment, the imposition of

precarious wage work and shrinking social protection. 'The invisible hand of the market and the iron fist of the state combine and complement each other to make the lower social classes accept de-socialized wage labour and the social instability it brings in its wake' (Wacquant, 2003: 14).

## Conclusions

The 'rehabilitation revolution' promised by the coalition government seeks to put the employment of prisoners and ex-prisoners at the heart of the new penal strategy. It is apparent that part of the appeal of working prisons is that their introduction allows policy-makers to demonstrate that they are serious about both rehabilitating and punishing offenders. 'Criminals must be properly punished, but they must also be properly rehabilitated to stop them from committing other crimes' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 7). Consequently, work is usually mentioned in connection with words like 'hard' and 'tough'. There is little sense that employment should be fulfilling or rewarding. 'Prisons will become places of hard work and industry, instead of enforced idleness' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 1). Hard work will also be a feature of non-custodial punishment. There are faint echoes of a debate that goes back to the start of the development of the modern prison over whether work should develop employment skills or consist of the pointless labour of the treadmill. From this perspective, work becomes a vehicle for disciplining those alleged to display anti-social attitudes towards 'honest work'.

The working prison purports to further rehabilitation by inculcating the attitudes and skills necessary for participation in the labour market. 'For prisoners about to leave prison, it should help provide the skills needed to live a crime free life outside' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 15). The Centre for Social Justice (2010) recommends the doubling of the number of prisoners working in prison workshops to over 20,000 during the next three years. It suggests the development of training for jobs characterised by skill shortages, such as NHS jobs, recycling and activities for the forestry commission. 'There will be commercial rewards for private sector companies with such a strategy. But the greatest reward to the national interest would be that every year several thousand prisoners would be trained for work' (The Centre for Social Justice, 2010: 37).

This is viewed as key means for reducing re-offending and, thus, protecting the public. Kenneth Clarke's speech at the Dinner for the Judges at the Mansion House maintained that: 'the public are not made safer if we tolerate the continual growth of a sub-class of rootless prisoners who keep coming steadily back to the courts and the prison gates shortly after each release' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 3). He went on: 'we must reduce the rates of re-offending[...]So we must put more emphasis on work and training' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 3). This is nothing new. Various policy documents over the past decade have emphasised the link between employment and re-offending. However, the recognition that the link is strongest for those in stable, well-paid employment with prospects (see Farrington *et al.*, 1986) is conspicuous by its absence in coalition government policy documents. Although the graphic design social enterprise established by the Howard League at HMP Coldingley shows that it is possible to provide innovative, high quality work opportunities in prisons.

This may be because the focus of working prisons will be to prepare some offenders for contingent labour. Exposing offenders to the routines of work may simply be shorthand for preparing them to accept any working conditions. This will also help to address the political sensitivities of relying on immigrants to populate the ranks of the contingent workforce. Yet such work is the antithesis of the sort of employment most likely to lead to a reduction in re-offending, given that it is characterised by weak attachment to the workplace, irregularity of routines and a 'hand-to-mouth' existence. There are also the labour displacement effects to consider. Prisoner worker competition may hit the lowest unskilled strata of the workforce hardest, with the result that the newly unemployed face conditions conducive to criminal behaviour themselves.

Prisoners should not be seen to financially benefit from the improvement of opportunities to undertake work in custody. The experience of paid prison work will, for example, allow inmates to make greater financial reparation to victims and the tax payer. The Ministry of Justice (2010: 16) maintains that: 'we also think that it is important that prisoners see work as a way to pay the debt that they owe to society and to victims of crime'. This will be facilitated by implementing the Prisoners Earning Act 1996, which enables deductions to be taken from low risk prisoners earning higher wages while working on license prior to their discharge into the community. Consequently, prison work is also valued for its ability to allow offenders to atone for past sins.

'We want to make it easier for the private, voluntary and community sectors to use their expertise and innovation to develop the working prison' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 15). This is not particularly innovative. Bentham's 1791 plan for the Panopticon envisaged that inmates would be employed for as much 16 hours a day in their cells with the profits going to a private contractor (see Soothill, 2007). The rejection of Bentham's proposals owed much to the view that prisons were not factories but places of religious reformation (Soothill, 2007). More recently, the US prison system has sought to increase the labour force participation of prisoners, which has brought the entrepreneur back into the prison and, through post-release programmes, has extended the prison into society (Weiss, 2001).

US experience highlights some of the limits of this approach. Parenti (2000) notes that few US prisoners worked for private firms, most were employed by state-owned 'prison industries'. He argues that private firms do not like the invasive, slow, overbearing prison environment where production is often interrupted by security concerns. They are also unwilling to court the bad publicity associated with exploiting prisoners. However, private prisons now house just under 9% of US prisoners, compared to 6% in 2000 (Newsweek, 30 June 2010). Parenti (2000) argues that they do not lower the costs of incarceration for state governments because any savings are usually absorbed by the company as profit. Furthermore, a concern with the 'bottom line' may undermine the long-term sustainability of some private jailers. It is in this context that prison riots, scandals involving the mistreatment of prisoners and mass escapes have undermined support for private prisons (Parenti, 2000).

In conclusion, the prison plays two important roles in the UK post-industrial labour market. First, it houses the growing surplus population resulting from economic transformation and reduced spending on social welfare. In other words, it accommodates the major casualties of capital's unceasing drive for new markets and enhanced profits and the ascendancy of neoliberalism. Second, it becomes a lucrative new market and, in the process, some prisoners are transformed into an economic resource. Consequently, the working prison can be conceptualised as an attempt to prepare some inmates for the contingent workforce and the normalisation of this type of labour among the poor. The present research has shown that this will be no easy task and it is also far from clear that success would lead to reduced re-offending. Furthermore, the danger is that the development of the working prison may divide prison society between a lumpenproletariat of the unable and unwilling, and an embryonic contingent workforce.

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*The Development of Working Prisons: Transforming Inmates from the Lumpenproletariat to the Contingent Workforce?*

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