



University of the
West of England

Miller, J. (2010) *How does the labour process impact on employment relations in the small firm? A study of racehorse training stables in the United Kingdom.* PhD thesis, London Metropolitan University.

We recommend you cite the published version.

The publisher's URL is <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/14471/>

Refereed: No

(no note)

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CHAPTER 5

THE LABOUR PROCESS IN RACING

Introduction

This chapter engages with Spencer's (2000) argument that workplace research needs to engage with the specificities of capitalist production, in order to uncover the specific nature of the labour process in racing stables. It therefore takes forward the fourth research aim, to examine and analyse the labour process in racing stables. The labour process in racehorse training is an employment activity that equates very closely to the statement by the Centre for Socialist Economics (1976:1) that in the labour process, 'nature is transformed to fulfil human needs', echoing Marx' original description of the labour process (1976). The horse is an element of nature, even the highly bred and highly-strung thoroughbred racehorse. It is subject to transformation by humans from its natural wild state at birth, to being sold as a yearling and then moving on to the racing stables environment. Thereafter, it is broken in as a riding horse, going on to be trained to become an athlete and a competitor.

The training of racehorses has its own labour process, which reflects the three 'simple elements' of Marx's (1976:284) description, namely purposeful activity; the object of that activity; and the instruments of work. In racing these are (1) the exercising, care and transportation and racing of racehorses, (2) the racehorse itself and (3) the equipment and physical environment of the stable and racecourse. These categories are used here in order to explicitly engage with the racing labour process. For racing a labour process has developed which is shaped by the work of training and racing horses, the rural location and the industry structure in which it takes place, and by the history and development of racing. As discussed in Chapter 3, trainers are constrained by the State, and the myriad groups which make up the industry form a nexus of control which

inevitably has had an effect on the labour process (Ram and Edwards 2003), particularly in terms of the low status of stable staff in a process which is labour intensive. Stable staff are manual labourers whose work is unusual but highly physical. Stable staff are care givers, skilled athletes, equine experts, and in some cases long distance lorry drivers. Their work still retains elements of the craft tradition and, as will become apparent, stable staff accomplish skilled work as well as more routine and mundane tasks.

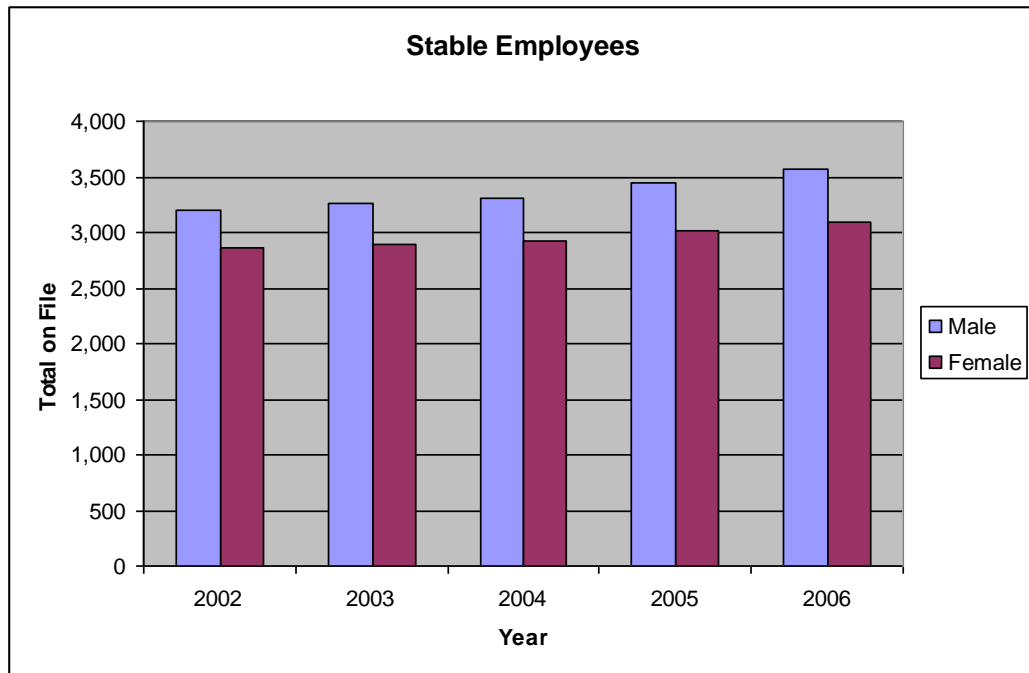
In order to explore this in detail, the chapter discusses the detailed labour process in racing stables. In order to further contextualise the labour process, the first section presents data on contemporary employment in racing, drawing on secondary data produced by the British Horseracing Board (BHB) and presenting stable staff data drawn from Phases A and E of the research. This shows that employment in racing has increased every year, with male and female employment rates almost equal. The next sections set out the three elements of the labour process in turn, drawing on data gathered in Phases A, B and E of the fieldwork. It then discusses the nature of the rural labour process. Finally it reflects on the labour process in small firms and examines how the evidence from racing stables reflects the literature on small firms.

Contemporary stable employment rates

By 2006, 6500 staff were employed in UK stables (Figure 5.1), reflecting the increase in numbers of stables and numbers of horses in training. Stable staff are not required to be licensed but all staff have to be registered with the BHB which issues security passes to stable staff accompanying horses to race meetings. Statistics provided by the British Horseracing Board show that numbers have increased steadily from 2002-2006 and that the ratio of male to female staff remains fairly constant¹.

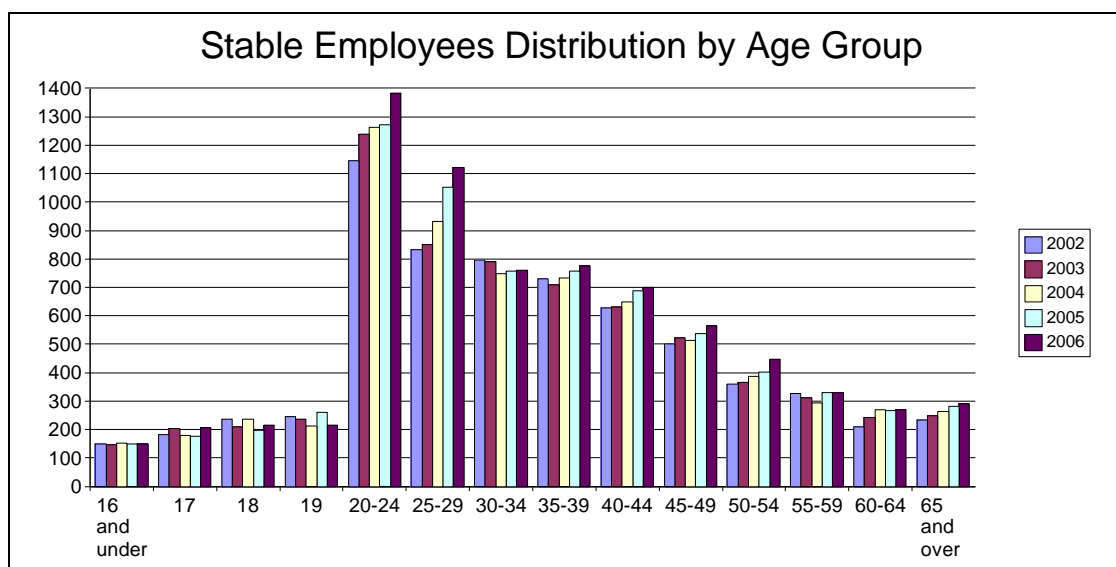
¹ Unfortunately, the statistics were not further analysed by the BHB in terms of grade and age and this information was not forthcoming, despite an enquiry to see if such analysis were possible

Figure 5.1
Employment rates 2002-2006



Source: BHB 2006

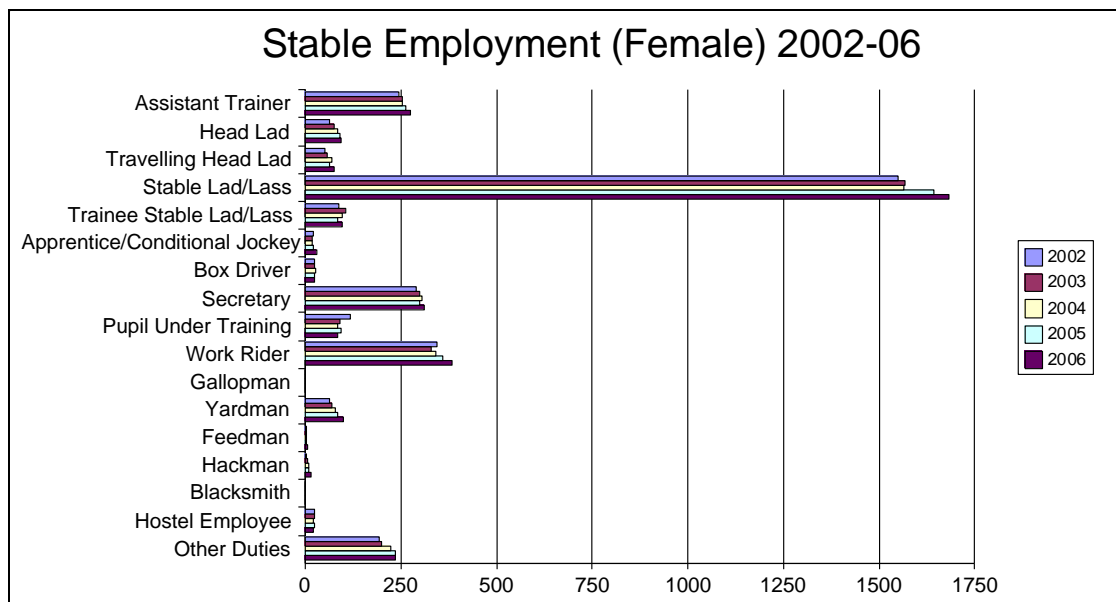
Figure 5.2
Distribution by age group 2002-2006



Source: BHB 2006

Figure 5.2 shows the total population of stable staff by age group, giving evidence of a large concentration of younger workers in the age range 20-29. This may prove significant for this thesis for, as Waddington and Kerr (2002) have shown, this is a key group for union renewal. This aspect of the thesis is taken up again in Chapter 7.

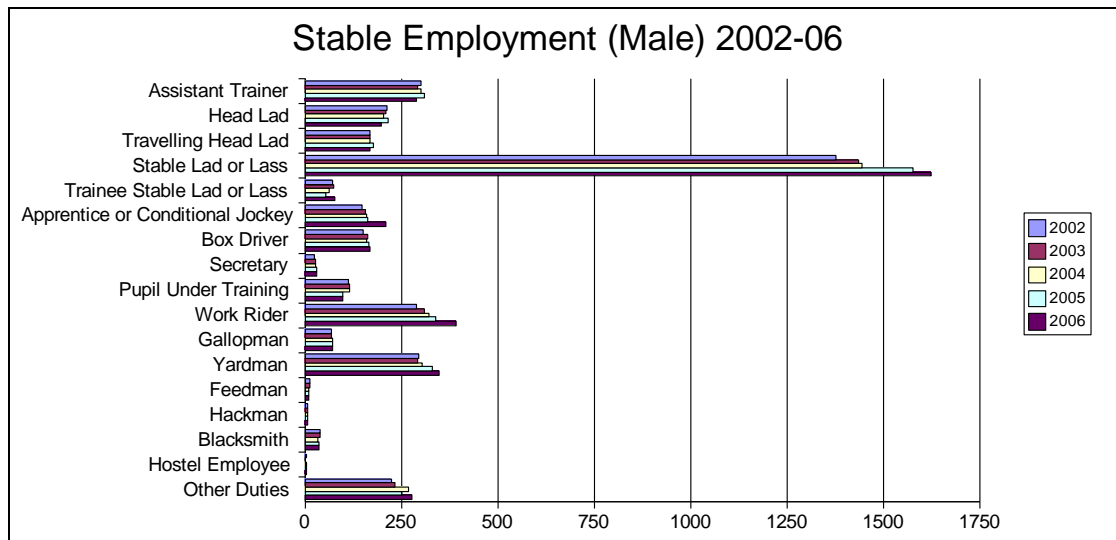
Figure 5.3
Employment rates for women 2002-2006



Source: BHB 2006

Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show that while, large numbers of men and women workers are concentrated in the basic grade of stable lad/lass, far fewer women make it to the first line supervisory grade of head lass/lad. Fewer women again are taken on as apprentice/conditional jockeys. No women are taken on as gallopmen (*sic*), feedmen (*sic*) or blacksmiths but only women are employed as hostel employees (catering and cleaning).

Figure 5.4
Employment rates for men 2002-2006



Source: BHB 2006

Housing

In 1975 many workers still lived in tied housing or hostel accommodation provided by the trainers, reflecting the tradition in farming of low wages and tied accommodation within agricultural workplaces (Newby 1977). This ensured that stable lads were always immediately available twenty-four hours a day. In the post-war years, a move towards providing hostels for stable lads was largely abandoned because they were costly and difficult to run and also because trainers frequently complained that the lads did not look after the facilities or were inclined to go on drunken rampages causing damage. Tied accommodation has now largely been abandoned although trainers do still provide accommodation in particularly remote locations, and/or for very young workers (Winters 2000a; LPC 2001).

In Phase B, it was shown that the majority of trainers provided some accommodation on site, 44 did and 24 did not. However, Table 5.1 reveals that the majority of trainers made provision for small numbers of staff living at their place of work.

Table 5.1
Number of people accommodated on site

Number of people	Number of stables
1-4	28
5-9	8
10+	8
Total	44

Source: Trainer questionnaire Phase B

Further analysis reveals that these were all at stables located in rural areas (Table 5.2). Observation of accommodation provision in Phase A of the research further confirmed this and also showed that accommodation was generally provided for very young workers who either did not drive or could not afford a car to reach their workplace from home. The majority of respondents also revealed that they either did not charge for this or that rents were nominal. Respondent D4² commented on the provision of housing thus

Big yards with a house are an attraction for men in the industry as mortgages are a problem with such low wages.

He was able to offer a self-contained flat in his house, currently occupied by one of the stable girls who did not have a car.

Staff accommodation ranged from caravans (Respondent A11³), to purpose built houses (Respondent A9⁴) and rooms within the trainer's own house (Trainer A14⁵; Respondent D4).

² Trainer and NTF Council member interviewed at his stables October 2003

³ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Thirsk May 2003

⁴ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Didcot May 2000

⁵ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Rugeley May 2000

Table 5.2
Location of stables providing accommodation

Location	Stables
Newmarket	12
Lambourn	13
South East	8
South West	8
Midlands	3
North West	3
Yorkshire	10
North East	6
Scotland	1
Wales	2

Source: Trainer questionnaire Phase B

The Stable and Stud Staff Commission (BHB 2004) pointed out that for those staff who were provided with accommodation, this was a valuable addition to wages as many staff were unable to afford to buy their own home and many also found it difficult to rent in towns like Newmarket where rents were generally high. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 show responses given in Phase A.

While renting houses did not seem to be too much of a problem, purchasing was. This

Table 5.3
Renting Housing

	I can afford to rent housing near to work			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	8	1	5	14
Female	5	0	5	10
Total	13	1	10	24

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

Table 5.4
Buying a house

	I can afford to buy housing near to work			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	3	1	11	15
Female	3	0	7	10
Total	6	1	18	25

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

further confirmed by Respondent E7⁶ who commented that:

If I wasn't married to a lawyer, we wouldn't be able to afford to buy a house on my wages.

He was based in Wantage, in the Thames Valley, an area of very high cost housing.

Wages

The pay of stable lads derives from three sources, weekly wages, a variable element embodied in prize money attracted by successful racehorses and the hourly rate paid for time spent working away from the stables, typically going racing. The weekly pay rate is set annually by the National Joint Council for Stable Staff (NJCSS) in 'negotiation' with the Stable Lads' Association (SLA) and is a minimum pay rate. Drawing some comparisons with the National Minimum wage, and a comparator group of agricultural workers, it can be seen in Table 5.5 that stable staff aged 21 have maintained a differential of around 75p over the NMW and a differential of around 40p over agricultural workers. This is a fairly crude comparison as the NJC and Agricultural Wages Order grading structures are more complex and thus difficult to compare throughout. However, it does show that those stable staff who rely on the NJC pay rates to determine the wages are scarcely well paid.

⁶ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Taunton January 2004

Table 5.5
Comparison of NJC, NMW and AWO pay rates

Year	National Joint Council for Stable Staff*	National Minimum Wage**	Agricultural Wages Order***
	Grade A £ per hour 40 hour week	Main rate £ per hour	Standard worker £ per hour 39 hour week
2000	4.54	3.70	Not available
2001	4.81	4.10	Not available
2002	5.01	4.20	Not available
2003	5.26	4.50	5.15
2004	5.57	4.85	5.40
2005	5.76	5.05	5.40
2006	5.90	5.35	5.74
2007	6.30	5.52	6.00
2008	6.61	5.73	6.26

Sources: * NTF
** Business Link
*** Agricultural Wages Board

It has not proved possible to make a complete comparison for the period, as the Agricultural Wages Orders for 2000-2002 have not been made available by the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB 2005), following a decision under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 not to publish missing data retrospectively.

The survey of trainers in Phase B painted a similar picture although it is difficult to form firm conclusions since only 15% of trainers provided valid responses, 69 trainers in total. The survey asked trainers to reflect on the impact that the NMW had had on their businesses and nearly all set out pay scales that were in advance not only of the NMW but also of the NJC minimum pay rates. Again, comparisons are difficult to draw throughout the sample but, taking the rates paid to the basic stable staff grade at 21+, the following average hourly rates were being paid in the main racing centres in 2000:

Table 5.6
Average hourly rates paid to stable staff 21+

Newmarket	Lambourn	Middleham	NJC rate
£5.69	£5.95	£5.28	£4.54

Source: Trainer questionnaire Phase B

The majority of questionnaire respondents commented that these were the rates they had to pay, in order to recruit and retain qualified staff. However, when compared to the national minimum rates set out in the NJC agreement, the differences only amount to a few pence per cent. It must also be pointed out that these are average differentials, based on very small samples. Nevertheless, this suggests that where there are concentrations of racing stables, local pay rates are ‘negotiated’, although there is no formal mechanism for doing this. That being said, a ‘ripple effect’ would also appear to be in force since the other respondents dispersed round the UK mainly showed that they were paying more than the NJC minimum rates. There is an interesting gap that could usefully be addressed in the future to explore the mechanisms whereby small firms in the same industry, and their workers, deal with pay bargaining. Although few indicated that they were paying less than the NJC rates, it is striking that those trainers who did admit this were in racing centres, rather than isolated rural locations. Three trainers admitted that they were paying below the rates stipulated by the NJC: one near Lambourn paying £4.10 ph, one in Newmarket paying £4.25 ph and the third in Middleham paying £3.60 per hour.

This forms part of the stable staff position of disadvantage, which neither of the regulatory bodies sought to address until 2000 when labour shortages finally forced the BHB to address the problem (BHB 2000; Winters 2000a). Low pay still remains an issue, and was addressed again by the Donoughue Commission, instigated by the BHB in 2003 (BHB 2004:38) which concludes that for entry pay with competitors who also

recruit school leavers 'racing is not competitive with the police, army or nursing'. The commission also comments (ibid:16) 'pay remains too low for many stable staff to rent or purchase housing', partially confirming the earlier results from the Flat racing survey in Phase A (Winters 2000a).

Stable staff are also entitled to a share in prize money which has been in payment since at least 1974 (Jockey Club 1974) and is variable pay, enshrined in Rule 195 of the Rules of Racing (BHA 2008), which currently allows for 5% of prize money to be set aside for distribution amongst stable staff. Rule 195(d) (ibid) stipulates that:

The Stable Employees of the Trainer will decide the distribution criteria which will be applied to the percentage money. Payments may only be made to persons whose names are included in the Register of Stable Employees as being either currently employed by the Trainer or employed by him during the period covered by the payment. A copy of the criteria must be displayed in the stable yard in a place where it can be inspected by all employees.

Respondent E5⁷ said that there was no prize money at her yard as the horses were not successful and it was not seen as a successful yard, which made it difficult to recruit staff. Respondent A18⁸ said that he received a share of prize money four times a year as the trainer had proved to be successful with the horses he trained. Respondent A41⁹ complained that stable staff only received a fraction of what owners received and that the stable staff portion should be increased to 10%, while Respondent A52¹⁰ complained that owners received prize money untaxed, whereas it was taxed as part of stables staff wages and thus was a diminished form of reward.

A third element of wages was the time to be paid to stable staff when away from the yard, that is to say when going racing. For every hour spent on racing duties, staff were to be paid no more than the National Minimum Wage rate, that is to say not even the national minimum rate stipulated in the NJC agreement, let alone the actual hourly rate in payment when at the stables. This was a contentious issue, as revealed in Phase A

⁷ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Cheltenham December 2003

⁸ Yard Man interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

⁹ Stable lass interviewed at Arundel May 2000

¹⁰ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Thirsk stables May 2000

and in Phase D. Respondent D4¹¹ was frankly amazed that the SLA had agreed to this and it was certainly an issue that stable staff were not happy about. Respondent E7¹² could not understand why lads were paid a lower overtime rate when going racing. Respondents A27, A33, A53 all asked how it could be that overtime was only paid at National Minimum Wage rates and that they were paid more if doing overtime on the yard. None of these respondents seemed to be aware that this was the agreement ‘negotiated’ on their behalf by the SLA.

The foregoing sections show that a number of issues have been and remain long standing problems for the industry, particularly pay and hours of work. It has also been shown that the industry does, from time to time, look at staffing issues from the national level (for example the Blackwell report in 1974 and the Stable Staff Resources Study Group in 1999) with varying outcomes for workers. These issues were returned to again in 2003/4 by the Stable and Stud Staff Commission (BHB 2004), coinciding with Phases D and E of the fieldwork discussed in this thesis.

Purposeful activity - The working day and week

The work of stable staff is divided between stables duties and the activity of ‘going racing’. Table 5.7 on the next page sets out the working day in detail, including all activities for ease of reference. This section deals with the daily work routine at the stables which can be described as follows. Stable staff work a split shift, typically commencing between 6 and 7 am and working through to 12.30/13.00. The early start is in order to get the best going on the gallops, that is to say before the ground is too churned up by heavy use. The remainder of the shift commences at 16.00, normally finishing around 18.00. This shift pattern is organised over a 12.5 day fortnight, with staff divided on overlapping fortnights, in order to ensure the care of the horse 7 days a week. The variation in this pattern is on a race day, or when attending horse sales,

¹¹ NTF Council member interviewed at his stables October 2003

¹² Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Taunton January 2004

when the day may finish well in to the evening or involve an overnight stay. The contracted hours as set out in the NJCSS Memorandum of Agreement (BHB 2007) are 40 over a period of five and a half days.

Purposeful activity - Work duties

For stable staff the day is therefore divided into ‘morning stables’ with exercise routines for the horses, and ‘evening stables’ when the horses are settled down for the night in their stables. The most varied duties arise in the morning session and involve the feeding and mucking out of at least three horses (‘doing your three’); exercising the same three; and on race days getting one or more horses ready to travel to the racetrack. These duties involve elements of skill and of routinised labour; they also contain directed and supervised activity, plus a significant amount of autonomous work. The routine lies in the mucking out, rug changing, grooming, cleaning tack and tidying the yard. The skill lies in the speed of task achievement to the trainer’s or head lad’s standards. A further element of routine work surrounds feeding the horses and this routine, if not followed accurately, may have adverse consequences for the well being of the horse.

As Cassidy (2002:111) observed from her own research in Newmarket, ‘Lads engage in a profession that grants a certain amount of autonomy’. The autonomous element lies within the daily exercise of each horse which, while conducted under the trainer’s specific instructions regarding pace and distance over which to exercise, requires riding skill *and* becomes highly individualised once the rider is working with his or her horse on the gallops. The rider is entirely responsible for his or her safety on horseback and has to assume responsibility for the safe work of the racehorse. While rider and horse proceed from and return to the stables in a ‘string’ of horses, ie a group situation, they still need to be aware of and effectively control the animal they are to exercise. Horses are unpredictable and even the calmest animal may be startled unexpectedly. Moreover,

once on turf, although the racehorse is in its element and is ready 'to go', the rest of the string surrounds it and also horses from other stables in the area, all similarly worked up. These natural equine reactions are at odds with the rider's instructions with regard to pace, distance and other instructions, and control requires considerable skill.

What is perhaps surprising is the degree of continuity in some aspects of racing, particularly with regard to working practices. As Munting recorded (1987:121) 'The detailed work of training horses has changed hardly at all'. This was supported by Herbert (1974:14-15) who recorded that:

Life in a racing stable, as we approach the last quarter of the twentieth century, remains basically feudal...the ways of a racing stable have changed hardly more in the last convulsive century than have the saddles and bridles and the shoes on the horses' hooves.

This can be confirmed at the start of the 21st century also, since a lack of technological input, coupled with a labour intensive labour process, are still present as observed in racing stables during Phase A (Winters 2000a). While neither Munting (1987) nor Herbert (1974) was addressing industrial relations issues, these are still telling factors in seeking an explanation of the reasons for the current state of affairs between trainers and their workers, taking Thompson's position (1983) that the nature of work is itself a significant feature in reaching an understanding of industrial relations, but one which is largely overlooked in the labour process literature, for example.

Skilled work or unskilled work?

The work of a lad is regarded by many, and in particular their employer, as unskilled labour. The opinion that 'if they don't like the work/conditions/wages then they can go elsewhere' was often encountered in Phase A of the fieldwork and yet, then as now, racing has always faced labour shortages, as observed above by Gallier (1988). It is no easy business to deal with a highly-strung thoroughbred and there is plenty of evidence that a great deal of skill is required to work with these animals (Gallier 1988: Cassidy 2002). Some owners of racehorses seem to have been more conscious of this fact, even

to the extent of placing a more accurate estimation of the value of the competent stable worker to a successful racehorse. For example, in an account of his successful horse, Park Top, the Duke of Devonshire (2000:17) observed:

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance to a thoroughbred's racing career of the part played by the lad or girl who looks after it. He or she is the human being with whom the horse is in constant contact. The lad or, as in this case [of Park Top], the girl not only grooms the horse twice a day, she also feeds and rides the horse at exercise daily.

The stable lad is in the unique position of observing the daily nuances of equine behaviour – after all, the trainer has devolved that responsibility to him or her, whether the skill involved is acknowledged by the trainer or not. The stable lad knows about 'his' or 'her' horses in great detail and this is a knowledge that is of great value to the employer. Two comments in particular encapsulated the general view of staff being interviewed; Respondent A22¹³ said:

Our work is highly skilled. It would be 100% easier to take a racing lad into a factory to learn to use a machine than take a machinist out of that factory and try to teach him how to ride a racehorse and everything else an 'unskilled' racing lad can do.

Respondent A66¹⁴ said that:

It really frustrates me that people don't see that a stable lad/lass's job is a skilled one. You could not just drag anybody in off the street and expect them to ride out 3 or 4 lots, break-in, school, drive horseboxes, etc etc

Respondent E15¹⁵ added:

Stable staff are the 'wheels of the industry'. We are craft workers, old school, all-rounders who know everything about horses

This was echoed by questionnaire respondents who held that their work was skilled as Table 5.8 shows.

¹³ Stable lad interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

¹⁴ Staff questionnaire respondent

¹⁵ Stable Lass interviewed at Haydock Park February 2004

Table 5.8
Work skills

	Our work in racing is a skilled profession		
	Agree	Unsure	Total
Male	15	1	16
Female	9	1	10
Total	24	2	26

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

The nail was squarely hit on the head by Respondent D4¹⁶ who held that ‘staff are skilled but the problem is that there is no formal recognition of skill’. As skill remains unquantified, staff cannot make progress and as Respondent A21¹⁷ argued:

Training needs higher status and there should be more formal recognition of skills gained within the job

Nevertheless, the evidence from a range of sources was that the role of stable staff is key to a successful racehorse. As Filby found (1983) poor stable relationships may mar a horse irrevocably; for example, a horse which is particularly nervous around humans will need sensitive handling by its stable lad/lass lest it becomes unrideable and thus not able to participate in races. Cassidy (2002:112) also identifies that a skilled lad is in command of ‘techniques which are unique to the racing industry...Riding racehorses is conducted according to its own detailed set of rules that cannot be extrapolated from the technology alone, so must be learnt’. She remarks on the sheer physicality of the task, which requires a quite different blend of riding skills than those normally encountered or expected. These skills mark out the work of stable staff as unique. Horses are highly dependent on their human caregivers, with racehorses being utterly so, both at the training stables and when racing.

¹⁶ Trainer and member of the NTF Council interviewed at October 2003

¹⁷ Stable Lass interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

An additional aspect of their work is that their skill set is industry-focussed as Table 5.9 reveals, at least for the male respondents. For the women, this was quite a different matter, perhaps reflecting the gendered nature of work in racing, where the other job opportunities open to women are as secretaries or working in hostels (see Figure 5.3). Comments from stable girl, Interviewee E15¹⁸ showed that she considered that stable staff had a skill set which encompassed some

Table 5.9
Transferable skills

	I have skills which I can use in another industry			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	5	2	9	16
Female	5	4	1	10
Total	10	6	10	26

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

transferable skills, particularly secretarial and how to deal with people, as well as the skills explicitly used when riding. Her companion, Respondent E14¹⁹, said:

You have to learn quickly, be sharp, be cunning. You need diplomatic skills, PR skills, secretarial skills. You need to be tough and fit.

Stable staff believe that their work is skilled and not easily replaced. As the next section will show, this has more recently become an issue for trainers with the expansion of Flat racing since 1999.

Deskilling and work intensification

Spencer (2000:228) argues that Braverman ‘emphasised that deskilling would only be actualised when conditions allowed it to develop’. In the racing labour process, it is very difficult to see how the work could be deskilled in the same way that work on a moving assembly line may be organised into small, routine and repetitive tasks. Stable

¹⁸ Stable Lass interviewed at Haydock Park February 2004

¹⁹ Stable Lass interviewed at Haydock Park February 2004

work requires the daily performance of a close relationship between each worker and each horse being cared for. The horse/human relationship is the central dynamic of the racing labour process, not only in the practical daily routine but also as discussed later as a means of control. Mize (2006) argues in his study of the agricultural labour process, that it is very difficult to use labour process theorists' preoccupation with the degradation of work and deskilling to non-factory work processes, particularly rural and agricultural work. The main argument for retaining traditional working methods, put forward by trainers and stable staff (Winters 2000b) was the need for racehorses to have continuity and consistency of handling, hence the allocation of horses to individual stable staff. A key feature of the racing production process is the difficulty trainers have in adopting a division of labour to allow work to be speeded up at management's will. Trainers lack the technical means of control that would ensue from a machine driven system (Edwards 1979). Moreover, workers remain in the position of the collective worker identified by Marx (1976:464) as a precursor to the division of labour in factory production, that is to say a 'combination of the many specialised workers which is to be found in the individual workshop'. Taken together, the combined features of racing production leave the individual stables at the level of an industrial workshop, with the trainer being the 'master craftsman', directing the work of a collection of specialised workers, each of whom undertakes the full range of craft activities associated with training racehorses. However, very few stable staff are able to become trainers, unlike apprentices whose aim is to become master craftsmen. As discussed in Chapter 3, a great deal of capital is involved in starting up the business of training racehorses; most trainers have either inherited their business, have diversified into racing from farming, have capital of their own from other sources or are supported by others who wish to invest their capital.

The only area of the stables labour process where tasks are regularly divided up is where trainers also meet a general shortage of labour by engaging the services of specialist ‘work riders’ whose sole task is to exercise one or two lots of horses for as many days as required. These are jockeys or other competent riders who solely take horses on their daily exercise routine and undertake no other stables duties. The trigger for this was the actions of the BHB which decided in 1999 to expand the Racing Calendar in order to ‘grow the product’. The expansion of the racing calendar to seven days a week on the Flat did not command wholehearted support from staff as Table 5.10 shows.

Table 5.10
Support for Sunday racing

	I support Sunday racing			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	3	4	10	17
Female	3	3	4	10
Total	6	7	14	27

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

Moreover, this is a source of grievance as additional part time staff who come in specifically to exercise racehorses in the morning have no additional stable duties. They are engaged for their riding skills and paid a fee per horse, sometimes earning wages approaching those of a stable hand:

Part timers – we cannot do without them but they are earning only £30 less than the full time staff. Part timers come in at 6 am, ride out two lots and go home (Respondent A27²⁰)

The same problem still existed in 2004 as E21²¹ reported that while tasks were being stratified in some stables:

Pay needs to be looked at as some part time staff are still earning almost as much as us full timers, but without the irksome duties round the yard.

²⁰ Stable lad interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

²¹ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

Filby (1983:209) predicted that ‘that the signs of greater specialisation heralding a more permanent division of labour between work jockeys and general riders and workers performing non-riding functions will become more evident’. In that sense, he saw trainers going down the line of deskilling discussed by Braverman (1974) by the use of part time workers. However, then as now, this is more to do with meeting an entrenched labour shortage in the industry which was highlighted by the Blackwell report in 1974, and has remained a problem ever since (BHB 1999; Winters 2000a; BHB 2004).

In 2000 the employers proposed that shift working should be introduced in order to meet the increased demands of the racing calendar. Responding to this, Respondent A22²² held that:

I don't think shift work would benefit anyone as this is an industry in which you need to know your job and that means that you would need more people to know more about the horses and here we go back to the catch 22 position again [staff shortage].

This is echoed by Respondent A1²³, who said that the shift system was ‘dead in the water’ while a Respondent A10²⁴ said that he did not want different lads on horses in the morning exercise routine, he needed horses consistently ridden by the same lad or lass who knew that horse inside out. As already established above, staff also need to have an intimate knowledge of ‘their’ horses since ‘the unsuccessful practice of racehorse riding can result in serious injuries and even death’ (Cassidy 2002:117).

Paragraph 45 of the NJC agreement (BHB 2007) talks of the *ideal* ratio of one lad to three horses but there is no express term in the employment contract which guarantees this. Intensification of work is therefore achieved by requiring stable staff to look after three horses on a daily basis, increasing to five or even ten when covering staff absences/race days/labour shortage. As a result of this change, the employer is able to

²² Stable Lass interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

²³ Trainer interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

²⁴ Trainer interviewed in Lambourn June 2000

realise greater surplus value by higher rates of allocation, coupled with deskilling in the form of corner cutting in the stable routine to meet greater time constraints.

A further source of intensification is the lengthening of the working week, at least for those stables involved with Flat racing, where the racing calendar has been extended to seven days a week. As discussed above, this has brought a working pattern which is not only excessive but in breach of the Working Time Regulations, where workers are required to work 14 weekends in a row, without a break.

This was bitterly complained of when it first became a problem (Winters 2000a) but has never been challenged through the National Joint Council or at employment tribunals. The 2007 NJC Agreement (BHB 2007) now states that the reference period over which hours are calculated had been changed from 17 weeks to 52 weeks, and that individual employees could be excluded from protection under the Working Time Regulations, provided they signed an opt out agreement. When the question of the opt out was posed in Phase A, only Respondent A17²⁵ was clear that, as a Travelling Head Lad, he had formally waived his rights.

Working hours were a source of complaint in Phase A of the fieldwork, with staff emphatic that working hours should be shorter, as Table 5.11 shows.

Table 5.11
Working hours

	Working hours should be shorter			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	14	3	0	17
Female	6	2	2	10
Total	20	5	2	27

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

The arrangement of hours across a fortnight (a long running arrangement) prompted the following comments:

²⁵ Head Lad interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

Weekends off should be from the Friday night-Monday. We only have 1.5 days off every 2 weeks. Doing my job I won't even get that through the summer. Especially with all the Sunday meetings on now! (Respondent A18²⁶)

I am lucky in that I work for a trainer that I can say to that I want a day off when I feel tired. However, this is not the case for the majority of people (Respondent A25²⁷)

The Memorandum of Agreement (NTF 2007) stipulated that workers had a right to one weekend in two free from duties 'having regard to the nature and requirements of the industry'.

The staff diaries added to this. Diaries 1A and 1C both reported having to work on weekends off and it was a general complaint amongst all respondents that weekends off were difficult to get. Respondent E5²⁸ commented:

There's no time to go shopping and attend to personal issues. Too much racing and not enough staff. I've no racing tomorrow [Saturday] and none Sunday, thank God.

while Respondent E16²⁹ said that he was working on his day off (a Saturday) at Haydock Park, travelling back to base in Dorset that night, then was immediately travelling from Dorset to Plumpton in Sussex, and on to Folkestone in Kent. These two respondents were both employed in National Hunt racing, so it was evident that a shortage of labour was still a problem some four years after Phase A of the research and across both codes of racing.

Diaries A1, A3 and A5 also reported very late finishes (between 21.00 and 01.00) on race days on a total of 10 occasions over the month being surveyed. Generally, the customary practice was that late finishes should allow a late start the following day but each respondent recorded that they were back at work the following day at 06.00 or 07.00, the normal start time at their particular stables. Respondent E5 reported that she had set off at 6 am to get to the race meeting at Cheltenham and was supposed to be

²⁶ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

²⁷ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Newmarket June 2000

²⁸ Stable lass interviewed at Cheltenham December 2003

²⁹ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Haydock Park February 2004

able to come in late the following day. However, she said that she had only tried this once and had been reprimanded by her trainer. The 2000 Memorandum of Agreement implied that a late start should be allowed (NTF 2000); the 2006 Agreement makes this explicit (NTF 2006).

Long hours form part of the reality of this labour process but for those working on the Flat especially the new reality was that the expansion of the racing calendar meant ever intensifying workload. As discussed in Chapter 3, the BHB moved race meetings on to a seven days per week basis without first ascertaining whether there were enough stable staff to meet this demand. As reported by the Stable Staffs Resources Study Group (BHB 2000), set up to address this issue, 104 consecutive days racing on the Flat were scheduled between April and August 2000. With 17.5% labour turnover, it proved difficult to meet the demand in 2000³⁰ and this has been an on-going problem as reported by the Donoughue Commission on Stud and Stable Staff (BHB 2004), which estimated a turnover of 22% in 2003.

Work intensification and holidays

While workers knew that working with horses was not an easy job, the lack of breaks in Phase A was starting to take its toll:

Conditions are very hard in the winter, which is accepted, but mainly it's the long hours (with the split in the middle of the day) and the endless days without a break. It's normal for most the lads/lasses to work 6/8 weeks without a day off. Even to work the normal 13 days without one off in this day and age is just too much. (Respondent A25³¹)

As can be seen from Table 5.12, this also had an impact on holiday arrangements and several respondents complained that it was virtually impossible to get a holiday during the summer Flat racing season, a particular problem for those with families.

³⁰ Phase A of the research

³¹ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Newmarket June 2000

Table 5.12
Holiday arrangements

	I can take a holiday when I want			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	3	1	12	16
Female	1	0	9	10
Total	4	1	21	26

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

As Table 5.13 shows, it was also very difficult for all staff to take time off during the week,

Table 5.13
Days Off

	I can take a day off during the week			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	3	3	10	16
Female	4	0	6	10
Total	7	3	16	26

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

The NJC agreement stated that ‘Holidays will be taken at times to be mutually agreed and will have regard to what is practical in the local circumstances’ (NTF 2007). Practically speaking, this was sufficiently flexible to allow employers to deny days off because the ‘local circumstances’ of increased amounts of racing inevitably meant that it was never going to be ‘practical’ to roster days off during the week. The evidence from staff was that holidays were taken at times imposed on them by the dictates of racing, rather than times which suited them and/or their families.

Status of stable staff

The status of stable staff in the racing labour process, and in the industry generally, is a key issue. From the following comments it was clear that staff felt that their work went unappreciated:

It's like being in the 1800s, the bosses feel they are doing you a favour in giving you a job. (Respondent A24³²)

We are riding valuable animals, but paid a pittance. (Respondent A18³³)

Observations also revealed that in the post mortems which inevitably followed a race, particularly unsuccessful ones, the stable lad or girl would not be directly involved while the horse's 'connections' (trainer and owners) conferred. An example of this was at the Cheltenham meeting where Respondent E5³⁴ walked the horse round to cool him off, effectively becoming part of the horse, but was not included in those discussions happening a few feet away from her. She probably knew at least as much as the trainer, if not more, about that individual horse since she looked after him daily, exercised him daily and probably schooled him over fences too.

This is signified not only by low pay and the issue of unrecognised skill but the fact that stable staff are excluded from industry bodies. Although there is the National Joint Council for Stable Staff (NJCSS), it does not seem that this operates as a very effective mechanism for including staff in major decisions. For example, it was only following an expansion of Flat racing to a seven day a week pattern that the BHB acknowledged that there was a labour shortage that might hamper their marketing of racing's product. The staff were not consulted about the increased amount of racing. An overwhelming majority of those surveyed in 2000 responded that they had not been consulted as Table 5.14 shows.

³² Head Lad interviewed at Newmarket June 2000

³³ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Newmarket June 2000

³⁴ Observed at Cheltenham October 2003

Table 5.14
I was consulted about increased racing

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	2	1	14	17
Female	0	0	10	10
Total	2	1	24	27

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

As Respondent A18³⁵ said, the first he and others had learnt of the newly expanded calendar was in the Racing Post.

Staff advanced the facilities at some racecourses as symbolic of their status:

The majority of racecourses facilities for stable staff are *disgraceful*; most, I think, would be both a health and a fire hazard, but as usual it doesn't matter how much we ask or complain, nothing is ever done about it because we don't matter. (Respondent A22³⁶)

Some canteens and stable lads digs for overnight stays need desperately paying some attention to. A lot more needs to be done for stable lads. If it wasn't for stable lads there would be NO racing at all. They are the ones who put in all the hard work into even getting them to a racetrack. There are no thanks or rewards for us. (Respondent A18³⁷)

Respondent A26³⁸ summed the position up as follows:

If only more people could get an insight into life behind that big door of hard work, wet snowy mornings, slippery reins and getting run away with, mucking out, looking after six horses, riding out 3, 4, 5 or 6 horses, a few more eyes might get opened and the big face of reality in to the job we really do.

Lack of appreciation was also recorded by the Stable and Stud Staff Commission (BHB 2004:53) which found that:

A lack of recognition and a poor work culture are also significant causes of job dissatisfaction after low pay and long hours.

Nevertheless, stable staff do occupy an important position in the labour process since, as Herbert (1974:40) found in his study of a racing stables:

³⁵ Stable Lad interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

³⁶ Stable Lass interviewed in Newmarket June 2000

³⁷ Travelling Head Lad interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

³⁸ Head Lad interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

The responsibility vested in lads is great. The safety, even the life of valuable horses...depends not just on the ability of their lad to sit tight. It depends too on the understanding which that lad's experience and acumen bring to bear on that horse. The horse will be improved by a good lad's or a good girl's sense and sensitivity; it will be grossly marred by their lack.

As Cassidy concluded (2002:111), lads are kept at a structural disadvantage but:

By taking control of a racehorse on the Heath [in Newmarket] the lad exercises an element of control over the owner of that horse, momentarily reversing the relationship between the two.

and also briefly reversing the relationship with their trainer. While staff clearly recognise their contribution to the labour process, this is not formally acknowledged in the wage-effort bargain.

The object of work – the racehorse

As it can be seen, the training and care of racehorses is a labour intensive process, where it is virtually impossible to substitute machines for human labour, with the exception of the mechanised horse walker used to exercise some horses; its use will depend on a range of factors – age, temperament, gender, that is to say it is not a device which is suitable for all horses, nor does each stable have one. In this sense Braverman's comment (1974:51) that 'human labor...stored in such products as domesticated animals, represents the sole resource of humanity in confronting nature' is particularly apt.

A racehorse cannot be ignored and dominates daily working life for trainer and staff, 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year. Moreover, workers live on site or nearby and in communities that are often entirely made up of workers involved in racing. Thus stable staff can never get away from their work, they 'eat, drink, sleep horses'. This was emphasised by the following comments:

Loss of your horse through death at a race meeting is the most awful thing.
(Respondent E5³⁹)

³⁹ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Cheltenham December 2003

I got out of racing because I lost a horse when a schooling accident killed him. Horses are like my children. (Respondent E14⁴⁰)

and, with regard to the poor pay and poor conditions at some racecourses:

So long as my horses are happy, I can put up with this. (Respondent E16)

As observed by Respondent E13⁴¹:

Employers play on the fact that the workers love horses and will tell a worker that *your* horse is going racing therefore *you* must work on your day off in order to take *your* horse racing.

However, going racing is a hook as Respondent E10⁴² states:

I enjoy the buzz of going racing doing a winner, winning best turned out. Meeting people from other parts of the country you haven't seen for years.

but going racing is not without its difficulties as these comments reveal:

Driving horses is stressful, as you have to be aware of what is happening in the box while also concentrating on the traffic. (Respondent E6⁴³)

I do lots of driving. This is very stressful for the horses, especially if we are delayed. (Respondent E18⁴⁴)

Stable staff must necessarily have a close bond with the animal(s) in their charge since the essence of successful horse(wo)manship lies in the ability to understand and control the animal being ridden. In the racing context, successful racehorses are being asked to act against their natural state, that of a herd animal, in order to win by breaking away from the herd at the crucial moment in a race. During the daily exercise routine, stable staff need to have precisely the same degree of control, not least for their own personal safety while riding. The training of racehorses exemplifies what Burawoy (1979:30) means when he refers to mechanisms within the labour process which are capable of 'constituting workers as individuals rather than members of a class'. In racing, there are

⁴⁰ Stable Lass interviewed at Haydock Park February 2004

⁴¹ Jockey Club Security Officer interviewed at Chepstow January 20004

⁴² Stable Lad interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

⁴³ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Taunton January 2004

⁴⁴ Box driver interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

strong reasons why stable staff have to have an individual relationship with the object of their labours.

Despite the problems of work intensification discussed above, stable staff still found the job enjoyable, comprehensively disagreeing that the increased amounts of racing and horses to deal with had produced a factory-like atmosphere (Table 5.15). In the end, as Respondent E21⁴⁵ said, ‘I’ve got the best job in racing’, but he also admitted that he would leave ‘tomorrow’ as there was too much racing, hours were too unpredictable, and marriages could be ruined as a result.

Table 5.15
Is racing like factory work now?

	Racing is like working in a factory nowadays			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	6	2	9	17
Female	1	2	7	10
Total	7	4	16	27

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

Higher workloads were tempered by the fact that staff overwhelmingly wanted to work with horses as shown in Table 5.16. Respondent E13⁴⁶ was at pains to point out that ‘the horse is a tremendous hook’ and confirmed the author’s previous experience that ‘for all those who leave, most will come back to racing’. He noted that ‘lots of staff like working in a small yard’ even preferring to remain at a small and unsuccessful yard, which did not attract much if any prize money, simply because they enjoyed their work with horses.

⁴⁵ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

⁴⁶ Jockey Club Security Officer interviewed at Chepstow January 2004

Table 5.16
Reasons for joining the industry

	I wanted to be a jockey	Background with horses	I wanted to work with horses	Love of horses	Other	Total
Male	3	2	2	6	3	16
Female	1	3	2	2	1	9
Total	4	5	4	8	4	25

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

Respondent A27⁴⁷ made the point that money was not an incentive but also underlined the fact that workers will put up with poor wages to continue working in the industry:

No lad or lass comes into racing for the money but for the love of horses, that's what keeps the majority in the industry.

While Respondent A26⁴⁸ pointed out that staff would even find ways of subsidising those wages:

As people say, you work in racing for the love of the horses and not the money. But when you don't get a lot to start off with, it tends to sometimes dishearten you when you love your horses to bits but have to have another job on the side, like I do, in a pub on a night time to compensate for the lack of wage in your main job.

However, there was another side to this as the following comments reveal:

Trainers need to reflect on how they treat staff and how that impacts on exercising horses. (Respondent A25⁴⁹)

referring to the important position of staff in the successful outcome of the labour process. E13⁵⁰ said that:

A lot of bosses put horses way above humans. They are hopeless at managing staff but cannot understand why they suffer huge staff turnover. Staff are the foundation of the industry – without them racing wouldn't happen.

Workers are employed within a production process that combines the labour process and the process of valorisation. Filby (1983:210) applies this directly to the labour

⁴⁷ Stable lad interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

⁴⁸ Head Lad interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

⁴⁹ Travelling Head Lass interviewed Newmarket June 2000

⁵⁰ Jockey Club Security Officer interviewed at Chepstow January 2004

process in racing when he states that ‘labour performs essential functions in the transformation of the thoroughbred into a thoroughbred racehorse’.

The object of work and emotional labour

It is apparent from the foregoing sections that there is an important aspect of the labour process in racing stables that must not go unremarked. This is the horse-human relationship which runs through all aspects of the labour process. On entering the labour process in racing stables staff are able to focus their feelings about horses on the ones they are allocated. Horses may come to them as untrained or untried youngsters (particularly in Flat racing) and staff participate closely in the development of the horse. They have to teach it to respond to human commands, and to coax it when it is reluctant to do what is being asked. There is pleasure to be gained from physical contact of grooming, tacking up and feeding, and pleasure is a two way process, since horses gain ‘pleasure’ from being groomed or fed or generally being given attention. As racehorses are utterly dependent on their human companions, they similarly look to their caregivers not to cause them discomfort or pain. They are capable of displaying anger and upset in receipt of rough handling or carelessness. As Cassidy (2002:120) found in her study of racing in Newmarket ‘not only do racehorses have characters, they also have moods’.

Stable staff therefore have a close bond with racehorses, borne out of their affinity with horses and the practical need to avoid being kicked, bitten or thrown. This bond was often expressed as one of ‘love’ by respondents [quotes]. It is not emotional labour as defined by Hochschild (1983) and taken up in the literature on the new workplace of the service sector (Taylor 1998). Unlike the customer service situation, staff are not being expected to put on an act in order to satisfy human customers and it is not unrealistic to say that their love of horses is a genuine, rather than an ‘acted’ emotion (Hochschild 1983). The horse/human bond is crucial to good and safe riding. It is a relationship of trust that cannot be achieved in an instant. The horse must trust its rider in order to

obey instructions regarding direction, pace, and pulling away from the 'herd' of other horses which it will be exercising with. The rider must be able to trust that her/his horse will respond correctly to the riding aids of hands, legs or whip, will 'pull up' when required to stop, will not bolt, will not shy, and will jump an obstacle safely. Back in the stable, staff must be able to work round a horse safely, that is to say without being kicked or trampled or bitten. When transporting horses, they must be able to load and unload the horse on and off the lorry without incident, again avoiding being kicked or trampled. Being 'good with horses' is a real practical skill which needs to be used again and again; being a successful horse(wo)man is bound up in the emotional bond between horse and human. Stable staff are attracted to racing because of a positive desire to work with horses; in that sense they have a prior orientation to the work, often through riding and dealing with horses as private individuals before entering the racing world. They have already developed positive feelings towards horses from an activity which brings pleasure through accomplishment of the skill of riding and caring for a horse. The Donoghue Commission (BHB 2004:3) recognised that a powerful recruiting and retention agent for stable staff was a love of working with horses but commented that 'that love and dedication should not be used as an excuse for poor practices in their employment'. However, emotional labour is often depicted in the literature as being expressed in workers' behaviours towards others such as customers or colleagues, that is to say other human beings. Stable staff are not in a position to 'get their own back' on a difficult customer, the horse/human relationship just does not function that way. Nor is this gendered emotional labour, love of the horse was equally displayed by men and women as revealed above.

Stable staff labour with the human emotion of love. They do this as a genuine response to horses, rather than as a management requirement. Stable staff display a very specific emotion, love of the horse, which differentiates their emotional labour from that

discussed in the growing research on emotional labour with customers as a crucial focal point (Bolton 2003; Guerrier and Adib 2000). Payne (2009) refers to emotional labour involved in nursing, day care in nurseries and social work where a human subject is the focal point of the labour process but there has been little research on emotion work with animals, pointed out by Harris (undated) in his study of human-horse relationships in modern society.

The instruments of work - The stables

Racing stables, as already established, are generally located in rural areas where there is open ground on which to conduct the daily exercise routine. Apart from individual loose boxes to house the horses, there will be a feed store, hay barn, tack room and other storage for bedding and tools, parking for the horse lorry and other vehicles. There may also be an automated horse walker, a carousel-type arrangement into which horses are loaded and 'walked round' by the machine. The trainer's house will be part of the property and there may be other housing for staff living on site. It is not unusual for racing stables to have been created from a former farming property. In the fifteen stables visited in Phase A, staff facilities ranged from a portakabin at one end of the yard, to a purpose built staff canteen and staff room, to no provision whatsoever. Herbert (1974) found that stable staff in the 1970s, like farm workers, still often occupied tied accommodation. While tied accommodation is now no longer a feature of working life, it was found that a majority of trainers (Flat and National Hunt) continue to provide on-site accommodation for some of their workers as shown in Table 5.1 above.

Much of the stables labour process therefore takes place in these surroundings. As discussed in Chapter 3, the management structure is most likely to have three tiers: trainer, head lad/girl, stable staff. There will additionally be travelling head lads/girls in larger stables and an assistant trainer in the very largest. As already discussed, the

workforce size is determined by the number of horses in training at any one yard, horses being allocated roughly on the basis of three per worker.

The trainer devises the weekly racing plan and its attendant daily training regime for the horses. In most stables, the trainer will issue primary instructions while horses and their riders circle him or her in the stable yard. Although it was generally accepted that this was a necessary part of the daily routine as the trainer need to inspect each horse and assess its current stage of fitness to race, this was sometimes seen as a time-wasting exercise:

Time is often wasted on the yard waiting for the trainer to come out and give us instructions. We just spend time walking round and round on the horse. (Respondent E21⁵¹)

The trainer, or a deputy, will meet each string of racehorses at the training gallops in order to observe individual performance, issue further instructions and be in a position to report back to the racehorse owner(s).

In smaller stables, the trainer will not only direct and control individual labour but is more than likely to work alongside stable staff as the need arises. At two of the smaller stables visited in Phase A, the trainer was regularly to be found mucking out stables, and grooming horses (Winters 2000a). Even in the larger establishments, the trainer's presence was most certainly made visible by his/her direct interventions at key points of the morning's activities. In all fifteen stables visited, the trainer lived alongside his or her training yard; in ten stables part of the house doubled as an office. This certainly fits with the control strategy observed by Ram (1991) and Marlow and Patten (1993), namely that of 'visibility', where the boss has experience as a worker in the industry also.

One important issue was that of health and safety at stables. Respondent E19⁵² commented:

⁵¹ Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

⁵² Travelling Head Lad interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

Health and safety is a joke, it is not taken seriously by employers. We have to carry heavy muck sacks and work in a very dusty environment from the hay.

Respondent A22⁵³ added:

We don't have anywhere to eat and often have to eat in the drying room, along with wet and dirty tack and rugs.

This complemented the questionnaire responses, where respondents said that they understood the health and safety rules at their yard but also that they needed more training in health and safety.

The instruments of work - The racecourse

Staff, particularly Travelling Head Lads and Head Girls, have greater autonomy in the second part of the labour process, when they go racing. Here stable staff are often not accompanied by their trainer, especially in a busy stables where large numbers of horses go racing on a daily basis. Although the trainer will be unable to accompany each horse when racing, the stable staff who do attend a race meeting will be expected to follow instructions already laid down for them and report back accurately on the day's proceedings. Respondent E13⁵⁴ put it like this:

While all the tasks they undertake at the racecourse are very basic tasks, they are crucial to running the horse successfully.

The trainer thus has a high dependency on his staff while they are out of his/her sight at a race meeting. They are representing not only the trainer's interests but those of the owner(s) also and may be literally representing the trainer when s/he not in attendance at any particular race meeting.

The trainer will concentrate effort in a particular race meeting where important owners will be met and supported, or on a high profile race, which means that the work of 'going racing' must be shared around. In these circumstances, stable staff take on complete responsibility for the horse(s) they are transporting to the race meeting. At the racecourse, they will offload the horse, settle it in the course's own stables and then

⁵³ Stable Lass interviewed in Newmarket June 2000

⁵⁴ Jockey Club Security Officer interviewed at Chepstow January 2004

prepare it to race at the appointed time. In the meantime, they have to 'declare' the horse, ie confirm that it is racing, otherwise it cannot participate. They will lead the horse into the parade ring, where horses are viewed by the public and where jockeys come to meet the owners and to be 'legged up' into the saddle. Stable staff must ensure that the horse is tacked up correctly and safely, that jockeys are sporting the right 'colours' to signify the horse's ownership, and that the horse is wearing the number cloth. If their trainer is not with them, they must also be prepared to meet and deal with the owners and the jockey. Once the race is over, they collect the horse, cool it down, prepare it to travel home and then make the return journey in the horse lorry. Table 5.17 on the next page gives an indication of the normal routine and approximate times taken to complete the various tasks.

The racing labour process includes the activity of delivering each racehorse to one of the UK's 59 racecourses, at one or several times in its racing career. This is where 'their' horse is presented to its most critical audience, race goers. It will hopefully be proof of the hard work that has gone into its preparation, reflecting well on the stable girl or lad, as well as the stables as a whole. It will be clear from Table 5.18 (on page 182) that despite the increased amounts of racing since 1999, the activity of 'going racing' was often seen as the fillip that made up for the drudgery of stable duties. However, staff facilities at racecourses were a locus of complaint. Indeed, travelling to different racecourses to interview staff in Phase E allowed some opportunities to look at staff accommodation – at Warwick the women's dormitory opened straight off the canteen, revealing cot-type beds with ancient thin blankets in very Spartan surroundings. It was later confirmed by the racecourse officials that these facilities needed 'investment to bring them up to scratch' and that the intention was to demolish them and rebuild modern facilities. This had already happened at Cheltenham, which

Table 5.18
Going racing

	I spend too much time away racing			
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	1	3	10	14
Female	3	1	5	9
Total	4	4	15	23

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

could not have provided more of a contrast, with clean and warm single rooms voted by Respondent E3 as ‘absolute luxury, with nice warm duvets’. The staff canteens at Taunton and Uttoxeter were very damp, cold and smoky, and the food at all the canteens was invariably of the ‘greasy spoon’ variety

Respondent A11⁵⁵ said:

I rarely send staff overnight; it’s not nice for them.

The general response from staff was along similar lines, with additional complaints about the fact that racecourse canteens are often shut shortly after the end of racing when staff would often welcome a meal before making the journey home. Additional comments were also offered about the inadequacy of provisions for the horses also.

Some racecourses were particularly singled out as follows:

Haydock, Folkestone and Doncaster have dreadful accommodation. We’re in 2004 not 1804! In some places there is no privacy, no separate male and female accommodation and a lack of security. (Respondent E23⁵⁶)

Table 5.19 sums up the response of staff in Phase A on racecourse facilities and shows that staff had an overwhelming adverse reaction to current provision:

⁵⁵ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Thirsk in May 2000

⁵⁶ Stable Lass interviewed at Perth April 2004

Table 5.19
Racecourse facilities

	Racecourses should improve stable staff facilities		
	Agree	Unsure	Total
Male	14	2	16
Female	10	0	10
Total	24	2	26

Source: Staff questionnaire Phase A

Going racing was also seen as a way of making some money, in order to supplement the weekly wage. However:

I do a lot of travelling abroad with my job as second travelling head girl. The expenses given for abroad trips are terrible. At £20 per day [in 2000], only for the first seven days of your trip it is costing us money to go abroad instead of making it. We cannot expect to live on it and make money from these trips. Especially when away for weeks at a time. (Respondent A23⁵⁷)

Racing expenses aren't enough. If you're overnight the canteens are usually shut (unless 2-3 day meeting) so you have to go out. A main meal plus a drink is £10+ so that's your expenses gone. (Respondent A28⁵⁸)

Despite their complaints about facilities and inadequate racing expenses, stable staff looked upon their racing duties as a visible expression of their professional skill when they are otherwise overlooked by the racing public. This was where 'their' horse(s) was put through its paces and their work with that horse was on display to the racing public. Although not a regular and fixed event, some races carried with them a prize for the 'best turned out' horse, with a small sum of money being paid to the member of staff who had principal responsibility for the animal.

⁵⁷ Travelling Head Lass interviewed in Newmarket June 2000

⁵⁸ Stable Lass interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

Rural labour process

The production of racehorses is inevitably a rural labour process because of the need for trainers to have access to stables and land. If not actually living on site, many workers live in nearby 'racing towns' such as Newmarket and Lambourn where the horses dominate local structures and society. Trainers live at their place of work in the same way that farmers do and, in the same way as Newby et al (1978:147) found in their study of the rural labour process on farms, the trainer's working week 'will therefore constitute virtually his entire waking hours'. It is impossible to escape, even when wanting to, because of the peculiar nature of the job.

Mize (2006) points to the exceptional nature of agricultural work, particularly with regard to season, weather and the perishable nature of products. In racing, as in farming, the working year is arranged around the seasons, with Flat racing undertaken on the longer summer days, and National Hunt racing largely confined to the winter months. Many trainers have sprung from a rural and often a farming background and the evidence also showed that some trainers, at least, continue to farm in order to provide feed for their horses, eg trainers A13⁵⁹, A14⁶⁰ And D4.

In small farms, the farmer is a high percentage of the total labour force, working alongside labourers in same labour process for at least some of the time. 'This brings farmers into much more frequent and pervasive face-to-face contact with employees which in turn has consequences for the 'industrial relations' of agriculture' (Newby et al 1978:149-151). The important point here is not that small farmers are akin to small business proprietors in other sectors who work alongside their employees but that small farmers are working in an explicitly *rural* labour process, often with a live product and certainly with crops, both of which are subject to seasons and adverse weather – a labour process which has a high degree of unpredictability about it, as does the

⁵⁹ Trainer interviewed at his Tamworth stables June 2000

⁶⁰ Trainer interviewed at his Rugeley July 2000

preparation and presentation of the racehorse. Again there are some direct comparisons to be made with racehorse training where, from our evidence, it was apparent that trainers often worked alongside their staff in the daily routine of feeding and mucking out horses.

Stable staff therefore work in small firms in rural areas and within a labour process that has several affinities with the agricultural labour process. This might suggest that stable staff are exclusively recruited from the 'rural labour market'. However, there is a debate as to what constitutes an exclusively 'rural' locale. In his study of agricultural workers in the 1970s, Newby (1977) clearly looked at the rural village and workers whose views and values are shaped by an upbringing in such an environment. His subjects belonged to a traditional rural community of farmers and farm workers whose working lives had similarities with the trainers and stable staff discussed by Herbert (1974). Workers in racing, however, are now at least as likely to be drawn from town, with 50% of interviewees in 2003/4 saying that they came from an urban environment. Although staff do not come solely from a rural labour market, Table 5.17 (above on page 173) that many staff have a prior involvement with horses, suggesting at least an intermittent connection with the rural.

Studies of the rural worker have tended to be presented from the 'deferential worker' thesis (Newby 1977) and according to Marsden et al (1992:1):

Researchers have tended to characterise rural and particularly agricultural labour as highly exploitable, more deferential, less collectivised and unionised and more 'flexible' than its urban and industrial counterparts.

However, Brough (1989) challenged the use of the 'deferential worker' analysis, pointing out that it is a difficult concept to measure, lacking an agreed definition. Nevertheless, the recent study by Mize (2006) argues that agricultural workers are subordinated to the agricultural labour process through coercive pressures, rendering them relatively powerless, thus having to defer to their employers.

The racing labour market has always been quite unusual in that employers have been dependent on attracting workers of a particularly slight build, capable of riding a large and often unpredictable animal during morning exercise, prepared to arise at 5 am, commence work at 6 am, work outdoors in all weathers, work a split-shift and accept long and unsocial hours if accompanying racehorses to race meetings. On top of this, employers need to retain staff in the longer term in an industry that has a reputation for low pay and poor management. As Gallier observed of her work as a stable girl in the late 1970s (1998:47):

There is a shortage of stable lads, not only in Newmarket but all over the world. People who are lightweight, brave, athletic, and prepared to do a dirty and dangerous job for a pittance are in short supply.

These are issues that still face trainers in the 21st century.

Marsden et al (1992) argued that rural labour processes were embodied in traditional agriculture and new labour processes as firms were being attracted to set up in rural areas where cheaper and more flexible labour was likely to be available. However, racing fits in with neither of these categories and is perhaps best understood as a category of rural labour process in its own right.

Respondent E5⁶¹ was of the opinion that her job, while not akin to farming was ‘definitely rural’ work, even when the stables were located in a racing town such as Middleham in Yorkshire where she had worked before moving to a small stables in the Fens. She also said that her trainer had:

Advertised for staff but hasn’t been successful. We are in a very rural location and there is nothing to do after work.

While Respondent D4 said that:

Young people need a social life, which makes attracting and retaining staff a problem in the UK situation, which is one of very rural locations.

⁶¹ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Cheltenham October 2003

Agribusiness, that is to say the concentration of farming into large enterprises, has long since mechanised as much as it can, so that farmers can manage with very little labour and thus reduce wage costs. There is no equivalent 'equibusiness', as trainers have not sought to merge their businesses in order to achieve economies of scale. It is argued by racing's employers that the one to one horse/worker relationship must not be disturbed and, so long as there is a steady supply of workers willing to accept low wages and work intensification through long hours, reduced access to days off and holiday time, or an increasing horse: human ratio – or a combination of all these factors – there is nothing attractive about redesigning work processes to reduce labour costs. Indeed there is no need as things currently stand.

It is a labour process which is also a way of life, where workers and employers inhabit a specific world, delimited by the daily routine of training and racing horses and reinforced by the fact that the human actors work and live alongside the object of their labours. As Gallier (1988:9) remarks, 'Funny thing, horses. Dirty, dangerous, greedy beasts, they get into your blood like a virus, and once you've got it, there's no cure'. As the sample interviewed in 2000 revealed, every respondent who had previously left the industry had returned. At one of the Lambourn stables Respondent A44⁶² (now in his late 50s) had left the industry to avoid the danger and risk while he was bringing up a young family and who had been a successful small business owner in his own right. Once his sons had all left home, he sold the firm with alacrity and returned to the industry after a 20-year gap, saying that he had hated every day he spent away from horses.

Stable staff certainly fit the description of '...a working class, as a descriptive category for people who existed by selling their labour power...' (Wright 1988:2). However, as the small firms sector is very diverse, Scott et al (1989) argued that there is no generic

⁶² Stable Lad interviewed at Lambourn May 2000

small firm worker who was automatically prepared to trade off lower wages for a smaller and friendlier workplace. The grounds for this were the lack of a homogenous labour process across small firms and lack of a uniform product. In racing, however, there is a common labour process that produces one sole product, the racehorse. The product is sold into one product market, horseracing. As discussed earlier, trainers rely on a specific labour market to find workers with particular bodily characteristics and skills. Unusually for research in the small firms sector, it is possible to rely on these elements of consistency across racing stables and their workforce.

According to the workers, there is no monetary incentive to work in racing. As stable staff want, above all else, to work with horses, they are prepared to trade low wages for the opportunity to work in racing stables. However, with wide-ranging grievances that were also reported, it is not clear that racing stables are 'friendly' places to work. Of particular note in this regard is that evidence gathered by the Donoughue Commission in 2003 (BHB 2004) revealed a culture of bullying amongst head lads and girls (the first line supervisors) and it was certainly the author's earlier experience that the 'old school' head lads often used such tactics (see discussion on page 202).

Herbert (1974) found that stable staff still displayed deferential behaviours towards their employers, reflecting Newby's (1977) and Marsden et al's (1992) views of rural workers, also supported by Murray (1983) in his survey of small Italian rural firms. While staff interviewed and observed for this research did not display exceptional deference to their employer at the stables, there was no doubt that some deference was still expected while in the public gaze at race meetings. Staff would lead a horse round in the parade ring before the race, generally dressing in sombre and inconspicuous clothes. They would collect the horse at the end of the race, melting into the background. Jockeys, on the other hand, were expected to display public deference to

the horse's owners, tipping their cap when introduced prior to being 'legged up' into the saddle.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the detailed labour process in racing stables, structuring the findings around the three elements of the labour process as laid out by Marx (1976). In order to contextualise these findings, the first section presented data on employment rates in racing which demonstrated that racing employment has increased year on year and that male and female employment rates are almost equal. However, the data do not show that this is a feminised occupation overall, although it is fair to say that a gap opens up in the supervisory grades, with around 50% more men than women entering the grades of head lad and travelling head lad. The largest group of workers falls in the 20-24 age range, the next biggest category being ages 25-29. The statistics show a steady decline in employment from the ages of 30-65+ which suggests that this form of employment is overwhelmingly young people's work.

Data on housing were discussed, revealing that some workers are accommodated on site at racing stables but that this is no longer tied housing. While more than 60% of employers surveyed said they provided housing, this was often in remote locations or specifically reserved for very young workers. For workers, the problems of low wages meant that buying housing was very difficult and many ended up having to rent. This was exacerbated by the high cost of housing in and around racing centres such as Newmarket and Lambourn.

It was found that stable staff are low paid workers, although likely to be paid more than the National Minimum Wage and more than farming workers; these wage differentials were to be counted in pence rather than pounds reflecting perhaps the rural nature of their employment. Low pay is an issue which has been identified by several industry-led studies but has not been successfully addressed as a result. There are two further

elements to stable staff wages: prize money and overtime when 'going racing'. Prize money is variable pay and tied to the success or otherwise of the stables. Overtime is a contentious issue, being paid at NMW rates rather than actual pay rates or time and a half.

The chapter next addressed the three elements of the labour process: purposeful activity, the object of labour and the instruments of work. It was found that the working day is arranged as a split shift and working hours are arranged over a fortnight. There are severe problems for stable staff in getting time off, especially during the Flat racing season, because work has been intensified by the creation of a pattern of racing which now occurs seven days a week. It also found that this is a labour intensive process in which there is little opportunity to substitute machines for labour as work duties are individual, physical, involving skilled work as well as more routinised duties. Individual horses need individual attention, including during the daily exercise routine and when being cared for and transported to race meetings. It was also found that this is a labour process which continues into the activity of taking horses to race meetings, again an activity which cannot be mechanised.

In both parts of the labour process, stable staff felt that their status was not properly recognised and that they are skilled workers. Symbolic of this lack of status was not only pay but also poor staff facilities at some of the racecourses they had to attend. However, working with racehorses brought with it an additional problem for stable staff and that is the emotional content of the work. Stable staff overwhelmingly come into racing because they want to work with horses and their emotional labour with individual horses reflects the demands of the horse and the way in which horses and humans inevitably form close bonds. Unfortunately for them such caring work does not bring with it high financial rewards or high employment status.

Ultimately, this is a labour process which takes place in a rural location and it is found to be a labour process which fits neither exactly with farming nor with forms of small firm employment which have relocated to rural locations to avail themselves of cheaper labour. It is also a common process, with the same routine being enacted and repeated, day in and day out, and replicated in each of the 612 racing stables in the UK, the only real variation being time spent taking horses racing which is a more flexible activity, dependent on weather, condition of the turf, type of racing available at each meeting. This was supported by Respondent D4⁶³ who said that the routine at National Hunt stables was ‘pretty much the same as in Flat racing’, the only real difference being that NH racing could use heavier riders as the horses were older and thus fully developed. There is thus evidence of a single labour process that is present at the level of each firm, challenging Murray’s (1983) view that there are considerable variations of labour process even between firms in the same sector. Racing stables stand out as an unusual subject for this reason.

The labour process in racing stables is defined by the work undertaken, the racehorse itself, the structure of the racing stables, the structure of the racing industry and the activity of going racing. It attracts a certain type of worker, one who is physically capable of working on horseback and who is highly motivated by the desire to work with horses. Despite the specific nature of the labour market that trainers have to rely on, stable staff occupy a very low status in the racing industry, reflected in their pay and the ways in which their labour power is exploited to the advantage of trainers. Chapter 6 now moves on to explore the detailed control strategies adopted by trainers since trainers have a high dependency on their staff for the safety of the horses, both in the training process and when going racing. It is clear that the ways in which they are able

⁶³ Trainer interviewed October 2003

to secure worker consent to being management demands in a low wage and long hour culture must be further explored.