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Changes at Work

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Over the past ten years, I have spent a lot of time talking with people about their work: more precisely about their jobs and their employers. What has been striking about these discussions is the force with which people identify significant changes that have taken place in their working lives. Repeatedly I have listened to people recounting how "things have changed completely these last ten years"; "compared with how things were ten or fifteen years ago I would say the situation is completely different"; some have spoken with dramatic effect about how they "wouldn't have believed possible" the kind of changes that have taken place. In this, of course there is some exaggeration and there has been further distortion as sociologists and business commentators have occasionally amplified these accounts. Many things have changed only slightly and within change there is always continuity but it does seem that at this moment the social organisation of western economies is going through a period of quite significant disturbance.

In reflecting upon these matters I have increasingly thought about upon how they have been expressed in my own life. In the town where I was brought up in South Wales, the "jobs" available were clearly outlined and understood. There were "jobs" in the steel works and in the coal mines. Boys who left school at fifteen or sixteen went into either of these workplaces and became coal miners or steel workers. Those with academic qualifications

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became apprentices and were prepared for jobs as skilled maintenance workers in these industries. All of them understood their job to involve a powerful occupational identity and to be a "job for life". At that time (the late fifties) the steel works in the town employed over 13,000 workers and the coal mines 3,000. Nationally these industries, between them employed one and a quarter million workers. There were comparatively few manual jobs for women. The girls who left school at fifteen worked as machinists in the one garment factory in the town; alterative employment was offered in local shops and, for those with some academic qualifications, in the local "council offices". The strong expectation was that young women would marry and not return to employment.

During this period, those who passed examinations and went to University, looked forward to employment in management or in one of the professions. Their world mirrored the world of manual work in two main respects: it was regarded as a long term commitment, often based in the public sector; and it was strongly marked by gender. For the men these were jobs for life with a strong occupational identity and the security of a pension. In the professions, as with manual work, women tended to be segregated into particular activities (like school teaching) and generally experienced marriage and childbearing as major obstacles to career advancement.

While this place where I grew up was different in some respects from others (eg. textile belts where women had employment in the mills throughout their lives) it helps to highlight certain characteristics of a set of social arrangements which have been variously identified as welfare statism, Fordism, and "smoke stack" industrialism. These terms have been developed in response to changes which have been seen to produce their opposite in Thatcherism or anti-

statism, post-Fordism and post-industrialism (see for example, Piore and Sabel, 1987 and Massey and Allen, 1989). They reflect upon the dramatic change that has taken place in the composition and organisation of work and employment across the UK which can be seen most dramatically in the changes in the coal and steel industries. Once the centre of a state managed "smoke-stack" economy, today they are privately owned and with a combined labour force of less than 40,000 reduced to just 3% of their post-war strength. In my town, the coal mines have closed and less than a thousand people are now employed in the steel works.

1. De-industrialization: From Manufacture to Services:

In 1979 just over 7 million people were employed in manufacturing industries in the UK; in 1995, the figure had reduced to three and three quarter millions (see *Table 1*). The scale of employment decline is extended if we add the experience of the mining industry where a further 220,000 jobs have been lost since 1979. This decline has been related to general patterns of change associated with the implementation of new technologies and the rise of low cost production facilities in the newly industrialising countries of the Pacific. One account from the textile and garment industry tells a familiar story:

> On Friday, workers at the Coates Viyella factory at Rainhill Merseyside picked their notices up off the floor of a Portacabin outside the plant. Their envelopes had been left in little piles by a management anxious to close the door at 1 p.m. sharp. For Pat Donoghue and Lisa Kelly, it was the final humiliation. "People had to grovel on the floor to pick up their notices. they didn't have the decency to hand them to us", said one of the workers.
>
> The factory at Rainhill produces shirts for Marks and Spencer, but there has been no work since April 10, when the staff heard from the managing director that the paint was to close. All work would be transferred to Coates Viyella factories in Mauritius and Indonesia where local workers will produce the

same shirts for less than half the wages paid a Rainhill (*The Times*, 6 May 1996)

Table 1: Changing Patterns of Employment in the UK (000s)

	Manufacturing	Services	Totals*
1979	7,013	13,680	22,970
1985	5,307	13,860	21,073
1995	3,789	15,912	21,103

Source: *Employment Gazette*, various years *Includes "other activities"

In this way employment in the textile and leather industries which stood at 723,000 in 1979 was reduced to 366,200 by 1995. The process of plant closure and the relocation of employment has effected many branches of manufacturing industry. In sectors as diverse as clothing, vehicle and chemical manufacture, job losses have been linked with geographic relocation of production sites. It was seen dramatically in the operations of such giant manufacturing corporations as ICI which, in the early eighties changed the balance of its production from one which was dominated by its British plants to a truly diverse international operation. Its employment base altered in a similar ways creating severe job losses in its main British locations on Teesside and Merseyside (See Beynon, Hudson and Sadler, 1994). As a *quid pro quo*, the UK has offered suitable production sites for the branch plants of US and German corporations as well as those from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. These companies have formed the basis of the UK electronics and computing industries. The extent to which this emphasis upon "inward investment" has come to form the keystone of employment policy in most of the cities and regions of the country, is an interesting phenomenon in itself. However, no matter how successful these operations have been, they

have come nowhere near to replacing the manufacturing jobs that have been lost, and which continue to drain away.

Generally, the manufacturing plants which have arrived and those others that have remained open have been managed in ways which have seen their labour forces dramatically reduced. This process was referred to as *downsizing* (occasionally *rightsizing*) in the USA. It was seen to be a solution to the intensity of international competition in, removing the sclerosis of industries dominated by "jobs for life" practices and state support through subsidies and guaranteed contracts. More generally, machines (robots and computers) have been replacing jobs at pace which has led to some observers predicting *The End of Work* (see Rifkin, 1996).

On both sides of the Atlantic these changes have been associated with considerable employee trauma. Most commonly it has been achieved through the introduction of various forms of redundancy schemes, combined with procedures and techniques aimed at increasing the productivity of those who remain. Employment levels have also been reduced through "out sourcing" techniques which sub-contract work to other, more specialised organisations. This "outsourcing" often takes the form of a sub-contract which operates *within* the parent plant. It has become common for employees on a particular production site (a car plant or a steel mill) to be in the employ of a number of *different* companies. In the car industry, for example, it was once common for assembly line workers after they had reached a certain age to move to less arduous work away from the assembly lines. The job of "janitor" was one such and involved responsibilities relating to the cleanliness of the plant. When I visited the Nissan factory in the North East of England, I noticed that cleaning jobs were being performed by people in different coloured overalls; men in fact who worked for another company. When I

asked about this I was informed that: "we are a car company not a cleaning company". Many manufacturing firms have done the same, reducing their labour force to its productive core, hiring additional help when needed and subcontracting many ancillary operations (Wood, 1989).

As a result of these changes, it is increasingly unusual to meet a factory worker or manager nowadays. The people we share carriages with on trains (many of them with cellular telephones) work in banks, in insurance companies or in the retail trade. They belong in offices, hotels and shops rather than on factory floors and down coal mines. Often though, the past is just a scratch beneath the surface. Most taxi drivers I've talked to have had a previous existence working in factories; so too the men who collect the trolleys from the car parks at Tesco and Sainsbury. Mostly these people express resignation over the ways in which their lives and the world around them has changed. Occasionally you encounter anger; especially, in my experience, in the steel towns. On one occasion in South Wales I was told with some feeling that:

> its your lot, the boys from the University who have brought this about. All your new ideas and messing with things you don't understand. You've sold us out to the bloody Japs. We could make steel as good as them. There's no doubt about that; no doubt at all. And where are we now - on the scrap heap.

In these towns, men (without formal skills and training) made their lives around the furnaces and the hot rolling steel. These were the men who talked to me of having "broken hearts" as the result of "downsizing".

As manufacturing employment declined, new employment opportunities emerged in other

expanding branches of the economy. The most dynamic of these in the eighties was the service sector most obviously visible on our High Streets as insurance companies and building societies opened new offices. The rise of these financial services associated with the borrowing, investing and lending of money was a dramatic phenomenon. So powerful was it that by 1995, over half of the regions in Britain (including the famed industrial economy of Scotland) earned more from financial services that they did from manufacture (HMSO, 1996). To this can be added the revolutionary changes that have taken place in the tourist and retailing sectors. In 1995 a million and a quarter people were employed in the hotel and catering industries; more that the combined labour forces of almost all the industries we associate with traditional manufacture. Retailing is another buoyant sector where the development of the super-store, located away from city centres has done so much to rearrange the shopping and leisure habits of large proportions of the population.

These changes are considerable ones and have combined in ways which have produced a significant shift in the pattern of work and employment. They have also had a deep and profound effect upon the sensibilities of our society, in ways which social scientists are beginning to reflect upon. It is clear from *Table 2* that the shift away from manufacturing has also been a shift in favour of the employment of women. Many of the expanding service industries (notably the ones that I have just mentioned) employ more women than men, and this heightens the sense of transformation and change. However, many of these service jobs have characteristics which are not dissimilar to those in manufacturing .In large hotels, waitresses are responsible for laying tables for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They often do it to a set routine: one laying the soup spoons, another the desert spoon and fork and so on. At MacDonalds we are told that

> a quarter-pounder is cooked in exactly 107 seconds. Our fries are never more that 7 minutes old when served'. In any one of their restaurants they 'aim to serve any order within 60 seconds. At lunch time in a busy restaurant we serve 2,000 meals an hour (see Beynon, 1992).

In his account of these developments Ritzer talks of the new "MacDonalised society":

> MacDonaldism shares many characteristics with Fordism, notably homogeneous products, rigid technologies, standardised work routines, deskilling, homogenisation of labour(and customer), the mass worker and homogenisation of consumption.... in these and other ways, Fordism is alive and well in the modern world (Ritzer, 1993)

Table 2: Changing Patterns of Gender Employment (000s)

	Manufacturing		Services		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Totals
1979	4,964	2,050	6,674	7,006	20,692
1985	3,738	1,570	6,373	7,488	19,166
1995	2,659	1,131	6,861	9,052	19,702

Source: *Employment Gazette,* various years

Continuities clearly exist in the lives which people lead in this new service driven economy. Nevertheless, a recognition of this should not obscure difference (between an assembly line and a dining room) and the quite fundamental changes that are taking place both in people's perceptions and in the ways in which economic organisations pattern themselves. Most clear is the ways in which service organisations are driven by a particular conception of the customer and that many service sector jobs involve workers in direct (social) relationships with people (du Gay, 1995). As a consequence "the customer" has taken an ascendant position in our understanding of work, and this has worked back into manufacturing. At the

Nissan company, the assembly line workers are told to "build the car as if your work mate was going to buy it".

Furthermore, these changes have produced new kinds of occupations and activities which have had a significant affect upon the structure of society and the ways in which we understand our position within it. It has become a more "visual" society (see Jenks, 1996). We are surrounded by more and more complex forms of visual communication on television in advertisements on street hoarding. More and more students spend time in universities and colleges as education, training and communicative skills become crucial attributes in the labour market. . All this is supportive of a view of a society which is being *culturally transformed* and of the view of a *post-industrial society* which is both democratic and liberating; inside and outside of work.

The new service workers are a mixed bunch however. They include the very rich (like Elton John) and the very poor (like the many thousands of office cleaners). In the USA, Reich calculated that just 20% of the jobs in the new economy were ones which were intrinsically satisfying and economically rewarding. He refers to these as the work of the *symbolic analysts*, (the journalists, designers, architects, lecturers) whose work has creativity at its core as they communicate complex ideas to a broader audience (clients, customers, user groups). They represent his "privileged fifth" (Reich, 1992) and they match the 30% identified by Will Hutton in the 30:30:40 society (Hutton, 1995). They contrast with another 25% who regularly perform routine tasks and the 30% who are responsible for the daily delivery of a variety of mundane services. Clearly views of this new world l vary with your position within it; ironically, of course, part of the function of the *symbolic analysts* is to perform such a task as "spin doctors" or public relations experts. Oddly, we live in *their*

interpretive world. The fact that it is also a world of inequality is made clear in *Table 3.*

Table 3: Changes in Weekly Earnings 1979-1995* (in 1995 Prices)

	Full-Time				Part-Time	
	Manual		Non-Manual		Manual	Non-Manual
	Male(£)	Female(£)	Male(£)	Female(£)	Female(£)	Female(£)
1979	278.0	165.01	337.7	197.29	75.3	89.6
1995	291.3	188.10	443.3	288.10	76.6	114.2
Real % Increase	4.8%	14.0%	31.2%	46%	1.7%	27.3%

Source: *New Earnings Survey* * Excluding overtime payments

Since 1979, the real wages of manual workers have lagged behind those of non-manual employees. Female part-time manual workers have fared worst of all with their wages only increasing by 1.7% in real terms. Amongst non manuals however, and especially middle and senior professionals, wages have increased significantly and with them changes in pattern of demarcation. Here women's wages have increased at a higher rate than men's. This was confirmed in a report by Susan Harkness for the Institute of Fiscal Studies:

> women who worked part-time did not do as well as those in full-time employment...the gap between the highest and the lowest paid has risen for women as it has for men: which makes the real winners high paid women who have seen the wages almost double in real terms since 1973. Those who have done worse - but who have stilled narrowed the gap with men - are part-time low skilled women (Harkness, 1996)

The overall effect of these changes upon working life is unclear. They serve to direct our

attention upon the nature of industrial and commercial management and its role in organising economic activity under these new conditions (see eg. Scase and Goffee,1989, Streek, 1987, Webb, 1992) The new theories of "post-Fordism" and "flexibility" emphasised the importance of labour and the need for management to involve people in decision-making as organisations cope with an increasingly complex and unpredictable world. The failings of British management in this regard were brought out forcefully by Nichols (1987); conclusions which were reinforced in two recent case studies. In a factory in North Wales, "the workers argue that management do not know how to do the jobs but insist on telling the workers that they do". A common reaction here was expressed in this way:

> when decisions come, most men in my department keep quiet ... in the workers' experience, nobody ever listens .. so we don't say much now (Jones, 1993)

Similar reactions were found in an automotive component plant in South Wales. Here a major organisational change was introduced in which management estimated that 88% of all the jobs had taken on increasing numbers of tasks; for this too succeed the company needed to call increasingly upon the trust of the workforce. A common response here was:

> For eighteen years (this) has been a standard company. If they could kick you in the teeth they would and did. Now they expect trust merely because they ask for it (Trotman, 1993).

In spite of comments like these "downsized" companies and their managements are placing more and more emphasis upon the need to involve their workforces, to develop "team-working" and to improve the education and training opportunities available to people who are

increasingly seen as one of the corporation's most valuable resources. The shelves of the management sections in book stores are packed with texts on Total Quality Management which feature heavily in contemporary courses in business administration. These are the "buzz words" of the decade. In the British publishing industry publishers like Harper-Collins have introduced its "Visions and Values" initiative involving team building and the various arrangements involved in Human Resource Management. Staff are involved in measuring their own performance through GRPI (goals, roles, processes and inter-personal relations). However many were unconvinced of its applicability to a working context which thrives on creativity and imagination. One reported that "it seemed to have no practical application for us. It made me very angry and it made me very ill" (*The Observer*, 21 April 1996)

There is a lot of ambiguity and tension in these developments. In the context of a competitive economy which has displaced the producer from its centre, companies have to deal with the need to sell and to please their consumers. The market has taken an ascendancy which relegates the workings of offices and factory floors to subordinate status. Here, Anthony has pointed out, with much perception, managements now claim the right not only to manage but to "manage the meaning of events". It is they who form the conduit between producer and consumer. But they are often inadequate to the task. In his researches, Anthony (1995) detected a "schizophrenia" in British management; on the one hand, emphasising "team working" and togetherness while on the other being swamped by the onset of further "downsizing" as the market takes its toll. In his detailed interpretation of the literature on "team working", Willmott discerned a considerable level of "confusion and emptiness" amongst workers involved in the new management techiques (Willmott, 1994).

This, of course raises some very interesting questions about the changing position of women

within the authority structure of the new economy. Cary Cooper and Marilyn Davidson, the authors of *Shattering The Glass Ceiling*, see the 1990s as a major turning point. In Davidson's view:

> Management literature in the seventies and eighties was all about how to adapt, cope, power-dress and fit into male culture...After downsizing, you want to utilise what's left and that's when barriers of race or sex don't make economic sense (*The Guardian* 10 June 1996)

It seems that many of the managers of the future (the time coordinators, the flexible workers, the team workers) will be women and in the considered view of Professor Cooper: "the quicker we get women up there and dump men the better".

2. The Rise of the "Hyphenated Worker":

If we attempt to relate these changes back to the ways in which work and employment relations have altered a number of complex processes become evident. Most clear is the fact that the stable superannuated labour force which characterised the 1950s has been severely eroded. The labour force of the 1990s is made up of a number of different kinds of employees: part-time-workers, temporary-workers, casual-, even self-employed-workers. As we enter the twenty first century these *hyphenated workers* are becoming a more and more significant part of the economy.

Table 4 documents some basic patterns of change within the labour force since 1979. It illustrates the way in which the number of *employees* has declined both absolutely, and as a

percentage of the economically active labour force. In 1979, employees made up 88% of the labour force, in 1996 the percentage was 75%. The difference is explained through the increasing numbers of unemployed people and the rapid growth in those registered as self-employed. The numbers in both these categories have almost doubled, and in their different ways have often been used as an indication of the increasing dynamism of the economy and its changing relationship with society. Unemployment and self employment have often been seen as two sides of the same coin which moved people out of inefficient, declining industries (often seen as "featherbedded" with state subsidies) through temporary periods of unemployment and retraining into new, more demanding and enterprising contexts.

Table 4: Labour Force Changes 1979-1995 (000s)

	Employees	Self-Employed	Training	Unemployed	Total(000)
1979	22,432	1,778	--	1,428	25,638
1985	20,746	2,713	390	2,990	26,840
1995	21,675	3,269	273	2,376	27,726

Source: *Labour Force Survey,* various years

I talked with one man who had worked in a large company of architects. He had been provided with a company car and, by his account, his working environment was stress free and easy-going. The company had grown on the basis of public-sector contracts; designing housing schemes, municipal swimming pools leisure centres and the like. In 1989 his firm, and many like them across the country, had a major financial crisis and he was made redundant:

> It was a large company, and looking back, it was very badly organised. They didn't need to be efficient really with the kinds of contracts they were negotiating; we charged £120 an hour on those big contracts with local authorities and the government departments. Everything was big: it had a big main-frame computer which contributed very little. Today, the industry has changed completely. In fact it's unrecognisable compared with what it was like ten years ago.

John experienced redundancy and employment as a trauma. However with the help of an Apple Mac he trained himself in Computer Aided Design. Within three years he was set up in his garage with two large colour screens running *Microstation* and tendering for small and large contracts in his local area. He described the enjoyment he gets from working with the computer programme:

> it's amazing to think that not so long ago I used to have to draw all of this on a board; it's really quite amazing what I can do with the Apple Mac; how I can change things in ten minutes which before would have taken me a day!

A clear "success story" therefore; but one which get's more complicated as we take it further and John describes in more detail how he fits into the new industry:

> As I said its unrecognisable from what it used to be. All the big firms got rid of staff in 1989, they retained core employees who are now used to set up new projects. Everyone else is registered with an Agency; that's where I get most of my work from. We register with the agency and then we get recruited as the firms need architects - on a temporary contract.

Although "self employed" and working for himself, John employs no-one and obtains most of his income from large architectural companies. He often works in *their* offices (with his new skills) and travels much further in search of work than he ever did before. He has been very enterprising (retraining himself, investing in computers in his home) but he is not a classic *entrepreneur*.

This story is a common one. In one way or another it applies to most of the people who appear in the "self employed" category, and this casts doubt on the usefulness of the category as an indicator of radical change toward entrepreneurship. A closer examination of the data on self employment reveals that it is concentrated in a relatively few industrial sectors. In transport and communication and the group of industries associated with banking and financial services, self-employment makes up 13% of the total workforce; in distribution, hotels and catering it is 14% and in construction a massive 45%. In his detailed study of the self-employment phenomenon, Harvey (1995) has argued that the case of the construction industry is revealing and more representative than that of architecture. In this industry, self-employment increasingly relates to manual production workers and not professional or white collar employees. In 1992, fifty eight percent of the manual workers in the construction industry were self employed. As Harvey puts it:

> It is legitimate to speak of *mass self employment*... moreover the expansion of self-employment has not taken place at the expense of the large contractors ...(who) now undertake major contracts using predominantly self-employed workers. The self employed are indeed the core workforce. (Harvey, 1995, p.3)

These people work as bricklayers or steel erectors or labourers on the large building sites of company's like Costain and Tarmac. They are paid by the company and to all intents and purposes they are employees; but the companies do not recognise this relationship. Like John they are self employed and register with Agencies.

The data in *Table 5* makes clear that, along-side the self-employed worker, part-time work stands as the main source of employment growth in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1995 there were three and a half million fewer full time jobs than there were fifteen years earlier. The dynamic in the jobs market has been in part-time employment, usually for women. This "gender bias" in part-time work is being

modified slightly as increasing proportions of men find employment on this basis. In the hotel industry, for example, part-time employment made up 26% of all jobs in 1971 (21% for women and 5% for men). By 1991, the proportions had almost doubled with the part-time jobs of women (33%) and men (11%) providing almost half of the jobs in the industry. This practice has been encouraged by government initiatives (like *Job Match)* which emphasise the attractiveness of this type of employment, seeing it as indicative of an increasingly flexible labour market. To these part-time and self-employed workers can be added the numbers of employees who (although not "self-employed") work on a succession of temporary contracts.

Table 5: Changing Labour Contracts (000s)

	Male		Female		Total
	FT	PT	FT	PT	
1979	13,032	605	5,560	3,781	22,978
1985	10,922	808	5,408	3,937	21,171
1995	9,536	1,106	5,650	4,812	21,101

Source: *Employment Gazette,* various years

The kinds of changes indicated here can be seen to offer great opportunities for employers. Some authors have emphasised the advantages for workers also, stressing the ways in which deregulated labour markets facilitate people moving into and out of particular jobs, careers and markets. The practice of holding more than one job has extended beyond company directors and members of parliament. Its advocates have developed the idea of a job *portfolio,* although for most people these are not as lucrative as those which hold stocks and shares. Nevertheless, Hakim, and others, have pointed to the benefits which self-employment and non standard work contracts offer for women

reentering the labour market. These authors argue for greater flexibility and for employment arrangements which permit a range of possible living and working options. Patricia Hewitt (1993) has been adroit in pointing out unnecessary inflexibilities in work contracts and the potential advantages that could flow from altering our use and understanding of time. In fact many women have developed their employment careers through a complex process of time juggling. A waitress at a Yorkshire hotel explains how:

> Craig my eldest son was five when I started work here. It was just evenings then. I started off as casual at night when the children were little and my husband looked after them. I just did banquets...Then I gradually started doing weekend breakfast and the odd lunchtime. Then I did the week breakfasts and it fitted in quite well as my husband was working local and he could see them off in the morning for me. then they grew up and they got to an age when they could be left on their own (Charles, 1994; 146; see also Crompton and Sanderson, 1990)

These arguments often resonate with the discussion of industrial transformation, the role of innovating firms and other radical changes within the work-place. Here too however, the evidence is both patchy and contradictory. Attitudinal surveys have indicated that women are happy to combine paid employment with the demands of child-care and a family, (to get out of the house, to meet people etc). They also show the importance of the need for money (providing independence and necessary household income). But , for women (like men) the experience of paid employment can be a the source of tension as well as satisfaction. Furthermore, the emphasis upon choice often obscures the fact that in many circumstances, market and power relations favour employers, and that these changes taken together may well trap some women in low paid employment rather than liberate them. Ted Johns, consultant with Minitruth Management takes this view arguing that:

> only 57 percent of the workforce is now employed on a full time permanent basis The other 43 percent work part-time or on fixed term contracts or have a "portfolio" career. This kind of employment contract gives organisations much greater power over the employee. It increases the pressure to conform on those who want to retain employment.(*The Observer*, 21 April 1996)

Certainly this view would be supported by some advertisements in places like Consett:

> we are seeking people who are prepared to work on a casual basis, with extremely flexible hours. We can accommodate from 3 to 10 hour stints throughout the 24 when work is available. Applicants must have very nimble fingers to cope with the work involved, and be prepared to work at 24 hours notice. (quoted in Wray, 1993)

Furthermore, "non-standard work contracts" may be imposed, rather than freely negotiated. This has been the case in the retail sector where many employees have found their full-time contracts revoked in favour of part-time ones. A recent MORI poll of senior personnel managers found that:

> More than half the managers believed that the desire to cut over-heads by avoiding the legal terms and conditions due to full-time workers might influence decisions to introduce flexible working patterns (*Financial Times* 31 November 1993)

The situation is made more complex in industries like the hotel industry where the use of split shifts and casual labour is such that the difference between "full-time"; "part-time" and "casual" employment has become very blurred. One manager from the industry explains the difficulties of defining a "casual":

> We have very few workers who are the sort of casuals where you ring up and say "can you work tomorrow". They're more permanent casuals in a way - but it's because of the number of hours they work a week; that's why they're casuals as opposed to part-time

Another reflects on the nature of "full-time" employment:

> we have two different sorts of full-timers. Some are on the "inclusive" which means that they do 39 hours a week. If they do under then they're still paid for 39 hours but they owe us the hours. The others are on a "maximum 39" and they only get paid for the hours that they do and that can be anything between 16 and 39 hours (Charles,1994;107)

This pattern was observed nationally, as Department of Employment researchers estimated that as many as half of the people employed on "full-time" contracts were, in fact, involved in working

arrangements that were less stable than this term implied. This indicates the pace to which casualised or "non-standard contacts" have become a generalised aspect of working life, applying to men as well as women.

These are the *hyphenated workers* in the *hyphenated economy*. The old industrial economy of Britain was highly regulated; it employed large numbers of highly unionised workers employed on full-time contracts. As we have seen, most of these were men, and they were paid what was recognised as "a family wage" a form of payment which sustained the idea of the man as the bread-winner. This "family wage", like coal and steel production, is a thing of the past. Most generally the standard of living for families in the UK is sustained by more than one income. Women's wages (once slandered as "pin money") have become an essential part of household income. Oddly, at a time when "work is becoming scarce"; more and more people are working longer hours. In my journeys around the country I have talked with many people who have made what Shor (1992) has termed "the Faustian contract" : trading time for money - spending too much time earning and not enough living. In Britain we work longer hours than anywhere in Europe. Twenty percent of us work on Sundays and !5% of us are routinely paid to work over 46 hours a week. Low wages contribute to this of course, and before accepting the overarching benefit of these changes it is worth paying attention to the words of warning spoken by the Director General of the Institute of Personnel Management.. In his view, "flexibility" had led to abuse by many employers with workers being hired and fired on terms determined by employment legislation rather than the needs of the individual, or the dictates of the production process. Such policies were leading to:

> the creation of a permanently casualised industrial peasantry, with little protection and no stake in the future.

In his view, this situation "can't be in the interests of organisations or society" (*Financial Times* 31 November 1993). This opinion is reinforced by research into home-working which indicates that the experience of unskilled, less privileged workers is more exploitative than rewarding (Mitter and Rowbotham, 1993; Phizacklea, 1993).

Taken together these findings raise important questions about the employment rights of workers, and also raise questions about efficiency. These new arrangements (or more correctly the return to old arrangements of a previous century) may well conflict with the requirement for employees to be more committed to their work and to the company that employs them. Fucheyama (1995) has resurrected the idea of "trust" as a crucial part of any employment relationship. This was the background to a decision by Yorkshire Tyne Tees Television to offer full staff status to contract staff. In the previous three years employment levels in the company had fallen from 2,400 to 650 staff, with a further 250 employees on short term contracts. In his assessment of the situation, Mr Ward Thomas, Chairman of the company recognised the self deception involved in defining many of these workers as "short term". While their contracts were of a fixed term (involving no liability to the employer) they were being systematically renewed. He added that "it is right that they should feel secure about their employment". This was welcomed by the trade union, whose representative, Tony Lennon argued "casual staff have less loyalty to their employers and there is little incentive to provide training" (*Financial Times*, 21 November 1995)

4. Privatisation and the Squeeze of the Public Sector:

In the post-war period, the labour markets in many of Britain's industrial regions were dominated by state sector employment. People worked for a nationalised industry or for a public utility; they worked

for local or central government; they worked in schools and hospitals, in the fire service or police force.. In the decade 1982-1992 employment in this sector declined by over a million (*Table 6).* This was almost entirely due to the process of privatisation which moved nationalised industries like aerospace and steel into the private sector to be joined there by the major public utilities. Once sold off, these corporations experienced radical restructuring. Changes were most obvious in the privatised utilities with water, gas, and electricity each shedding over 25% of their labour forces while generating increasingly high wages and dividends for their senior executives; the so-called "fat cats" (see Froud et.al.1996). For their part, employees in these corporations have found their working days increasingly subjected to monitoring and regulation. Conversations with fitters and engineers working for British Gas produces a set of common responses:

> it's change after change after change. But I wouldn't say that these changes were done with our benefit in mind. For example they've just introduced this new machine which if we attach to the boiler flue measures the emission and lets us know whether it's necessary to strip down the boiler. Before, on a service we would strip down every boiler; now we don't need to. But it's not done to make our job easier. Now we have to do more jobs in a day and there are less of us.

Table 6: State Sector Employment 1982-1992 (000's)

	Public Corporations and Nationalised Industries	Public Services	Total
1982	1,756	5,265	7,021
1992	588	5,210	5,798
Decline	1,168	55	1,223

Source *Economic Trends,* 1995

The one major corporation remaining in the state sector is the Post Office; plans for its privatisation being defeated in the House of Commons. While this reprieve has meant that many small local post-offices have remained open it has not slowed down the pace of organisational change within the postal service itself. It was this - the introduction of new rotas and team working - which produced a ballot in favour of strike and a series of one-day stoppages in 1996. The greatest fear of these workers was that team working (why do you need a team to deliver mail!) would reduce the work task to the morning delivery and thereby facilitate the imposition of part-time contracts.

The experience of the postal workers is shared by other state workers employed in the public services. While their number has remained around 5.2 million throughout the eighties, these people have seen their jobs and working arrangements changed dramatically. The introduction of budgetary constraints, new measurements of "output" and the generalised introduction of "Agencies" with management structures responsible for the monitoring and organisation of work have involved little less than a revolution in many of these organisations. For example, in his assessment of the ways in which civil service employment has altered, Fairbrother has drawn attention to the ways in which the Benefits Agency has transformed the organisation of the Department of Social Security which is now:

> organised on the basis of three territories rather than seven regions, and 500 offices have been grouped into 159 district management units-DMUs

In these new arrangements "staff deal with claimants via an integrated computer system" and "there has been the intensification of managerial work as well as the physical removal of managerial responsibility from the majority of local offices" (Fairbrother, 1995, 141).

Similar changes have strongly influenced the operation of schools, universities, hospitals, local authorities, the BBC and the emergency services (fire, ambulances, the police). In each of these areas there have been similar responses of protest, and complaints about increased work-loads. As a result, in the 1980s, industrial disputes in the UK are becoming increasingly concentrated in the public sector, with public sector unions increasingly dominating the politics of the Trades Union Congress. Regularly these workers and their representatives draw attention to issues of work intensity and stress associated with the organisational changes.

At one point it seemed as if these professional groups would reinvigorate the work ethic. Teachers talked of being "at the chalk face"; and workaholism" became a legitimate illness as people turned up earlier and earlier for work, and often boasted of it. However, there are signs that this phase is over. Throughout the public service sector employees have been complaining about the lengthening and restructuring of the working day.

A recent national survey by the Association University Teachers indicated that "academic staff are working an average week of 55 hours, with one group, women professors, working an incredible 65 hours per week" (AUT, 1994). In response, , one senior academic told me that he'd:

> been working in the University for over thirty years, and I've always turned up for my lectures and classes. this term, for the first time, I rang in to cancel my classes saying that I was unwell. I had so much work to do that I just had to have two days alone at home - "on the sick" - to catch up.

In response to this situation the AUT launched its "Lessen the Load" campaign which aimed to draw attention to the fact that:

> Since 1983-4 student numbers have increased by nearly two thirds while staff numbers have risen by a mere 11.4%...it is the staff who have borne the brunt of this dramatic change and whose work loads have increased massively (AUT, 1996, 6)

Others have commented on the increasing demands upon working time and the ways in which these are increasingly resolved in relation to external criteria established by the funding council in relation to teaching and research. Many have questioned the impact of these changes upon previously established professional ethics (see for example, Harley and Lee, 1995; Minkin, 1996). The British Sociological Association conducted its own survey and found that:

> no-one reported any positive effects of the research assessment exercise. Most thought it detrimental to quality, of both teaching and research...although one respondent noted that deterioration in output was not to be put directly at the door of the RAE, everyone else accepted that it was responsible for a series of consequences that were described as "appalling", "obscene", "greatly detrimental" and so forth. (Warde, 1996,2)

This disenchantment with imposed work norms was demonstrated graphically by one delegate at the Nation Union of Teachers' Annual Conference in 1993 who arrived to speak at the rostrum bringing with her on a porter's trolley the documentation relating to the National Curriculum.

Within the National Health Service, the development of private Trusts and the introduction of management systems built around the internal market have produced considerable friction. The parallels here with some of the more rigid management systems introduced into private manufacturing are quite strong ones. One medical secretary described arrangements in one of the departments in her hospital, in ways which reminded me of the early Ford system (see Beynon, 1984). There, she said, "laughing is forbidden; even smiling gets you into trouble". To ask hospital workers whether the TV series *Cardiac Arrest* resembles life in their hospital is to produce an immediate response:

> everything that has happened in it has happened in our hospital. Except on one occasion when the administrator helped some-one who was on a trolley. Ours wouldn't have. he would have filled in one of his chittys and walked away.

Regularly, nurses say that they: "love the work but hate the job". Accounts of increased work loads and perceived irrationalities are repeated throughout the state sector. In one of the Social Services Departments I visited I was told that:

> The pressure of work has got such lately that people are regularly taking days off work "on the sick" as the only way of coping with it. As soon as a new virus appears, everyone develops the symptoms: one after the other. I've started to make a joke of it. I call into the offices and ask "has anyone got something that I can catch: I need a few days at home"

All this is suggestive of important changes taking place within the state sector which relate to changes in state policy and the imposition of external, budgetary constraints upon activities which were previously delivered on the basis of "service" and "need". They form an arena in which conflicts over purpose, and the evaluation of work are fought out. That the conflict over values seems to be so acute in the state sector illustrates the extent to which these state workers and public service professions drew upon ideas of public service as a means of establishing their collective identities and developing their complex interests within society. It was these codes which were being contested and broken down by the managerialism of the eighties and nineteens.

In turn, many professional people resent the increased demands placed upon them in a world where their "service" isn't valued. As one teacher put it to me:

> I went into this job because I was interested in it; interested in teaching kids. But that isn't valued any more. Not by the government or even by the parents. Its 'money' that counts nowadays. There are a lot of things - extra-curricular things - which I just won't do any more.

5. Insecurity and Stress:

In Britain the most dramatic changes over the past decade and a half have been associated with the rate of unemployment and with increased insecurity (and "fear") expressed by employees and the self-employed worker alike. As we have seen (in *Table 2*) unemployment increased in the early 1980s and has remained high since then. However, the unemployment data alone underestimate the numbers of people who, for one reason or another, at not in employment. The number of those "out of work" is best measured through the idea of "economic inactivity". This data is contained in *Table 7* and it indicates the extent of the gap that exists between this measure and the unemployment data. . It demonstrates a long term decline in the percentage of men who are "in work" and a corresponding increase in the percentage of women, especially married women. It demonstrates too how the labour force, in addition to being more balanced between men and women is increasingly unrepresentative of people under eighteen and over fifty four. In the view of Schmitt and Wadsworth (whose more refined data suggests that inactivity rates are in fact higher than is suggested here):

> The evidence suggests that a shift in demand away from low skilled work, rather than any voluntary reduction in labour supply, was responsible for the rise in inactivity.(Schmitt and Wadsworth, 1995,115)

They add that the depressed state of wages and employer preferences which favour part-time work have also had an effect. This is borne our in research commissioned by the Rowntree Trust which argued that economic growth would not, in the nineties have a significant effect on unemployment rates. Like Schmitt and Wadsworth, the editor of the studies findings Pamela Meadows, of the Policy Studies Institute, argued that:

> unemployment at less that 2 million is simply the tip of the iceberg. We are entering the twenty first century with 7 million people of working age who have no jobs (Meadows, 966:6)

Table 7: Economic Activity Rate Percentage

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF MEN:
Percentage economically active by age

	1975	1981	1985	1991	1993
16-17	55	47	65	68	63
18-24	89	89	91	89	83
25-34	98	97	97	97	94
35-44	98	98	98	95	93
45-54	98	95	93	92	92
55-59	94	90	82	79	76
60-64	84	73	53	52	51
65-and over	16	11	8	8	7
16-64	93	90	89	88	86
Total	81	77	76	75	72

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF NON-MARRIED WOMEN:
Percentage economically active by age

	1975	1981	1985	1991	1993
16-17	52	40	66	74	58
18-24	82	83	81	79	75
25-34	76	76	74	70	69
35-44	75	75	78	78	70
45-54	77	74	73	76	70
55-59	62	61	51	55	53
60-64	34	23	16	23	19
65-and over	6	4	2	2	2
16-59	72	70	74	74	69
Total	42	44	45	46	43

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF MARRIED WOMEN:
Percentage economically active by age

	1975	1981	1985	1991	1993
16-17					
18-24	54	57	62	71	74
25-34	52	51	57	71	72
35-44	66	69	69	77	79
45-54	67	69	67	75	74
55-59	49	54	50	55	56
60-64	26	21	20	25	22
65-and over	6	5	4	5	4
16-59	59	61	62	72	73
Total	51	51	51	59	59
All Women 16-59	62	64	66	73	72

Source: *General Household Survey,* various years

This report indicated that employers increasingly favour women and part-time contracts. It also indicated that companies increasingly lay off older staff, hiring cheaper younger replacements, resulting in non-participation rates of 50% in these older age groups. Further support for this line of argument comes from research commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust which raised concern over the way in which:

> the decline in the numbers of full-time secure pensioned jobs in favour of sub-contracting, part-time working and short term contracts has serious consequences for both young and older people, especially when coupled with discrimination against both young and old on grounds of age.

They added:

> in the 1980s, during the period of recovery following the early 1980s recession, employment levels first regained their pre-recession level and then went on rising so that by then end of the decade they were 2 million above their pre-recession peak. In the 1990s even the restoration of the pre-recession level cannot be taken for granted (Trinder and Worsley, 1996).

While the recession of the early eighties affected manufacturing and the old industrial regions, the last recession hit directly at the new post-industrial, service economy and its heartland in the South East. An investigation by *World in Action* (10 November 1992) into the local economy of Slough (the boom town of the 1980s) documented "the fear that affects every office and shop-floor in Britain". In a sample of 1,000 they found that 9% had recently been made redundant; 43% were worried about being made redundant and 60% expected there to be an early redundancy within the family. The leader of the local Council remarked:

> everyone is depressed on the borough council...this country seems to be geared up for one thing - unemployment. You can't plan your future

A year later, a MORI/IRS survey commissioned by the *Financial Times* found that:

> the number of workers who fear they might lose their jobs in the next twelve months rose to more than 50 per cent in December- in spite of last week's sharp fall in unemployment (*Financial Times*, 20 December 1993)

This survey revealed some interesting variations in the pattern of change. In referring to a "surge" in the increased fear of redundancy, particular groups were highlighted:

> Part-time women workers are taking most of the jobs being created but this group has seen the biggest rise in job fears.... The anxiety ratio also rose among white-collar staff and lower managerial staff... possibly reflecting the likelihood of more public-sector job cuts

In a reanalysis of Labour Force Survey data, Philip Bassett and Patricia Tehan estimated that in the three years 1990 -1993, as many as 28% of the labour force (ie 7 million people) experienced periods of unemployment (*Times*, 11 January 1994).The *British Social Attitudes Survey* for 1994, registered a significant increase in the proportion of employees who saw job protection as their most important concern. Fourteen percent of the sample had been made redundant in the past five years, 52% had worked in workplaces where there had been redundancies and 80% knew someone who had experienced redundancy. These data are supported by a survey conducted at the University of Warwick by Whitstone and Waddington. Focusing on issues relating to trade unionism, they recorded only 6% of respondents claiming that their job was secure. Shop stewards and workplace representatives stressed managerial attitudes and the abuse of authority as giving greatest concern to their members. These feelings were felt most strongly in the public services.

While the earlier period of uncertainty had affected manual workers in the manufacturing and extraction industries, by the 1990s insecurity was widespread. For example, on 3 March 1994,

The Times noted that:

> more than 1,000 young business travel agents will be looking for jobs in corporate management this year after graduating from new training schemes.

It added that:

> a recent study has said that up to 700 students on new tourism degree courses could fail to find jobs within the travel industry because of the recession.

Eighteen months later, the *Financial Times* was commenting on the fact that:

> there has been a sharp increase in the number of travel agencies which have collapsed. In the three months to the ends of September, the number of failures rose by 46 per cent compared with the same number last year.

In its view:

> the industry is bracing itself for another tough year in the face of erratic consumer behaviour in a market which most describe as "not buoyant" (*The Financial Times*, 28 October 1995)

Perhaps the most interesting survey has been the one conducted recently by Mintel into "Marketing to 45-64s" (Mintel, 1995). This group has hitherto been the source of considerable purchasing power with no mortgage to pay, and children who have finished their education and are employed or married. The survey reports an astonishing change in the circumstances of this age group which it depicts as "the sandwich generation"; caught between the changed demands and circumstances of their parents' and their children's' generation. Caught too in the changed circumstances of their own employment. The study highlights: "a new mood of disenchantment with the world of work" with a significant decline in the proportion indicating that they would continue working if they didn't need the money. In its view:

> it is certainly true that the widespread changes in working practices across the decade (including greater reliance upon new technology and a more "results oriented" approach in many occupations) are likely to have been unsettling for established members of the workforce

This report, helpfully draw attention to the ways in which fears and anxieties about security compound the stress which is related to the intensification of work itself. In the year to March 1993, Britain's largest 1,000 companies shed 1.5 million workers (*The Director*, March 1993), cutting costs and restructuring their operations. In the view of Alistair Anderson, managing director of Personal Performance Consultants UK: "downsizing in companies has meant that often people have been left ill-equipped and ill-prepared for the job expected of them. This itself creates great stress". He added that, in his belief:"the demands on the workforce are greater than they have ever been" (*The Financial Times*, 8 December 1993).

Here as everywhere there are ironies. So acute is the stress experienced by the "survivors" of corporate shake-outs that many of them wish that they had been "let go". In a recent survey of 40 UK organisations in the public and private sectors, all of whom had undertaken at least one redundancy exercise, Drake Bean Morin (1995), the management consultancy found that:

> survivors frequently feel confused and insecure about the future, and envy their former colleagues' lump sum payments and the opportunities opened up by career counselling....It is common for productivity to nose dive

More recently, a survey of 1,300 managers carried out by the Institute of Management pinpointed "recession survival strategy" as the source of significant levels of stress.

> Four out of five of the managers in the survey said that their work loads had increased in the past two years and the same numbers were worried about their future financial position. More than half the managers said that they were concerned about future career opportunities.
>
> As companies emerged from recession, however, the new management job structures were not offering improved job security, reduced stress levels or the easing of work loads (IM, 1995)

In this respect these responses fit well alongside the findings of Cary Cooper's researches into the work habits of industrial managers. These confirm that many managers are rejecting the demands of the office in favour of time spent in more rewarding relationships beyond the work-place.

In the 1970s, the problems of British employment relations were strongly identified with the days lost through strike action. In the 1990s it seems that work- related stress (accounting for the loss of as many as 90 million working days a year) has replaced it. This helps to highlight the ways in which the most significant changes taking place in employment relations involve an interplay between the labour process and the content of the job on the one hand and institutional and external factors on the other. Of these, the depressed nature of labour markets; the reorganisation of labour contracts and related changes in the composition of the labour force; and the changing nature of public sector employment are of considerable significance. In this context the decision by the Department of Health to shred printed copies of the commissioned publication: *Mental Health and Stress in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers* is of some interest. As Cary Cooper, one of the authors, put it:

> obviously it struck a nerve somewhere....(but) it is clear that long hours do not mean good health (*The Times*, 6 October 1995)

In assessing the current situation in labour markets across the UK the Pennington column of *The Times* put the matter rather succinctly. Responding to the Bank of England's puzzlement over the failure of

earnings to push up in the period of recovery, it argued thus:

> ask anybody working in the real world why earnings have not risen during this recovery as in past ones and they will come up with a much more sensible answer, which is blind terror.
>
> The industrial reforms of the 1980s have rendered the labour market permanently less secure for large swathes of the work force. Many more people work part-time and on temporary contracts and the use of casual labour is widespread.
>
> The jobs market is stacked dramatically in favour of the employer rather than the worker. look no further than the fear of unemployment for the reason for low earnings growth. (*The Times* 9 November 1995)

This was supported by an investigative report by *The Observer* in which Neasa MacErlean interviewed a variety of different employment consultants in order to establish "How to make sure that you don't get sacked". Some of her findings were these:

> Jo Bond of Coutts Career Consultants said:"Keep fit and healthy. The older you are the more important it is to project a fit and healthy outlook; it's highly important for people over forty"
>
> Elaine Aarons employment solicitor of Eversheds, advises: "Keep a distance from **the** politics of the organisation. It doesn't do someone any good to be going to official or unofficial union meetings. These people often don't do we'll when a redundancy situation is going on. Unfortunately, it is as if we are going back into the dark Ages where employees have to take everything on the chin".(*The Observer*, 26 May 1996)

Given this, it is perhaps not surprising to note that trade union membership in the UK has declined by 5 million since 1979. Unemployment and the closure of unionised enterprises provides the main explanation of this decline. This together with the difficulties involved in unionising many of the new workplaces and the growing tendency for employers to *deunionise* companies and establishments. A survey conducted by Industrial Relations Services of 98 companies in 1993, revealed that 25 had derecognised unions in the previous twelve months. The Workplace Industrial relations Survey (3) data suggests that such derecognition and the removal of collective bargaining rights leads to a

substantial decline in union membership. On its evidence density rates fall from 54% to 15% after derecognition.

In his interpretation of this data, Millward has argued that:

> Britain is approaching the position where few employees have any mechanism through which they can contribute to the operation of their workplace in a broader context than that of their own job (Millward, 1993)

It would be possible to interpret this decline in unionisation and the response to deunionisation as evidence of the rise of individualism and the decline of a collective ethic. There are signs that the new leadership in the Labour Party take this view, stressing that trade unions should cease to behave as (putative and imperfect) organisations of class, and rather emphasise their role as service organisations capable of providing individual services for their members. Several trade unions have taken this path and there is some evidence that their members appreciate these new advantages of union membership.

However a recent major survey conducted at the University of Warwick seriously questions this interpretation, and the salience of individual benefits in the minds of union members. The authors of this survey concluded that their data:

> emphasises the continuing relevance to workers in all occupations of the traditional reasons for trade union organisation and membership - their need for an independent collective means of defending and promoting their interests (Whitston and Waddington,1994)

Their respondents repeatedly mention the need for support at work in the event of a problem. Shop stewards and workplace representatives stressed managerial attitudes and the abuse of authority as giving the greatest cause for concern to their members. Across the sample only 6% of the workforce felt secure in their jobs. These feelings were felt most strongly in the public services.

6. Conclusions:

Things are changing in our society: sometimes imperceptibly, sometimes dramatically and before our very eyes. Much of this change is associated with work and employment. The processes. whereby new labour forces were reproduced (many of them unchanged for two or three generations)have been radically transformed. As a consequence dockers in Liverpool strike for months attempting to prevent the imposition of a contract which, in their view, would reintroduce the casualisation of the nineteenth century. Thousands of people queue in Manchester for the chance to work for Euro-Disney in Paris. A man kills his friend in Bristol in a conflict over a part-time job desired by both. Trainee managers for retail companies, like "Toys R Us", are informed that the company demands "total commitment" and a working week of at least a 100 hours.

Undoubtedly, many people's lives have improved immensely in the last twenty years: both in terms of their real wages and in the opportunities which have opened as a consequence of rapid social and economic upheaval. However in its new form, organised around a dynamic new technology, the economic system produces high levels of insecurity and involuntary economic inactivity. In the UK this has combined with the tacit ending of "the family wage". As a result more and more of us need a job in order to keep up our standard of living just at the time when, jobs are becoming scarcer. Nowadays more and more people are being pushed to the edges of the labour market; often to fight their way back in again but with little guarantee of security.

This "deregulation" of the British system of employment relations has brought it more in line with the US. However it has failed to deliver new jobs at anything like the US rate. At the same time there are

grounds for feeling that it has done damage to the normative attachment of employees to their occupations and to their particular employer. Historically this relationship has been strongly underpinned by the state. For this reason the withdrawal of the state from the labour market has produced a situation of moral turbulence. In reflecting upon this Edward Luttwack has argued that conventional politics of left and right can no longer deal with "the central problem of our days: the

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