

ETUI-ETUC Conference, 27-29 June 2016, Brussels

Shaping the new world of work – The impacts of digitalisation and robotisation

Panel 10: Working Time

Participants:

- Ilse de Vooght, Femma
- Tracey Warren, University of Nottingham
- Philippe Askenazy, CNRS

Discussant: Barbara Surdykowska, 'Solidarnosc' Trade Union

Moderator: Agnieszka Piasna, ETUI

Reporter: Stan De Spiegelaere

Tracey Warren focused on working time and underemployment. According to her, working time has a clear class dimension. Managers are mostly keen to work less hours while lower level occupations would prefer to work longer hours.

Philippe Askenazy discussed the experience of the French 35 hour week and its effects on things like employment and working conditions. The reduction of working time from 39 to 35 hours was combined with other measures to compensate for rising costs. These flanking policies include among other a annualisation of the working time and the introduction of time saving accounts. As a consequence, the real reduction in working time was limited. It did, however, have some positive effects like:

- Significant decline of employees 'working long hours'
- Reduction of household inequality
- Job creation (about 300.000)
- Innovative work practices

However, unions and their inclusion is essential for the parallel increase in job satisfaction. It remains an open question, however, what the flexibility measures which led to a 24/7 economy, affect the society in terms of well-being and inequality.

Ilse De Vooght presented the view on working time reduction from the viewpoint of a Belgian feminist organisation. She focused mostly on the gender issues related to working time, unpaid work, work-life balance etc. Her organisation, Femma, as a consequence pleads for a 30 hour workweek which should solve the interesting paradox that some are complaining about too much work while others are complaining about not having enough work.

Barbara Surdykowska, the discussant, made some more critical remarks towards the idea of working time reduction. According to her productivity gains went (and should go) to consumption rather than a reduction in working time. Additionally, the idea of doing it collectively was challenged by her as she is more in favour of specific targeted policies.

In the Q&A sessions some interesting remarks were made such as:

- A representative from Eurocadres evoking the problem of working time for higher level functions as '*the office is constantly in your pocket*'.
- Askenazy evoking the need for consumer action on the issue. In his view, workers are not likely to demand a reduction in working time, just as they were not in favour of banning asbestos. It was/is only when the consumer comes in that there might be some movement.