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The Future of Work: Labour Market Policy, Collective Regulation and Some Reflections on Theory

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Pressures influencing work and employment

- Pressures for (broad) continuity:
 - Work and employment will continue to take place within the context of late – and increasingly financialised – capitalism
 - Capitalism creates tensions that are structured into the employment relationship
 - Tensions play out at multiple levels and with multiple actors
 - Tensions won't (can't) disappear!
- Pressures for (some degree of) change
 - Digitisation, computerisation, miniaturisation
 - Demographic changes – ageing population, queries about migration policy
 - Regional disparities in policies and effects of national policies

Labour Market Policies

- Current government policy remarkable un-interested in employment and labour markets
 - Steel sector, youth (un)employment, skills development
 - Exceptions: NHS, (education), and National Living Wage
- Interesting feature of current labour market policy is that both unions and employers believe themselves to be rather disenfranchised
 - Skills development – Apprenticeship Levy
 - Impact of National Living Wage
- Continued employment growth in low-wage (low-profit) sectors
 - Outside London, fewer 'good' jobs because of public sector austerity policies

Likely future effects on work and employment

- Lack of strategic oversight means we are highly unlikely to see anything other than reactive and chaotic responses to ‘shocks’
 - Some regional exceptions (devolved authorities, Northern Powerhouse)
- Weak systems for planning and funding skills development
- No evidence of plan to ‘rebalance’ the economy
- Continued growth of highly flexible work esp. expansion of self-employment
 - Strong sectoral pressures for employers to pursue this
- Young workers assumed to be dependent until 25
 - Link to rising/vanishing retirement

Collective regulation of work

- Long-term trend away from collective regulation
 - Both Junior Doctors' Contract and forced Academisation of schools can be understood as a way to further challenge collective regulation in the public sector
- Widespread effects:
 - Good quality, (public sector) jobs stripped out of labour markets that are particularly dependent on them i.e. outside London and SE
 - Increased managerial power – even if that is in the context of new forms of employee voice
 - Different pressures to reconcile competing employer/employee interests – move away from institutional regulation of conflict: société bloquée?

Effects of 'bad jobs'

- One of the effects of increasingly financialised decision making within organisations and within context of decreased countervailing pressures (unions, CB) and little labour market strategy is to transfer risk to workers
- Does 'work pay'?
 - 2 x adult National Living Wage household in Coventry approx. £29K
 - Typical house price for 2 bed terrace: £120K or rent £700 pcm
 - Assumes full-time, open-ended contract with steady hours
- Employment growth in low-wage, low-margin, low-profit sectors (retail, hospitality, care work)
- Growing wage inequality – although low-wage sectors have relatively low-paid managerial jobs as well
- Increased regional disparities

Some reflections on theory/theories

- Good theory should have explanatory potential even if (when) the context or form of employment changes
- Too often, scholars in our broad field of work and employment focus on changes in context when the question we should be asking is: does X, Y or Z theory predict/explain the effects of these changes?
- If the theory can't predict/explain then we need better theories

And some prospective reading

- Michel Crozier's work came to mind when I was thinking about the 'blocked society' but his work is really useful more widely:
 - *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*
 - *Actors and Systems* (with Freidberg)
- And I don't think any of us can go very far without really understanding how the financialisation is affecting (working) lives. I would start with:
 - Thompson, P. (2003) *Disconnected Capitalism: Or Why Employers Can't Keep Their Side of the Bargain*. Work, Employment and Society.
 - Thompson, P. (2011) *The Trouble with HRM*. Human Resource Management Journal.