

Work and employment in a Green society

Before the turn of this century, the industrial revolution in this country had so raised productivity per worker that several theorists of that time estimated that the material needs of Britain could be met from an average working day of only two to four hours.

Since then, and especially at the times of the two "World Wars", when the brakes were released on production, productivity throughout the developed world has continued to rise.

At the end of the second World War, American economists soon realised that the enormous expansion of productive capacity brought about by the demands of that war would soon "saturate the market" if turned to meeting peacetime needs - in other words, the needs of all *who had the money to buy with* would be met, so they would stop buying. "Depression" would set in.

They could, of course, have proposed that the markets be expanded by *creating and giving* the money to the needy, and this could be continued until all *their* needs had also been met - but this, from their Capitalist viewpoint, would only postpone the "problem": "markets" would still soon "collapse": the ultimate catastrophe for a Capitalist!

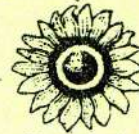
Instead, they persuaded their leading industrialists and designers of the "benefits" of a deliberate policy of "planned obsolescence" - producing short-life, unrepairable goods - to ensure that needs were never all to be met.

At first found repugnant, this has now become the generally accepted policy, almost worldwide; so much so that most people fail to appreciate the extent to which modern production is of no real benefit to anyone.

The productive capacity of the World is now vastly greater even than in the '50's; people continue to work long hours; yet needs remain unmet all around us: not only through the misdirection of effort into arms production and the ever-growing forces of repression, but also through ever-changing fashions and the production of shoddy, deliberately short-life, unrepairable "throw-away" goods - and the mammoth efforts of the huge packaging and advertising "industries" to persuade us to want them - and Capitalism continues to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer.

Meanwhile, anthropology has discovered - surprise, surprise! - that "primitive" societies do not, in most cases, spend all their waking hours striving to survive; they spend most of their time socially: relaxing, talking, singing and dancing. They also have time to listen, to be with their children, to

share each others' problems - time all-too clearly lacking for most people in this society, except for the "unemployed", for whom the problems created by society are overwhelming. It is *not* a human need to be enslaved to a "job" to earn a living.



The major parties all seek "economic growth" to "create jobs" and keep people working (and to create wealth - for some!), but seem unable to appreciate that a productive and distributive system, using modern technology and geared to meeting real needs *economically* (in its true sense), could "saturate the market" very quickly indeed, using far less of raw materials than currently, and then could "wind down" and release humankind from wage-slavery - if the incomes were provided without the jobs.

The idea that "jobs", "good" or otherwise, are in themselves in any way of benefit to people, other than, *under present arrangements*, as a means of claiming a share of the goods and services available, *must* be challenged outright; advocating "job creation" implies acceptance of the lie that "jobs" are what people *need*. The only truth in this arises because of psychological maladjustment through people's acceptance of the *work ethic*, and of society's attitude to the unemployed which is a result of this. There is also much confusion between "jobs", meaning paid employment, and all the many possible activities, self-chosen or otherwise, and regardless whether they command an income, which benefit society, raise self-esteem or avoid boredom or a feeling of worthlessness; some of these may be "jobs", but there are far more which attract no payment, while very many "jobs" lack these attributes.



The Green Party has a policy to issue Basic Incomes; let us imagine an established Green world based on this:

The Basic Income is enough to allow everyone to purchase enough food, warmth and shelter to maintain health and minimal comfort, with enough left over for modest travel, entertainment or other "luxury".

It replaces social security payments, pensions, etc. as well, in effect, as providing "wages for

housework".

Industry has been reorganised to provide efficiently and sustainably, and distribute all that is required by the population.

With rational use of modern technology, this necessarily implies that far fewer people are employed in this, for far fewer hours, than now.

For some, the Basic Income will suffice; they are content to consume no more; a few are simply "lazy" (though this implies a psychological maladjustment and will rarely be other than temporary); some are unwell, or old - too lethargic or otherwise incapacitated to want or be able to do more; but for most people, most of the time, their needs will be greater.

Some will satisfy these needs with little demand for more money. Gardening is an ever-popular pastime, and many will appreciate the quality and freshness of food they have grown themselves, individually or in co-operatives, or exchanged with or bought from neighbours. (Community Ground Rent ensures that land for such purposes is generally available at reasonable cost.) Others will enjoy a variety of productive crafts which benefit themselves and their neighbours. Others will similarly produce works of art.

Community projects and neighbourly help undertaken without pay are likely to be common.

Probably large numbers will still be earning by working in industry and commerce; but hours will be far shorter, and more flexible. Having the Basic Income will ensure that the workers can dictate the terms of their employment, even in those establishments which have not yet become workers' co-operatives.

And, of course, the structure of pay-differentials will have undergone drastic revision: unpleasant/dangerous jobs will no longer be accepted unless there is real social need for them; those that remain will attract very high pay levels, while other jobs, ones people positively enjoy doing, will only attract low pay.

There will, in fact, be a continuum of pay-levels, from nothing, for the entirely "voluntary" (today's term - meaningless in this new society!), through very low, to moderate, to high levels.

Many jobs now commanding high wages, in armament-production, for example - will have disappeared, while the range and number of unpaid occupations will have increased vastly.

"Unemployment" would, of course, have become a

meaningless term.

High tax on unrenovable or overused resources, e.g. minerals, trees, applied at the point of initial extraction, will have made manufactured goods generally much more expensive, but far longer-lasting, and cheaply repaired and maintained. Recycling of their raw materials will also be far more worthwhile.

To achieve the level of Basic Income for the above, all unearned, unjustified income will have been taxed away or otherwise cut-off. The main sources of funding would be Community Ground Rent, levied at 100% on the full rental-value for the permitted use of all land; Resources Taxes; Community Credit operated by Community Banks, passing back to the community the profits from any interest charged on loans, and displacing private capital in investment in socially worthwhile enterprises; while stabilised exchange rates between currencies would have ended the opportunities for huge speculative gain which exist in the present money markets.

The level of BI possible will, of course, depend on the level of funds available to redistribute from such sources, and perhaps from direct taxes on production or even earned incomes; but it should be largely self-regulating - if too few opt to work on production and distribution, less will be available as BI, causing more to supplement it by returning to productive work. If this is overdone, BI will rise, but so will the level of unsold, surplus goods, so pay will drop, and the incentives to seek it will also become less attractive.



In the early years of a Green administration there would, of course, be plenty of work to be tackled, putting right all those things neglected in past decades - redesigning and reconstructing industry and its products for economy and durability, providing adequate and well-insulated housing, tackling pollution, transforming agriculture, rebuilding the sewers, and so on; and at first the Basic Income would be small, and would only supplement other "benefits"; but as work became needed less, the Basic Income should at the same time grow, steadily replacing those other benefits and allowing more and more people to reduce their hours of paid work; take more/longer holidays; take breaks from work for couples to raise children; retire earlier. And become more sociable, better citizens.