

## **The Experience of Work**

DiPs at *The Blue Mugge* pub Monday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015 19.45 to 21.15hrs

1. 'A good anecdote can get us further than a graph...' Going round those who wish give a brief anecdote or account on the experience of work, 30 years ago, 50 years ago.. from a personal/family perspective - which could be grand-parent/parent experience (brief, meaning just a few sentences...). Save discussion on this until later, linking to any points below, as appropriate).
2. Ditto, but on contemporary experience of work (through family experience maybe or what one knows from general knowledge of the contemporary situation). Again brevity is crucial. Any issues raised can be woven into discussion following from 3 on...
3. Will Hutton (Principal, Hertford College, Oxford & Chair, *The Big Innovation Centre*) wrote an Observer article, 23<sup>rd</sup> August this year, entitled:  
**'Once firms cherished their workers, now they are seen as disposable'.**  
This is a summary of his argument:
  - a) 'The Cadbury family built a model town Bourneville for their workers....the message clear.. Cadbury cherished and invested in their workers expecting commitment and loyalty back, which is what they got...
  - b) 'Jeff Bezos, founder of *Amazon* (totally different) ...relationship with workers entirely transactional... *Amazonians* (as NYTimes article same month puts it) are held to standards that are 'unreasonably high'...working long and late with e-mails arriving past midnight...'
  - c) 'The nature of firms/work is changing: the capitalist world of the so-called golden age between 1945 and ...1974 was defined by Cadbury type companies... offering a career and personnel progression.
  - d) 'The firm of today: 'employs throwaway people, m/class workers at risk as much as their working class peers...' The Precariat? Distinction between 'public sector and private sector' is blurred?
  - e) 'This approach has delivered 1.4 million zero-hours contracts... All this allegedly to secure growth. Except that over the last 20 years, growth, productivity and innovation in Britain and America has collapsed..... Ultimately long-term value can't be done by treating your workers as cattle'.

Is the above a fair summary? Read the full article at:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/23/amazon-jeff-bezos-workers-rights-capitalism-employment-law>
4. Paul Mason, Channel 4 News Economics specialist and author of *PostCapitalism – A Guide to our Future* (2015). The book has been criticised (it is contentious obviously) but reviewers from the Financial Times across a number of newspapers and journals have respected the case made... Mason argues therein:
  - a) Computers, 'intelligent' robots, and relentless IT innovations are creating primary resources at little cost (for consumers) and with almost limitless shelf-life. For Mason, capitalism (as we have known it) cannot survive these developments.
  - b) 'The digital revolution has put extraordinary new powers into the hands of workers, but it has also empowered bankers as well... given them the ability to create money out of thin air..' We now have tensions, fed also by gender issues, that are unsustainable...
  - c) Crucially '*info-technology* is reducing the need for work and *information goods* are crowding the market's ability to form prices correctly – take *Wikipedia*, for example, made by 27,000 volunteers for free, not for profit' (as a commercial company, this would be worth £billions).
  - d) Radical change, revolution even, is now possible through 'the network'. By creating millions of networked people Mason writes '*info-capitalism* has created a new agent for change in human history – the educated and connected human being'.
5. Given the above trends, in 4, if accurate, leisure or 'free time' should increase (demographic change is relevant here too). So - final point to engage with:  
'Leisure came from a Latin word for permit (*licere*), and from the 14<sup>th</sup> century meant opportunity or free time; it is significant of the narrowing specialization of 'work' that we now have 'leisure time activities', often requiring considerable effort but not described as work, which belongs to our 'paid time''. Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1976).