

Career Education and Labour Market Conditions: The Skills Gap Myth

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the prevailing high-tech knowledge-based economy rationale supporting current career education program development and contrasts it with labour market realities by addressing the following questions: a) What employment sectors anticipate significant job growth, and what skill levels or academic knowledge are required to work within those sectors? and, b) will increasing the level of student knowledge and skills make a difference in addressing the problems identified as the motivation for various skill initiatives in career education programs? Based on our empirical analysis of labour market conditions and a number of subsequent inferences, we conclude that the trend toward career education in public schooling is predicated on fallacious assumptions about present and prognosticated employment patterns combined with ideological attempts to deflect public attention from the systemic crises facing modern industrialized countries.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article analyse d'une part, la prédominance de la haute technologie, basée sur les connaissances d'une économie cohérente, et qui supporte l'aménagement du programme actuel dans le cursus scolaire et, d'autre part, met en confrontation cet état de faits avec la réalité du marché du travail, à l'aide des questions suivantes: a) Quels sont les secteurs de l'emploi qui prévoient une augmentation conséquente du travail et quels sont les niveaux de compétences ou connaissances universitaires requis pour y travailler? et, b) Est-ce que l'augmentation du niveau de connaissances et de compétences de l'étudiant va changer les données du problème; celui de choix devant lequel il se heurte pour prendre la décision de s'inscrire à diverses unités de valeur dans le cadre de l'orientation scolaire. Aujourd'hui, nous pouvons dire que, fondée sur une analyse empirique des conditions du marché du

travail et sur un nombre de conclusions antérieures, la tendance de l'orientation de l'enseignement dans le domaine public, repose sur des hypothèses fausses. De surcroît, les schémas de l'emploi pronostiqués sont associés à des efforts idéologiques dans le but de détourner l'attention du public des crises que les pays industrialisés modernes rencontrent dans le système.

Introduction

There is significant growth in the number of international and domestic education programs designed to prepare students for future occupational opportunities. The rationale supporting this reform movement typically cites an increased demand for employability skills in a high technology knowledge-based labour market. In this article, we investigate the veracity of this rationale by responding to three central questions:

- What labour market sectors anticipate significant job growth?
- What skill levels or academic competencies are required to work within those sectors?
- Will increasing the knowledge and skill level of workers resolve other problems the career education skills initiatives are designed to address such as unemployment and social cohesion?

In the first section of the article, we identify the rationale supporting a range of contemporary career education policies and programs. In the second section, we evaluate the view that skill gaps are causing labour market supply problems for industry and unemployment for workers by examining both domestic and international labour market trends. We also review labour market patterns within British Columbia, and compare them with national and international trends. Finally, we consider whether the skills required to work in job sectors where growth is anticipated can, or should be, targeted by career education. In the remaining sections of the article, we explore why, in the absence of demonstrable evidence, the existence of a knowledge and skills gap is assumed by career education program planners. We conclude the article by arguing that the primary motivation for contemporary career education reform appears more ideological than practical in nature.

The Rationale for Career Education

In 1995 the British Columbia Labour Force Development Board (BCLFDB) released *Training for What?* a document that addressed three major questions related to provincial employment and education: a) Where will work be in the future? b) What skills will be required for this

work? and c) How can British Columbia best organize its learning system to address these skill needs? The board argued that answering these questions was a critical first step to ensure students gain the necessary skills to participate fully in the knowledge economy, and refers to its research as a "public policy issue of the highest priority" (p. 1).

The BCLFDB's report (1995) emphasizes a widening skills gap between provincial workers and projected labour market requirements by maintaining that, "there is a substantial gap between British Columbian's current skills and those they will need in the future" (p. 3). The board contends that British Columbia will gain an international competitive advantage by increasing the knowledge and skills of workers, and re-shaping student attitudes to comply with those of industry: "British Columbia is in the midst of a fundamental shift from a resource-based economy ... characterized by international competition and constant technological change. In this New Economy, education and training arguably provide the single most competitive edge" (p. 1).

The argument advanced by the BCLFDB is in no way unique. Similar calls supporting career education reform in public schools, often termed "school-to-work" programs in the United States, pervade most industrialized countries. All of these programs aim to prepare students as future workers for a rapidly and perpetually changing labour market, and for an increasingly competitive global economy requiring high levels of knowledge and skill. Western Australia's *Work Studies* (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2001), for example, reflects this emphasis:

It is well recognized by community interest groups that the world of work is undergoing rapid adjustment to wider social and economic changes in Australian society. Our ability to adapt to and capitalize upon these changes is considered by opinion leaders to be vital to the maintenance of national social and economic well-being (n.p.).

In the United States, California's *School to Career Plan* (California Department of Education, 2001) similarly observes that, "new world-class education standards must be developed which are uniformly high and comparable to the best standards of other industrialized nations" (n.p.).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) plays a central role in rationalizing career education on an international level. It was initially established in 1960 as the administrative successor to the Marshall Plan, the United States sponsored effort to reconstruct war-torn Europe after World War Two.

The OECD represents the world's 30 leading industrialized nations on a variety of issues related to economic development including education. It believes that increasing the skills and knowledge of workers will resolve a range of social, economic, and labour market problems, a view that permeates the education policy of OECD countries:

As global competition and the effects of new technology rapidly change the nature of work, millions of individual workers in member countries are discovering that they need skills of a much higher level than in the past – or that the skills they do have are obsolete. (OECD, 1997, p. 13)

The OECD maintains that member countries must invest in human capital to enhance economic prosperity, employment opportunities, and social cohesion. Social cohesion is understood as income equality, and hence requires minimizing income differences within member countries by improving employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed workers. The OECD (2002) suggests that individuals, corporations, and nations increasingly recognize that high levels of knowledge and skill are crucial to improve social cohesion, and generate both employment growth and national prosperity:

Our 21st century economies and societies are increasingly knowledge-based, some would say even knowledge-driven, shifting away from older industrial models. How is this happening and how quickly? What role does or should education play in this transformation process? Given the fundamental nature of these developments, as well as the speed of change, there is a challenging agenda of analysis simply to keep up. New concepts need to be developed and applied to grasp the production, mediation, use, and management of knowledge. (n.p.)

Many Canadian career education programs adopt the OECD's position on the need to enhance the knowledge and skills of workers. The Conference Board of Canada (1995), for example, cites the demands of the "knowledge-based economy," and describes the aim of its influential *Employability Skills Profile* (ESP) as providing students with the skills required "to participate and progress in today's dynamic world of work" (n.p.). Canadian career education policy papers and programs suggest that redressing skill deficits will enhance student employment fortunes within dynamic labour market conditions. Debling and Behrman (1996), co-authors of *Employability Skills for BC*, indicate that the government sponsored project was undertaken because students are ill-prepared to meet existing provincial labour force demands: "Young people leaving

education experiences are not well-prepared to meet the current demands of the workplace or those anticipated in the future" (p. 1).

The assumption that a skills gap exists between workers and available forms of work also provides the rationale for a range of North American secondary school curricula. In Ontario, the *Guidance and Career Education* curriculum considers its primary aim to play "a central role in secondary school by preparing students for a complex and rapidly changing world" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 1). The primary aim of British Columbia's *Career and Personal Planning* is "to practise the academic, teamwork, and personal management skills needed to succeed in the workplace" (Ministry of Education, 1995, p. 4). Citing escalating technological change and the need for increased labour market flexibility, British Columbia's *Business Education* maintains that students must be prepared for changing labour market conditions by increasing their relevant knowledge and skills (Ministry of Education, 2000). In the United States, the School District of Philadelphia Office of Curriculum Support (1998) rationalizes its *School-to-Career* program by citing the need for all students "to become productive citizens and employees [by enabling them] to achieve economic self-sufficiency" (p. 2). California's *School to Career Plan* (California Department of Education, 2001) contends that, "new world-class education standards must be developed which are uniformly high and comparable to the best standards of other industrialized nations" (n.p.).

Career education policy advocates consider this type of education essential to provide students with the skills and knowledge required for labour market competitiveness in a presupposed high tech knowledge-based economy. The following *a priori* assumptions are embedded within this view:

- Current and projected labour market opportunities require workers to possess increased levels of knowledge and skill.
- There is a growing skills gap separating the academic abilities of students leaving secondary school, and the actual competencies required for current and projected employment opportunities.
- Individual competitiveness, in the form of enhanced knowledge and skill, is synonymous with international competitiveness.
- The competitiveness which results from a highly skilled labour force will somehow ameliorate socio-economic problems such as unemployment and social stratification.

The assumed skills gap separating workers from available labour market opportunities, however, provokes a fundamental concern. As we

argue below, there is no discernible evidence that indicates current or projected forms of employment will require significantly increased levels of knowledge and skill. Research suggests that the majority of present labour market opportunities within many industrialized nations, including Canada, do not demand high levels of technical knowledge and skill, but are in fact situated in low salary, low skill, service occupations such as hospitality, food service, and retail (Herzenberg, Alic, & Wial, 1998; Keep & Mayhew, 1995; Human Resources Development Canada, 1996; Livingstone, 1996; Lipsig-Mummé, 1997). We will also argue that there is no obvious reason why increasing the knowledge and skills of domestic workers will alleviate the various other problems career education is intended to address including social cohesion.

Provincial, National, and International Labour Market Trends

In 1996, the British Columbia government, in conjunction with Human Resources Development Canada, published *Work Futures*, a forecast of provincial employment outlooks extended until 2005. The document was drafted by representatives from industry, labour, government, and education to present "a comprehensive view of present and future labour market conditions" (Human Resources Development Canada, 1996, p. 1). Contrary to the view that high tech knowledge-based work is the employment wave of the future, the report indicates that the food and beverage industry is the area of greatest projected provincial growth with almost 18,000 new jobs anticipated by the year 2005. The provincial food and beverage industry stands only above the baby sitting/nanny classification in terms of pay scale with jobs in the former area averaging slightly more than \$16,000 per annum. Low paying service industry jobs will account for most labour market growth with 16,000 new jobs for short order cooks expected to be created between 1996 and 2005. In British Columbia, the service industry now represents the largest employment sector in the province and continues to experience the greatest measure of job growth expanding from 1,386,900 people in 1996 to 1,534,700 in 2000 (British Columbia Statistics, 2000).

The anticipated proliferation of relatively low paying service industry occupations during the next five years undermines many of the assumptions supporting career education reform. These reforms are designed to improve student employment prospects in a high-tech knowledge-based economy. Further, as *Work Futures* reports, the

hospitality industry is already served by numerous trade programs in national and provincial institutes that provide students with the specific technical training required to work in this sector. In addition to the proliferation of low paying hospitality jobs, some provincial employment growth is expected in occupations that require varying levels of tertiary education. These positions include senior management personnel in finance, telecommunications, and other business services; computer programmers and analysts. There is also some anticipated growth in the health care and education sectors. Workers in all of these sectors require some post-secondary education in the form of a college diploma or university degree, and many of these occupations demand high levels of specialized professional training. The capacity of secondary level career education, then, to prepare students for these professional occupations appears extremely limited.

On the national level, there is similarly scant evidence indicating a widespread knowledge and skill shortage among Canadian workers. Under external pressure in 1997, for example, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) conceded that no more than 20 per cent of unemployment could be attributed to skill deficits (Robertson, 1998). Livingstone (1996) suggests that only a Grade 8 education is required to perform the typical factory or office job within advanced industrialized societies. He also asserts that since the 1970s a third of North American workers possess skills they are unable to utilize in their present employment circumstances. A 1996 Canadian report suggested that over half of all Ontario workers surveyed under age 35 possess skills they are unable to use because their occupations require exceedingly low levels of academic knowledge and technical skill (Robertson, 1998).

During a 1997 Industry Canada sponsored conference attended by more than 50 private and public sector leaders, however, Don Woodley, Chairman of the Information Technology Association of Canada, continued to claim that, "we must make sure Canadians have the skills and training to thrive in knowledge-intensive industries" (Industry Canada, 1997, n.p.). Although Industry Canada funds a number of skills-based schooling initiatives in conjunction with private industry, an esteemed panel established by the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Science and Technology (ACST) found no evidence of a widespread skill shortage among Canadian workers. The final report of the committee, chaired by Jacquelyn Thayer Scott, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University College of Cape Breton, indicates the panel, "found no

evidence of a current, generalized skill shortage of technical and scientific skills in the Canadian industry sectors we have examined in detail" (Industry Canada, 2000, n.p.). The most recent version of *Job Futures* continues to predict that Canadian employment growth will remain strongest in the comparatively low skilled service sector at least until 2004 (Human Resources Development Canada, 2002).

Contrary to the high-tech knowledge-based economy rationale supporting American career education reform, Harrison and Weiss (1998) report that data collected by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal low paying service sector jobs accounted for most employment growth between 1983 and 1993. In light of these findings, the researchers concluded that, "it is quite amazing how powerful the myth of a steadily disappearing demand for low-skilled labour in America has been perpetuated" (p. 10). Indeed, current employment figures released by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that the vast majority of new jobs are retail sales and cashier positions. The bureau points out that these positions only require short-term on-the-job training, and are amongst the lowest paid in the labour market (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). By 1996 three quarters of all United States occupations were located in the service sector, up from two thirds in 1979 (Herzenberg, Alic, & Wial, 1998). This employment pattern is not expected to change in the foreseeable future. Labour market forecasts based on United States Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate that until 2005 only one in eight higher than average growth occupations will require a college degree, while two thirds will demand no more than a high school diploma (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

The demographic shift in North American labour markets toward low salaried service sector occupations from manufacturing and industrial positions over the last two decades, then, reflects an international trend mirrored in virtually all industrialized countries (Wise, 1989; Dutka, 1994). Labour market projections in the United Kingdom, for example, indicate that small businesses, part-time work including clerical, selling, catering, cleaning, hairdressing, and personal services are the only job sectors where significant employment growth is anticipated (Keep & Mayhew, 1995). Over the past 30 years, European and North American countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand, have been transformed from industrial-based to increasingly low salaried service sector economies (Lipsig-Mummé, 1997).

Recent evidence suggests that corporations in the high technology manufacturing fields are responding to global competition *not* by *creating* additional high-tech positions, but rather by *eliminating them*. Permanent lay offs of highly skilled workers are commonplace. In 1993 alone, the Fortune 500 companies laid off 583,000 high-tech, highly skilled employees (Robertson, 1998). The trend toward high-tech lay offs continues with technology manufacturing giant Nortel recently advising shareholders the company intends to eliminate 50,000 international jobs. Fibre optic giant Corning recently announced worldwide job cuts totalling more than 20,000 workers (SiliconValley.com, 2001). Major Canadian companies are responding to global competition not by creating full-time permanent high-tech positions, but by replacing existing jobs with part-time and temporary workers. A 1993 survey conducted by Robert Half Canada Inc., found that over 80% of canvassed companies plan to increase their use of temporary staff whether they are experiencing growth or downsizing. In fact, a full two thirds of the interviewed companies expect to reduce their total employment numbers in the future (Campbell, 1994).

The Causes of a Skills Gap Myth

Why, then, given the lack of empirical data supporting the existence of any actual connection between supposedly required higher levels of technical knowledge and skill, and actual labour market conditions do governments continue to support employability skills education reform? There appears to be several reasons behind this support. First, government policy developers, recognizing that many of the jobs eliminated by technology are industrial, manufacturing, assembly-line, and production-type positions, assume *a priori* that only high-tech employment opportunities will remain. To acquire these jobs, they believe students must obtain higher levels of knowledge and skill through public education in the number of available high-tech opportunities. Second, industrialized nations appear committed to the view that only a highly skilled workforce will protect their competitive advantage over developing countries where cheaper sources of comparatively unskilled labour are readily available. A highly skilled labour force, or so the prevailing reasoning submits, makes a country or region more appealing to business. Finally, there are important ideological underpinnings propelling the trend toward career education which we will discuss later in the article. Empirical evidence and sound

economic reasoning expose fundamental weaknesses in the first two assumptions.

There is no empirical evidence indicating that the elimination of low skilled manufacturing jobs leads to the creation of high-tech positions requiring increased levels of knowledge and skill (Crouch, Finegold, & Sako, 1999). In fact, many of the jobs eliminated by technology are never replaced, a finding perfectly consistent with the profit orientation of corporations and businesses operating within a market economy framework. Workplace technology is intended to enhance profits by reducing production costs rather than augment the number of high-tech employment opportunities available to workers. The belief that technology will ultimately lead to fuller employment, then, ignores the primary motivation for its implementation within market economy culture. Full employment is neither possible nor desirable in a high-tech economy valuing technology for its capacity to create a competitive business advantage by eliminating jobs to reduce production costs (Allman, 1999). Over the last several decades, for example, the world's 500 largest multinational corporations have grown sevenfold in sales while the worldwide employment of these same firms has remained virtually flat. Major multinationals' sales grew from 721 billion in 1971 to 5.2 trillion in 1991, claiming a steadily growing share of commerce, but the human labour required for each unit of their output has diminished dramatically over the same period (Greider, 1997).

The second error committed by career education advocates is assuming that a highly skilled labour market protects national competitiveness, attracts international corporate investment, and generates job opportunities. Indeed, the relative importance of highly skilled workers compared to other production advantages such as low wages, an absence of labour legislation and limited environmental regulations is highly questionable. In search of a labour supply marked by low wages, unregulated working conditions and regions with limited environmental laws, the manufacturing sector increasingly looks toward developing countries (Robertson, 1998; Crouch et al., 1999). The OECD reports, for example, that the major cause of upper level job loss among industrialized nations is global competition in the form of manufacturing jobs being transferred to low wage countries (Streeten, 1998).

As manufacturing and industrial enterprises downsize and/or relocate, many workers find alternate employment in temporary and low salaried service sector occupations (Livingstone, 1996). Although skill shortages may cause labour market difficulties for a few high-tech

industries wishing to relocate, the primary incentive for corporate location remains reducing labour and production costs, and thereby increasing profits. Rather than generating high-tech employment opportunities, technology allows many occupational tasks that once demanded skilled work to be performed by comparatively low skilled labour in countries typified by low wages, poor working conditions, few environmental regulations, and low levels of democratic rights (Allman, 1999; Crouch et al., 1999).

It is difficult to identify specific labour market benefits to students, workers, or nations from a general up-skilling of the labour market, but there is an obvious advantage to corporations. A highly skilled labour market creates a supply side advantage to employers by ensuring intense competition between workers for available job opportunities. Competition between workers for available jobs reduces employee benefits, forces wages to be lowered, and encourages students to increase their human capital through additional education and training. Keep and Mayhew (1995) report, for example, that the skills enhancement strategy has failed to pay dividends for British workers, but has paid handsome dividends for employers in terms of reducing real wages. There is in fact growing recognition among European governments that the rapidly improving education level of students is not creating jobs or generating economic growth, but merely being used to screen new recruits for existing employment opportunities (Crouch et al., 1999).

Career Education and Social Cohesion

There is another important assumption related to career education that we wish to address in this article. The OECD actively promotes the view that,

Investment in education and training helps form the human capital – the skills and abilities – that is a vital element in assuring economic growth and individual advancement and reducing inequality. It is an important element in combatting unemployment and improving social cohesion. (Healy, 2001, n.p.)

Recall that enhancing social cohesion requires improving income equality. Contrary to the conviction that skills enhancement strategies in public education are alleviating income discrepancies, the available evidence indicates that income gaps between workers in industrialized countries continue to widen.

The general economic status of workers from industrialized countries has decreased significantly during the last two decades. Society is

becoming increasingly polarized with growing income divisions reported in virtually all industrialized countries (Hyland, 1997). Livingstone (1996) observes that social polarization is widely evident in North American income trends: "The movement was primarily out of the lower middle [and] into the very bottom and top of the earnings distribution ... the largest share of the movement was downward" (p. 64). Younger workers have been particularly hard hit by changing labour market conditions with real wages among this group declining more than 25 per cent since 1977. Indeed, real wages for most American workers have declined steadily over the past two decades (Herzenberg et al., 1998). The Hudson Institute, a corporate sponsored think tank in the United States, candidly admits that greater gaps separate the incomes of the well paid from the poorly paid within the new global economy (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). Citing OECD research on career education programs in Britain, Nash (1999) reports, "two decades of costly job-training programmes have failed to stop unemployment spiralling among young people" (n.p.).

Viewed collectively, then, these findings contradict the claim that improving the work-related knowledge and skill level of students will enhance social cohesion. Such a claim ignores the profit-driven basis of market economy culture, the growing income gaps between workers and increased competition for limited high skilled labour market opportunities. The cause of growing income gaps between workers has far less to do with alleged skill deficits than it does with an absence of meaningful employment opportunities. If community-minded objectives such as social cohesion are to be achieved within market economy culture, it will require a major restructuring of economic, social, and educational priorities. To achieve social cohesion, the concept of work requires relocating within a framework of social democratic citizenship that explicitly recognizes the right to full meaningful employment, and government policy that accepts political and economic responsibility for protecting that right.

The Ideological Implications of Career Education

We believe that the increased emphasis on career education is largely attributable to the global economic changes witnessed during the past few decades and the associated rise of neo-liberal ideology. The recurring recessions of the 1970s generated international concern with the welfare state policies introduced following World War Two (Young, 1990). Welfare state policies required significant state economic intervention

in the form of comprehensive social programs which were designed to improve wealth distribution and enhance social justice. The neo-liberal ideology that has materialized in the wake of welfare state collapse considers unfettered market forces the key to achieving global economic prosperity. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2000) describe neo-liberalism as "capitalism with the gloves off" or, more precisely, the "corporate domination of society that supports state enforcement of the unregulated market and establishes the market as the patron of educational reform" (p. 1). Within this neo-liberal milieu, the responsibility for economic success and social stability is increasingly placed on the private sector. Education becomes a means of enhancing international market conditions and corporate profits by preparing the necessary human capital.

Within this neo-liberal context, then, the trend toward career education appears ideological in two important ways. First, by ensuring that the goals of the market become the goals of education, students are indoctrinated into a particular world view. Market economy principles and practices such as supply and demand, unfettered competition and routine occupational displacement are naturalized by career education programs as either inevitable or beyond reasonable dispute. British Columbia's *Business Education*, for example, describes the rapid rate of labour market change influencing families, workplaces, communities and the environment, and the need for students to adapt to unstable working conditions, as the "new reality" (Ministry of Education, 2000, n.p.). This ahistorical depiction of society is ideological because it advances a culturally dominant, or hegemonic, perspective while neglecting available criticisms of market economy practices and alternative world views.

As Eagleton (1991) argues, successful ideologies typically seek to render their assumptions natural and self-evident by embedding them in social common sense. The tacit objective is to ensure that nobody within a particular social context could imagine how things might be different. Social reality becomes co-extensive with the ideology itself to prevent general recognition that the latter in fact generates the former. Eagleton observes that, "a ruling ideology does not so much combat alternative ideas as thrust them beyond the bounds of the unthinkable" (p. 58). Under the guise that schools must be renovated to meet the labour force demands of the new global economy, then, career education provides an ideal vehicle to wrap students in ruling ideology and the social reality it constructs.

Second, career education is ideological in that it diverts public attention from the structural causes of class stratification and other serious social problems by implying that public schools and worker skill deficits are responsible for deep-rooted structural difficulties. It is far simpler, and of course more ideologically effective, to vilify public education by drawing attention to supposed skill gaps than it is to address the fundamental injustices embodied in market economy assumptions and practices. The responsibility for unmanageable economic difficulties is conveniently shifted from corporate and political interests onto education. To change the structural conditions shaping social reality would involve the far more daunting task of challenging social class organization, and redressing the systemic injustices causing widespread poverty and escalating class stratification (Spring, 2002).

Summary

In this article we have addressed two central questions related to the assumed connection between labour market trends in a so-called high-tech knowledge-based economy and education programs intended to prepare students for corresponding employment opportunities. We have determined that it is at best a questionable, if not demonstrably false, claim that a widespread knowledge and skill shortage is causing current labour market supply problems, unemployment, or increased social stratification. Domestic and international labour market conditions and forecasts instead suggest that the percentage of new jobs requiring high levels of knowledge and skill is limited when compared to low-skilled service industry occupations.

Based on this finding, then, we believe that the trend toward career education in public schools is predicated on fallacious assumptions about current employment patterns in combination with ideological attempts to deflect public attention from the systemic crises facing modern industrialized countries. Career education may produce a subdued and ideologically compliant workforce, but it will have virtually no impact on alleviating the social and labour market problems it professes to address. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of neo-liberal ideology, corporations are situated as the political *first estate* within Western democracies. Social welfare policies, originally intended to mitigate the effects of *lassiez faire* capitalism, have been dismantled, along with the socialist assumptions that rationalized them. In the absence of counter hegemonic forces, a dominant propaganda strategy has emerged within career education that presents market

economy principles and practices to future workers as the inevitable framework for global reconstruction.

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