RECENT TRENDS AND FEATURES IN UNEMPLOYMENT

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I. Problems of definition and problems of substance.

1. Introduction. The contemporary unemployment scenario manifests new trends and features. There have been changes in the demand for labor as well as changes in labor supply. And they require us to modify our approach to the problem of unemployment, as well as our view of the labor market.

The unemployment plaguing many countries in the 1980s is much different from that of the 1930s or even the 1950s [Garraty: 1978; Hawkins: 1979; Casson: 1983; Freissenet: 1984]. The socio-economic conditions underlying the present unemployment are so different that it seems no longer useful for sociologists, economists and political scientists to use categories and imagery created 50 years ago.

For many years, the typical unemployed person was the male adult head of the family, breadwinner, who absolutely needed a job, without which he risked starvation [Pilgrim Trust: 1938; Bakke: 1940a, 1940b]. Today, the typical unemployed person is a young, single man or woman who, because of some occasional economic activity and/or because of some family support, has fewer economic troubles than his/her predecessor.

We can observe this type of change both in Western Europe and in the United States. This is one of the reasons why it is no longer possible to identify immediately "the unemployed man" [Bakke: 1933; Cohen, 1945; Beales, Lambert: 1985], that social figure which after 1929 became a social-anthropological standard definition and a protagonist in the social-oriented American and European literature.

What are the main changes? If we take all of the people in search of a job and not only those who have lost a previous job, we observe the following:
- i) In terms of occupational status, there are more people traditionally not in the labor force who are now asking for a job.

- ii) In terms of age, there are more young people without any previous work experience who run into trouble finding their first real job.

- iii) In terms of gender, there are more women, both young and adult, searching and finding jobs [West: 1982; Paukert: 1984; Accornero, Carmignani, Pruna: 1987; Shank: 1988].

These changes also have methodological consequences. In fact, to fully understand contemporary unemployment we must no longer focus only on adult unemployed people, or only on people who have lost jobs.

These changes also have socio-political consequences. In fact, to effectively understand contemporary unemployment:

- i) We have to worry more about joblessness, which concerns most young people because its consequences are remote and incalculable and because its remedies are not totally clear.

- ii) But we have to worry less about traditional unemployment, which mostly concerns adults, either because its consequences are immediately noticeable or because its remedies are well known.

2. Statistics. The changes I am talking about are now visible in countries with different development levels and unemployment rates, countries such as Italy and Japan, Spain and Australia [Oecd: 1985, 1986, 1987]. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that such changes are more visible in those countries where the social statistics do not give overly restrictive definitions of "unemployment". In my opinion this fact is very important.

The Monthly Labor Review published two comparisons made by Joyanna Moy on unemployment rates in several countries [Moy: 1984, 1988]. Her results were surprising since the unemployment rate in Italy appears to be close to that of the United States. But Moy calculated the Italian unemployment rate on the basis of American methodology for unemployment statistics. If she had also calculated the American unemployment rates using Italian methods, she would have found that the Italian situation is better than the American one.
It seems absurd. Everyone knows that in Italy there are many more unemployed people than in the United States [Bruni, Franciosi: 1986; Piacentini, 1986]. What is the problem? Is it a case of statistical fallacy or an example of "statistical artifact"? [Piore: 1987] Or, perhaps, is it a trick? I don't think so. The problem is the classic problem of definitions. The question is very simple: "Who is unemployed?" This is the point. As Joan Robinson effectively observed [Robinson: 1937], the concept of unemployment is absolutely not neutral [Jahoda: 1982]. In fact the concept of unemployment -- and the image of "the unemployed man" -- sometimes depends on the statistical methodology, but many times the statistical methods themselves depend on the social security policies, especially with regard to the condition and level of unemployment compensation [Grossman: 1985].

These political and methodological divergences explain why national statistics are often difficult to compare. In addition, many countries employ International Labor Office standards for measuring unemployment, but they apply them in ways that create discrepancies [Macmahon: 1986].

It is a rational and rigorous procedure to consider as unemployed all people who have a right to compensation and assistance by the state. And it is also logical to verify whether or not the unemployed are really without employment [Worswick: 1976]. So, according to the International Labor Office standards, to be considered unemployed a worker must:

- i) Be involuntarily without a job, having lost it through circumstances beyond his/her control;

- ii) Be inactive, that means without any other job or activity;

- iii) Be available, that means ready to accept a job as soon as he/she finds a new position similar to the lost one;

- iv) Be willing, that means active in the search for a new position until he/she is re-employed.

Obviously, these general requirements are specifically applied in different ways in each country, according to both the social orientation and the administrative procedures of the governments. There exists a huge literature on the political and historical changes of the boundaries of unemployment definitions and benefits, as well as on the "encouraging" and "discouraging" effects of various kinds and levels of unemployment subsidies [National Manpower Policy Task Force: 1974; Clarkson, Meiners: 1979; U.S. Department of Labor: 1985].
Therefore, the dimension of unemployment depends on the way "unemployed people" are defined and counted [Cohen, Gruber: 1967; Goldfarb: 1978; Oecd: 1979]. For example, the Italian data -- and the Spanish too -- depend on an extensive interpretation of the phenomenon. In these countries, there are two public institutions that collect data and in fact both of them consider as unemployed those people who declare themselves to be. That is: self definitions concerning the need for work are accepted as objective definitions.

In my opinion, the adoption of this system is useful and not wrong. By the way, this choice stems from the advice of labor market scholars. Before, Italian data were not actually capable of sketching the social dimensions of unemployment.

Two Italian institutions generate unemployment figures. The first, the Italian Statistical Bureau, bases its data on the declarations of individuals interviewed quarterly from a large sample of over 100,000 families. The other institution is the Public Manpower Service, where anyone in search of a job can ask to be registered. According to these two sources, there are in Italy about three million "unemployed" people, that is over 12 per cent of the labor force.

Labor market scholars know that the high Italian or Spanish unemployment rates would be sharply reduced if some categories of people presently considered unemployed were excluded. For instance, if we exclude female housekeepers who need part-time and/or temporary jobs but who spend very little time in search of them, the unemployment rates would decline significantly.

Yet I am not arguing that there are in reality fewer unemployed people than the data indicate, neither in my country nor in others. I am instead emphasizing the advantages of those definitions that expand rather than restrict the social and economic boundaries of unemployment. I prefer to risk overestimation rather than underestimation, because correcting and deflating data is easier than expanding and completing them.

The use of restrictive criteria to define unemployment reduces the available information. Indeed both the dimensions and the dynamics of the hidden unemployment become underassessed. Because of these "deflated" data, the government may be induced to implement undesirable and unsatisfactory social policies.

Of course, an overvaluation of unemployment could also cause errors and waste if the government makes large expenditures on the basis of "inflated" data. But a different kind of result is more probable -- a "perverse" result in Boudon's terms [Boudon: 1982]. If there appear to be too many unemployed people, the risk will be to give much attention to the problem -- as politicians customarily do -- and then to do little to solve it. (This seems
to me the case in Italy, where successive governments maintained for many years the unemployment ordinary subsidy at an incredibly low level -- about 60 cents per day! -- and increased it just in 1988, as a result of being reproached by the Constitutional Court.) Hence, both too extensive and too restricted definitions can bring about similar effects.

Therefore I would like to stress the fact that social perceptions and economic dimensions of unemployment depend on both the "technical" methodologies used by the institutions which collect statistics and on the "social" condition of eligibility as defined by the governments.  

3. A Typology. The Italian Statistical Bureau data -- I believe, without violating the core International Labor Office standards -- count as "unemployed" all individuals who declare themselves "in search of work" [Istat: 1977-1988]. I do not think that any individual who defines himself/herself in search of work should be considered unemployed in a strict sense. But I think that such an individual is an interesting subject through which to analyze contemporary unemployment.

The Italian Statistical Bureau considers three types of subjects in search of work, and counts as unemployed all individuals who fall into the following categories:

- i) The unemployed in a strict sense, that is those workers who have had a job, and after having lost it, are looking for another;

- ii) The people in search of their first job, that is the people who have not yet had regular work experience;

- iii) The other people in search of jobs, that is the people who need a job not having a professional position, like housekeepers, retired people, and students.

Until 1987, data were presented to the public in very general terms and provided only the total number of "unemployed" people. Thus, newspapers often referred to enormous quarterly increases in unemployment levels. Public opinion was shocked, everyone argued for effective remedies, but the debate ended quickly. Even in the South of Italy, where the unemployment rate was three times higher than in the North, no serious protests occurred.

Why wouldn't a country with traditional patterns of social unrest revolt as a result of these high levels of unemployment? My
answer is that contemporary joblessness is much greater than traditional unemployment. The longest time series data show the following changes in the structure of unemployment in terms of the three categories defined above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNEMPLOYED BY TYPES</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1987</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a strict sense</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In search of first work</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other individuals</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A part of the sharp decline in unemployment in a strict sense can be attributed to the increase in the use of the "Cassa Integrazione". This is an unemployment benefit program for laid-off workers with the important peculiarity that the laid-off workers are not considered to be unemployed. It is hard to establish how much higher the figure for 1987 would be if these workers were included because we do not have any criteria to measure how many of them are actually unemployed with no prospect of being recalled. However, I believe that the pattern shown by this table is not substantially changed by this phenomenon.

In a recent book, I emphasized the importance of these changes in the social structure of unemployment, arguing that it was no longer possible to speak about unemployment in broad and traditional terms [Accornero, Carmignani: 1986]. The government has acknowledged this remark, and since then our Statistical Bureau has presented more analytical data.

However, one may ask: doesn’t the emphasis on recent forms of joblessness reduce the importance of unemployment as a social problem? Could this not be the reason for government intervention? My answer is: no, since more analytical data on unemployment make this social phenomenon even more worrisome. More precisely, the new data show that the most relevant component of unemployment consists of young people who are unable to find a real job though they are not in total idleness. It is this growing component which makes contemporary joblessness different from traditional unemployment, and in my opinion more worrisome [Oecd: 1984].

and stress instead other more classical characteristics of unemployment [Godfrey: 1986; Layard, Sentance: 1986]. I think that one reason why it is difficult to understand the issue of joblessness is that it is impossible -- in several countries -- to identify the different subjects among the "unemployed people". It is misleading to consider all unemployed people in the same way, and it is absolutely insufficient to distinguish among them only on the basis of the duration of unemployment [Lang, Leonard: 1987].

The main risk consists in the illusory distinction one can draw between employed and unemployed people. This risk is both analytical and social because between employed and unemployed people, there are the underemployed [Glyde, Snyder, Stemberger: 1975]. And underemployment is not only a typical phenomenon of precariously and instability in underdeveloped areas. Work-time reduction and flexibilization of work exacerbate this phenomenon [Boyer: 1986; Institut Syndical Europeen: 1985].

The definition of young people as "growing up without work" [European Centre for Work and Society: 1983] is effective but inaccurate since they are not totally unemployed. They are just underemployed, in a condition of mobility and fluidity between jobs.

Some people who have employment today will lose it tomorrow and will have to choose whether or not to stay in the labor market. Other people who are studying will soon enter the labor market because they will be offered employment. The total level of unemployment (and of employment too) could remain the same, but we have to take into account both the stocks and the flows in the labor market [Smith, Vanski: 1975; Gonul: 1985]. In other words, we have to think not in term of positions, but of people who move among positions.

II. The Problem of Mass Joblessness.

1. The Phenomenon. In my opinion there is no international condition of "mass unemployment" -- as defined by Edmund Malinvaud [Malinvaud: 1984; Cowling et al.: 1984] -- but rather of "mass joblessness." With this concept, I am referring to the strong alteration of proportions between:
(a) The number of people who are searching for a new job, having lost their previous one, and

(b) The number of people who are looking for work for the first time and who are without a job or professional position because of their age or condition.

The second group is larger than the first, and this reality is more visible where the social statistics are more accurate: the trend is clear. I am still referring to Italian data. If the whole period under consideration were to be divided into sub-periods, we would get the following proportions between categories (b) and (a):

- 0.85 from 1959 through 1968;
- 2.22 from 1969 through 1978;

The percentage of the people in search of their first job as compared to all people searching for jobs shows us the following trend:

- 32.3 from 1959 through 1968;
- 42.9 from 1969 through 1978;
- 51.5 from 1979 through 1987.

Local data show that in economically stronger areas, there are proportionally more people who have lost a job than in economically weaker areas. The explanation for this paradox is simple. Where there are more unemployed people in a strict sense, there are also higher employment opportunities, while there are fewer opportunities where there are more jobless people. (This situation produces social effects quite different from the "discouraged worker" described by Tella and Mincer [Tella: 1964, 1976; Mincer: 1966; Finegan: 1978].)

We all know the employment consequences of both technological innovation and industrial restructuring, particularly in the cases of technological obsolescence and/or industrial decline. However, nowadays unemployment is due much more to jobs not found than to jobs lost. The group of young people searching for their first job, occupation, or position is increasing the most consistently. The same is true for the group of people not belonging to the labor force who are looking for some kind of job. Among the unemployed, in comparison with the past, there are, therefore,
more people without a real work experience or position and fewer people with a professional status and/or career.

Today, it is common sense to say that it is more difficult for a youth to find his/her first real job than for an adult to find a new job similar to the job that was lost. In Western Europe, this mass condition concerns at least 10 out of 18 million unemployed, and this condition could become worse in the near future [Oecod: 1977; Malinvaud, Fitoussi: 1980; Jallade: 1981; European Economic Community: 1982]. But this is also a social trouble in the United States [Murray: 1978; Ellwood: 1982; Marshall 1983; Lillie, Mishel, Shellabarger: 1987].

Let me emphasize this point. Classic unemployment mainly consisted of workers who had temporarily lost their job for a single period of time as a result of contingent fluctuations of the business cycle, either at the national or at the plant level. It was then a conjunctural problem even if its roots lay in the industrial system. (According to William Beveridge, unemployment was "a problem of industry" [Beveridge: 1909]).

Contemporary joblessness, by contrast, appears to be a structural problem. And although this phenomenon involves an increasing number of young people, it cannot exclusively be regarded as a problem of young people.

2. What about Causes? Let's look briefly at the question of causes. Why is joblessness going up? There are several current explanations:

One is a demographical explanation, related to the well known baby-boom phenomenon. But this phenomenon gives only a partial explanation. In fact, the labor supply of women is everywhere higher than the labor supply of men, in spite of a perfect gender equilibrium in birthrates. So, we also have to take into account a kind of "participation effect", that is, young women's willingness to enter the labor market and to work outside the household.

Another explanation is institutional. According to several scholars and to many entrepreneurs, contemporary joblessness depends on the contraints in the hiring-firing procedures and rules. But this explanation is also weak. In fact, unemployment affects countries with both hard and soft barriers in the hiring-firing process.

There is also an economic explanation. According to many economists, joblessness depends on the excessive wage levels paid to young workers, especially if their wages are related to their output. This kind of explanation works only wherever there are
high levels of young joblessness and little differences between adult's and young people's wages [Beckerman: 1986].

A more persuasive explanation is a sociological one. It stems from the influence of the increasing length of schooling on young people's expectations and behavior. This tendency can only be attributed partially to the extension of schooling. It also comes from the present conditions of the labor market. In fact -- as P. Osterman pointed out -- it is not that trouble in the job search and in the labor market encourages further schooling and higher work expectations.

Let's ask ourselves frankly: "Why is the work age, why is the beginning of a real career becoming more and more advanced?" It is too easy to say: "This is a capitalist system consequence or decision". I don't think so. It is also a consequence of the contemporary relationship between schooling and work.

These relationships are more complicated than twenty years ago, first of all because of the expectations in the labor market in terms of the pay-off from education [Walker, Barton: 1986]. So that the longer education lasts, the longer the entrance in the labor market is delayed. It even seems that the extension of schooling has a more than proportional outcome on the beginning of work activity.

I think, however, that there is a further specific explanation of contemporary joblessness among youths. It is an organizational one. In my opinion, there is evidence of great responsibilities on the demand side because of a new manpower strategy by the firms. I am specifically referring to the tendencies emerging nowadays in the enormous and profound restructuring process of economy, industry and labor.

One consequence is the strong reduction and often the abandoning of any efforts to hoard labor within the firm. At the micro level, this organizational strategy can be defined as follows: "It is better to have one worker less than one worker more". To face the demand fluctuations, therefore, firms choose every kind of flexibility. This strategy reduces the chances for young people much more than for adults because, when an entrepreneur decides at last to hire one worker, he generally prefers an experienced one. In recent years, new jobs were created more by new firms than by old ones, and we know that the new firms prefer to start with experienced workers. These two phenomena operate against employment of young people, and we absolutely must take them seriously.
3. The Main Difficulties. Joblessness seems to be less troublesome than unemployment because its economic consequences are maybe less relevant. In contrast to the past, there is an increased separation between the condition of unemployment and the risk of poverty. In my opinion, the main reasons do not lie in the greater level of workers' household incomes or in the greater amount of state welfare expenditure.

The main explanation really rests on the fact that unemployment consists more of jobs not found than of lost jobs. This circumstance increases the possibility of absorbing and "damping" into the family the consequences of joblessness. This is why the millions of unemployed people in Western countries have not caused the massive impoverishment phenomena we would have expected [Gordon, Gordon: 1966; Gordon: 1972; International Labour Office: 1985]. Unemployment itself is not a determinant of poverty:

- i) Research by the European Economic Community showed that in Italy unemployment, as a specific causal factor, could explain only 11-13 percent of poverty cases in the households with both employed and unemployed people, and only 2 percent in the households consisting entirely of unemployed people [Sarpellon: 1982];

- ii) A government report in 1983 estimated that unemployed people in poor conditions accounted for 12.8 percent of total unemployed people, and 4.6 percent of total poor people [Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri: 1987].

Contemporary joblessness limits the consequences of unemployment as a determinant of poverty. In fact, the condition of jobless people is influenced by a twofold circumstance. On the one hand, they are not totally inactive; on the other hand, they usually have only precarious and peripheral jobs.

This kind of underemployment shows notable geographical differences. In the powerful economic areas, the labor demand is high for both strong and weak jobs. In the other economic areas, labor demand is low for every job.

In the areas where there is less labor demand, such as Southern Italy, we observe a typical "unexpected consequence". Joblessness does not make young people "discouraged workers" since it gives them aspirations for a "secure" job, generally in public service. (This cannot increase the efficiency of public services, since the individuals entering the public sector after years of waiting have very low motivation to work.)
4. Different Features. The economic condition of mass joblessness does not depend only on the socio-professional characteristics of the individuals and on the levels of their household incomes. It also depends on a phenomenon that is often neglected. Joblessness has diluted the typical traditionally "proletarian" characteristics of unemployment. This phenomenon, in fact, involves today many people who are members of the "middle class". This is even more true when joblessness regards young people. And this fact seems to me absolutely relevant.

Contemporary unemployment has become a diversely composed social reservoir since its new features -- because of joblessness -- have increased the social diffusion of the phenomenon. So, contemporary unemployment is increasingly heterogeneous both in terms of earnings and status.

There is surprising but persuasive evidence concerning the long-term unemployed. Years ago, this condition foreshadowed spells of indigence if not poverty. Today, it is endured without major problems by many young people in search of their first job, especially if they are from middle or upper-middle classes. So, unemployment can even touch some strata of the bourgeoisie through its jobless children. This is certainly disconcerting news.

However, the labor market reaffirms the nature of class both of unemployment and employment. After being unemployed, each individual becomes employed on the basis of the opportunities offered by his own social stratum, and there is a very little mobility between strata. Italy’s last General Population Census (1981) showed the following distributions of employed and unemployed people according to their social status [Goldthorpe, Hope: 1974]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>EMPLOYED</th>
<th>UNEMPLOYED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper/middle</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower/middle</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100.0   100.0
Thus, if unemployment attenuates social cleavages, employment reproduces them [Berg: 1981; Therborn: 1986].

5. **Work Paths.** Mass unemployment is a symptom that traditional allocative mechanisms are in crisis. The reason is that today's labor market is substantially different from that of the Taylor-Fordist era.

Until a short time ago, labor demand had a strong influence on the behavior of individual subjects in the labor market. Large industrial companies, for instance, hired entire blocks of unskilled workers and provided very standardized and interchangeable requirements. This kind of labor demand had profound influences on social expectations, skill levels, and geographical mobility. Under this system, labor supply was "modeled" within big and rigid stocks of skills and attitudes.

Until a short time ago -- particularly in Europe -- professions were handed down from parents to children. This typical model of social reproduction of status through employment had a very noticeable influence on social behavior and the class structure itself. In this way, the labor supply was quickly "channeled" within work paths that left little room for individual choice.

Today, the search for work has become for young people a very complicated matter, a real puzzle. In comparison with the past, there are in fact more degrees of freedom and -- at the same time -- more kinds of constraints. Today, labor demand cannot as easily shape labor supply. So, labor supply receives less orientation in professional as well as in social terms. This is a substantial social conquest, but together with new opportunities, it brings new troubles. Everyone in the labor market can and must make his/her choices -- much more than even a few years ago. People who are looking for workers are less interested in individuals with generic and standardized skills. People looking for jobs are more demanding about their future position. And much more than few years ago, all of them want to look closely at each other before joining in a labor contract [Spence: 1974; Granovetter: 1974].

This "road to stable employment" is an uneasy and often long transition for young jobless people [Mcrae: 1987]. Learning how to find a good job is becoming even more difficult than training for it. Such a phenomenon is felt especially in those social strata that never knew unemployment. Many proletarian children are still compelled by need to accept any kind of job as soon as possible. They remain in the era when almost all young people went to work right after finishing school, oriented by their
parents' profession, educated by local productive sub-cultures, and directed by their class ranking [Willis: 1977].

But in general, young people tend to enter the labor market much later. They prolong their schooling:

- i) because education pays both in social and economic terms [Accornero, Carmignani: 1988; Accornero et al.: 1988] in spite of the so called "intellectual unemployment" [Barbagli: 1982];

- ii) because of the troubles they have in searching for a good job;

- iii) because they want to chose a job and in some ways they have to, more than before.

This transition likewise protracts the co-habitation of young jobless people with their family as well as their dependence on their family. This situation is described as "prolonged adolescence". This is probably a less oppressive dependence of young people on their parents than the traditional one. In fact, it helps them. But at the same time they are bound to it. It discourages geographical mobility, it postpones marriage until one finds a good job, it slows procreation, and probably obstructs the spirit of initiative, the "instinct of workmanship" [Veblen: 1914].

This situation makes young jobless people more selective with respect to labor demand. They can be more selective because they are less constrained by their needs and have to be more selective because they are less certain about their future.

6. Some General Consequences. Mass joblessness has many general consequences on household income standards, styles of life, and market resources. These consequences depend on the number, the age, and the profession of household members, either employed, unemployed or out of the labor force. But I want to emphasize that the most lasting effects of the phenomenon remain the least studied. Besides, many of the troubles of joblessness are going to become clear only in the future.

Therefore, it is not enough and it may be misleading to study the social aspects of contemporary unemployment using only the psycho-sociological categories established half a century ago in the well-known research at Marienthal, the small town near Vienna where all the workers had been laid off [Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, Zeisel: 1971; Jahoda, Rush: 1980; Kelvin, Jarret: 1985].
I think that mass unemployment stirs up major preoccupations just because too many governments have demonstrated their inability to solve it. Instead, all governments have tried to face adult unemployment, even by mean of high expenditures. For instance, one remedy consists of massive early-retirement, a solution which is rapidly spreading and which produces "perverse effects" on labor markets.

Mass joblessness seems to be undermining modern capitalism. In what sense? For instance, many researchers are lamenting the output loss determined by youth unemployment. I agree, but it would be better to notice the new way in which capitalism is using young unemployed and the new functions it is assigning them.

First of all, many jobless people -- in this sense not unemployed people -- are becoming in fact "productively" employed and exploited in a great number of precarious and unskilled jobs. Nowadays, joblessness is full of "fragmented" jobs which begin at school age. Jobless people are often "interstitial workers". The reorganization of the industrial system requires manpower able to be more flexible and pliant like the economic structure. [Berger, Piore: 1980; Piore, Sabel: 1984] This dependent role is carried on by many young jobless people.

Secondly, the shift from unemployment to joblessness influences consumption and savings. Since most young jobless people live with their families -- often it is their only chance -- they are good consumers, especially of a whole range of mass products like clothing and entertainment. This market is substantial, strongly advertised and based on swift changes of fashions and types. Young people are leading in this market segment. Therefore:

(i) If we compare two societies with the same level of total unemployment, but one with more unemployed people in a strict sense and the other with more jobless people, the first one will show lower levels of consumption and saving because the heads of households have less income. In the second one, family will provide income sources for the young in search of their first job; furthermore, these young people are often precariously employed in the labor market and earn some kind of income. In conclusion, a society with jobless people, as opposed to a society of unemployed household heads, is a society where the family provides income maintenance.

(ii) If we shift from a full employment society to a society with jobless people, we will have a shift from more saving and durable consumption to less saving and more non-durable consump-
tion. The reason is that household heads provide income to young people that spend their time [Becker, Ghez: 1975] in non-durable consumption while on the contrary the family will reduce saving and durable consumption.5

So, we can say that the capitalist system uses jobless people as a pool of unemployed people that is also able to provide some level of consumption. When the capitalist system is unable to reach full employment, it is more convenient for it to have a pool of jobless people that provide some level of consumption than a pool of unemployed like the traditional one, who are close to the poverty level and do not provide any consumption. Therefore, it is quite plausible to consider jobless people as "consumption dependents".

This coupling of roles -- interstitial worker and consumption dependence -- is perhaps one of the deep explanations both of mass joblessness and of its social durability. If so, this phenomenon requires new recipes.

NOTES

1. Our knowledge of labor markets is insufficient. For example, when National Census Bureau officers interview an individual in order to determine his/her position in the labor market, they ask: "Do you need to work, do you want a job?" Whenever the individual answers: "Yes, I do: I am in search of a job", they do not ask: "How many working hours do you need, do you want?" If they did, they would know the real amount of labor supply by its inner time structure. In fact, now we know only the number of individuals in search of jobs, and we presume that they want a normal full-time job. In fact, however, some individuals want or need more working hours while others seek fewer than the actual present working time. We need a more precise idea of the labor market. (The best way would be to ask: "What wage do you expect for your skill, what earning do you need for your condition?")

2. Note this interesting observation about the U.S. labor market: "While many of the unemployed are affected little by their weeks of idleness, millions of workers who are able to find jobs ... earn less than what is necessary to support themselves and their families" [Taggart: 1982].
3. According to the American Census Bureau, the marrying age in 1988 for both men and women is the highest since the beginning of this century. See the preliminary 1988 "Report on families and households", reported by newspapers, September 20, 1988.

4. For instance, see the issue 'Unemployment' of the review "Social Research", No. 2, April-June, 1987.

5. I am grateful to Andrea Ichino who helped me to define this issue in an economic perspective.