Workers' strategies to secure jobs, their uses of scale, and competing economic moralities: Rethinking the 'geography of justice'

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers workers' strategies to secure jobs, the justice of these strategies, and the spatial scales which they involve. It is argued that the justice of such strategies is strongly bound up with the scales at which they are enacted: the morality of social relations is intrinsically geographical. The paper discusses strategies within which workers compete individually or collectively for a given geographically-structured supply of jobs, including the use of social oppressions and territorial chauvinism in such competition. It contrasts these strategies with actions which challenge social oppression within employment, and which seek to know, contest and control flows of capital at large spatial scales. These latter strategies present a radical alternative to mutual competition, and embody different notions of economic justice. All of these strategies are analysed for the relations among workers and between workers and capital which they construct, the scales at which these relations are played out, the political ideologies they involve, and the moral notions generated and deployed. It is argued that to understand these different moralities, justice needs to be conceptualised not as rights understood as quasi-property of individuals but rather as a moral aspect of social relations. Accordingly, the 'geography of justice' is conceived as the geography of these social relations rather than geographical patterns of (dis)advantage. It is argued that the 'interests' of individuals and of collectives are not given objectively by social structure but are constructed through and between different feasible strategies of action; this has implications for the problem which selfishness poses to socialist economic strategies.

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Introduction

For the left, the contemporary world economy is one of gross injustice. The ever-widening distribution of income, the intensification of work and of managerial direction, the enormous social and spatial unevenness of employment, the contrast between the freedom and mobility of capital and the paucity of options for labour − all these are criticised as unjust. But this critique quickly encounters difficulties. The left's morality is opposed by the dominant notion of justice in the present period, *the justice of markets*. Providing firms, workers and consumers are free to access open markets, the invisible hand ensures outcomes must be just, in that each receives what they contribute to production. The freedom of property owners to pursue their individual or group interests through exchange and use of commodities is therefore the highest morality. While this ideology has been actively propagated by contemporary neoliberalism, it is rooted in the fundamental social structures of capitalism; I will refer to it as 'bourgeois economic

justice'. But this morality is not something coming wholly from outside the working class (used here in the Marxist sense): the chosen actions of workers are, for most of the time, within the framework of bourgeois justice (Herod, 1997a). This is because the taken-for-granted routine of workers is of competition for jobs; self-interested behaviour which ignores or downplays its spatially- and socially- wider impacts is the *normal mode of living as a worker* in capitalist society.

This competition is pursued in a variety of ways. The most basic and ubiquitous form is to make oneself individually acceptable to employers: obtaining a job, securing it by pleasing one's employer, getting promoted, or moving to a better job, all by means of working harder, receiving training, or through adopting the right attitudes and cultural attributes. Alternatively, workers may secure their jobs by *collectively* collaborating with employers to enhance the competitiveness of the unit of the economy which employs or potentially employs them; this 'unit' may be the workplace, the firm, the locality or the nation. In both these modes of competition, workers act in accordance with bourgeois justice: you look after your particular interests and ignore the effects on workers elsewhere. Moreover, these forms of competition seem to promise that

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effort will be rewarded, whether this be the effort of the individual worker or of collectives of workers in a workplace or territory, thus conforming to the effort/reward claim of bourgeois justice. A third, also collective, form of workers' competition is where those of a particular social identity exclude 'the other': white workers blacks, men women, and so on. In doing so they narrow the competition and make it easier to access and hold on to particular jobs. *These* exclusions are usually given legitimacy not by appeal to market justice but by reference to 'traditional' or 'natural' social roles. They share, however, the narrow self-interest of bourgeois economic justice.

All this poses key problems for socialist critique and practice. Socialists have to oppose the pursuit of jobs by individuals or more-or-less large collectives which ignore the interests of others, because such competition is integral to the inequalities, instabilities and power relations of the capitalist economy. The project of socialism, however conceived, involves practical solidarity and the creation of an altruistic culture. I argue in this paper that the individual and territorial forms of workers' competition can indeed be transcended by practices and notions of justice which develop in a socialist direction. These alternative practices have to grow out of the pressing daily needs which are currently normally expressed through workers' competition. Such proto-socialist practices both draw on and construct forms of collectivity and an egalitarian and altruistic morality.

In posing such an alternative, socialist *content* of justice it is necessary also to challenge the dominant *ontology* of justice. Bourgeois ideology conceives of justice as rights and resources *possessed by individuals*. These may then be *distributed* between individuals, social groups and territories more or less equally. The central aim of social democracy has been to achieve a more-just social distribution, while 'geographies of justice' have traditionally been concerned with spatial distributions. But this occludes the *social processes* and *social relations* by which (un)just distributions are created. I will argue that injustice in workers' competition for jobs arises from the social relations between capital and workers and between workers; a socialist pursuit of justice in employment is therefore concerned with *just social–spatial relations* rather than just distribution of rights and resources as such.

I develop these arguments by considering the forms of workers' competition for jobs, and how alternative, cooperative forms of securing jobs can be developed. These are associated with particular political perspectives, involving different class relations, each with its own particular use of geographical scale. These relations, in turn, are bound up with different notions of geographical justice.

I will argue that territories and their scales are integral to all notions of justice in employment, and this paper is intended in part to contribute to the on-going debates on the significance of geographical scale. It has been widely argued that not only does the (re)scaling of social processes affect their nature, but that scale and the articulation of scales are used *actively* by social actors (Cox, 1998; Harvey, 1982; Mitchell, 1998; Smith, 1992). Workers, in particular, may shift the scales of their organisation in order to strengthen their hand against employers or, more often, simply to try to keep up with employers' use of rescaling (Castree, 2000; Cox, 1997; Herod, 1997a, 1997b; Jonas, 1994). Workers' actions are strongly conditioned by, and directed at, capital's accumulation patterns and their geography (Gough, 1992, 2004a: Ch. 13).

The fullest extant discussion of workers' spatial actions to improve their employment and their associated spatial moralities has been given by Castree, Coe, Ward, and Samers (2004).[1] They argue that workers have considerable agency in shaping employment *because* employers do not have simple maximising behaviour, inflexible requirements, nor unambiguous strategies; industrial bargaining therefore has 'wriggle room', and workers have choices, albeit with highly variable degrees of constraint. Workers' consciousness, organisation and actions differ crucially in their scalar extents and, relatedly, in their degree of selfishness/altruism. While accepting these points, the present paper develops some distinct arguments. First, I relate the employment contract more closely than they do to both strategies within the labour process and forms of control of investment. Secondly, I characterise workers' strategies by their left–right political complexion, thus linking them to political science categories. Thirdly, I am critical of the social-democratic strategy favoured by Castree et al. for (at least) the present period, and I therefore discuss socialist strategies which they regard as utopian.

The purpose of this paper is theoretical development. I draw on a range of empirical studies of spatial employment relations and production strategies, from different historical periods and countries, but these are not discussed as case studies. I assume a fully developed capitalist society in which income from wage labour is essential to economic survival for most people. I abstract from non-wage income such as self-employment and petty entrepreneurship, and from wages from not-for-profit enterprises (on the latter see Eisenschitz & Gough, 2009). I consider five strategies through which workers seek to secure waged employment; I believe that this exhausts the basic possibilities, though there can be an infinite number of combinations, meldings and shifts between these strategies in concrete situations.

The plan of the paper is as follows. 'Justice as a social and spatial relation' section considers some contested meanings of 'justice'. 'Just wars? The varied spatial politics of workers' competition for jobs' section examines three different ways in which workers compete against each other for jobs, and explores how these use spatial scales and particular notions of justice. 'Collaboration between workers to secure jobs' section considers two forms in which workers cooperate with each other to pursue partly egalitarian and altruistic aims, again considering their scales and notions of justice. 'The problem of interests and motivation: how do workers decide between strategies?' section considers in more depth the problem of selfishness/altruism and its mediation through praxis. The conclusion reconsiders different notions of justice and their relation to geography, and the dialectics in workers' actions of justice, culture, class relations and space.

Justice as a social and spatial relation

Justice as social praxis

Let us first consider the sources of selfishness or altruism which might inform workers' behaviour. Two pertinent theorisations present themselves. Neoclassical economics, and liberal social theory more generally, assumes a purely self-interested individual. Forms of social cooperation entered into are motivated solely by the prospective benefits to the individual. As analysis of human nature this has to ignore plentiful paleontological and historical evidence of sympathy and altruism (Leakey & Lewin, 1993).

This theory finds its apparent opposite in the work of Kant, who proposed the existence of two distinct spheres, that of (material) reality and that of (ideal) morality; selfishness and altruism spring from the latter alone. This Kantian approach has been used in the most systematic account of the notion of justice in relation to geography, that given by Sack (2003). 'The good' is compelling and we are drawn to it. It is real, but separate from the rest of reality, located in the sphere of the ideal. We transform reality on the basis of our ideas about what we think reality ought to be; this gives the possibility for constructing good places. The impulse to selfishness is treated similarly. This approach, however, suffers from the same problem as liberalism in failing to place the feeling subject *within*

their life world. Similarly, altruism ('being drawn to the good') cannot arise except within social life: people develop more or less moral behaviour only through their activity in the Kantian 'reality'. As political programme, Sack's approach implies that moral decisions come from outside the daily social practice of the majority, presumably from an enlightened social-democratic elite. By contrast, my interest in this paper is in the moralities of the majority.

In contrast to liberal and Kantian concepts, I argue that people's actions are neither governed simply by human nature (highly schematised or not) nor by abstract attractions to ideal good or evil, but rather are developed in social practice and reflection on it. Material circumstances and individuals' resources, needs and wants are certainly important, as in neoclassical economics. But these are pursued through social relations, within which sympathy and altruism may come into play, and are thus *developed*. In this way each society develops particular notions of justice, normally multiple and conflicting, but nevertheless social rather than purely individual; these in turn enter into the material reproduction or disruption of the society. In short, moralities are moments of *praxis,* as pragmatist philosophers such as Dewey have argued. By setting morality and justice 'on their feet', this approach avoids the problems which famously made Marx reluctant to use those concepts (cf Harvey, 1996: 346–347).

Justice, interests, projects

Methodological individualism sees needs, interests and moralities as internal to the non-contradictory individual. But if moralities are associated with social action, then, even for a given social actor, alternative actions can be associated with different moralities. Liberal and pluralist theories assume non-contradictory interests. But in contradictory societies all actors have contradictory interests; these are expressed, and ultimately constructed, through different projects (Gough, 2004a: 29–30). Thus (spatial) contradictions for capital are expressed in alternative spatial projects (Agnew, 1997; Eisenschitz & Gough, 1993; Gough, 2004b).

Social actors generally undertake projects only if they are *feasible,* that is, they appear to have a reasonable chance of succeeding. Thus moralities which cannot be realised through feasible projects are socially meaningless (interesting only as *sui generis* fantasy). In consequence, the set of feasible projects for an individual or group defines a set of possible moralities between which to choose. Workers' varied moralities in securing employment thus need to be analysed as *feasible* spatial–economic–political projects.

Just distribution of resources versus just social relations

Liberal and pluralist theories, because of their methodological individualism, picture justice as a question of the resources *possessed by* individuals or groups. This is a generalisation of Lockean justice as rights of property. This conception is reproduced in liberal theories of justice, even those, like Rawls's, with avowedly egalitarian aims. Another influential example of this approach is that of Fraser (1995), for whom a major component of justice is the distribution of material resources (her other component being differences in respect). But distributions of resources (including, in fact, 'immaterial' ones) arise from sets of social relations: unequal and 'unjust' distributions arise from power. A radical notion of justice, then, must be concerned with these social relations. Thus Young, in her critique of Fraser, rightly argues that '[j]ustice should be about oppression, not distribution' (1995: 3). The individualistic conception leads, again, to a social-democratic politics where the enlightened state redistributes resources, whereas the radical conception of justice points to collective struggles against power.

This has implications for 'the geography of justice'. Much of this literature has been concerned with differences between territories in the quality of life and with the inequalities between individuals in those territories (e.g. Dorling & Allsopp, 2005; Philo, 1995; Sack, 2003; Smith, 1994: Part II). This focuses on spatial distributions, rather than how *social relations* are enacted in space. In contrast, I shall be concerned with the way in which place, distance and scale are deployed in social practice and imagination to produce notions of justice, and the ways in which the latter in turn enter into social practice. This is not counterposed to what Smith (1994) terms 'justice as equalisation', but it seeks to examine *how* the latter can be constructed.

These considerations also imply a critique of postmodern notions of justice. To the extent that the latter centre on a positive valuation of 'difference' of whatever type, and espouse a Nietzschean morality of expression of individual difference, justice is again conceived of as the expression of individuals' property or attributes – even if these do not issue from a 'centered' subject. (See Sayer's (1995: 231–234) discussion of the considerable overlap between postmodern thought and liberalism.) To the extent that postmodernism rejects *all* order as an effect of power (Foucault, 1979), it cannot help us to conceive of an orderly system of economic relations which is more just than the present one.

My focus in this paper, then, is *the (in)justice of social relations in space.*

Just wars? The varied spatial politics of workers' competition for jobs

Competition between workers

Mature capitalist society presupposes and reproduces a working class made up of people who sell their labour power. In general, other forms of livelihood such as subsistence or petty commodity production are not open to them. In selling their labour power, individual workers are in competition with all others for a supply of jobs which is, in the first place, beyond their influence. At this level of abstraction, then, the worker is constituted as the individual owner and seller of a commodity in competition with others. As such, workers' ideology, like that of petty producers, tends to be possessive individualism. Neoliberalism has sought to accentuate this, but it is inherent in all capitalist societies. This individualism is often modified by forms of collective organisation, particularly in trade unions. But the potential for and forms of such organisation are a function of particular *strategies* which workers adopt ('Justice, interests, projects' section above), which involve the development of particular *relations* to other workers and to capital ('Just distribution of resources versus just social relations' section).

In this section I consider three 'competitive' strategies, whose main thrust is competition with other workers; in the next section I consider strategies whose main aim is collaboration with other workers against capital. For each strategy I examine -

(a) the forms of competition between workers;
(b) the relations between workers and capital;
(c) the way these relations use particular spatial scales;
(d) the political ideology and the practically-embodied notions of justice involved; and (less systematically)
(e) the articulation and reinforcement of these strategies by academic discourse.

The competitive strategies I consider are individual advancement, social discrimination, and collaboration with capital to enhance production efficiency. Each strategy has a real logic in everyday life in capitalist society. They do, however, have their

limitations and contradictions, which may lead workers to change strategy, whether in a rightwards or leftwards direction.

Individual advancement

In this strategy, workers seek to secure and improve their job prospects through modifying the nature of their individual labour power or employers' perception of it. The central scale here is that of the body, and attention is narcissistically directed inwards (Harvey, 2000a: 101–110). But this body is reproduced within households and local communities. Moreover, maintaining or improving one's saleability may be directed not just to staying in the same job in the same place but to having wider geographical horizons, to becoming more socially and spatially mobile as a worker. This strategy thus articulates different scales – the body, the residential sphere, and wider scales of employment differentiation – in particular ways.

The practice of individual advancement in the labour market integrally involves a particular political morality, which both drives the individual and legitimises the political–economic organisation of a 'free labour market'. To compete as an individual develops independence and avoids parasitism on others, and this competition ensures that rewards are in line with effort, as neoclassical economics purports to show. Moreover, to compete effectively requires self-discipline and a 'strong character'.

This morality was given classic expression in strands of Protestantism and in 19C ideologies of self-improvement and self-sufficiency; in the 20C these were reproduced in dominant ideologies in the US, and since the 1980s by neoliberalism worldwide. The morality involved here is of 'equal opportunities' and unequal outcomes. 'Equal opportunities' means the absence of formal cultural or political barriers to competing in the labour market, barriers which are pictured as unjust infringements of liberty. In the 1990s a substantially different variant of this ideology was developed, particularly by the World Bank under Wolfensohn and in the 'Third Way' of Clinton and Blair. Here, the individual may need support from the state, capital or community in order to develop and enhance their labour power; the 'socially excluded' may need support in order to have any usable labour power to sell (Gough & Eisenschitz, 1996: 189–192).

The shift from 1980s to 1990s neoliberalism embodied a subtle shift in moral discourse: whereas in the 1980s the moral imperative to compete tended to be presented as economic optimisation for both individual and society, in the 1990s neoliberal morality pointed inwards, to the cultivation of self-control and self-improvement. The shift also changed the scale of the moral subject. The morality of the 1980s focused particularly on the individual worker and on the state as guarantor of free markets; the shift in the 1990s introduced the scales of locality and community, loci of support for improving individuals' labour power and ancient repositories of 'moral' behaviour (Hale, 2006; Levitas, 1998).

These practices, scales and moralities of personal advancement embody particular class relations. The individual worker is strongly subordinated to capital through their political isolation and their social–spatial mobility. This reality is neatly inverted in the official ideology: because everyone can freely compete for jobs, class is seen as having been eliminated, as in British prime minister John Major's claim to be creating a 'classless society'. 'Class' is here understood as an income and status distribution of individuals, a methodological-individualist understanding of class (Meiksins Wood, 1995). My critique should not, however, obscure the way in which sustaining one's place in this distribution is a spontaneous daily preoccupation of workers.

Enforcing social monopolies of jobs

One way in which workers seek to improve their prospects in a 'free' labour market is by the use of diverse sorts of social power. In various contexts men have excluded women, whites have excluded blacks, citizens have excluded non-citizens, and the middle aged have excluded the young or the old.

Capital has contradictory impulses in relation to these exclusions by workers, producing varied outcomes. Social discrimination in jobs has sometimes been supported by capital as a means of super-exploiting the excluded group. In other cases capital has gone along with such exclusions under pressure from workers. These cases produce a profoundly reactionary collaboration of workers with the employers which makes any resistance to them difficult; this is one reason why capital supports or tolerates the discrimination. In yet other cases, capital may oppose such discriminations because they tend to raise wages and conditions and cause shortages of recruits. The class relations of these exclusions are thus complex.

Their political morality draws on assumptions of the naturalness of social inequality. These are sometimes legitimated by pretending that the exclusion is based on skill (whose social distribution is taken for granted) or on biological differences supposedly relevant to the job (men's strength: Cockburn, 1983). Alternatively, exclusion may be naturalised as 'tradition'.

This discussion enables us to see two ways in which racist ideology is reproduced among workers within employment: firstly, through white workers' discrimination aimed at eliminating competition for jobs; and secondly, drawing on 'Individual advancement' section, through low esteem of black people by whites on the grounds of their supposed failure to compete effectively in the jobs market worldwide or nationally. An analogous argument applies to sexism *mutatis mutandis*.

The geographical scales involved in this type of competition are quite different from those of individual advancement, in that *bounded-territorial* political organisation and culture play a crucial role. Workers have pushed for social exclusions through (often unspoken) employment cultures locally or nationally, and sometimes through pressure on nation states ('the protection of women', immigration rules, barriers to imports). The national scale is of course integral to racist ideologies. Territories of varying scale are important as imaginaries: social inequalities are legitimated by reference to 'the way we have always done things here'. Thus territories are materially and ideologically integral to this strategy of job competition.

Collaboration with capital to enhance production efficiency

A third strategy for competition for jobs is through workers collaborating with capital to enhance the efficiency, and thus profitability, of production. This collaboration may be organised at different spatial scales: within a workplace, a firm, a regional or national industry, or across a whole regional or national economy; the scale of the collaborative unit is, however, always larger than the efficient individual involved in personal advancement. The premise of this strategy is that jobs will be secured and enhanced through enabling the capital within that unit or territory to compete better against capital elsewhere: the workplace against rival workplaces, the regional industry against competitor regions, and so on (Herod, 1997a). The competing unit of production is thus articulated with a larger scale, that of competitor capitals and workers. As with individual advancement, the strategy proceeds through an opposition and dialectic of two scales, in this case those of the collaborative unit (the inside) and the competitors elsewhere (the outside).

This strategy promises to benefit workers to the extent that they are constrained to seek employment within the corresponding unit or territory; workers with broad skills which are strongly in demand tend to be less loyal to firm or territory (Cox, 1998; Storper & Walker, 1983). Benefits may take the form of securing an existing job, attracting investment in new ones, or better wages and conditions. The zero-sum game is explicit here: jobs are to be secured and improved by competing more efficiently against workers elsewhere.

Bryan (1985) has shown how the competition between capitals is not primarily a question of exchanges in final markets but rather of exploitation within production. Within the strategy we are considering, the latter sphere becomes the object of workers' conscious action; this was given a systematic justification by the Guild Socialists (Cole, 1920), but can be found in all social-democratic ideologies. The forms through which inter-class collaboration proceeds are varied. Within a particular workplace, workers may collaborate with management in changing tasks, suggesting innovations in processes or products, intensifying their work, or in altering hours worked (Cooke & Morgan, 1998). Within regional or national industries, unions may collaborate with firms to enhance training, fund innovation, or rationalise capacity in ways which increase productivity – the 'high road' to competitiveness (on the Third Italy, see Brusco, 1982). State action, too, can be a part of this kind of strategy. Workers may exert pressure on the state to support 'their' capital (at a workplace or larger scale) through interventions to increase productive efficiency – the Keynesian approach to industrial policy. State intervention may also include the reproduction sphere: workers' organisations may push for education, health, housing and social services to be improved in order that their *labour power* is enhanced, thus increasing the territory's competitiveness. Hence reproduction, too, can be a sphere where the interests of capital and labour in productive competition are made to coincide (Eisenschitz & Gough, 1993; Ian Gough, 1982, Chs. 6 and 9). Ideologically, all these forms of collaboration are presented, by labour organisations particularly, as against market anarchy, as 'non-market' (Cole, 1920; Storper, 1997).

Through these varied paths, particular geographical class relations are constructed. There is collaboration between the classes not globally but 'locally', a collaboration within *this* unit or territory *against others*. Of course, these relations may be replicated in many places; but the point of the strategy is precisely to be different from other units. Within such collaboration, however, workers are not uncritical of capital. They seek to encourage capital to invest in long-term, risky 'productive' paths, rather than low-road cost-cutting or rentier activities (Costello, Michie, & Milne, 1989; GLC, 1985). This may involve workers siding with particular 'sectors' of capital against others, for example, industrial against financial, as Veblen urged (Fine & Harris, 1985); since the 2007–2008 credit crunch most trade unions have taken this stance.

The ideologies of this strategy do not, usually, present it in class terms, since these would be hard to square with ideas of justice: 'work harder and smarter so that your employer makes larger profits' does not sound high-minded.[2] Rather, the strategy is presented in the apparently classless terms of productiveness, enterprise, competitiveness and territory. This is given moral tone by the idea that productiveness and enterprise are moral qualities in themselves. As with the ideologies of individual advancement, the *need* for the unit of production to be economically competitive is presented as also *moral*. But note the alienation, in its Marxist sense: workers are to realise their creative powers by handing them over to capital, which then appears as the source of productiveness.

Finally, the strategy is pictured as a defense and enhancement of the territory in its 'natural' competition with others; localism, nationalism and xenophobia are integral to it. One finds this in successful economic nationalisms such as Japan and Scandinavia in the postwar period. It is also deployed in territories said to be 'in decline': the classes must collaborate or the territory will fall from grace, perhaps into a state of barbarism (Gough & Eisenschitz, 1996: Ch. 2). The culture and dignity of the territory is put at stake: economic competition becomes a moral imperative to defend civilisation. Thus Social Imperialism in late nineteenth century Britain combined paranoia concerning national 'decadence' and stepped-up inter-imperialist rivalry with putative inter-class solidarity and attention to workers' welfare. These moralistic strands may be deployed at the scale of the locality (Eisenschitz & Gough, 1993: 10–19, 75–76). A notable example was Newcastle City Council's 'Going for Growth strategy', which painted a picture of catastrophic long-term decline, reversible only by wholehearted collaboration of all actors (Byrne, 2000).

Through these ideologies, a strategy which jeopardizes other workers' jobs emerges not as selfish and parochial but as just and even a moral imperative. If unknown others elsewhere suffer, that is merely a side-effect of one's being productive, and the price of maintaining the social fabric of one's territory. Notice how geography is integral to this notion of justice, since it invokes an imagined territorial community and its 'natural' competition with other territories.

The strategy of productive collaboration has long been supported by centre–left Keynesian and institutionalist economists. Since the 1980s it has established itself as the dominant political–economy among economic geographers. 'New regional economics' emphasises the benefits to productive efficiency of collaboration between workers and capital, especially through the strengthening of information flows and learning (Brusco, 1982; Cooke & Morgan, 1998; Florida, 2005; Storper, 1997). For nearly all authors within this school, this is not just a description of 'the most economically successful regions' but a *strategy* which deserves support. The new regional economy is moral because it is productive, because it stabilises economy and hence society, because it involves non-conflictual and creative relations between workers and management, and because it rests on workers' skill and initiative. Critiques of this new orthodoxy have emerged, one theme of which is the *silences* of the new regionalism through which its morality is maintained. New regionalism largely ignores the problem of spatially uneven development (Gough, 1986, 1996; Hadjimichalis, 2006; Jones, 2001; Lovering, 1999; Peck, 2005; Perrons, 2001) and thus does not have to face the problems of workers who are outcompeted. It does not see any strong forms of conflict between workers and their productivist employers (Gough, 1996; Hadjimichalis, 2006; Murray, 1987). It has little to say about money capital, unless it is strongly regionally committed (Lovering, 1999; Perrons, 2001), and thus does not have to face the obviously amoral moment of capital as abstract value. New regionalism gives little attention to the reproduction sphere, and thus neglects the injustices constructed between production and reproduction (Gough, 1996; Peck, 2005; Perrons, 2001). These lacunae thus parallel the moral evasions of the productivist strategy.

A different justification for the productionist strategy has been given by (2004: xv11–xv111, 247–250), who argue that it is the best *feasible* strategy for workers *in the present world political conditions*. Hudson (2001) tends to the same view, but with somewhat greater hopes for socialist strategies (for example 321–322, 335–338). Castree et al. (2004) acknowledge that this strategy involves large inequalities in what workers can achieve, but argue that, given almost ubiquitous neoliberalism and the demise of 'actually existing socialism', socialist strategies are infeasible. Since this paper does not analyse the current world situation, I cannot here discuss this assessment. However, below I consider socialist strategies in a historically-abstract form,

including the question of workers' consciousness of collectivity. Implicit is my opinion that such strategies are *not* presently excluded (Fairbrother & Yates, 2002; Lebowitz, 2006; Moody, 2005).

Modes of competition, modes of bourgeois justice

These three strategies of workers' competition are different in the scales and concrete practices involved, and use distinct class relations and moralities. But there are notions of justice common to them: competition as an end as well as a means; the value of independence, economic efficiency and productiveness; and indifference to workers who are competitors and a construction of them as the inferior, whether it be individual 'losers', poorer social groups, or inhabitants of less productive territories. All three strategies construct oppositions between insiders and outsiders, and thus give moral priority to a small scale against larger ones. There are commonalities, then, between the overt racisms of social exclusion strategies and the politer indifference to workers in other territories found in productive collaboration. With the exception of some strategies of social exclusion, all seek collaboration between workers and capital 'on the inside'.

These competitive practices are evidently deeply rooted in capitalist space economy. How can we move beyond them, theoretically and in practice?

Collaboration between workers to secure jobs

Power, exploitation, and justice

All the modes of competition for jobs considered in the last section implicitly accept the neoclassical view of the capitalist employment relation: buyers and sellers have equal status in the labour market; sellers of 'labour' compete with each other, as do its buyers, and this competition ensures that 'labour' is exchanged justly; the value of labour performed equals the wage at the margin. The flaw in this argument was shown by Marx (1972). Labour power is not an ordinary commodity: its consumption by capital can create more value than it itself embodies, through its exploitation within the workplace. The 'free and equal' world of the labour market is thus inextricable from the coercive world of the workplace. This critique has particular power because it questions *in its own terms* the bourgeois notion of justice *as* individual property rights by showing the appropriation by capital of what has been produced by the worker ('Just distribution of resources versus just social relations' section). The Marxist account of employment shows, moreover, that exploitation in the workplace is constructed by flows of capital between sectors and places (Gough, 2004a: 269–283). Thus the outcomes of workers' competition in wages and job allocations may not be just, since these are constructed by *coercive* relations of exploitation and by the power of capital to determine investment flows. In addition, as we have seen, competition for jobs brings into play the *social power* of gender, 'race' and so on.

These roles of coercion and social power in employment point us towards justice as the achievement of *more-just social relations* (cf 'Just distribution of resources versus just social relations' section). The central aims of socialist strategy have been to challenge the power of capital over labour, and related gender and racialised power, and in doing so to shift from competitive relations between workers to solidarity and altruism. The latter would realise better than capitalism certain *transhistorical* moralities: respect and compassion for others (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2004). But this socialist morality is meaningless unless it can correspond to feasible social practice ('Justice, interests,

projects' section). This has two linked aspects: a *feasible system* of production to which we can aim, and feasible forms of organisation and struggle which can take us in that direction. I examine below how such strategies could effect a change from competition to cooperation between workers. I consider two strategies: militant but localised workers' struggles, and workers' meso- or macro-plans for investment. These differ in their scale and thus, I shall argue, their effectiveness. But both confront capital by building workers' solidarity, and hence change social relations.[3]

'Militant particularism': extracting more jobs from local capital?

I have argued that workers' attempts to maintain or secure jobs in their particular unit of the world economy deepen competition between workers. This may be so even in militant actions in defense of jobs. Hudson and Sadler (1986), for example, show that in the struggles in the early 1980s against closure of steel capacity in Germany, France and Britain, unions in different plants and firms often (though not always) competed to keep their own jobs as capacity was cut across the industry. Similarly, Harvey (1996: Ch. 1) has sharply criticised the 'militant particularism' of workers at Rover in Oxford who attempted to maintain jobs through local struggle. I agree with the general direction of these arguments. But two qualifications need to be made.

Firstly, locally-limited actions may not be a zero-sum game if they secure jobs *at the expense of capital*. Pressure from workers in a workplace, firm or across a national industry may slow employers' cutting of jobs; for a time the intensity of work may be held constant or even reduced, eating into the profits of the capitals concerned. In sectors with surplus profit rates, these cost pressures can be absorbed without redundancies; the British national-newspaper industry up until the 1980s was an example. But in normal sectors, capital will *seek to* disinvest, tending to equalise rates of profit between sectors. But capital's mobility is constrained through, inter alia, sunk fixed capital, ties to particular workers, ties to other firms, and embedding in territorial politics. Thus, as Webber and Rigby (1996) have shown, there can be substantial differences in both sectoral and national rates of profit over long periods. It is therefore possible for workers' pressure to secure jobs locally, sometimes quite durably.

Secondly, 'militant particularism' is normally a necessary *starting point* for spatially-wider and politically more ambitious actions against capital. This is because of the fundamental conditions under which workers' struggles are constructed. We have seen that there are powerful processes, simultaneously economic and cultural, which lead workers to compete against each other rather than cooperate (see also Sennett, 1998). Moreover, workers' knowledge of conditions in other sectors and places is limited, precisely because of their exclusion from the conception of production (Pignon & Querzola, 1976; Spooner, 1987): workers are denied time within the working day to plan production, and lack resources for coordination with others. Consequently, it is local issues which are best known as well as most immediate in effect, and hence around which it is easiest to build action. In addition, workers' organisation often relies on, or is strengthened by, daily social ties within the locality (Massey, 1993; Samuel, Bloomfield, & Boanas, 1986; Wills, 1998b). Thus union organisation and action is easier to construct locally than more widely. Harvey's critique of militant particularism does not sufficiently take account of these material conditions.

Harvey puts forward issues which he thinks the socialist movement in Oxford should have raised, including jobs for the unemployed, the low quality of jobs in Rover, overcapacity in the world car industry, and the ecologically-damaging use of cars, and *counterposes* these to the issue taken up by the unions, saving jobs

in Oxford (Harvey, 1996: 21–23, 40). Harvey sees the focus on preserving jobs as arising partly from a nostalgic wish to preserve long-established identities, even though these are the products of exploitation and involve "shit jobs" (Harvey, 1996: 40), and he criticises this morally as the oppressed colluding in their oppression. But the aim of preserving jobs was powerfully constructed by the need for a job in the short term, shitty or not, and the need to use actually existing local organisation to do so. In the conditions of industrial struggle in Britain in the 1990s, this was necessarily the starting point (see further Hayter & Harvey, 1993).

Building control of the economy at ever-larger scales

The point, then, is not to criticise locally-focused action from a standpoint of more ambitious demands around which no organisation exists, but rather to explore how local struggles can *develop* away from competition for jobs and towards challenging capitalist social relations. A key element in doing this, as Harvey argues, is to attend to scale (Hayter & Harvey, 1993: 41–42). Workers' competition for jobs is a corollary of capital's control of the labour process *and* of investment flows at scales up to the global. In order to weaken the former, the latter have to brought under social control (Gough, 1992, 2004a: 277–296; Gough & Eisenschitz, 1997). In particular, we need to consider how flows of investment and capital's control of work construct workers' competition at different scales:

(a) *The aggregate number of jobs* increases with the rate of extensive productive investment (that is, investment using existing techniques and products) in the economy as a whole. The number of jobs decreases with the rate of intensive investment, which increases labour productivity. The quantity and quality of investment is, then, a crucial determinant of unemployment rates, and hence of the competition for jobs.

(b) Aggregate jobs *in particular sectors* (national, global) are similarly proximately determined by extensive and intensive investment in the sector; this determines the pool of jobs for which the sector's (potential) workforce is competing.

(c) Sector job numbers are also determined by the intensity of labour. Overcapacity relative to effective demand can result from work intensification – a point which the shop stewards at Rover in Oxford argued strongly.

(d) Within sectors, distribution of jobs *between firms and localities* is dependent on investment which gives a competitive advantage.

Going beyond competition for jobs therefore involves *democratic control over investment flows at these various spatial scales*, and *control over the intensity of work*. The volume and type of investment in the economy as a whole, in sectors, and in enterprises needs planning in such a way as to ensure full employment in territories of different scale, and to create the maximum stability of employment in sectors and enterprises compatible with equalising work intensity and balancing capacity with demand. How this might be done goes beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that recent work on models of a socialist economy demonstrates that democratic coordination could constitute a dynamic planning process, interacting between different scales, so as to achieve such aims (Devine, 1988; Itoh, 1995).

On this basis it is not utopian to pose measures which overcome competition and build solidarity among workers (Lebowitz, 2006). Of course, such national and international systems of democratic economic planning have to be actively constructed. Workers' organisation and popular control of investment flows and work intensity have to develop together; and these need to be developed at increasingly large spatial scales and these scales of control related to each other. Possible organisational forms are varied. The traditional spatial form of union organisation, across a sector in a particular territory, is one starting point; through this, investment and work intensity across that territorial sector can be researched, contested, and eventually controlled. In large, multisite firms, including transnationals, cross-firm unions can develop a view of the firm's investment and competition between sites, and contest it (Spooner, 1987; Wills, 1998a); an example was the refusal in early 2001 by the Dutch union in the steel transnational Corus to take any work transferred from sites in Britain which the firm was seeking to close. But in international sectors which are oligopolies, one can envisage coordination between unions *across* firms, hence potentially contesting overall investment flows within the world industry (Herod, 1997b; Moody, 2005). This was briefly achieved in the late 1970s by steel workers in two different regions of France striking together to oppose job cuts in either region, and the German unions shortly after demanding nationalisation of the steel industry with the same aim (Hudson & Sadler, 1986). In territories which contain a large variety of sectors, particularly those dominated by small firms, territorial but cross-sectoral forms of organisation such as community unionism may be the only ones initially feasible (Wills & Simms, 2004); but these would need to develop sectoral forms to control investment. The essential point here is that workers' knowledge, confidence, organisation and control of investment and work *all develop together*, and can gradually build up in their scope – both spatial scale and sectoral reach (Lebowitz, 2006). And these are directed increasingly against the private control of investment and thus against capital itself.

Certain solidaristic demands then become increasingly realistic: jobs for all who want them, and reasonable and human intensity of work. Although jobs in particular sectors and enterprises cannot be guaranteed, since they are subject to final demand and productivity levels influenced by technology, economic planning can ease movement between jobs, and remove the need to migrate for work (Gough & Eisenschitz, 1997).

These aims could, indeed, be proposed as universal *rights*: the right to a job and to decent conditions of work. Harvey (2000a: 84, 96, 2000b) has pointed out that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains just such employment rights, which have, of course, been almost completely ignored by states and even by labour movements. Harvey nevertheless argues that the workers' movement should take such rights seriously. The language of rights can indeed be a powerful one in mobilising and uniting people, precisely because it expresses the key form of justice in capitalist democracies. But the historical neglect of the 1948 Declaration points to a limitation of the use of rights in the politics of employment: 'the right to a good job' is not in the usual form of a bourgeois right, since it does not refer to an aspect of a person but rather to the social relations which determine employment levels (cf 'Just distribution of resources versus just social relations' section). One needs to examine the social relations and forms of economic control and which would be involved in any non-rhetorical campaign for such rights. If decent jobs for all requires socialist relations of production, then moving towards these means cumulatively building organisation, knowledge and demands rather than relying on legal rights.

Such actions then pose the possibility of constructing different employment cultures and different notions of justice. Rather than a job being 'earned' by self-denial and by alienating one's capacities to capital (see 'Just wars?' section), it is merited by a reasonable contribution to a collective labour. Rather than being secured by exclusion of others, on whatever pretexts, it is secured by collaboration with others in economic planning and the work process. Rather than posing the individual, or the social

group, or the industrial-territorial unit as the site of interest, increasingly wide groups of workers acquire common interests. The scale of the just, as well as the human attributes promoted, are thus radically shifted. Paradoxically, this upward shift in scale enables the legitimacy of 'globalisation' and its supposed imperatives to be challenged: the inevitability and justice of capital's mobilities are challenged.

Such a *notion* of employment justice can only be popularised as part of the kind of *practices* of struggle and organisation just discussed. If such a morality is popular it then, iteratively, becomes a part of how workers' organisation is constructed, whose aims become more aggressive and ambitious.

The problem of interests and motivation: how do workers decide between strategies?

Herod (1997a) has described how workers' interventions into employment geography can vary strongly in their political complexion. The discussion so far suggests some reasons for this variety. Strategies are distinguished by the form of organisation of workers and its relation to flows of capital, and each of these is scaled in crucial ways. They differ in the social relations formed between workers and between them and capital, or, to put it another way, in their cultures of work: of 'tough individualism', of understandings of inside/outside, of gender, and so on. And they are distinguished by their notions of justice, with their particular scales, which are important in motivating people and thus constructing the strategies. The variety of workers' employment politics is thus bound up with the historical-spatial complexity of class relations, of cultures around employment, and of workers' capacities to organise.

In considering strategies within which workers cooperate with capital on the latter's terms — the strategies of competition previously considered — Herod (1997a: 16) argues that workers are not dupes of capital, partly because they are acting *consciously* in their own interests. We can now consider this question, and the meaning of 'interests', a little more deeply. In such strategies, workers are not (simply) duped by capital, since (a) workers adopt these strategies because they promise to, and sometimes actually do, yield jobs, and (b) the ideologies associated with these strategies do not come (solely, or mainly) from employers' propaganda but from within the social practices of economic competition. In these senses, one may say that competitive strategies are in workers' interests. But 'interests' are always practical and comparative: action *x* is 'in my interest' if it promises better results and/or is more feasible than action *y*. Strategies of collaboration with capital and competition with other workers are 'in workers' interests' if and only if other paths cannot secure jobs as effectively. We have seen that strategies which challenge capital and other forms of social power can in fact secure jobs better than competitive strategies; the problem is that they are opposed by capital, often involve new forms of organisation and culture, and thus seem utopian. The question of what is in workers' *interest*, and how workers are *motivated* by such an interest, therefore needs to be re-conceptualised: it is a question of what forms of workers' organisation and culture, and what transgressions of capital's power, can *feasibly be constructed*? This, of course, has no abstract answer, but depends on the spatial–historical conjuncture. It is for this reason that in most of this paper I have used the concept of 'strategy' rather than 'interest'.

This is relevant to the problem of selfishness: doesn't self-interest lead workers to compete with others, and fail to contribute to collective struggles because they can be free riders? Such self-interested behaviour is a fundamental assumption of liberal theory (see 'Justice as social praxis' section). Individualistic worker behaviour is taken as axiomatic in neoclassical economic theory. Public choice theory assumes the self-interested individual, who will and should cooperate if and only if the 'rationally-expected' outcome is favourable to them; 'Marxist rational choice theory' makes similar assumptions (Elster, 1986). There is certainly a real problem to be addressed here. Geras (1998) has argued that capitalist culture is dominated by a morality of 'mutual indifference': I do not expect any help from you since (and hence) you do not expect any help from me (cf Sennett, 1998). But liberal theory misrepresents the problem, by removing individualism from its construction by social institutions and practice, reifying it as a part of human nature. Part of the problem is liberalism's neglect of the social patterning of people's aspirations and relations to others (Barnes & Sheppard, 1992); I have emphasised that contrasted workers' strategies, both competitive and collaborative, are associated with distinct territorial and distance-related cultures. A liberal might retort that cultures are ineffective if they conflict with the 'hard constraints' of economy and human nature. But people's 'interests' and motivations are constructed by participating in *different projects* according to their possible outcomes and their feasibility; and these are open-ended, historical processes, whose development depends on a contestations of power which are simultaneously cultural, social, political and economic, and within which spatial scale is crucial (cf 'Justice as a social and spatial relation' section). Individualism or solidarity are just moments of these practices and struggles.

Relevant in this context is the work of Clark, McKay, Missen, and Webber (1992), who use a 'rational choice' framework to consider the coercion of workers and citizens within restructuring by capital and the state. Their conclusion offers some criticisms of this framework, and considers the claims of communitarian and collective notions of justice. But the latter notions are weakly developed by Clark et al. partly because economic coercion of workers by capital is considered as just one tactic of coercion among others ('intimidation', Clark et al., 1992: 55) rather than as a fundamental feature of capitalist dynamics and relations which informs *all* tactics. Moreover, they do not consider how individual and, especially, collective practical projects of economic intervention construct what is legitimate, and hence workers' and citizens' 'rational choices'.

Conclusion: justice and scale

Bourgeois notions of justice are based on rights regarded as quasi-property of individuals. In contrast, the notion of socialist justice used and developed in this paper is concerned with social relations between people. For this reason I have departed from commonly used approaches to 'the geography of justice' which are focused on distributions of benefits between individuals and territories. Spatially uneven distributions of jobs has been relevant to my discussion, particularly in workers' competitive responses to them and forms of economic planning which could ameliorate them. But the meaning of 'geographical justice' which I have sought to develop centres on the justice of social relations and the ways in which these use scale, space and territory. Geography is relevant to justice not simply as spatial outcomes but in the ways in which space is implicated in relations of power, competition, control and resistance.

The notion of the just which I have used is, at root, trans-historical. It assumes certain fundamental human needs which social arrangements should meet. It sees respect for others and concern for their welfare as central to just social relations. It is opposed to power over others because this implies lack of respect for them and harms their wellbeing (Baker et al., 2004; Young, 1990). But this notion of justice cannot be developed further without considering historically-concrete societies. Definitions of

the just acquire meaning and usefulness within *feasible* social arrangements. Since these arrangements are always spatial, defining the just is always historical *and* geographical.

Specifically in this paper I have considered what forms of injustice in employment are created by capitalist, gendered and racialised society, and how particular forms of working class organisation and a future socialist economy could create more-just relations of production: more secure employment, and relations between workers based on respect and solidarity rather than competition. I have argued that overcoming the injustices of contemporary employment arrangements implies not just taming but superseding capital. Space is strongly implicated in these forms of (in)justice. The forms of competition for jobs by workers in capitalism use different spatial scales in particular ways: the scale of the body and the individual, of the living space, of real and imagined cultural commonality, industry competition, and of flows of capital. As we have seen, it is often the *relation between* scales which is important here, a point which has been made in writing on other scaled social practices (Brenner, 2001; Smith, 1992; Swyngedouw, 1997). Similarly, the forms of workers' action which form the basis for a democratic economy use scale in particular ways. They construct workers' collectivity variously at the levels of the workplace, the locality, the nation and beyond. These scales of organisation, too, are deeply interconnected, in that those at smaller spatial scale cannot realise their progressive potential without having as horizon the larger scales of organisation. This is also true of forms of socialist coordination: workers' empowerment in workplaces and localities is contingent on, as well as being an ingredient of, planning of investment at larger scales.

All these scalar practices and materially-based social relations are integrally cultural, in that they involve particular relations between people and particular views of the self and others. These cultures are endowed with *moral* significance: it is right to compete with your co-workers for promotion, it is wrong for this industry to employ women, it is right to refuse to steal foreign workers' jobs, and so on. These moralities serve to legitimate those social arrangements.

Struggles to change employment practices are thus always, in part, struggles to create new cultures and new notions of justice. In these cultural and moral aspects, such struggles, and new durable social structures which they create, can change what people think and feel to be in their interest. This is not to propose that altruism exists ready-formed and waiting to be released — though human *potentials* strongly include sociability and compassion (Leakey & Lewin, 1993). Rather, it is to argue that people's notions of their interests and of what is just in relation to others develop with social practice; this is why I have been concerned with the *feasibility* of forms of struggle and economic allocation.

But this correspondence between practice and morality is not a mechanical one. People's notions of justice can be built on *partial* experiences and *anticipations* of what may be practically possible. Thus the notions of solidarity and economic justice traditional in the socialist movement have been neither pure speculation, nor based on an existing fully-fledged economic system, but rather extrapolations from partial and ambiguous experiences of workers' organisation and understandings of how things might be different. Notions of economic justice, then, are vital in both motivating and guiding people in their choice of strategy — which is why these notions should be of central interest to geographers.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

[1] An earlier version of the present paper was web-published as Gough (2002).
[2] A significant exception was the support for the productivist strategy by the official Communist Parties from the rise of Stalin, pursued still by the Communist Parties in India. They propagandised for alliances within each country between the labour movement and the 'progressive' or 'patriotic' bourgeoisie, aimed at developing the productiveness and modernity of the national economy. The class relations were made explicit, which was necessary in order to convince the cadres of the party who were schooled in Marxist categories.
[3] In Gough (2002: Section 4) I discussed varied strategies through which workers can combat employment discrimination by gender, ethnicity, as so on. This can be done in modes which seek to make *individual* members of oppressed groups more competitive, or alternatively in modes which seek to build solidarity. In the individualistic modes, actions to address different discriminations tend to be counter-posed to each other, whereas in the collective modes they are mutually aligned. The latter strategies, but not the former, can radically transform social relations and can meld struggle against class and non-class oppressions.

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