THE CASE FOR A SHORTER WORKING WEEK

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WORK TIME REDUCTION

WHY?

• Benefits for our economy
• Benefits for gender equality
• Benefits for society, health, and wellbeing
• Benefits for the environment
WORKING-TIME IS POLITICAL

WORKING TIME VARIES:

- Working-time varies widely across countries and throughout history

- Decisions made to reduce working time are ultimately political ones
Average hours per capita 1980-2014
(source: OECD Data)
Annual Hours Per Capita
(Source: OECD data)

- Greece
- Italy
- Spain
- UK
- Austria
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Norway
- Netherlands
- Germany

(Source: OECD data)
Gross domestic product per capita
(source: OECD data)

GDP Per Capita (US $)
Annual Hours Per Capita
Linear (Annual Hours Per Capita)
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

• MACRO-ECONOMIC ARGUMENT

  • No clear positive correlation between long hours and wealth

  • Countries who work fewer hours tend to have higher levels of productivity, as well as greater amounts of wealth per person
Worker productivity relies not just on the number of hours put in, but on the wellbeing, fatigue levels and overall health of the worker.

Shorter working weeks (and/or greater worker control over working time) can mean:

1. fewer sick absences
2. fewer in-work accidents and mistakes
3. higher worker motivation on the job
MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

WELLBEING & WORK:

• Annual cost for employers of poor mental health work is estimated to be £33-42 billion

• Work related stress, depression and anxiety account for 45 percent of all working days lost due to ill health

• Unevenly distributed: Over the last three years reported levels of workplace stress have been around a third higher for women compared to men
GENDER

UNPAID WORK:

- Majority of unpaid domestic and care work in the UK is done by women.

- In the UK women do:
  - 74 percent of all childcare
  - On average 26 hours unpaid domestic labour a week

- A shorter working week can help to redistribute unpaid work more evenly between men & women
GENDER

ECONOMIC COST FOR WOMEN:

• Unequal distribution of unpaid work hampers women’s career progression
• Women far more likely to work part time (41 percent of women work part-time, compared to 12 percent of men)
• Part-time is less well-paid than full-time counterparts regardless of qualification
• 77 percent of part-time workers feel trapped in their current job because of a lack of good quality part-time jobs
GENDER

WIDER ECONOMIC COST:

- A failure to use women's skills was costing the UK £36bn a year, equal to two-percent of GDP
- Bridging the UK gender gap in work has the potential to increase GDP by £150bn by 2025
THE ENVIRONMENT

CARBON EMISSIONS:

• Close link between high working hours and energy intensive, environmentally damaging patterns of consumption

• Countries with low working hours tend to have:
  • Lower carbon footprints
  • Lower ecological footprints
  • Lower carbon dioxide emissions
THE ENVIRONMENT

MEASURING THE IMPACT:

- 1 percent decrease in working hours could be followed by a 0.8 percent decrease in emissions.

- (Based on this assumption, the general movement towards a four-day week would result in an accompanying reduction of 16 percent)
THE ENVIRONMENT

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR:

• Reduced working hours could change the behaviour of households away from energy intensive behaviours, and toward more eco-friendly alternatives

• Creation of more free time outside of work creates the possibility for a general movement towards low-carbon ‘soft’ activities

• Added benefit of low carbon activities on wellbeing and community
AUTOMATION

MEASURING THE IMPACT:

• Predictions that between 30-50% of UK jobs at risk of automation by the 2030s

• Those without university education and further down the income scale are most at risk – danger of significantly exacerbating inequality

• The more worrying trend for some is the ‘hollowing out’ or polarisation of the job market
AUTOMATION

BOTH A PROMISE AND A THREAT:

• Productivity gains must be shared fairly with workers in the form of work-time reduction

• Urgency: without intervention, automation will exacerbate inequality
TOWARDS A FUTURE OF REDUCED WORK...

• A reduction in work-time is entirely feasible with current levels of technology

• The benefits for society, gender equality, the economy, and the environment can be significant

• Time must become political once again