

Breaking them in? School kids in the twilight economy

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This article sets out to explore the nature and extent of the participation of young people - many of them of school-leaving age - in holiday, weekend and after-school casual part-time work. It is argued that such a participation in the "twilight economy" of a segmented labour market prepares New Zealand youth for capitalist social relations of production. In conclusion, some of the implications of this study for industrial arbitrators and educators, as well as pointers for future research in this area are discussed.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to highlight a set of related issues which have not received much attention in the New Zealand debate regarding the relationship between young people and an economy in crisis. I am referring here to the high participation rates of young, school-age persons in casual part-time work, to the conditions under which such labour is carried out, and to the effect this has not only on young persons' material lives but also on their ideological construction of the social order and particularly of the world of work in a capitalist economy.

There have been a number of studies carried out locally about the institutional preparation of young people in training schemes and schools for the world of work (Gordon, 1985, Khan, 1986, Korndorffer, 1987, and Sultana, 1987). Many of these analyses suggest that both teachers and policy makers construct young people in such a manner as to suggest that the latter are largely ignorant about the world of work, and that they therefore need to be taught about it by the supposedly more experienced adults. One example of this assumption can be found in the influential report of Scott *et al.* (1985, p.15), where it is stated that "Secondary schools need to ask why so many young people are leaving school so obviously ill-prepared for adult life". Such constructions of youth reflect an old strategy which Apple (1982, p.54) expresses in the following manner: "When larger economic and governmental crises erupt, export the crisis outside the economy and government onto other groups". Young people - as well as schools and teachers - have therefore been blamed for unemployment, falling standards of work, declining productivity and so on.

In this paper I will argue that a high percentage of New Zealand students have probably experienced part-time work, and that not only are they not naive about the social relations and conditions of production, but that by their participation in the secondary sector of a segmented labour market they have already been exposed to a variety of the ills which beset capitalist societies generally. Indeed, their knowledge and experience often exceeds that of the teachers who set out to teach them about work through a variety of subjects in the curriculum. More specifically, this paper will address the following questions:

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- (a) How many young people hold part-time jobs?
- (b) What kinds of part-time jobs do they hold?
- (c) Why do young people seek to do part-time work?
- (d) How do young people get their part-time jobs?
- (e) Under which conditions do they generally labour?
- (f) What kind of social relations do they experience?
- (g) What have they learned from this work experience?

Each of these questions will be considered in turn in the following sections, and other questions which could be addressed in future research are highlighted in the concluding remarks. First, however, it is important to give some details of the study from which this paper is drawn, as well as of the methodology used to collect the qualitative data cited below.

2. The study

All the excerpts quoted in this article were recorded in 3 secondary schools in a provincial city of the North Island of New Zealand, and are part of a large database - over 4000 typed pages of interviews and observation notes. In Sultana (1987),¹ this database was used to analyse the ideological construction of the world of work on the part of schools and teachers, and the reactions to such messages on the part of students. A peripheral interest which soon occupied centre-stage in the development of a theory of learning was the influence of part-time work experience on the students' active reception and contestation of the messages given to them at school. Thus, students were observed constantly drawing on that experience, refashioning knowledge according to their individual consciousness which reflected the social and cultural relations to which they had been exposed (Gramsci, 1971, p.35).

One hundred eighty-seven female and 183 male young people were interviewed throughout 1986. Of these 69 were fourth formers, 142 were fifth formers, 65 sixth formers, 43 seventh formers and 51 students were on transition-to-work programmes. Out of the total sample of 370 students, 87 were Maori, and of these 49 were female. Four other students were Pacific Islanders.

The research strategy used was based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory methodology, with the main data collection tools being observation (in classrooms, staffrooms, recreation fields, work exploration sites, school camps, etc.) and informal and formal interviews. One of the major features of this methodology is the generation of substantive and formal theoretical propositions which are grounded in qualitative data. This database not only generates sensitising concepts, but is returned to over and over again and developed in a systematic manner so that hunches (and preconceptions) are tested, modified, abandoned or confirmed. In this way, propositions have to be saturated in data before they are accepted as part of the general theory. Unless otherwise stated

1 A number of articles reporting different aspects of the findings of this study have been published in a variety of journals. Of these, the most relevant analyse the lack of trade union education in New Zealand secondary schools (Sultana, 1988a); the way Maori students are channelled by schools, teachers and class-mates into the secondary sector of the labour market (Sultana, 1988b); the way students contest school-to-work messages given in transition programmes (Sultana, 1989a); the role of contacts and networks in gaining access to jobs in a period of labour market contraction (Sultana, 1990a); and the way girls, despite affirmative action within schools, enter traditionally female enclaves in the world of work (Sultana, 1990c). A brief overview of the whole research is to be found in the *British journal of education and work* (Sultana, 1990b).

therefore, excerpts cited in this paper are not anecdotal but typical of others which occurred frequently in the research field.

In the original study, the 3 schools in which the data collection took place were referred to as Co-Ed High, All Girls' High and All Boys' College to indicate the nature of their student population. Important differences in terms of both ethos and ideology were found between these 3 sites, but for the purpose of this particular paper, where the focus is on the students' experiences *outside* of school, no attempt is made to unravel these differences. It is to the experiences of young workers in the so-called twilight economy that we now turn.

3. Youth labour

(a) How many young people hold part-time jobs?

Close to 85 percent of the students interviewed had held at least one part-time job at one stage or other. A number of teachers informed the researcher that "this was part of New Zealand culture", and indeed, the percentage of part-time job holders for this provincial city is considerably higher than the 20 to 30 percent of all 14 to 16-year-olds estimated nationally for the United Kingdom by MacLennan (1980). Finn (1984) found that 75 percent of his sample of 150 boys and girls in their last year of compulsory schooling in 3 Coventry and 1 Rugby school had had some involvement in the juvenile labour market. Griffin (1985) found that 50 percent of her Birmingham girls had experienced some form of part-time employment prior to leaving school. The difference between the U.K. figures and those of New Zealand can only partly be explained by the fact that sixth and seventh formers were included in the sample of the present study. Generally speaking, the present research concurs with that reported by the British studies in that working-class and non-academic male students were more likely to have held paid work, while youngsters from ethnic minorities often had difficulties getting jobs, even though they had tried hard to find work.

I could find little research evidence to compare participation rates nationally with those of my sample. Taylor (1987, p.207) reports the head of one South Auckland school as saying that "a significant proportion" of her students held a part-time job. Catherwood (1985, p.6) notes that:

... many secondary school students will have had some experience of paid employment during their schooling, whether it be in the form of work during school holidays, part-time after-school work, or some informal activity for which they assumed responsibility and for which they received financial reward.

Finally, Clark (1986), in her review of part-time work in New Zealand, identifies 3 groups for whom such work is important. These are women, men who are approaching retirement, and young people who are either students or possibly testing employment options before deciding on a career.

There is therefore some evidence - even if this is not conclusive - to suggest that the widespread participation of young people in the "grey" economy is not particular to my sample of students, but applies to New Zealand youth generally.

(b) What kinds of part-time jobs do young people do?

Contrary to the general image of young students doing "children's work" such as newspaper rounds and milk deliveries, the range of jobs actually done extended to heavy, demanding - and occasionally dangerous - "adult" work. The majority worked for small

employers or for large retail and distribution companies.² Students were found to have worked in fast-food shops, dairies, hairdressing salons, garden centres, freezing works and coal-mines; they worked as farm-hands, fruit-pickers, kitchen assistants, waiters, forecourt attendants, buskers, on building sites, and with house-removal firms. These young people made deliveries, helped butchers in carving and carrying meat, fixed and spray-painted vehicles, filled shelves, served customers, handled large sums of money, dug trenches, laid cables, and packed and carried products.

An important feature of the kind of jobs done by these young workers was its reflection of different destinies in the social, sexual and ethnic division of labour. While this trend will be considered again in later sections, it is significant to point out at this stage that sixth formers - generally of middle-class origins - were more likely to be involved in creative and professional work situations, such as helping out in a photographers' studio or doing clinical work with a veterinary surgeon. Girls tended to work in home-based tasks (e.g. baby-sitting and cleaning) or shop work, while the boys did milk and paper rounds, helped out in farms, and assisted carpenters, mechanics, and house removers. As to Maori students, these were more likely to have experienced work in those 2 areas where Maori tend to congregate in the job apartheid of New Zealand: the freezing works and fruit-picking (Brosnan, 1986).

(c) Why do young people seek to do part-time work?

Students gave a variety of reasons to explain their eagerness to do part-time work. Teachers and parents generally encouraged them to get some work experience, both for financial and educational reasons. Young people could thus learn to "handle responsibility" and to "budget", develop "social graces", and "get references" from employers, which would turn out to be useful in future job-hunts.

A major reason for doing part-time work however was the fact of material constraints on young people. Not only was money important in order to socialise and to buy clothes - major concerns of youth who noted that when parental assistance stopped, so too did their social life - but also in order to supplement the family budget. Working-class students were particularly aware of the financial pressure on their parents who had to:

pay the house, the food and the power for us. So I felt sorry and I said: 'I want to find a job, man, and help the family in paying things'...You feel you're just taking an advantage of [their] money!

A fifth form girl admitted that she would feel bad "going to mum and dad and make them feel guilty because they can't give you the things you want".

It became clear that those students who came from solo-parent families felt even worse when they made use of the meagre resources available to their family. It is important to point out in this context that the first report of the Social Monitoring Group, *From birth to death* (1985), notes that one significant change in the structure of New Zealand families is the increase in the number of one parent families, so that more parents are having to carry the whole load of providing an income. The report also notes that the single supporting breadwinner concept is true for only 38 percent of New Zealand families, because many families are no longer able to maintain what they perceive as a reasonable standard of living with one breadwinner supporting wife and child. The present study suggests that when one of the parents is missing, the onus falls on the

2 This is also reflected in figures at the national level where, for instance, Taylor (1987) reports that L.D. Nathan's Food Division employs 1170 school students, while Foodtown employs 2760 school-age workers, or 30 percent of its workers.

children to provide some of that extra income. While some parents took a percentage of their children's income, others withheld pocket money allowances which would have otherwise supported expenses on clothes, travelling to and from school, buying lunch, and paying for entertainment and leisure activities. A case in point would be a fifth form girl who worked as a check-out operator in a large supermarket, who said that since her mother - a solo parent - was on the Domestic Purposes Benefit, "she can't afford to give me money as well...she'll buy me little things if she can afford it, but I really have to work to get money for clothes, or for things I like doing". Many young people were similarly found to be financing most if not all of their own leisure activities, besides helping out their parents.

High rates of unemployment put even greater pressures on young people to contribute to the family budget. Dependent as it was on farming, the provincial city in which the present study was carried out suffered the same fate as other farming communities in New Zealand, and generally featured close to the top of the list of towns where unemployment percentages were highest. Parents were thus reported by students to be quite appreciative of a supplementary income which could make a difference to the family's standard of living. This was especially true for the increasing number of families who - because of high youth unemployment³ - were having to support teenage sons and daughters who would otherwise have moved on to full-time employment and financial independence. As one teacher noted about transition students from "lower socio-economic backgrounds":

A lot of them are having a lot of pressure from home to have a job. In a lot of cases it's felt that the children need to be out of the home and earning money because money is very hard to get... The children are expected to come into the area of saving the family's financial position.

In this regard, Finn (1984, p.45) notes in his Coventry and Rugby-based study, "mass youth unemployment, in further delaying the transition to an adult wage, has had important implications for the structure of the working-class family economy".

The increase in unemployment levels also meant that, as students noticed in job adverts and in anecdotes they heard of job hunts in the family, qualifications were not enough: "To get a job, you've just about got to have work experience", noted many a student. "They all want to know how you've got on in previous jobs, but how can you get work experience if they don't employ you in the first place?!" Because of the "work experience trap", students were keen to have references from their part-time work employers, and students on transition-to-work programmes were even willing to forgo the wage by labouring free of charge during their "work exploration" placements in return for a good report from an employer (Sultana, 1989a). You could then "just hand the reference over to the new boss, and straightaway they see that you have experience about that job [...] that you get to work on time, and he'll know about your attitudes and manners".

References therefore showed that such young people had had the "initiative" to give up leisure in favour of work, and that they were sufficiently imbued with the work ethic to prove attractive to prospective employers. Moreover, students were keen to take on part-time work because they realised that this could occasionally lead to full-time employment, for it placed them on the shop floor, the site where much of the hiring of and firing from jobs in the secondary sector are carried out. As one student said, you "might get the first chance. If someone leaves, you might be the first one they'll try, because they know you".

3 In New Zealand, youths constitute the single largest group of registered unemployed. Teenagers in fact represent 16 percent of the working age population but make up nearly 40 percent of the registered unemployed (Khan, 1986).

(d) How do young people get their part-time jobs?

Part-time jobs could be found almost anywhere in the secondary sector of a dual labour market, that "twilight zone of unskilled labour where a variety of employers make use of [students'] flexibility and cheapness" (Finn, 1984, p.18). Such jobs were advertised in local papers, on sign boards outside shops, and on community noticeboards such as at the entrance of churches. They were also promoted at schools, where employers, often "old boys and girls" of the school, phoned in casual part-time and occasionally full-time vacancies. Careers advisers in the 3 schools advertised such jobs, and the researcher often noted slips of paper on school notice-boards with messages such as the following: "Boys who do as told wanted", or "Boys who can take on responsibility and who do not want to re-write their jobs from the first day wanted" .

The most common way of finding part-time jobs, however, was through family networks. Students constantly reminded the researcher that what counted was contacts, that "it's who you know, not what you know" which got you jobs. A fourth former described how she got her job "at a supermarket because my mother was there, and there was such a big waiting list...But I got in before the others". Such stories were common and, as Ashton and Maguire (1980) have pointed out in their U.K. study, and as the present author has discovered in a New Zealand context (Sultana, 1990a), many jobs in the secondary sector - whether on a part-time or full-time basis - are obtained through contacts. The employer has thus a cheap and relatively sure way of getting appropriate workers; workers who are recommended, and often supervised and broken into the job, by seasoned employees who have proven their worth.

(e) Under which conditions do they generally labour?

It has already been pointed out that most of the part-time jobs found by students were in the secondary sector of a dual labour market. Although the distinction between primary and secondary labour markets has been criticised for offering mere descriptions rather than explanations for the division of the labour market into "good" and "bad" jobs, the hypothesis is useful for drawing attention to the systematic exclusion of disadvantaged social groups - such as ethnic minorities, women and youth - from the better jobs in the labour market. Jobs in the secondary sector generally have a low status, and workers are obliged to do repetitive tasks, often under specific supervision and subject to formalised work rules. Most of the skills are generally acquired on the job through practice and experience. Other features of jobs in this sector are low wage rates, poor working conditions and instability of employment, lack of a career structure and opportunities for promotion, and lack of formalised grievance processes. Workers in this sector typically move through a random series of jobs which greatly restrict their opportunities for learning new skills or gaining advancement (Addison and Siebert, 1979).

The kinds of jobs students did were generally marked by these characteristics. Students distinguished between "careers" and "jobs": the former needed qualifications and "carried you through life". The latter were generally "rubbish" or "bum" jobs, especially if you were the last in an often-cited hierarchy of "executives, tradesmen and labourers". As a sixth former who had spent his summer holidays working in a freezing works plant said, "If you're a labourer, you get treated as dirt...you don't get the best jobs. The [others] can choose and pick. You're told what to do if you're a labourer".

Students generally did these part-time jobs for a utilitarian reason - as explained earlier, this could be money and some work experience to supplement qualifications.

Few were ready to take the job on a full-time basis, even if the opportunity presented itself. Few mentioned the technical relations of work as a motivation to work: what they did was far too frequently boring, and many declared that "I would like to leave, but I need the money". Students felt bad about "crummy jobs in a dairy", and noted that "most of these jobs, you don't get anywhere". Looking back at her summer work experience, a student commented, "It was so monotonous and mundane...so dreary! I'd hate to have a boring job!" Another student contrasted her after-school work in a supermarket with the ideal job she would want to do: "I want to do something that keeps my brain alert...I wouldn't want all that routine". Both working-class and middle-class students felt negative about the kinds of jobs they were doing, although the former seemed to find it less easy to imagine a different future for themselves as workers.

Taylor (1987) reports that only 2 statutory safeguards exist dealing with the employment of young people. These are the Factories and Commercial Premises Act, which prevents anyone under 15 years from working in a factory, and the Machinery Act, which restricts people under 18 from cleaning and adjusting machines while they are in motion. Nevertheless, students occasionally reported that they were doing dangerous work. This was not widespread, and in the few cases where it was reported, seemed to be happening with the consent of the parents. One fifth former accompanied his father to the coal mines:

It was dirty down there, and you had to look out for these conveyer belts because a piece of coal might fall off. I was building a roof-over, and we were using something pretty poisonous, and there was coal dust coming everywhere, and black soot everywhere, and after a while you'd start to smell...you'd really start thinking: 'What am I doing here in the middle of the holidays?!'

With the exception of milk and newspaper deliveries which are covered by codes of practice - that is voluntary agreements arranged between employers and the Council of Trade Unions - the conditions of employment and rates of pay of school-aged workers are governed by the system of national awards and collective agreements, and so are negotiated between employers and union representatives. In spite of this, students often complained that they were being "ripped off". Bruegel (1979) points out that cheap casual labour benefits employers because there is a great deal of uncertainty about appropriate rates of pay, and considerable variation between different jobs. Since the topic under consideration was not a major focus of the doctoral research project, statistics about actual income of students were not systematically collected.

However, while some students were obviously happy with the money they were getting (up to \$6 per hour in some dairies), others were not. In fact, some worked for nothing, doing babysitting or working in a family business, while others worked for as little as \$1.12 per hour (milk runs and newspaper deliveries - which, as one student pointed out, "is really slave labour"), and \$2.98 per hour at a large supermarket ("Most people do it for a bit of money...it's terrible pay!" said a student in this regard). The general trend was that students were often expected to work as hard as grown-ups at a wage rate far below that of adults.

That these young workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation is clear because, as MacLennan (1980) points out:

there are few enforcement agencies and personnel, who in any case have difficulty in gaining evidence or access, and are also charged with implementing and enforcing an excessively complex set of regulations with only minimal sanctions for offences (quoted in Finn, 1984, p.35).

Such exploitation did not refer only to money. The students' part-time status placed them in a weak position relative to that of the full-time workers, and thus the generally

bad conditions common to jobs in the secondary sector were aggravated by the casual and part-time nature of the work done. The students seemed to have few rights, and even fewer ways to ensure that these rights were safeguarded. The occasional student who felt positive about trade unions and inquired about joining them (Sultana, 1988a), was told by employers that they could not, consequently losing the possibility of collective protection. A fifth former working as a check-out operator found out, for instance, that when she was sexually harassed, "you can't fight back...You don't have any authority or anything. If you complain you just get fired or they'll laugh at you, and tell you you're just imagining it or dreaming it up".

Another disadvantage which students suffered because of their part-time status was that they were often treated as second-class workers by their full-time colleagues. This appears to be a general trend in the relationship among workers (Clark, 1986, p.30). Students working at a supermarket noted that the more regular staff "make you feel like you're not included in what they're doing...they make you feel like you shouldn't be there". Students felt that full-time workers "look down at you. They get away with a lot more things because they are full-timers". Hence, many young people - and especially those who were working in large establishments - did not even experience work satisfaction on the basis of social contacts on the job.

(f) What kind of social relations do they experience?

The kinds of social relations young people enter into in a variety of social sites such as the family, the school, and at part-time work, is of great importance to any consideration of how persons are socialised into particular modes of being-in-the-world. While class, gender, ethnic and adult-child relations are played out initially in the family (Arnot, 1985), the focus in this paper is on the exploration of the influence of part-time work experience on the initiation of young people into forms of capitalist consciousness.

While the students interviewed rarely had an understanding of capitalist social relations of production - because they had never been provided with either the language or the analytical tools to do so - they nevertheless referred to these realities because they were living them in their everyday life at their part-time work. Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that young people live capitalist relations of production at school as well. Like workplaces, schools are characterised by hierarchy, individualism, competition, fragmentation of tasks, and the carrying out of work for extrinsic rewards like grades and certificates. Students were often struck by the priority capital had over people, a new order of things which many had not experienced before in either the family or at school. One sixth former who worked at a large supermarket noted for instance that management were "not concentrating on the worker that much...they're just worrying how the business is faring. They don't worry about how that guy is or what's happening to him at home".

Above all, students were keenly aware that social relations at work were characterised by hierarchy and conflict of interest. A fifth former commented that at his work place, a fast-food outlet, "there's the boss, and then there's the workers, and the workers stick together, and the boss is by himself". Fifth formers who worked as check-out operators spoke of the constant hassling they received from their bosses, where they spent their time saying "Yes sir" and "No sir". The boss kept peering over their shoulders and "you feel guilty even if you've done nothing wrong. It's the higher ranking people who get at you". When they made mistakes, the supervisor would come along to correct them and, said one of them, "she makes you feel really down there! She makes you feel like a worm!" The young part-time workers generally turned to each other for support: "if a supervisor hassles me, we talk between ourselves and give one another moral support".

For some, part-time work sparked off other aspects of class-consciousness and class conflict: that between different classes of workers. As a fifth former employed first doing deliveries for a chemist, and then looking after files in a newspaper office said:

You get to meet a lot of people, but there's a thing you notice in jobs...there are people like the guys from the garages, and the people from the supermarket. You'd see them...ehm...when they're walking along the footpath, approaching people from places like the hairdresser's or the jeweller's, and you'd notice that one group here and another group there...and they don't mix...sort of a different class because of their jobs, which even then seemed quite strange.

Conflict arose not only between employers and employees, and as described in a previous section, between full-time and part-time workers. It also arose between males and females, for part-time work proved to be another site where social relations based on gender were played out. I have already referred to the sexual division of labour in terms of the different kinds of part-time work which males and females tended to engage in. This sexual division also took place in the same work environment, where young men and women were assigned different jobs by their supervisors. In a large supermarket, for instance,

...most of the guys are at the rear of the store, packing shelves and bringing trolleys in, and the girls are usually at the front, at the check-out controls. There are two guys being trained as check-out operators, but all the guys think it's ultra cissy.

These young women also felt that the sexual division of labour favoured males, who

...get an easy job when you think about it...They do the physical jobs...They think we're sort of fragile little things! [But] when you're a checkout operator, you end up on your toes all the time...You end up so dizzy. It would be good if you could move around and do different things. You're stuck in all day long, and you can't even get some fresh air!...At least you can let off steam when you're packing, but when you're at the check-out, you've got to keep a smile!...You've got all those numbers going through your head, and you get confused because you're thinking of problems at home, and you've got your homework to do...and you're giving out money, and it just gets to you.

The kind of social relations developed at work encouraged the production of the type of chauvinist and sexist behaviour that is usually celebrated on the shop-floor. Male students working in a garage with mechanics spoke of "initiation-type things": "You get thrown down this pit where they store tyres or put your head down the toilet, or cover you in grease. For them it's a big joke. They toughen you up a little bit, coming straight out of school". Fifth form boys who worked with adults in a house-removal firm noted that to "blend in" they had to act like the full-time workers:

When we're in the truck and they stop for a beer, and I say 'Hell! I can't!' because I'm under age, they look at me and say: 'Are you a pouf?!' and all that sort of thing. So you swear like hell and if there's a girl and all the fellas fling off, so you fling off and try to do better. You start walking after her and all this...It's really perverted at times!

This trial-by-maleness has its obverse side, and is of course experienced by young women workers as sexual harassment. Even though it was probably embarrassing for young female students to discuss such matters with a male researcher, there was a very high incidence of such harassment reported during interviews. Indeed, those who had not gone through such an ordeal were more of an exception than a rule. One fifth former put it this way: "It's just a fact of life, sexual harassment. You've got to fend for yourself...Everybody's got a hard life anyway...it's just one more thing added to you".

Young female workers on part-time jobs were sexually harassed by male customers, co-workers, and supervisors. Customers "call out your measurements, or keep looking at you...you know...not at your face...and it really unnerves you". One young student worked in a "hotel" and described customers who were "rugby players and they're really stupid...like they give me their room keys and tell me to come back at night, and after a while it just got that sickening, because it wasn't funny".

Another girl became frightened when a male colleague at a supermarket kept phoning her at home, and following her every evening. At another large supermarket, a student recounted how her supervisor would come up behind her while she was at the check-out and:

...rub himself against me, and stuff like that. And once we were doing night duty, and he came up to me and said: "I'll meet you at such and such a place in five minutes" and you just had to laugh and take it as a joke, because if you spoke up to him, he'd give you...what are those things called?...a written warning...if you didn't do what he wanted. It sort of gave him a feeling of power, and if you didn't sort of laugh along with him and that, he'd...he just made your life really hard for you.

Finally, another aspect of the social relations of production relate to the conditions experienced by young Maori part-time workers. It has already been suggested that the latter encountered problems in their search for jobs. In the "twilight economy" too therefore, Pakeha employers act as "gatekeepers" (Spoonley, 1978). A fifth form Maori "knew" that Pakeha employers thought that Maori were "dumb and lazy". She had found work in a fruit shop, but the boss never let her go near the till: "He talked to me as if I were a Hori, that's how he treated me at first". Maori students were also found unwilling to work in a work environment where there were few other Maori employees. A young Maori worker left her part-time job in a sewing factory because all the other employees were European. A Maori transition student on work exploration in a bakery said that:

"I got a bit nervous when I first started...all the rest were Pakeha. That's what bugged me at first. All these Pakehas watching you...Oh boy! They give you sort of an evil look, as if they don't want you to work there or somethin".

(g) What have they learned from this work experience?

The immersion in work - a world in some ways different from that of the home and school - could not but be a "learning", if not an "educational" experience for these young people. They felt more adult, more ready for the transition to the independence that the wage represented and the discipline it required. Some enjoyed the association with adult workers and employers who formed part of the "real world"⁴, in contrast to teachers who were related to:

not as human beings...They've got minds of their own. Some of them go straight out of school and into university, and then come back straight into school again. They probably don't know what it's like to go out and do a real hard day's work.

4 Bazalgette (1978) makes this case, arguing in opposition to Bowles and Gintis that school encourages patterns of dependency and immaturity which inhibit the process of transition to adulthood and to employment.

Moreover, the "hands on" approach at work seemed, for many of the young persons interviewed, more rewarding than the "book learning" at school: "I've learned more in a few months at the supermarket than the last 3 years at school", said a fifth form male.

Because of their experience of part-time work, students had developed a realistic understanding of what lay before them in their future as full-time workers - a status to which they invariably aspired. They considered part-time work "good experience, because that's what's going to happen when you actually go out and get a proper job, a full-time job". Their experience encouraged a critical view of what the teachers told them about the world of work. A fifth form boy working with a mechanic noted: "Teachers are giving us a false outlook on work life. They only talk about the good things, like pay and days off. They never really talk about the dangers of work". A female student similarly commented that teachers "don't talk about the guts of work...They never say that work isn't that marvellous sometimes".

Young people who had done part-time work seemed to be more capable of drawing the distinction between the demands made on them as students on the one hand, and as workers on the other. In some ways school seemed to be preparing them for work, but students also felt that school was easier to cope with than "the big bad world out there they so often tell us about". You could "fool around at school". "You can act natural. You've got to act older when you go to work". Students felt more "secure" at school. "Like, you make a mistake at your job, and you're fired. But you make a mistake here, and you find people to help you". These young people noticed that many of the full-time workers "get really depressed...And at school I'm never really depressed", and some tempered their precipitation to grab the first full-time job that presented itself, deciding to invest more in schooling.

It is important to note, however, that in the final analysis, the distinction between school-life and work-life represents a difference of degree rather than one of kind. School seemed to break young people in, and the social relations there prepared them for the discipline of waged labour. Students therefore noted that while in many ways school was different from work, it also and at the same time prepared them to cope with the demands of labour: "You see", said a sixth former, "We've this supervisor at work, and she's a real pain. And from having teachers like that at school you learn to take them as they come. I mean, she might be in a really bad mood one day, and sweet the next. But you've learned that at school...You've learned to accept it".

4. Discussion and conclusion

Childhood and youth, as Tucker (1977) among others has pointed out, are not mere biological constructs. They are also, and perhaps above all, historical projections and reflections of particular civilisations and societies. Suchodolski (1979, p.37) - a Polish philosopher who has written extensively about children's rights - notes that:

According to their circumstances, children in the past experienced either the joy of a carefree existence with plenty of opportunities for play in the fresh air, or a life of hardship and struggle characterized by poverty, homelessness, dependence on private persons, charitable institutions and even the State, and employment in adult work, which resulted in the exploitation and premature death of the children who made up this cheap labour force.

There is no doubt that the majority of young persons in New Zealand are *not* living an after-school life in the inhuman conditions of the mills and mines which Karl Marx denounced in the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, some might argue that this exposure to the "reality of work" is salutary, leading young people to "responsible maturity". It is interesting, for instance, that the Curriculum Review Committee (1986,

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