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Work, the Grand Cure

How changing the way Britain works
will be good for our health

Dr Howard Stoaite and Bryan Jones

We would like to thank Day Lewis Pharmacy for their generous support of this publication. To learn more about them, see page 76.

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Dr Howard Stoute

Back in the late 1970s, when I first started work as a junior doctor at the now defunct Joyce Green Hospital on the Kent marshes, health inequalities was the issue of the moment. The Callaghan Government had set up the Black Committee on Health Inequalities in 1977 and for once the prospect of decisive action to reverse health inequalities between classes seemed good. Sadly, the opportunity was lost. Douglas Black's committee was dogged by disagreement and indecision and by the time it had finally reached a consensus, Margaret Thatcher was in charge of Downing Street. The timing of Black's final report, with its call for several billion pounds worth of Government spending, couldn't in fact have been worse. Reporting back to Patrick Jenkin, Thatcher's first Health Secretary, DHSS officials described it witheringly "as a mixture of semi-digested data and proposals for massive public expenditure. It reads like a policy manifesto from a party who do not expect the responsibilities of office."

This is the problem with health inequalities. No-one doubts the need for action. Nor is there usually a lack of political will to tackle them. The Black report is just one of a succession of major inquiries into health inequalities commissioned by concerned ministers over the last thirty years. It's just that when the reports eventually hit the ministers'

desks, events have often moved on and the moment for action has either passed or is yet to occur. In 1980, it was the advent of Thatcher that did for the Black Report. Its successor, the Acheson Report, published in 1998, a year after I entered the Commons, was far better received by ministers. It spawned, or was used to justify, a whole set of new Labour policy initiatives such as Sure Start, Health Action Zones, the national school fruit scheme, the minimum wage and the new tax credit system. Nonetheless, there was only so much the new Government felt able to do in pursuit of Acheson's central recommendation for action to reduce income inequalities. Publicly relaxed about wealth and desperate not to lose its burgeoning reputation in middle England for prudence and responsibility, it went about tackling health inequalities on the quiet, anxious not to be seen to be indulging in any kind of old Labour style redistribution or class warfare. Consequently, although Acheson helped to secure some important initiatives, and made a powerful case for cross-departmental action to tackle health inequalities, the opportunity to put health inequalities at the heart of the political discourse and generate a decisive momentum for change was missed. The fact that virtually all of the running on health inequalities since Acheson has been made by the Department of Health, with only intermittent support from other departments, illustrates how little progress we've made. As the Commons Health Select Committee Inquiry into Health Inequalities, of which I was a member, concluded last year, the Department of Health is more or less impotent on its own. All it can hope to do is paper over the cracks. The decisive action has to come from elsewhere.

The timing of the last Government's review of health inequalities – the Marmot Review, which was published at the start of 2010, a few months before Labour left office – was,

on the face of it, equally inauspicious. With the economy in the doldrums and political attention diverted by the lingering expenses saga and the General Election, it was easy to see how it could slip quietly from view. A cash-strapped Government beset by short-term economic woes would be forgiven in some quarters for putting off so big, and so complex an issue as health inequalities for another day.

Who's to say though that this day will ever come? We've not managed to find one in the last thirty years, so why should it be any different in the next thirty?

I would argue that today is in fact the perfect time to grasp the nettle. In my political life, I've never known a period when the public was less relaxed about extreme wealth and income inequalities within society. The near collapse of our banking system, and the fall from grace of

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the City's once-heralded financiers, together with the exposure of the expenses system, has forced us as a nation to question the way in which different occupations are rewarded. If Westminster is to redeem its reputation then it should capitalise on this disquiet and use it as an opportunity – on a cross-party basis – to make a head on assault on the income and status inequalities that give rise to today's health inequalities.

Work: the Grand Cure

1. GOOD WORK, BAD WORK

The publication earlier this year of Sir Michael Marmot's strategic review of health inequalities would provide David Cameron with all the ammunition he might need if he wanted to make health inequalities a key plank of his administration's policy agenda. As this pamphlet will show, whether the new coalition Government has engaged in any meaningful way with Marmot's recommendations on health inequality – and on the health effects of good work in particular – will be a litmus test for whether the Liberal-Conservatives are really serious about inequality and social justice.

If the Marmot review's aim was to illustrate the crucial importance of adopting a joined-up approach to health inequalities, that is owned by every department, not just the Department of Health, then it succeeds brilliantly.

The political reaction to the review, however, showed how far we still have to travel. It was warmly welcomed by Labour's then Health Secretary, Andy Burnham and by the then Children's Minister, Dawn Primarolo, both of whom talked about its implications for their respective departments, but the rest of the Labour Government remained silent.

The new Government will have to wrestle with some significant economic challenges in the years ahead. It cannot afford to allow the question of health inequalities to disappear into the

political long grass however. Health inequalities is an issue of central importance to every government department; you can't build a strong economy or a healthy society by parking health inequalities as an issue on the fringes of government.

Good work

As the new Government tries to roll out an ambitious, if piecemeal, programme of change across the NHS, they will have some startling facts to contend with. These would be depressing whatever your political colours.

Over the last decade, health inequalities between the richest and the poorest in Britain have increased despite the record levels of investment in the NHS under Labour. The gap between men has risen by 4 per cent and the gap between women has risen by 11 per cent. Plenty of measures aimed ostensibly at tackling health inequalities have been introduced by the Department of Health, with targeted initiatives to cut coronary heart disease and cancer rates, promote healthy living and cut smoking. These have been implemented on a vast scale and often at great expense and, whilst some have been a success, many have failed to make much of a dent or alter behaviours in any meaningful way. The reason – as the recent Health Select Committee inquiry into Health Inequalities warned – is that many of the underlying causes lie well outside the remit of the Department of Health. The NHS may be better equipped than it's ever been to deal with the *consequences* of health inequalities; tackling their fundamental causes however is a challenge that's sadly well beyond its capabilities.

It now seems clear that if there is one lesson that the new Government could rightly glean from the last 13 years of health policy it is this: health inequalities are better tackled

outside the Department of Health than in it. But there is a wider lesson that is only slowly, reluctantly, beginning to dawn on policymakers across the political spectrum: 'good work' matters.

We know that it is not diet or lifestyle, but inequality itself that is the root cause of the entrenched health inequalities that exist in Britain today. A spate of high-profile books from Richard Layard's study on *Happiness*,¹ to Richard Wilkinson's *The Spirit Level*² and *The Impact of Inequality*³ have all made the same central point: inequality kills and more equal societies are invariably healthier, happier and more successful.

This pamphlet sets out to show how changing our working culture and how we perceive the jobs that we do is the key to finally reversing the stubborn trend of rising health inequalities.

Work, as Thomas Carlyle said, may be "the grand cure of all maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind".

Bad work

Unemployment has a particularly corrosive effect on people's physical and mental health, but there is equally strong evidence to show that having a good job is considerably better than having a bad job as far as our health is concerned. Work, as Thomas Carlyle said, may be "the grand cure of all maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind", but bad work that makes one feel undervalued and disempowered can have a devastating effect on one's self-esteem and consequently one's physical and mental well-being. We are much better off, socially, physically and spiritually when we have work that offers us a chance to find an out-

let for our creative spark and also provides us with a degree of stability and rootedness.

As the recent Marmot review of health inequalities⁴ stated:

“The relationship between employment and health is close, enduring and multi-dimensional. Being without work is rarely good for one’s health, but while ‘good work’ is linked to positive health outcomes, jobs that are insecure, low paid and that fail to protect employees from stress and danger make people ill.”

A renewed focus on job quality across the whole of the employment spectrum could help us make a significant dent in health inequalities in this country. Every person should be able to make the best of their abilities regardless of their background: no-one should be excluded from their chosen career path because they lack the social or economic capital to make it possible. But whatever job they find themselves in they should be able to feel that their labour is valued and fairly rewarded. If all employees have a high degree of control over the work they do as well as good workplace relationships and good pay, employment rights and security, then they are more likely to feel that they’ve got a job that is worth having.

We also need to think about people’s lives outside work. Among western European countries, only Spain has a higher percentage of workers than Britain who work more than 48 hours a week. As a nation we are becoming defined purely by what we do at work. Fewer and fewer of us are choosing to give time to other causes in the community and a culture of volunteering has all but disappeared in many towns and cities in Britain. We work, we come home, we fill a few hours before going to bed and then we get up again to go to work; for most of us there is no time for anything else. It’s revealing that whilst the sitcoms of thirty or forty years ago were

invariably based in the home, many of today's sitcoms are focused on our lives at work in the office.

And it's not just political parties that are feeling the pinch as the time people can give to other activities than work disappears. Virtually every kind of community organisation, from school governing bodies to charities to sports clubs, is now struggling to find enough suitable volunteers to keep themselves going. The halcyon period that some would have us believe in when we knew the meaning of community and vast numbers of us gave up time for some community cause or another, probably never existed. What is certain though is that work, together with the revolution in home entertainment that's taken place in the last quarter of a century, have left little space for community life. It's possible too that our growing obsession with performance-related rewards, where every action and every minute spent at work has a precisely calibrated value, has made the volunteering of time something of an anachronism – unless it is for strengthening one's CV.

The final report of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering underlined the scale of the problem. Volunteering, it said, faces a number of challenges if it is to fulfil its potential:

“There is growing sectarianism as communities turn inwards in the face of rapid change; we are increasingly risk-averse and consumer orientated; and many feel that in the last few decades we have lost something important – a sense of neighbourliness, community and collective sympathy. Some people might describe us as a society where we are increasingly cash-rich, but time-poor.”

A depleted community realm is not good for our health. The volunteers and joiners amongst us are invariably happier, healthier and more relaxed. They are also more trusting and

less fearful. If they know some of the fourteen year olds hanging around at the bus shelter at the end of the road, then they're less likely to worry about them or avoid going out when the evening begins.

We can't change this culture overnight. But we can begin to try and carve out some space for the community by redressing the balance between our work and personal lives. Employers today are supposed to allow their employees time to take up school governorships or elected posts; but how many do so ungrudgingly, or give them the flexibility they need? And even some top firms that trumpet their volunteering programmes in their annual reports and press releases have become distinctly lukewarm on the idea during the downturn. Until public sector and industry leaders lead by example, or the right to time off is rigorously enforced, it is unlikely this culture will ever change.

2. A PURPOSE IN LIFE

The key to good health and wellbeing is having a purpose in life. Good work, an active hinterland and strong social relationships can all provide that sense of purpose. The NHS, try as it might, can't do much to promote any of these things. It's good at picking up the pieces when things go wrong in our lives, but it can't prevent them going wrong in the first place. Health ministers in the last Government talked frequently about encouraging 'health promoting behaviour' as a means of helping to reduce health inequalities, but the reality is that interventions that will make a difference will come from elsewhere in government.

At present the chances are that if you come from one of society's more disadvantaged groups you will be far more exposed to adverse job conditions than the most privileged among us.⁵ As well as being more likely to experience job instability, you are also more likely to be exposed to physical or ergonomic hazards and adverse psychosocial conditions such as limited job control. A recent comparative study of adverse working conditions in eleven European countries by Johannes Siegrist found a clear social gradient in the level of job control experienced by employees aged 50 to 65. A host of other academic studies over the last twenty years have confirmed this trend. The Whitehall Study of

British civil servants showing a job strain gradient within the civil service hierarchy is the most famous example.⁶ Niedhammer's study of workers in the French gas and electricity industry is another useful piece of work.⁷

'Job strain', a condition that arises when limited job control is combined with stress at work, is associated with a wide range of significant health problems. According to Siegrist "a majority of at least twenty reports derived from prospective studies document elevated odds ratios of fatal or non-fatal cardiovascular (mostly coronary) events among those reporting job strain or effort-reward imbalance". Other researchers have also alluded to a strong connection between job strain and a raised risk of developing type 2 diabetes, hypertension as well as elevated fibrinogen and atherogenic lipids.

By addressing adverse psychosocial work conditions therefore we stand a real chance of tackling the social gradient in health among those in work.

In saying this, we also have to think about the consequences of this for the long-term unemployed and those who fall regularly in and out of work. In improving psychosocial working conditions, there is of course a real risk that we may end up actually exacerbating the health gap between the out of work and those in regular work. In an economic downturn with higher numbers of people out of work this is an especially important policy consideration.

It serves to underline the crucial importance for the new Government of getting people into meaningful, stable work as quickly as possible after a period of non-voluntary unemployment. However much we try to sugar the pill of unemployment by providing schemes aimed at increasing peoples' 'work-readiness', there is no substitute for proper work and we should never lose sight of that fact. The most effective health policy we can have is one that gets people

into work and keeps them there. Whilst unemployment – particularly if you come from a disadvantaged social group – leads to a higher risk of chronic limiting illness and poor mental health, re-employment is generally associated with a reduction in symptoms according to Siegrist. Whilst looking at how to cut levels of unemployment is not the focus of this pamphlet, we do want to emphasise that any measures taken to improve the quality of work must go hand in hand with policies aimed at reducing unemployment.

We should also say a word at this point about the costs of promoting ‘good work’. In the following sections we will be proposing a series of measures aimed at encouraging employers to invest in schemes that will improve the quality of their employees experience at work. Finding the money to do this won’t be easy at this point in

Health inequalities are responsible for productivity losses of £31-33bn per year.

the economic cycle, especially with all government departments looking to cut costs. There are two things ministers need to bear in mind however. The first is the cost to the exchequer of rising health inequalities. A report by Frontier Economics⁸ prepared for the Marmot Review has suggested that health inequalities in this country are responsible for productivity losses of between £31-£33 billion each year, together with between £20-£32 billion worth of lost tax revenue and higher welfare payments. It also puts the direct cost of health inequalities to the NHS in terms of increased acute activity, higher prescribing costs and more mental health activity at around £5.5 billion a year. Given the new Government’s avowed concern to reduce the gap between public expenditure and receipts not only in the short term

but for future generations there is a sound long-term economic case to be made for investing in good work now.

The second point to remember is that there are any number of potential savings within the NHS that have yet to be realised. Research commissioned by the Proprietary Association of Great Britain⁹ for example estimates that the NHS is spending about £2 billion a year on treating minor ailments that could easily be dealt with by patients themselves without a visit to their GP. A coherent, high profile strategy to promote self care could yield substantial savings for the NHS through reduced drug costs and fewer consultations.

In a similar vein, weeding out treatments and procedures still being practiced in the NHS that are out of date could also save the NHS a great deal of money. A few years ago for instance the Chief Medical Officer revealed that the NHS was spending over £20 million a year on removing patients' tonsils unnecessarily and carrying out hysterectomies when other cheaper procedures were more appropriate. These are just two examples. A concerted effort by NICE to identify other such obsolete treatments could highlight many more examples and lead to further savings.

Cutting the number of hospital beds in areas where there is a clear overprovision of beds could also help us to shave costs in the NHS. Despite recent efforts by the last Government to shift more care away from hospitals and into community settings, there is still a marked unwillingness in certain parts of the country to carry this idea through to its logical conclusion and actually cut bed numbers. Research by Reform,¹⁰ for instance, has shown that whilst there are just 2.5 beds for every 100,000 people in the South Central SHA area, there are over 4 beds per 100,000 in the North East.

Whilst Reform obviously has its own political axe to grind, it is nonetheless a sharp reminder that the NHS is

still too top heavy in places, and that more work still has to be done if the NHS is to achieve its stated aim of becoming a genuinely primary care led, prevention driven, more cost-effective service.¹¹

Taken together these savings could generate significant sums of cash that could be earmarked for measures to promote good work. If ministers are minded to make improving the quality of work available in this country a key plank of their health inequalities strategy, then the money for them to do so is there for them.

Work: the Grand Cure

3. HOW TO PUT THE EMPHASIS ON JOB QUALITY

As humans we need purpose and meaning in our lives, and work, along with family, is a primary vehicle through which meaning is created. As the Greek gods knew, there is no more terrible a punishment for man than to be forced to work without purpose or direction. It is hard for us to think of any worse a fate than that of Sisyphus, whom the gods forced to roll the same boulder up the same hill,¹² without purpose, for eternity. Every time he rolled the boulder to the top, down it came again, and once again Sisyphus began his gruelling ascent of the hill .

Sisyphus was suffering from what we would now describe as 'isostrain', a phenomenon that arises, the Marmot Review¹³ states, "when the particular psychosocial hazards of low worker control, having a large number of demands and little support at work combine". Today, Marmot says, it usually results in increased rates of absence due to illness, mental illness and cardiovascular disease.

In his book *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett, the sociologist, underlined the importance of 'craftsmanship' in the work we do. The craft process, whereby we select our materials and then manipulate them, using our skill and experience in order to create something that is of tangible value, is a necessary human experience. Without it we are lost.

The quality of the work we do therefore has a crucial bearing on our sense of wellbeing and ultimately on our health outcomes. If we want to reduce health inequalities therefore we need to place a greater emphasis on promoting job quality within each working environment. By this we mean secure work that allows employees autonomy, control and task discretion and isn't characterised by monotony and repetition.¹⁴ People should also be appropriately rewarded for the effort they put in and the skills they possess and have the training and support necessary to do their job effectively even when under pressure. Equally important is the culture of the workplace: people should have a genuine voice within their organisation and an ability to help shape its working practices and strategic direction. Also essential are good working relationships and a flexible management style that allows employees a reasonable worklife balance and the opportunity to fit in family and personal commitments when necessary.

Research commissioned by the former Department of Trade and Industry, which used similar criteria to those outlined above, found that the amount of 'good work' in the UK has risen in recent years after a period of marked decline in the 1990s.¹⁵ The picture is still very patchy however and it is clear that we still lag well behind many of our European neighbours when it comes to job quality. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, the UK has marginally more low quality employment than France and Germany, and significantly more than Nordic countries. Nearly 70 per cent of jobs in Denmark for instance are deemed to be of high quality compared to just over 42 per cent in the UK. Another Europe-wide survey by Aon Consulting attributed the high level of 'sickies' pulled by British workers each year compared to their continental peers to a lack of interesting work and limited opportunities

for flexible working among other things.¹⁶ Over a quarter of the 120 million non-genuine sick days taken each year in Europe were taken by British workers the survey found.

Moreover, on some measures there is evidence to show that the UK may actually have gone *backwards* rather than forwards over the last twenty years. Job control is one such example. According to a recent Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) skills survey there was a marked decline in job control between 1992 and 2006 across all occupational groups. The growing use of information technology based management systems, for instance, means that the working practices and outputs of many employees are now far more closely monitored than they were a generation ago. This requires people to work in a

The UK has marginally more low quality work than France and Germany and significantly more than Nordic countries.

very structured fashion that leaves little room for flexibility or discretion and is also inherently more stressful. Such employees are also unlikely to receive any additional pay by way of compensation. These IT based systems now affect as many as half of all employees and few sections of the economy are immune. Everyone from professionals and managers who use networked computing services, to check-out staff connected to electronic point-of-sales systems, clerical staff who update online computer databases, to call centre operators on computer controlled switchboards, now find themselves almost completely reliant on ICT systems in their day to day work.

While many employers may congratulate themselves on introducing technology that allows them to monitor and manage the performance of their employees in such an

accurate and cost-efficient fashion, it is clear that not all employees are quite so appreciative. Employees with less job control no longer feel as though they are active participants in their organisations. Their sense of commitment diminishes; they feel less responsible for the consequences of their actions and they feel increasingly dissatisfied. Not only is this bad for the health of the business but it's even worse for the health of its employees.

So how do we go about improving matters? As with so many aspects of social policy, we have a lot to learn from what happens in Scandinavia. The Scandinavian experience shows just what can be done when you combine reasonably tough employment laws, high quality active labour market programmes and high tax and benefits. It creates an inclusive labour market with decent work for the overwhelming majority of employees which results – unsurprisingly in a happier and therefore healthier population. These Governments have long understood, as research by Warwick Business School has now conclusively demonstrated,¹⁷ that a happy and engaged employee is invariably a far more productive one.

Denmark – along with neighbours Sweden, Norway and Finland – all perform substantially better than the UK in terms of the level of employee autonomy that exists within the workplace,¹⁸ which in anyone's book is surely one of the most important factors in promoting a sense of wellbeing. There are two main reasons why these countries perform so well in this area. Firstly, union density is very high in each of these countries. A strong union presence will help to neutralise attempts by employers to impose more controls on the working practices of their employees. And even if they aren't always successful the fact that employees know that they have the union on their side, fighting their corner,

makes them *feel* more in control of their working lives – which is just as important.

The second reason is that all of these countries have invested heavily in programmes of workplace reform. Each Government has understood the importance of trying to improve – or at least protect – the quality of its citizens' working lives and has invested heavily in programmes that focus on job enrichment or improving companies' productivity or organisational performance. It is reasonable to suppose that this investment has helped to keep these countries ahead of their EU competitors in terms of the extent of autonomy that exists in the workplace. It has probably also played at least some part in helping to improve overall health outcomes and minimise health inequalities among the working population.

There are some employers in the UK who understand the importance of good work. One example, mentioned in the Marmot Review, is Artizian, a medium-sized catering company that won the Health, Work and Wellbeing Award at the National Business Awards in 2009. Artizian has a low rate of staff turnover at all levels of the company and also a low staff absence rate due to sickness. This success, Marmot reports, is due to "a strong belief in a shared company vision, integrating employees' views into its work strategy, and making all senior management known to all workers, keeping them visible and seen to work." As well as providing learning and development opportunities for all staff, Artizian goes well beyond any formal statutory requirements when it comes to consulting its staff about developments within the company. It provides a regular 'gossip session' for staff so that they can discuss their feelings about issues within the company.

If we are going to replicate this success across the UK then we could start by ensuring those measures that are already

on the statute book are in fact being implemented. The TUC estimated earlier this year, for example, that there are at least 1.5 million employees who are not receiving the national minimum wage. A new Pay and Work Rights Helpline was set up in the last months of the Labour Government to allow employees to call an adviser in confidence for information and advice on pay issues. Ministers hope that this will make it easier for employees to get the advice and support they need and ensure that their right to a fair wage is enforced. Its success will depend however on how well it is promoted, particularly among lower paid occupations, and also on whether people have the confidence to actually use it. Many employees are reluctant to take action after all – even when they know they are being exploited – either because they're worried about how their employer will react or because they don't think any action will be taken.

One way of addressing this fear is to promote the advantages, or more specifically the protections, that union membership provides employees.

We also need to review urgently the level of resources given to the national minimum wage enforcement and compliance teams. Since the minimum wage was set up there have been fewer than half a dozen successful prosecutions of employers for non-compliance with minimum wage regulations. Part of the problem is that each enforcement team is too small to deal with the caseload that comes its way. To be fair, ministers have attempted to boost their resources in recent years. Additional resources – some £3m extra a year for four years – were made available for enforcement work back in 2006 and greater powers were given to enforcement officers in the Employment Act 2008. Despite this, each regional compliance team remains seriously overstretched:

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has a total of just 125 staff in post at its 17 compliance centres across the UK at present. Even if you accept the most conservative estimate of the level of non-compliance with minimum wage regulations by employers, HMRC resources barely even scratch the surface. No wonder so many employers feel that they can flout the law with apparent impunity. In contrast the Department of Work and Pensions employs over 3,000 benefit fraud investigators and carries out over 2,000 fraud investigations each week. It's a statistic that, with hindsight, made the Labour Government's claims that it took minimum wage enforcement very seriously look fairly hollow.

Only by increasing enforcement resources do we stand any chance of challenging the culture of evasion that exists in certain sections of economy that are dominated by

vulnerable, low paid staff. Extra resources would also allow compliance teams to spend more of their time working with employers to prevent abuses from occurring in the first place rather than simply reacting to episodes of non-compliance. A more proactive approach predicated on promoting compliance and persuading employers that it is in their interests as a business to meet their obligations to their staff as a responsible employer is crucial if things are to change.

It's an approach that we'd like to see implemented in relation to *all* aspects of employment law. A holistic compliance strategy led by a single agency that encompasses everything from paid holiday entitlement and statutory sick pay to the pay and conditions of part-time agency workers relative to those of permanent full-time employees. Such an

We would like to see the new Government introduce a National Employment Rights and Innovation Office.

agency would have more teeth and more impact than the hotchpotch of agencies and strategies that we have now.

The new single Pay and Work Rights Helpline, which has replaced five separate helplines for workers and employers seeking employment rights advice, was a tacit admission by the last Government that its approach to compliance hadn't been as coherent or transparent as it could have been. We need to go further than this however. As well as looking at advice and enforcement, the new agency should also focus on what practical steps can be taken to help employers improve the job quality of their employees. For instance, innovation grants could be made available to employers that are looking to introduce programmes of job enrichment or initiatives aimed at enhancing autonomy and job control. Employers could be encouraged for instance to submit bids for work programmes that will enable employees from all pay grades to work together on particular projects, or schemes that give employees the opportunity to rotate jobs within their organisation.¹⁹

Striking an effective balance between enforcement and empowerment isn't the easiest thing to do, but we believe that the advantages of locating both roles under the same roof more than outweigh any difficulties that might crop up. Its overriding benefit, we believe, would be a cultural one. A forward looking remit, with a clear emphasis on helping companies make the reforms they need to empower their employees and so drive their business forward, would encourage employers to see compliance in a positive rather than a negative light. It would underline the fact that investing in your employees and performance improvements are two sides of the same coin and that the latter can't be achieved without the former. If all goes to plan, any residual fears held by employers about the 'dead hand of the regulator' holding back the business and covering it in

unnecessary red tape and costs would soon be banished once the new agency hits its stride.

For these reasons we would like to see the new Government introduce a new National Employment Rights and Innovation Office. Such a body would be capable both of tackling recalcitrant employers and also of providing a comprehensive package of support and encouragement to firms that have been slow to adopt the latest statutory requirements and best practice ideas. In time, with the right resources and political backing, we think it could make a significant difference to the working culture of the UK, even during a period of economic slowdown. We have to remember that although there are rogue employers out there who treat their employees in a shameful fashion – almost as disposable objects – and others who take their staff for granted and wouldn't dream of putting any money into them, the vast majority are decent and well meaning. They want to do the best for their staff and they're not about to turn down any reasonable offer of assistance. Their biggest impediment is not their motivation but their relative size.

The UK economy is still dominated after all by small operators with fewer than ten people. Some 85 per cent of UK companies fall into this category.²⁰ Because their budgets are tight, many companies of this size do not employ a personnel specialist. Consequently there is often no one in firms like these with any sort of in depth knowledge of employment law or human resource management. Though they would like to do more for their employees, they often lack the requisite funds and knowledge to ensure that they are firstly up to date with the latest legislation and secondly are able to implement it. And when business is slow and credit is in short supply, the temptation to put things off until the economic weather is a bit brighter can be hard to

resist. A well resourced National Employment Rights and Innovation Office however, that worked closely with employers, would make it much easier to ensure that all employees, regardless of circumstances, get what they are entitled to, even in a time of economic trouble.

A government-funded free advice and support service for business – now called Business Link – has existed in various guises since the early 90s. It now helps over half a million established businesses a year and also provides pre-start up support to several hundred thousand fledgling businesses. Its approach is focused very deliberately however on awareness building and it prides itself on being able to provide support in an impartial, neutral fashion. It provides various ‘checklists’ to businesses, for example about employment and environmental regulations they need to adhere to and ‘alerts’ about any imminent changes. What it doesn’t do at any point is to make a case as to why these regulations are needed or how improving the lot of one’s employees might help the business move forward. No doubt this is due in part to a fear that any attempt to proselytise to business would be loudly and vehemently condemned by employer bodies – who would then in all likelihood publicly proclaim their ‘loss of faith’ in the organisation.

Such concerns are understandable but if there was ever a time when the country could do with some shameless proselytising about the importance of ‘good work’ then it is now. Rather than sit back for fear of offending the delicate sensibilities of prominent business leaders (some of whom never miss a chance of course to heap opprobrium on anything resembling government interference), we should be upfront and bullish about the workplace changes we want to achieve. The new National Employment Rights and

Innovation Office, with its fresh outlook and the licence to campaign, would be well placed, we believe, to take on this challenge. Whether the new Government considers this will be a litmus test for whether they will be building upon or ditching the employment reforms that were introduced over the last thirteen years.

It will also help us improve the health outcomes of our working population. Studies that have examined the impact of measures aimed at improving the psychosocial quality of the work environment have

consistently shown positive effects on employees' mental health and well-being and sickness absence, the Marmot Review found. Interventions that increased participants' job control and degree of autonomy, for instance,

together with participatory

initiatives that allowed employees and managers to work alongside each other on 'problem solving committees' worked well, the report concluded.

The evidence was compelling enough in fact for the review to make improving the quality of work across the social gradient one of its key policy recommendations. In essence, you can't tackle health inequalities without looking first at our working culture.

You can't tackle health inequalities without looking first at our working culture.

Work: the Grand Cure

4. HOW TO EXPAND EMPLOYEE-OWNERSHIP

When British Airways invited its staff to work without pay for a month in a bid to save cash, some commentators suggested that the company would have had a far better chance of success if its staff had had a financial stake in the company.²¹ Asking your staff to share the company's pain in the bad times without offering them the prospect of a fair share of the profits when the economic clouds finally lift won't get you many takers, they warned.

In the event they were right. Only a few percent of BA's staff opted to follow the lead set by the firm's Chief Executive, Willie Walsh. Would things have been different if BA had been partly or indeed wholly owned by its employees? Employee-owned businesses and co-owned businesses may still seem a touch exotic for British tastes, but there are plenty of seasoned business experts who are genuinely excited by the concept. Handled in the right way, they say, there is lots of evidence to suggest that employee-ownership could be the key to unlocking the latent potential in all kinds of businesses. Research by Birmingham University Business School for example found close links between employee-ownership and improvements in productivity, innovation and employee retention. In other words, give people a stake in their company and there is a

good chance that they will be better motivated, more productive and more inclined to go that extra mile for the business when necessary. It's the difference between being someone who happens to work for a business and someone who feels as though they're an integral part of the business.

More importantly as far as our argument is concerned, employee-ownership is also good for people's health and can help us tackle health inequalities. For a start, those localities with high levels of employee-ownership appear to be in better health than the community as a whole.²² The Equality Trust meanwhile, a body founded in 2009 by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, the authors of *The Spirit Level*, has also pointed to the "growing evidence of health and social benefits for individual employees" from employee-ownership.²³ Giving employees a stake in their company, a right which hitherto has been the preserve of the highest earners in the economy, can help us democratise the workplace, the Equality Trust believes, and consequently reduce the health gradient in the working population. Greater employee-ownership in fact is one of the Trust's key campaign demands.

In saying this it is clear that employee-ownership – as the Employee Ownership Association itself has warned – is not enough in itself however to guarantee job satisfaction and improved health and well-being. A financial stake is a powerful incentive, but if your job is a precarious one, or you work in an organisation with a strict hierarchy that doesn't encourage participation from the shop-floor in management issues, then its appeal doesn't seem quite so strong. Richard Reeves²⁴ argues, very persuasively, that the true potential of employee-ownership is something that can only be released when it is combined with a workplace culture that actively promotes 'co-creation'. By this he means

a workplace where consultation, information sharing and employee forums are the norm and every employee, however humble, knows that their ideas and feedback will be treated seriously and with respect. ‘Co-co enterprises’, companies that successfully combine co-ownership with a culture of co-creation, are populated, he claims, with employees who are not only keener and more productive but also happier and more fulfilled than the employees of conventionally led firms.

A research paper published in the US that looked at the impact of ‘shared modes of compensation’ on company performance in the UK over twenty years²⁵ seems to support this conclusion. The co-owned companies with the most impressive profit margins and pro-

We improved public services but people felt like consumers and not partners in the services they received.

ductivity figures were those that had the strongest commitment to workplace democracy in the shape of employee consultation and involvement. This inclusiveness, the report suggested, had the effect of narrowing the gap between the firms’ corporate bosses and those at the opposite end of the income scale. It allows each employee to see, with greater clarity, the connection between their own actions at their desk or on the assembly line for instance and their companies’ overall corporate performance. For the employee of a Co-co company, the firm’s market performance isn’t just a problem for the company’s directors, it’s everyone’s problem and one that each of them has a part to play in helping to address. This creates a workplace culture that promotes free and innovative thinking at every

level and allows employees to grow in confidence and authority and become less dependent on the directions given to them by their immediate managers.

Another report from America, published this time by the US National Center for Employee Ownership²⁶, was equally adamant about the combined value of “employee ownership and participative management” practices. “We can say with certainty,” the report concluded having examined seventy empirical studies “that when ownership and participative management are combined, substantial gains result. Ownership alone and participation alone, however, have at best, short lived results.”

According to the EOA more and more organisations are waking up to the advantages of employee-ownership. The co-owned sector of the economy now has an annual turnover in the region of £20-25 billion and accounts for 2 per cent of the UK’s economic output. It includes household names such as the John Lewis Partnership as well as a growing number of knowledge based companies providing professional services such as the engineering and consultancy business, Arup and PA Consulting. Co-owned enterprises are also establishing a growing foothold in the public sector. Eaga, a major provider of residential energy efficiency products in the UK, does much of its business with central and local government organisations and social landlords. Another example is Sunderland Home Care Associates, which is owned by its two hundred employees. SHCA provides over four thousand hours of social care a week, and has been widely praised for the quality of its work. Not only are its care staff better paid than those employed by many other services but they have the licence to do that little bit extra for their clients when the occasion

demands it – a policy that has obvious benefits for clients and also makes the job itself inherently more satisfying.

Charles Leadbeater has argued that the “open, collaborative and democratic culture”²⁷ of employee-owned organisations is far more conducive to innovative thinking than the rigid, hierarchical structure of most existing public sector providers. He believes that employee-owned organisations are ideally placed to meet the public sector’s “incessant and growing” need for innovation, and that they should be given a more central role in the delivery of public services. Neither the risk averse public sector nor efficiency focused private sector contractors have the same innate capacity for “curiosity driven innovation” as employee-owned organisations.

And it isn’t just within a work context that the benefits of employee-ownership are felt. The Chairman of Loch Fyne Oysters,²⁸ another business that went for co-ownership, found that the greater confidence and self-reliance that the company’s employees developed thanks to the new management and ownership structure, spilled over into their lives outside work too. They became much more involved in the local community, he said, and were far more willing to take on positions of responsibility in local organisations.

All this raises the question as to why it is that employee-owned firms are still such a relatively marginal presence in the economy. It may be becoming more fashionable as a concept, with both Labour and the Conservatives talking enthusiastically about mutualism and co-operatives in the run-up to the election, but a 2 per cent share of the economy suggests that we still have a lot of persuading to do. Self-interest is one obvious explanation. If you’re the owner of a company that’s turning in a decent profit year on year, it’s going to take a lot to convince you that offering up a share of the firm to your

employees is the right thing to do. It may potentially make the firm more dynamic and more innovative, but if you lose your majority stake in the process, you're not going to see much of the extra profit yourself. Some majority shareholders, those perhaps who derive as much pleasure from the success of the business as from the financial rewards it generates, might be willing to give it some serious thought, but most won't.

Something that might make them think again is the presence of some significant fiscal incentives. At one time a company would have been able to claim tax relief on any money it chose to pay into an 'Employee Benefit Trust', a vehicle often used by companies that wished to become co-owned enterprises. Unfortunately it was also exploited by companies that simply wanted to reduce their tax liability and eventually it was scrapped altogether in the Finance Act 2003. No equivalent provision has been introduced in the intervening years and the failure to do so is seen by many in the sector as a major hindrance to its continued growth. Clearly this is something that the new Government needs to remedy if we are to see more employee-owned and co-owned businesses emerge in the future.

We also need to do more to support new and emerging employee-owned businesses. Finance is a particular problem. Even before the economic downturn, many nascent employee-owned enterprises were finding it difficult to persuade outside investors to put money into their businesses. And when they did manage to find investors they were often faced with prohibitive interest rates or restrictive covenants. A report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Employee Ownership suggested that many potential investors had a limited understanding of the co-ownership business model and its benefits and were "nervous" about investing in co-owned enterprises. They pre-

ferred to put their money into business ventures that operated along more familiar lines according to tried and trusted business models that they knew well. Given the choice between an employee-owned business and an individual entrepreneur for example, most venture capitalists would tend to favour the latter in most instances.

Their efforts to win over investors certainly aren't helped by the current dearth of official statistical data either in the UK or at European level on employee-owned businesses. If you're a serious investor

who wants to find out more about the extent of the sector and its performance over time then you won't find much reliable, official data out there to help you in making a considered judgement.

This so called 'data gap' will need to be plugged if

employee-owned businesses are to be taken seriously by investors as well as by service commissioners in the public sector, academics and journalists. It's an important step in helping us to level up the playing field between employee-owned businesses and more conventional enterprises.

The central thing that would really help, however, to sell the employee-owned model to sceptics in the financial and business sector would be if the new Government was to embrace the idea a lot more publicly, and with a lot more conviction and enthusiasm than it's done up to now. Yes, there were a few statements and speeches by ministers from the last Government, some very senior, extolling the virtues of employee-ownership, but it's never been part of a concerted strategy, though, aimed at taking the idea to the next level.

The new Government should embrace employee ownership more publicly and with conviction and enthusiasm.

Take the Thames Gateway Co-operative's (TGC) unsuccessful bid earlier this decade for instance to win the contract to manage and operate the Dartford to Thurrock M25 crossing over the river Thames.

The Dartford crossing nets the Treasury an impressive annual income in toll revenues of around £50 million. It's one of the biggest highways contracts in the country and one that is invariably fought over by major international consortia with impeccable highways management and engineering track records. The TGC, an employees' co-operative composed entirely of existing Dartford crossing operations staff, was not, it's fair to say, the type of bidder that the Highways Agency was expecting to hear from therefore when it published a contract notice in the Official Journal of the EU.

Sadly, it's not difficult to predict what happened next. TGC's bid, which was described by Highways Agency officers, in a less than complimentary way, as being led by a "toll collector and a traffic officer" was peremptorily dismissed by the Agency without even a modicum of scrutiny.²⁹ It failed even to make it past the pre-qualification application stage; the very first hurdle in the tendering process. A subsequent appeal also failed as did a petition to the Department for Transport that was signed by nearly 90 per cent of the Dartford crossing's workforce at the time.

The five year contract was eventually awarded to Le Crossing, a more orthodox Franco-British consortium that included Ringway, a civil engineering firm with a long list of highways contracts under its belt and a turnover of more than £300 million. The consortium may not have had any direct experience of running the Dartford Crossing, but as an international organisation with plenty of cash and well connected backers behind them, it ticked all the Highways Agency's boxes and that was enough for them.

Having met the TGC team to discuss the bid we certainly felt that their case was sufficiently compelling to warrant further consideration, as did several other Labour MPs in the area. But despite strong support from local MPs, the unions and the co-operative movement neither the Highways Agency nor the Department for Transport were prepared to give it a chance.

It later became apparent in fact that no bid from an employee led team, however compelling, would ever have stood much chance of success. The criteria used by the Highways Agency to assess tenders for contracts such as this were weighted heavily in favour of established plcs and made it virtually impossible for a new enterprise like the TGC to be short-listed.

When considering a bid, a statement from the Highways Agency said,³⁰ the Agency needs to establish whether the tendering organisation's "past performance history is acceptable" and whether it "has an established track record". The TGC had plenty of experience to call on, but no formal track-record of any kind, so its bid was deemed by the Agency to be "too risky to let in": end of story.

If employee-led tenders for public contracts are to have any better odds of success in the future then the rules of the game have to change. Rather than ruling them out straight away before they can even walk we should give them a chance to develop their case fully. We need a more flexible approach that's able to accommodate more unorthodox bids from teams that aren't able to prove their worth by pointing to the number of multi-million pound contracts they've won and twenty years of healthy company accounts. Some, inevitably, will still fall short, but they deserve the opportunity of a dialogue with the contract commissioner or their agents before a decision is taken.

We should also give some thought, as industrial relations economist Anthony Jensen suggests, to the possibility of setting up a body that could provide employee-owned enterprises with advice and practical support in submitting a formal tender. The TGC bid was compromised by a failure to get the right kind of advice in a timely fashion about how to present and manage their bid. By the time they'd educated themselves about the tender process and mustered the arsenal of information and support they needed to mount an effective bid, it was too late. If they'd had been able to speak to a government-sponsored advisory body at the outset, who'd been able to disabuse them of some of their misapprehensions about how the process worked and point in the right directions, things might have been very different.

As well as providing advice, it would also help if this new body was able to offer bid teams grants, preferential loans or subsidies to help them pay the premium needed to obtain high quality financial and legal support for the bid. This would enable employee-led bids with limited resources to compete with consortia of major companies on a more level playing field.

The concept of employee-ownership has been hovering on the fringes of British political culture for the last hundred and fifty years. John Stuart Mill no less saw employee-ownership as the necessary next step in our economic development: "We may, through the co-operative principle see our way to a change in society, which would combine the freedom and independence of the individual, with the moral, intellectual and economical advantages of aggregate production".³¹

It has proved its worth on countless occasions; it is now time to put the idea of employee-ownership at the centre of our political debate.

5. HOW TO PROMOTE VOLUNTEERING AND FLEXIBILITY

In Britain today large sections of the working age population have little or no experience of volunteering and play next to no part in the life of their community. Although nearly two thirds of employees volunteer their time in some way – a significantly higher proportion incidentally than among people who aren't working – only a third of them do so on a regular basis.³² Just under 40 per cent of employees don't volunteer at all and a quarter have only done so on an occasional or one off basis.

There are also significant socio-economic differences. High earning employees with management responsibilities are much more likely than either intermediate level employees or routine employees to take part in volunteering activities. In virtually every area of volunteering activity, everything from raising money, to organising an event, to giving support and advice to others, you find a much higher percentage of managers taking part compared to other employees further down the income scale. Take the category of organising or helping to run an event for example: whilst 55 per cent of 'higher or lower managers' and 53 per cent of 'intermediate or lower supervisory' employees told the national volunteering survey that they volunteered in this area, just 40 per cent of routine and semi-routine workers did so. If you combine these socio-economic

differences with the regional and gender differences that also exist, it's possible to find groups of employees in which scarcely anyone volunteers. Young men working in semi-routine jobs in London is one such group.

A world that revolves exclusively around work is rarely a healthy one. Even people who find their work enjoyable and fulfilling find that they benefit from taking on voluntary commitments in the community. Not only does it give us the chance to meet new people from outside our usual social or professional milieu, it equips us with new skills and a fresh perspective on life. Life as a volunteer, and the challenges and rewards it brings, also somehow makes it easier to deal with the inevitable set-backs and frustrations that occur at times in even the most successful of careers. In short, the more strands we have to our lives, the happier and better adjusted we are. A portfolio lifestyle provides us with multiple opportunities for personal development and allows us to fulfil more of our ambitions in life. No-one in fact loses anything from the deal. The community benefits from the volunteer's skills and experience and the employer benefits from having a re-invigorated, more confident and less stressed employee on their staff who is able to bring new expertise and enthusiasm to their job. And the individual volunteer benefits enormously of course, both socially, emotionally and intellectually on account of the new role within the community that they've managed to carve out for themselves. It gives them a sense of rootedness and a sense of connection with their community that's hard to find when work and very little else dominates most of your waking moments during the week.

This is borne out by a study commissioned by Volunteering England from the University of Wales, Lampeter.³³ Looking at all the published research on the

impact that volunteering can have on health, Lampeter's study found a clear link between good health and volunteering. As well as uncovering evidence that volunteering can increase longevity and improve our quality of life, family relationships, self-esteem and purpose, it also found that it can help to reduce depression and stress and hospitalisation. Volunteering, it said, is of particular value in promoting 'eudemonic well-being': the capacity to feel good about oneself. It makes us feel that "we are a significant part of the world around us and that people notice, care about and value our existence" the review stated.

Given the evident health benefits of volunteering and the current socio-economic variation in volunteer participation levels, it seems reasonable to conclude that promoting volunteering could have a big role to play in

Since the dawn of the Labour Party it has been volunteering that has given many people the self-belief and skills to improve their lives.

helping us to tackle health inequalities. Removing the obstacles that are preventing lower-income employees from volunteering and eliminating the social gradient in volunteering activity we have today should be a key plank of our health inequalities strategy in this country.

We shouldn't forget after all that since the dawn of the Labour Party, it has been volunteering, often as trade union activists or via their local church, that has given many working class Labour Party members and politicians the self-belief and the skills to improve their lot in life. Their lives were made richer by volunteering and it is right that the same opportunities are extended to people in similar circumstances today.

So how can we make this portfolio lifestyle a reality? Persuading people of the virtues of volunteering isn't the issue: most people are well aware of the advantages of life as a volunteer. It's persuading them – and their employers of course – that it is not only desirable, but feasible too, despite the demands of their working life. To lower-income employees with no history of volunteering, and who work and socialise with people who also don't volunteer, the difficulties involved in trying to shoehorn a dedicated period of time every week for volunteering activities can appear almost insuperable. If your working day from nine in the morning onwards is full, and you don't get home until six or seven at the earliest, where exactly do you find time for volunteering?

Unsurprisingly, lack of time is the reason commonly given by people for choosing not to volunteer. Among working age people for instance who would *like* to volunteer if they could, around 90 per cent excuse themselves on the grounds that they've "not enough spare time".³⁴ Conspicuous busyness after all, not conspicuous leisure, is today's badge of honour for successful people.³⁵ Many are reluctant to take time out of the office because it implies that they might be dispensable, or superfluous to the smooth running of the business. Others worry that it might earn them their manager's disapproval or make it difficult for them to win concessions from their employers in other areas.

It's for this reason, we believe, that we need to focus our efforts on employers if we are to get Britain's working population into the habit of volunteering. Attitudes will soon begin to shift if employers begin to buy into the idea of volunteering and adapt their corporate philosophy accordingly so that everyone from their most prized and high profile employees to their lowest paid staff have the licence to spend time out of the office as a volunteer.

Although some employers are beginning to appreciate that an employee with an active hinterland is often more productive and certainly happier and better adjusted than one who has little time for outside activities, such employers are few and far between. More firms are now offering employer supported volunteer schemes, as part of their corporate social responsibility agenda, but their commitment to them is sometimes only skin deep. Around a third of employees do have access to employer led volunteering and giving schemes according to research carried out in 2007 for the Cabinet Office.³⁶ Only one in four employees takes advantage of these volunteering schemes however; a figure which suggests that employers are not exactly going out of their way to encourage their workers to join them. Half of employees, the Cabinet Office research revealed, would seriously consider signing up to such a scheme for instance if they could have paid time off to take part, yet only a fifth of firms with volunteer schemes offer such an incentive. One also suspects that many who would like to take part feel that doing so might harm their career prospects rather than enhance them.

The sense that some firms see their volunteering schemes primarily as fashionable corporate decorations that generate good PR and impress clients and shareholders is borne out by their willingness to consider scrapping them once the recession hit. A survey carried out for *Human Resources* early in 2009³⁷ found that "volunteering was regarded as the least important way of meeting business challenges over the coming years" among the firms interviewed. "For employers", HR said, "volunteering is often seen as something they offer in the good times; a way of showing staff they care while ticking the corporate responsibility box. In bad times the idea of paying staff for days spent volunteering holds little appeal." In other words volunteering schemes are viewed by

employers as a disposable luxury rather than as an intrinsic feature of their organisations' culture.

The Commission on the Future of Volunteering reached a similar conclusion. "Most employees do not have a great deal of positive support for volunteering from their employers", the Commission's Manifesto for Change³⁸ noted. In fact a consensus of the employees consulted by the Commission "did not feel that they could ask their managers about taking time off to volunteer" given the marked absence of a "culture of volunteering" within their organisations.

Furthermore, support for employer-led volunteering schemes varies considerably according to the size and sector of the employer. Large organisations with more than 250 employees are far more likely than small and medium sized employers to have a volunteering scheme in place. Whereas over 40 per cent of larger employers have schemes, just 16 per cent of organisations with between 50 and 250 employees also have them in place. And among small organisations with less than 50 employees the figure is even smaller still at only 13 per cent. Public sector organisations are also nearly 10 per cent more likely than private sector firms to have set up a volunteering scheme.

The last Government was very supportive of the idea of employer-supported volunteering schemes. Back in his days in the Treasury, for instance, Gordon Brown challenged all employers to introduce a volunteering scheme for their employees and under Labour, the Cabinet Office, as we have seen, was also active in commissioning and publishing research that looks at the subject of employer supported volunteering schemes.

There are more grounds for optimism here: there is some evidence that younger workers today (or Generation Y

employees as they've been dubbed) are more interested in working for organisations that provide them with opportunities to get involved in the community. A survey carried out by Deloitte in the US found that 'Gen Y' employees actively seek out companies that can offer them "skills-based volunteerism".³⁹ In this country meanwhile, a growing number of leading graduate employers have set up community volunteering schemes in a bid to give themselves an edge in the graduate recruitment market.

This is encouraging, but it doesn't exactly amount to a wholesale change in culture among employers towards volunteering. If organisations were truly serious about volunteering then their top managers and officials, everyone from the Chief Executives, to their Heads of Department

Once people in senior positions begin to volunteer, then others will soon follow in their footsteps.

and Section Heads would be spending part of their week as volunteers, not just idealistic new graduate recruits. It's the actions of people in senior positions after all that set the tone for the whole organisation. Once they begin to volunteer – with the overt support and encouragement of their employers – then others will soon follow in their footsteps. In time, volunteering, having once raised eyebrows, will become almost de rigueur among employees at all levels: no longer an add-on but a core activity that lies at the heart of each organisation's corporate philosophy.

Employers could also help things on their way by offering their employees, as the Commission on the Future of Volunteering has recommended, flexible working hours for volunteering, together with time off work to match volunteering

work carried out outside working hours. They could also look at employees' work within the community as part of the annual appraisal process.

It's possible given time that the concept of employer-supported volunteering may eventually seep of its own accord into the corporate consciousness of Britain. We might have to wait a long time though given the rate of progress to date. In our view the impetus will have to come from the coalition Government either through the taxation system or even through legislation. Issuing challenges to employers isn't enough to achieve the step change we need.

The Treasury could start by offering a package of fiscal incentives to employers who are prepared to release a fixed percentage of employees from each rung of their pay scale for a specified period of voluntary work each year. As well as appealing to employers that have previously given little thought to volunteering, it would help to strengthen existing volunteering schemes that employers have already brought in. And while the package would be more likely to attract large and medium sized employers, there's no reason why it couldn't be tailored to appeal to small employers too. No doubt some of the employers who sign up for the package will do so with decidedly mixed feelings about the value of employer led volunteering schemes. But if it helps to instil a culture of volunteering within the organisation, and leads to the performance gains we have described above, then it will have achieved its purpose. Employers' initial scepticism will hopefully melt away once the benefits of volunteering become apparent and once the word spreads even their most recalcitrant competitors may decide to take a second look.

If we accept that volunteering is good for individuals and good for society, which the Government and every other mainstream political party evidently do, then we

should make good on our rhetoric, and take steps to address the one overriding obstacle, namely our working culture, that's preventing millions of Britons from becoming volunteers. Win over employers and volunteering suddenly becomes feasible. It's high time we acknowledged this and did something concrete about it.

Flexibility

For many successful high-earning people in this country, the ability to work flexibly is a godsend, giving an enviable level of control over their lives which may make them more productive. It also gives them the chance plan their days around personal commitments such as trips to the post office and their GPs, a luxury unavailable to many lower income workers working fixed hours.

It's clear from the academic work on this issue that flexibility increases the more you earn and the higher up the social ladder you are. A recent pan European project⁴⁰ looking at flexible working hours found that although the majority of workers in the EU have some forms of individual or company-based flexibility in their work hours, it varies markedly according to social status, gender and economic sector. The study mirrors the situation in the US, where "flexible work arrangements are especially stratified".⁴¹ A study found that low wage workers were less than half as likely as higher wage workers to have access to flexitime and telecommuting, with managers regarding these arrangements "as tools to motivate and retain highly skilled and valued workers".

Indeed, the advantages of flexible working rarely seem to percolate through to people in lower income neighbourhoods in this country. A qualitative study by the Centre for

Analysis of Social Exclusion of economically active adults in a low income neighbourhood in London⁴² found that the right to request flexible working was not consistently available and depended heavily on managers' discretion. People's "ability to adjust their work to accommodate family life appears to have little to do with choice" the study concluded. Another qualitative CASE study, this one looking at time and income poverty,⁴³ was even more scathing; finding that in many cases the right to request flexible working was "an empty promise, as a result of employers' prevarication and lack of effective external enforcement".

The pan European study mentioned above also found however that as well as offering convenience and control, "individual flexibility" had a positive impact on health, safety and well-being. Evidence to support this has also been brought to light by the Cochrane Systematic Review.⁴⁴ This review, which included ten studies and looked at over 16,000 people, found that flexible working – or more specifically 'the self-scheduling of working hours' – had a positive impact on sleep, mental health and blood pressure. In other words our health is boosted when we, rather than our employers, are able to control our working hours. The review team found evidence for instance that police officers who were given the chance to alter their start times at work were psychologically much better off than officers who had no control over their start times.

Promoting a flexible working culture therefore is a strategy that could pay real dividends in our campaign to reduce health inequalities. After all, the people with the most to gain from this approach are those in the lowest paid occupations.

As the law stands now any employee who has worked for their employer for six months consecutively can ask for

flexible work arrangements, and parents, guardians and carers have the statutory right to do so. Employers are obliged to 'seriously consider' any application that is made and can only reject them if they can provide sound business reasons for doing so. Despite some evidence that employees are making increasing use of this right, a survey carried out for the former Department of Trade and Industry a few years ago found that only around half of employees have the option of working flexibly available to them. The same survey also

found that no more than a fifth of employees have the opportunity of working at home on a regular basis.⁴⁵ The current economic downturn isn't helping matters, the TUC believes. "With employers focused on getting through the recession,"

Brendan Barber, the TUC General Secretary, noted, "many will have taken their eye off the ball in offering flexible working".

The reason why so many employers are resistant to the idea of flexible working, according to Graham Leicester of the International Futures Forum (IFF), is that we have a very "static notion of 'jobs' and fixed 'workplaces' in this country".⁴⁶ What we need to do, Leicester believes, is to move "towards a more fluid conception of the regional economy based on 'work', connections and mobility". In this model work follows the employee, rather than the other way around, and employees will have the freedom to alternate between working at home, working remotely elsewhere as well as spending time in a central office hub. This 'extended

If we want a flexible working culture, we should start with our ingrained Monday-to-Friday commuting culture.

economy' he argues will not only improve our work-life balance and give us more control over our working lives, it is also inherently more sustainable as it will relieve a lot of the existing pressure on our transport infrastructure.

If we are to inculcate the British workplace with a flexible working culture as the IFF hopes, a good way to start would be to tackle our ingrained Monday-to-Friday commuting culture. According to the TUC, British workers spend a total of nearly 22 million hours a day commuting to and from work every day.⁴⁷ Their figures reveal that the *average* commuting time for full-time male employees in Britain is just over an hour a day and for full time women employees it's 53 minutes. London based employees may face the longest commutes – 78 minutes for full-time men and 76 minutes for full time women – but things aren't much better for employees living in the north or the west. In Scotland full-time male employees spend almost an hour a day commuting whilst their counterparts in the North West of England face a journey time of 55 minutes.

All this time spent commuting is not good for our health. It's not just that it adds significantly to the length of our working day and stops us from spending time at home with friends or family – which obviously has a detrimental impact on our sense of well-being – it's the fact that we have limited control of our lives when we are commuting. We referred earlier to the importance of 'job control' in promoting 'good work'. We made the point that even employees who work very long hours under pressure can still derive a great deal of satisfaction from their jobs if they have a high degree of autonomy and job control. In other words, working long hours in a 'stressful' occupation doesn't necessarily damage our health. Commuters, in contrast, aren't able to take control in the same way. The moment we

leave our houses or workplaces we're at the mercy of the rail or bus timetable and the level of traffic on the roads. We *have* to leave at a certain time, and we're largely dependent on other people if we are to get to where we want to be at a certain time. Not only is this stressful, but it's the worst kind of stress as far as our health is concerned, because we have no control over our environment during that time. For employees with limited job control at work, it's a double whammy.

We can't remove commuting from our lives entirely, and nor would we want to. Time spent at work in contact with our colleagues is crucial if we are to do our jobs effectively, and is also important socially. In many occupations though these days there is absolutely no reason other than habit why we need to be in work five days a week between nine and five. Thanks to broadband many office based workers can now log on to their office network at home and perform a good number of the tasks they need to in a given day without leaving their front doors.

And is there any inherent reason why flexibility can't be introduced into occupations that have always proven very resistant to changes in traditional work patterns such as the construction industry? Admittedly, there isn't much scope for home-working within the construction industry, unless you work on the technical or design side. Nor is it that easy to work extended hours three or four days a week to allow an extra day off given that most construction sites are generally only open for a certain number of hours during the day. Yet flexible working within the construction industry is possible and those companies that have embraced it have seen real benefits from it. Allowing employees to work flexibly by coming in late or leaving early on some days for example has made it easier for construction companies to

recruit and retain skilled individuals – a major advantage in an industry where experienced skilled workers are increasingly hard to come by. It has also kept them “incentivised and motivated” according to one small construction firm.⁴⁸ Furthermore, companies that are receptive to flexible working also find that their employees are more willing to be flexible in return: they are more likely to agree to the occasional early start for instance or to cover for other employees when necessary.

Giving employees like this the opportunity to work flexibly – either by working at home one or two days a week, working longer hours four days a week and taking the fifth off or coming in later in the day once the peak is over and ticket prices are cheaper – would make an enormous difference to their sense of wellbeing. For a start it would save them money, a major plus point in an economic downturn when people are being asked to forgo pay increases or part of their salary. Secondly, employees who could work at home would get a boost from the fact that their employer feels able to trust them to work productively away from their desks. It will make them feel more positive about their job and their productivity levels may even go up rather than down, contrary to the popular stereotype about ‘working from home’. Thirdly, it will allow people to make more efficient use of their days and get on with things that otherwise they’d have no time to do. Instead of fighting their way through the peak hour crowds they could be visiting the bank, spending time with family, or getting more involved in the community. All of these things can only improve people’s sense of health and well-being.

Some transport ministers have tried, albeit very tentatively, to engender some enthusiasm among employers for a flexible working culture, or at least flexible start and fin-

ish times that avoid peak commuting hours. As these comments have usually been made in the wake of yet another eye-popping hike in regulated peak rail fares, they've tended to fall on stony ears. They come across more as a desperate attempt to justify the unjustifiable than a balanced and carefully prepared argument for change. If the Government genuinely wants to convince employers and employees of the value of reduced commuting and flexible working, then it's going to have to do better than this.

As a sign of its intent the new Government could start by introducing a green paper on commuting and the extended economy. This would allow ministers to set out the long-term economic, social, environmental and health-related benefits that would flow from a cut in

The new Government should introduce a green paper on commuting and the extended economy.

commuting. It would also be an opportunity to paint a picture of the 'extended economy' of the future; one that's built on a business culture that actively encourages flexible working together with home and remote working. Having published a green paper setting out its long-term vision for a flexible working culture, ministers would then be able to speak on the issue with more authority in the future. It would begin to resemble a coherent agenda rather than shallow rhetoric aimed at limiting the fallout from the announcement of an unpopular policy.

A green paper would also of course represent a chance for the Government to sketch out some of the possible policy measures that would be needed if flexible working were to become a reality. Why not a free public transport 'happy

hour' for instance every Monday between 10 and 11am on all local and commuter bus, train, tube and tram services? It's not a cheap option, particularly in today's world, but it would be a good way for government to drive home a message about off-peak commuting and flexible working and simultaneously capture the imagination of the public. Even if it were to run on a short-term trial basis, the attention it would attract in that time might be enough to persuade quite a few employers – and employees too – to think more seriously about flexible working. If it forces business leaders to question whether it's really necessary for the bulk of their staff to be at their desks or workspaces on the dot of nine, then it will certainly be worth the outlay.

Another idea that could be floated in the green paper is the possibility of introducing fiscal incentives or grants aimed at encouraging employers to allow more of their staff to work from home at least one day a week on a regular basis. This might just be the push, or the 'nudge', to use the phrase of the moment, that employers need to make them take action on this front.

Some thought should also be given to the state of our transport infrastructure. 'Smarter commuting' during off-peak periods and more home working will ease some of the pressure on our transport networks, but that won't lessen the need for fresh investment in commuter rail, bus and road services. Employees will still need to commute after all and the clamour for faster, more efficient and more comfortable services isn't going to die away. High speed inter-city rail links may be the issue on everyone's lips at the moment in Westminster, but the case for high speed commuter rail links is arguably even stronger. Slashing journey times into Britain's main cities from their outer suburbs and feeder towns, would not only benefit more people than

high speed intercity services, it would probably have a greater economic impact. The TUC estimates that over a quarter of a billion pounds worth of working time is lost each day in the UK because of commuting.⁴⁹ By investing in faster commuter services therefore we would be adding considerably to the productivity levels of British firms: not only would their employees arrive sooner, they would also arrive fresher, happier and in a more productive mood. The new high speed rail service from Kent into London that opened last year is an example of just such a service. Prior to its opening commuters living in Gravesend in North Kent counted themselves lucky if they managed to get into Central London inside fifty minutes. Now, thanks to trains that travel at 140 miles per hour, they can get there in twenty minutes. For Gravesend residents it's been a revelation. Seasoned commuters have been able to reclaim their evenings and leave their house in the morning in daylight. Children get to see their parents twice a day, and money is being spent in Gravesend's evening economy for once.

If nothing else though, a green paper will perform a valuable role in putting the issue of commuting to work firmly on the political agenda as part of the wider debate on 'good work' and 'fair employment' that the Marmot review on health inequalities has prompted. Given that commuting to work can absorb the equivalent of anything up to a fifth of the working day, it's an issue that deserves far more attention than it's been given up to now. Our perceptions of work and our quality of life are heavily influenced after all by the ease with which we're able to travel to and from work. By reducing the frequency with which we have to commute - or at the very least making the experience more palatable than it is now - we stand a far better chance of making 'good work' a reality for all of Britain's working population.

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6. HOW TO TACKLE WAGE INEQUALITY

Good work can give us happiness, a sense of well-being and direction in life. With the economy flagging it would be easy to postpone any discussion about job quality, but in our view this would be wrong. What people want is a political narrative that looks beyond today's economic difficulties and suggests that a better quality of working life is in fact in reach. Hard, pragmatic choices may have to be made but it shouldn't stop a determined Government putting in place the initiatives and incentives that can help to make good work a reality for more people. As the Marmot Review has shown, good work isn't just desirable, it's absolutely *vital* if we are to improve our health outcomes, tackle our health inequalities and advance the cause of the good society.

What we haven't touched upon much so far in our discussion is the issue of wages; or more specifically wage inequality. Yet, like it or not, this lies at the heart of the good work debate. The graphic income inequality between occupations that exists in this country makes it that bit harder for us to promote the concept of good work. The bigger the income gap between those at the top and those at the bottom, the harder it becomes for low earners to believe that society values the work that you do.

The health consequences of income inequality have been widely reported in recent years. Study after study has shown that death rates, levels of chronic disease, obesity and after lifestyle conditions are all markedly higher in those countries, regions and cities that are the most unequal in terms of income. Cities such as London or Glasgow, both of which contain pockets of severe deprivation, situated only a few bus or tube stops away from areas of extreme wealth, have significantly higher death rates for instance than Swedish cities or cities in the most egalitarian Canadian provinces and Australian states.⁵⁰ Reducing this income gap is essential if we are to stand any chance of tackling health inequalities in this country.

The first step in narrowing the gap is to increase public awareness of how significant the gulf has become. We've always been slightly coy in this country about talking about how much we earn. Drawing attention to the size of your income, was – and still is in some circles – seen as the height of ill-breeding. It isn't just a concern about social etiquette however that's led many of our highest earners to exercise a judicious silence about exactly how much they take home. They do so because they know that the rest of the country, from Middle England downwards, won't respond well to being made aware of just how big the gulf in their respective incomes actually is. It's something that even the banks have come to appreciate: warning their high rolling staff to rein in their spending in the City's bars and restaurants whilst public anger about the scale of bankers' bonuses and the bailout is fresh in people's minds.

In fact even Britain's most high profile top earners, such as professional footballers, who are never far from the media limelight, take pains to keep the scale of their earnings out of the public domain. To football fans here, it's no

secret that top premier ship players, and quite a few championship players too, earn salaries of telephone number proportions each year. Most are hazy about the details though; in part because they really don't *want* to know exactly how much they're getting compared to them, and in part due to fact that the information is genuinely hard to get hold off. As Hunter Davies, writing in the *New Statesman* last year said; "In the UK, we think we know how much our heroes get, but we don't, as it's kept very secret and certainly does not appear in any match programme"⁵¹

Consequently it can come as quite a shock to be suddenly confronted with the bald figures. Davies, a journalist who's followed the game for the best part of forty years, was genuinely taken aback to find – in stark

Greater wage transparency is what we need, however painful the experience might be.

contrast to anything you might find in the this country – a list of each player's salary printed in a match programme of an American Major League Soccer team he was given. The programme, which was for a friendly between Sounders FC of Seattle and Roman Abramovich's Chelsea, proudly displays the weekly income of each member of the two squads. Unsurprisingly, it's the wages of Roman's Galacticos that stand out. Needless to say the prospects of the same information appearing in future Chelsea programmes are fairly remote: reminding your fans who earn £20,000 or so a year that it'll take them over seven years just to earn what Frank Lampard does in a week wouldn't be good business practice. Maybe in the immediate aftermath of an emphatic home win over Manchester United,

the collective euphoria felt by the crowd might just be enough to offset some of the discomfort that these mega salaries provoke, but not for long.

Greater transparency is exactly what we need though; however painful the experience may be. The recently published report of the National Equality Panel chaired by John Hills⁵² is certainly a step in the right direction in this respect. It's a chastening read for anyone involved in politics. Despite some levelling off in the last decade, people on the brink of the top tenth of the income range in Britain are still bringing in more than four times the income of those at the upper end of bottom tenth of the population. Compared to 1980, when people at the top end were earning 'only' three times as much as people at the other end of the income spectrum – which wasn't that far shy of the situation in Scandinavia; only a handful of developed countries today are more unequal than the UK.

In its coverage of the NEP report, the *Guardian*⁵³ got into the spirit of things by gamely publishing an income distribution graph that showed the contrasting fortunes of the bottom 10 per cent of earners – headed by hairdressers on £12,403 – and the top 10 per cent earning anything over £46,400 a year. A salary of over £70,000 would put you in the top 3 per cent of earners. No doubt some of the paper's professional readers, politicians and civil servants included, will have been surprised at how high up the income scale their salaries are. Every reader who saw the graph, whatever their salary, will have had some thoughts though about whether it represents a fair or appropriate distribution of income.

It's a message that needs to be consistently hammered home. The best way of making the political case for narrowing the income gap between the top and the bottom is

to arm the public with the basic facts of who gets what. Some people might not be too concerned; arguing that in a free society everyone has the right to earn as much as they can get away with. Others may worry that putting incomes under the microscope in this way and asking high earners in effect to justify what they earn might jeopardise their children's or grandchildren's prospects for getting on in life. Most people in this country though are governed first and foremost by their belief in fairness. Faced with the stark figures showing the egregious extent of income inequality in this country, profession by profession, job by job, it's unlikely that they'll be prepared to let the matter drop or stay apathetic. A clamour for change will steadily grow.

The culture of secrecy that surrounds the incomes of Britain's top earners has to be stripped away. There's no reason why we shouldn't be able to know what any single individual, in the public or private sector, takes home each year. Yes, people have the right to a private life, and yes, organisations such as the BBC wouldn't be doing their job if it didn't worry about the commercial and legal ramifications of revealing how much it pays its top stars. Yet their right to privacy has to be weighed against the wider public's right to live in a society in which income inequality is kept to a minimum. We would argue that the latter trumps the former every time.

We believe that every employer in this country should be compelled to release details of the total salary and benefit package that every post in their organisation attracts. The information should be freely available on their websites and should also be fed into a central, publicly provided, database that anyone can access. We believe that putting this data into the public domain will help push the debate

surrounding income inequality in an altogether more progressive direction. It will do more to undermine income inequality we think than any high pay commission or any other august body that happens to be set up to review executive salaries. Rarefied bodies rehearsing the same points that we've already heard won't change things: the pressure for change has to come from below and from the denizens of middle England and Labour's erstwhile heartlands. And it's data showing what people earn, so much of it incendiary, that will help to create that pressure. As someone once said, if you don't like the way the argument is going, then either change the argument, or find some way of making people think differently about the argument.

In addition to thinking about wage inequality, we also need to consider benefit levels. From 1997 the Labour Government redistributed a significant amount of money from the wealthy to the least well off households via the tax credit system. It also ensured that a larger slice of higher earners' pay is subject to top-rate tax by raising tax thresholds in line with inflation (RPI) rather than earnings – which have grown at a much faster rate than inflation. Since 1997 earnings rose by a half whilst prices rose by only a quarter on the measure the last Government used to up-rate most benefits.

Most benefits and tax credits have also only been increased in line with inflation⁵⁴ and this has undoubtedly contributed to the growing gap between the incomes of the poorest and wealthiest households in Britain. If Jobseekers Allowance and its precursors had been up-rated in line with earnings rather than inflation since the start of the 1970s then it would now be worth twice the amount that it is today. And although people in every income bracket are affected in some way by this policy of up-rating in line

with inflation, those in the highest brackets are affected much less than those at the bottom. This is because only the taxed portion of the income of higher earners is affected by this policy whilst the *entire* income of benefits recipients is affected. A report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published in 2008, *The Impact of Benefit and Tax Up-rating on Incomes and Poverty*, found that someone in the bottom fifth of the income distribution will lose on average about 17 per cent of their income, whereas someone in the top fifth will lose only 5 per cent.

In 2009 the level of state support available to low income working and non-working families, pensioners and single people on JSA and IB rose sharply well above the rate of inflation. Given the change of government, there are doubts whether these increases will now be sustained in the years ahead. Unless they are, however, we believe any appreciable reduction in relative poverty and income inequality will be almost impossible to achieve. An unambiguous commitment by this new Government therefore to increasing state benefits in line with earnings year on year would be a long-overdue policy change.

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7. HOW TO MEASURE GOOD WORK

Whilst a whole industry has sprung up in recent years to service our choices as consumers, providing us with a vast range of 'star ratings' and 'best buys', hardly anything of that kind exists to help us make up our mind about a potential employer. In most cases we're on our own. *The Sunday Times* produces its annual list of the hundred best companies to work for, which looks at issues such as contentment with pay and benefits and the contribution companies make to the community, but there isn't much out else out there.

Those who are really keen might try to find out whether the organisation they're interested in has met the Investors in People standard. Set up in the early 1990s at the instigation of Michael Howard, the Employment Secretary at the time, Investors in People is a non-departmental public body now under the aegis of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Its ten point Investors in People framework covers many of the issues we've touched on in this pamphlet: one of them for instance is "employee empowerment and involvement". Organisations that meet the Investors in People standard are expected to show concrete examples of how the people that work for them "take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision making".

It's no doubt a very rigorous and exacting process that asks some challenging questions of the organisations being assessed, but neither the process nor its outcome is one that the public is privy to. The only clue you get is if you happen to catch sight of Investors in People's tasteful little logo on a company's website or headed paper. But rather than a discreet process carried out behind closed doors for the benefit of employers, we want a high-profile initiative aimed directly at the public that gives each employer a clear and easy to understand rating as a provider of good work. At the moment there is no real public pressure on bad employers to get better. There is no public clamour from clients, the community or politicians for instance for employers to meet the Investors in People standard or any other such standard. In short there is no momentum for change.

We want to move to a situation where every person thinking about whether or not to apply for a job, or everyone thinking of doing business with someone else checks first of all to see if the organisation has its 'Good Work' accreditation. We wouldn't need to encourage or compel organisations to get accredited; public and peer pressure would do the job for us. No-one would want to do business with an unaccredited organisation, and potential employees and clients would actively seek out those organisations that had achieved a Gold rating say, as oppose to a Silver or Bronze rating.

So what would a 'Good Work' accreditation actually measure? Well, we could start by asking for the following:

- ♦ A commitment to enhancing employees' control over their work by investing in skills; encouraging innovative thinking; and trusting all employees to take

autonomous decisions within the workplace when appropriate.

- ♦ A commitment to stamping out monotony within the workplace and giving employees a variety of tasks wherever possible throughout the working day.
- ♦ A commitment to involving all employees in an organisation's decision making process in a meaningful way and giving them the necessary knowledge and support to take effective decisions within this process.

Each organisation seeking accreditation would have to provide compelling evidence of what it was doing to meet these criteria in order to be successful. An organisation that was able to demonstrate an effective management structure that provided feedback on performance from the top together with proper reporting systems for complaints, observations and ideas from employees at every level would score well in the last criterion for example; particularly if feedback from employees was used to help shape the organisation's corporate vision and business practices. Similarly, an organisation that sought continuously to invest in the skills base of its employees and gives them the trust and the space to get on with their job, and where necessary adapt to changing circumstances, would do well in the first criterion.

- ♦ To this list of criteria we should add the other ideas we've discussed in this pamphlet. We should demand:

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- ♦ A policy of complete transparency with regard to the disclosure of the pay and rewards package given to each employee; from the top to the bottom of the organisation.
- ♦ A commitment to the release of 25 per cent of employees from every pay grade each year for volunteering activity.
- ♦ A proactive and constructive approach to flexible working that seeks to explore how employees at every level of the business could work more flexibly should they wish to do so.

Particular credit should be given however in the accreditation process to organisations that are employee-owned and encourage employee participation in the organisation's decision making process; the so-called co-owned, co-decision making model. This is, quite literally, the gold standard we believe when it comes to good work. As a truly democratic model that gives each employee a stake in the organisation and respects their voice and contribution to the business it is the essence of good, health enhancing business practice and deserves special praise. Without this in place an organisation would have to work extremely hard to achieve the very highest scores.

The new 'National Employment Rights and Innovation Office' that we discussed earlier would be in a good position to administer this accreditation process. As a new, high profile body with the muscle to campaign vociferously and aggressively if necessary for the adoption of better, healthier working practices, it is the perfect body to give the accreditation process the fanfare and the publicity it needs if it is to capture the public's imagination.

8. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The new Tory Secretary of State for Health Andrew Lansley is currently consulting on plans to replace primary care trusts and strategic health authorities with a new NHS Commissioning Board which, among other things, will have an “explicit duty to promote equality and tackle inequalities in access to healthcare” and an “explicit duty to address inequalities in outcomes from healthcare services”.

The new board will have nothing like the same influence or resources however as the present network of Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts that the Tories are determined to scrap. SHAs and PCTs have their critics, but among the bureaucrats and managers about to be made redundant are experienced people whose job it is to analyse health inequalities in each locality and to divert resources to tackle them. A distant, and highly streamlined commissioning board won't have the means to do this, and nor will GPs. In this strategic vacuum it's hard to see where the impetus to tackle health inequalities will come from.

The proposal to transfer the responsibility for public health from PCTs to local authorities - something we have always supported - provides some room for optimism. Forcing councils to think about health outcomes when they are planning and delivering local services makes a great

deal of sense. Councils will need time to build up their expertise however as well as extra resources, something unlikely to be forthcoming in the immediate future. Much will also depend on councils' ability to forge meaningful partnerships with their local GP consortia and the new raft of academies – over which of course they will have no control. Hopefully the new 'Total Place' project, which offers the prospect of closer partnerships between public sector agencies in a bid to reduce inefficiency and duplication, will help with this, but we should remain cautious. The Tory predilection for setting public sector bodies free to do their own thing means that there is now less, not more, opportunity for collaborative working in the public sector than there was six months ago. And that is not good news as far as health inequalities is concerned. In short, Lansley and his team have a lot of work to do if they are to show that their pre-election rhetoric about the importance of tackling health inequalities has some real substance to it.

In this pamphlet we have set out some of the policy interventions relating to work and our life outside work that we believe will help the new Government live up to its claims by making a material difference to the health and wellbeing of people across the social spectrum and so reduce health inequalities. Good, fulfilling, flexible work and an active life outside of the office shouldn't be the exclusive preserve of the wealthiest and most successful members of our society. Provided the Liberal-Conservative Government is prepared to engage seriously with this agenda, they are things we can all enjoy.

While our proposals work together as a package, they are not, of course, the end of the matter. We should continue to challenge the Liberal-Conservative coalition Government,

to test its arguments, to rebut its claims and to make the case that good work really does equal good health for all.

We recommend that the new Government should consider the following:

- ◆ A well-enforced employment strategy led by a single agency that encompasses everything from paid holiday entitlement and statutory sick pay to the pay and conditions of part-time agency workers relative to those of permanent full-time employees. Such an agency would have more teeth and more impact than the hotchpotch of agencies and strategies that we have now.
- ◆ A new 'National Employment Rights and Innovation Office', capable both of tackling recalcitrant employers and also of providing a comprehensive package of support and encouragement to firms that have been slow to adopt the latest statutory requirements and best practice ideas.
- ◆ A free public transport 'happy hour' for instance every Monday between 10 and 11am on all local and commuter bus, train, tube and tram services.
- ◆ A body that could provide employee-owned enterprises with advice and practical support. This new body should also offer grants, preferential loans or subsidies to help pay for the financial and legal support required when an employee group tries to bid for their company.

- ♦ A package of fiscal incentives to employers who are prepared to release a fixed percentage of employees from each rung of their pay scale for a specified period of voluntary work each year. As well as appealing to employers that have previously given little thought to volunteering, it would help to strengthen existing volunteering schemes that employers have already brought in.
- ♦ A new coalition Green Paper on commuting and the extended economy setting out the long-term economic, social, environmental and health-related benefits that would flow from a cut in commuting.
- ♦ Fiscal incentives or grants aimed at encouraging employers to allow more of their staff to work from home at least one day a week on a regular basis.
- ♦ Compel every employer to release details of the total salary and benefit package that every post in their organisation attracts. The information should be freely available on their websites and should also be fed into a central, publicly provided, database that anyone can access.
- ♦ A 'good work' accreditation that measures an employers' commitment to enhancing employees' control over their work, to stamping out monotony within the workplace, and to involving all employees in an organisation's decision-making process.

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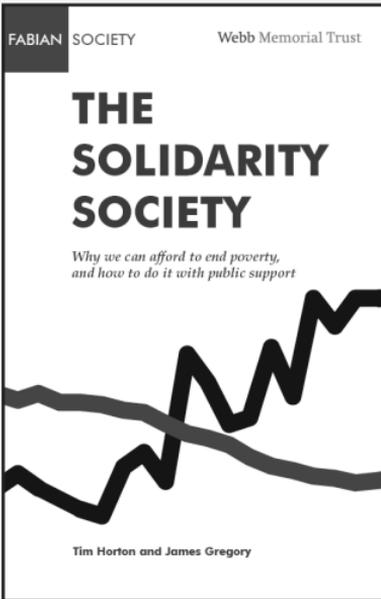
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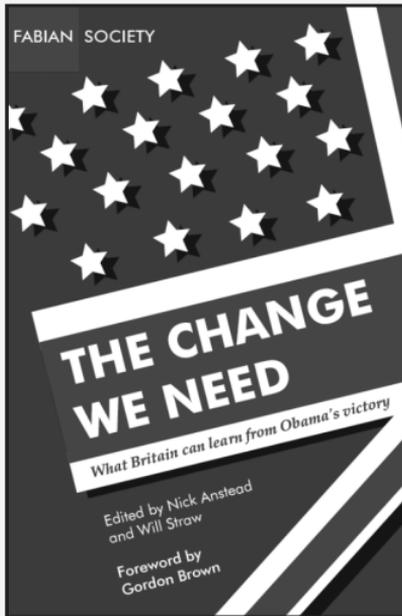
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