



**TUC**

Changing the world  
of work for good

**A future that works  
for working people**

© Trades Union Congress 2018

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS

020 7636 4030 [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

For more copies call 020 7467 1294 or email [publications@tuc.org.uk](mailto:publications@tuc.org.uk)

Please ask if you need an accessible format.

## Contents

Introduction and summary .....	4
The changing world of work .....	7
The future of jobs and pay .....	14
It's about time .....	21
Voice control .....	30
A future that works .....	37

## Section One

# Introduction and summary

For 150 years the TUC, and the unions we represent, have been fighting to change the world of work for good. We've won significant gains for working people along the way.

- Fair pay – from the 'dockers tanner'<sup>1</sup> to the national minimum wage, we've fought for a fair day's pay for a fair day's work
- The right to time away from work – from the eight-hour day to paid parental leave, we've won time to spend on family, friends and leisure
- A voice in the workplace and a fair framework for union law – at the heart of trade unionism is the principle that working people should have a say in the decisions that affect them, and that acting together we can achieve more than we can alone. Our right to have a say in the decisions that affect us, to be represented at work, and to be able to collectively bargain to improve our pay, terms and conditions are at the heart of everything we do

Throughout it all we've fought for equal treatment for everyone, no matter what their background. We've supported women machinists at Ford in Dagenham and Halewood to win equal pay, and the workers at Grunwick to win union recognition and racial justice.

The world of work has changed significantly since 1868, when the TUC was founded. Match factories have been replaced by Amazon fulfilment centres; dockers with Uber drivers. And changes in technology, demography and the climate are set to change work further still over the coming years.

Trade unionists are optimistic about the future. Our past shows that by working together, we can make work better. But at present, the way that work is changing poses real challenges to achieving our aim of a fair deal for workers.

This report brings together the latest evidence with a new large-scale poll on how technology could affect the future of work, conducted for the TUC in the summer of 2018.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 1889 dock strike won an increase of 20% for casual workers – from 5d and hour to 6d (6d piece known as a tanner). 6d in pre-decimal currency equates to 2.5 pence)

## Unfair pay

New technologies have the potential to make us all richer. The government estimates that robotics and autonomous systems could boost UK output by over £200bn. With the UK stuck in a productivity slump we urgently need to invest in potential new sources of growth.

But the rewards from new tech are currently concentrated on a few Silicon Valley billionaires, while working people in the UK experience the longest pay squeeze since Napoleonic times. Pay falling behind living costs tops the list of workers' concerns over the next five years (48 per cent of workers we polled put it within their top three – over twice the amount who say they're worried about the potential for technology to take their jobs). **And most UK workers (51 per cent) are worried that the benefits of new technology will be hoarded by managers and shareholders.**

Making sure that workers' get a fair share of the rewards from growth is our biggest challenge. And we know we need stronger trade unions to meet it.

## It's about time

A shorter working week, and more control over our time, has long been the promised pay off from technological progress. JM Keynes, the economist who shaped post-war government policy, suggested we'd be working 15 hours a week by now. In the last century, trade unions won the eight-hour day, the normalisation of the weekend, and limits on excessive working hours. Today, we found that **if they could choose, a four-day working week would be most people's preference.**

But instead, new technology is threatening to intensify working lives. For some, the on-demand economy has meant packaging work into ever-smaller pieces of time. This is a return to the days of piece-work, creating a culture where workers are required to be constantly available to work. **Over 1.4 million people are now working on 7 days of the week**, 3.3 million people work more than 45 hours a week and, in our polling, we found that stress and long hours are workers' biggest concerns after pay.

Others still struggle to get the hours they need to fit with family life. Ensuring that the benefits of greater productivity deliver more time as well as more money for workers should be front and centre of our negotiating agenda.

## Voice control

The communications revolution should make it easier than ever for everyone to have their say at work – for unions to organise, and for bosses to listen to their workers. But new technology is increasingly being used not to empower workers but to seek to monitor and control them. **Over half of workers say they are being monitored at work, and, only two in five feel able to challenge this decision.**

Unions are critical to the task of helping people have their say on the introduction of new technology, but with collective bargaining coverage falling to just one-in-four workers, it's clear that there's a long way to go before all workers have the chance of a fair say at work.

## **A future that works**

We know that we can tackle these challenges using the technology that's served us for 150 years: representation and collective bargaining in the workplace. Trade unions must play a key role in shaping the future of work, ensuring that workers share in the benefits of growth through shorter hours and higher pay. To achieve that, we need:

- A renewed effort to expand collective bargaining, with trade unions aiming to renew collective bargaining coverage across the private and public sector – supported by a policy framework that gives working people more of a say in their workplace, in their sector and at the national level.
- Government to establish a new Future of Work Commission that brings together trade unions, employers and independent experts. It would set out how the government can:
  - Ensure that new technology is introduced with the consent of workers, with new technology agreements agreed by trade unions in workplaces across the country.
  - Investigate how to boost productivity across the UK by investing in new technology that can improve people's quality of life.
  - Ensure that the gains from that productivity are shared with workers, setting out an ambition to move to shorter hours and higher pay. The commission should see moving to a four-day week with no drop in living standards as an ambition for the twenty-first century.
  - Provide skills training for those at risk of losing their jobs as the workplace changes – with a new learning entitlement for every worker, delivered with advice from a union rep.

## **About the polling in this report**

GQR conducted a poll of 2,145 working people in Great Britain aged 16 and over. Fieldwork was conducted between 24 July and 3 August 2018. Results were weighted to be representative of the working population of Great Britain by gender, region, age, social grade, ethnicity, full/part-time work, public/private and industry sector.

Section Two

## **The changing world of work**

Work has changed dramatically over the 150 years since the TUC formed. Many of the changes we have seen have been for the better. We now have shorter working hours, in safer workplaces, and while the battle for equality is far from won, steps have been taken to tackle sexism, racism and homophobia at work.

But in the last thirty years, industrial change has been managed in ways that have harmed workers. The transition from a manufacturing to a service economy has been accompanied by weakened rights for workers, and since the financial crisis we have experienced a decade of feeble pay growth and increased insecurity at work.

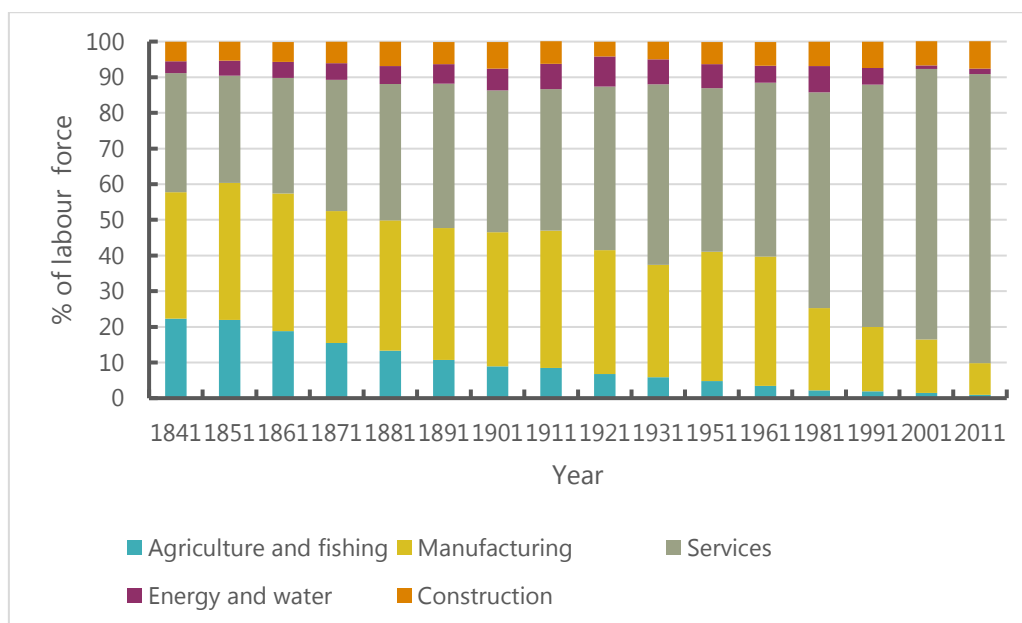
The next thirty years will see work change again, with the advent of new technologies including robotics and artificial intelligence. Demographic developments and the necessity of meeting our commitments to tackle climate change will also shape employment. This section briefly reviews these trends, focusing particularly on the impact of technology. In the following sections we go on to look at how trade unions can respond to them to ensure a better future for workers.

### **Change is the only constant...**

In 1868, when the TUC was formed, over half the workforce worked in either agriculture or manufacturing. Today, less than ten per cent of workers are in these industries, and over 80 per cent work in the service sector.



Chart 1: The UK economy has shifted away from manufacturing and agriculture



Source: ONS (2015) 'Transition from a manufacturing to service led labour market over past 170 years' at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/transitionfromamanufacturingtoserviceledlabourmarketoverpast170years/2015-08-06>

Technological change has been one significant driver of the changes in the type of job that people do. The tripling of the size of the railway network between 1848 and 1899<sup>2</sup> saw a move away from agriculture, as did the invention of refrigeration technology. Developments in transport and in computerised tools to manage supply chains saw the globalisation of manufacturing from the 1960s onwards, as well as the rise in jobs in IT and professional services. In 1950, almost one-in-three workers (29 per cent) worked in manufacturing, while one-in-twelve (8 per cent) worked in professional and technical services. By 2016 these shares had reversed (29 per cent worked in professional and technical services, and 9 per cent in manufacturing).<sup>3</sup>

But political factors have always shaped the way that changes in technology have played out in the workplace. For example, over the past thirty years, Britain's laissez-faire attitude to industry has seen UK manufacturing employment decline more sharply than any other advanced economy except Switzerland. Our decline has been twice as fast as that of Italy and Spain, and about a third again as fast as that of the United States and France.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> ONS (2015) 'Transition from a manufacturing to service led labour market over past 170 years available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/transitionfromamanufacturingtoserviceledlabourmarketoverpast170years/2015-08-06>

<sup>3</sup> Bank of England – a Millennium of Macroeconomic data <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/research/Pages/datasets/default.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> International Monetary Fund (2018) World Economic Outlook, April 2018: Cyclical Upswing, Structural Change, available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2018/03/20/world-economic-outlook-april-2018>



impact of this sharp decline in manufacturing, concentrated in certain areas of the country, has helped to leave Britain now facing the most extreme regional inequality in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

In the decade since the financial crisis, political decisions including austerity, attacks on trade unions, and a refusal by government to rein in employers' attempts to push new risks onto workers have played a major role in shaping work. This transfer of risk can be seen in the form of zero-hour contracts, false self-employment and insecure agency work that have seen workers' pay stagnate and insecurity at work rise.

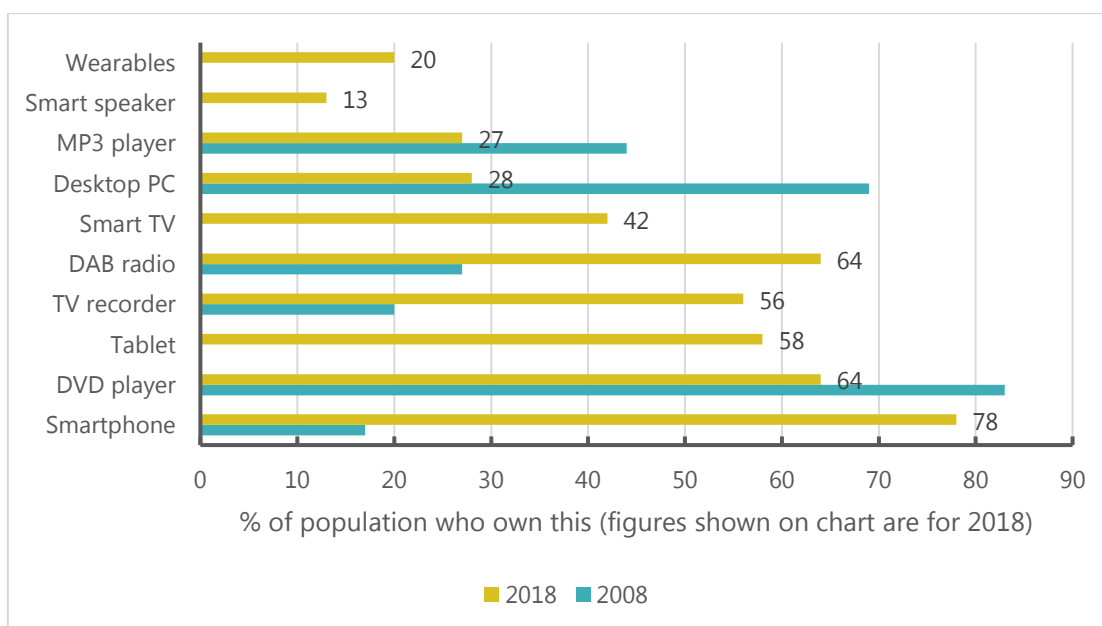
But today's workers have already been living through a period of rapid technological change. The chart on the following page uses data from Ofcom (the communications regulator) to show the rapid uptake of digital technologies over the last decade. Eight-in-ten people now own a smartphone, up from less than two-in-ten just a decade ago. And in our polling most workers (61 per cent) said that technology had already changed the way they worked in the last ten years, and that their job was now reliant on this new technology (63 per cent). For some workers, technology seen as futuristic is already part of their working lives:

- 28 per cent of workers say that machines undertake clerical tasks in their workplace
- 8 per cent say they are working with machines or robots
- 8 per cent say that artificial intelligence is already used in their workplace
- 10 per cent say that some human workers have been replaced with machines
- 24 per cent say that new technology has introduced new activities or kinds of work that didn't exist before.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Trades Union Congress (2018) *Time for Action: TUC Statement on the HM Treasury 'Sprint Statement'*, available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC-spring-statement-2018.pdf>.

Chart 2: There has been a significant change in every-day technology use over a decade



Source: Ofcom (2018) 'A decade of digital dependency' at <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/decade-of-digital-dependency>

## New challenges?

Many believe that the pace of technological change is accelerating, driven by developments in artificial intelligence and robotics.

## Artificial intelligence

The University of Manchester describes AI as

*the name given to a collection of programming and computing techniques that attempt to simulate, and in many cases exceed, aspects of human-level perception, learning and analysis.*

Examples might include identifying objects, recognising patterns, or speech recognition. This can be used to enable, for example, translation programmes or voice-operated software.

Artificial intelligence has the potential to automate many tasks currently done by humans in professional roles. For example, AI is already being used to help with fact-checking inside newsrooms.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Corinna Underwood (January 17th, 2018) Automated Journalism – AI Applications at New York Times, Reuters, and Other Media Giants  
<https://www.techemergence.com/automated-journalism-applications/>

This type of technology has improved rapidly, and many tasks previously considered too difficult to automate are now seen as routine. The self-operating Roomba vacuum cleaner, for example, carries out a range of tasks that were considered almost impossible to achieve in the 1980s.

Predictions of a 'general intelligence', however, remain a long way off. Writing for the University of Manchester, Professor Vasco Costello argues that

*Human-level AI will likely exist, but not this year, and perhaps not this century... A common metaphor used to describe the situation is that we're making good progress climbing a tree on our way to the moon – meaning both that we're still very far from our goal, and that although we are advancing, there is no guarantee that we can keep going along our current path, and may have to try something altogether different.<sup>7</sup>*

## **Robotics**

The University of Manchester's definition of robots is as follows:

*Robots are programmable machines that carry out physical processes and may be controlled by a human operator or an AI system (or, commonly, a combination of both).<sup>8</sup>*

Examples might include welding, carrying heavy loads, conducting surgery (directed by a human), or self-driving cars – an example of where robotics and AI meet.

Sales of industrial robots have been increasing swiftly (see chart 3), although it's notable that the UK is a laggard in the use of this type of technology. The UK rate was only 10 robot units for every million hours worked in 2015, compared to 131 in the US, 167 in Japan and 133 in Germany in the same year.<sup>9</sup>

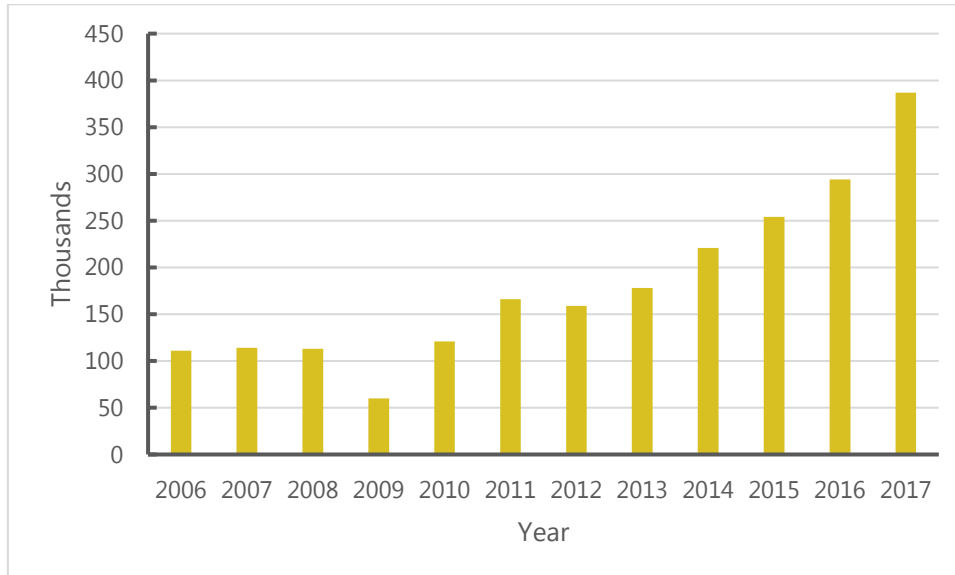
---

<sup>7</sup> Policy@manchester On AI and Robotics Developing policy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution' at [https://policyatmanchester.shorthandstories.com/on\\_ai\\_and\\_robotics/index.html](https://policyatmanchester.shorthandstories.com/on_ai_and_robotics/index.html) accessed 4th September 2018

<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> CEBR (2017) Will post Brexit Britain hinder a robo-revolution? at <https://cebr.com/reports/new-study-shows-u-s-is-world-leader-in-robotics-automation/>

Chart 3: Estimated worldwide shipments of industrial robots



Source: International Federation of Robotics (2018) 'Industrial robot sales increase worldwide by 31 percent' at <https://iffr.org/ifr-press-releases/news/industrial-robot-sales-increase-worldwide-by-29-percent>

The next sections discuss the impact of these changes on jobs and pay, on working time, and on workers' chance to have a say in shaping their work.

But it's worth noting at this point that these changes have the potential to make the UK significantly better off. The UK government has estimated that robotics and autonomous systems could deliver a 15 per cent boost in output (GVA) by 2025.<sup>10</sup> The consultancy firm PWC has estimated that UK GDP will be up to 10 per cent higher in 2030 as a result of artificial intelligence, the equivalent of boost to GDP of more than £200 billion, or extra spending power of up to £2,300 a year per household.<sup>11</sup>

At a time when UK productivity has been flatlining for a decade, these predictions seem out of line with our current experience. Private sector investment as a share of GDP is the fourth lowest of all advanced economies. Moreover, government investment is barely compensating, with the UK spending well below average and ranking 25th of 33 OECD countries. Government plans for the coming years will improve the position only marginally. This low investment level

---

<sup>10</sup> Letter submitted by Jo Johnson MP, Minister of State for Universities Science, Research and Innovation (September 2016) available at <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology%20-committee/robotics-and-artificial-intelligence/written/37004.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> PWC (2017) *The economic impact of artificial intelligence on the UK economy* available at <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/assets/ai-uk-report-v2.pdf>

helps explain why record employment levels have been accompanied by continued slow growth. This is not helped by the uncertainty surrounding our exit from the EU.

It's clear that if we are to realise the potential of new technology to deliver higher growth we will need a more strategic approach to investing in the economy. But with this investment in place, we are optimistic about the potential of innovation to deliver new sources of growth, as it has done throughout our history.

Technological change is not the only factor shaping the future of work in the UK. As we argue below, technology is not destiny. The distribution of power in the workplace and beyond will be the critical determinant of the kind of future we face.

But other changes will also have an impact. The necessity of meeting our climate change commitments means significant changes to our energy supply. The government estimates that the 'low carbon economy' already employs over 400,000 people,<sup>12</sup> but managed poorly, the transition to less carbon intensive forms of energy could pose significant risks for workers in energy intensive industries. And demographic change will mean that we will need the economy to be more productive in order to help support an ageing population. While in 2017, for every 100 working people there are 30 people over state pension age, by 2037 the number of people over state pension age is expected to increase to 35.<sup>13</sup>

If managed well, technology can help us to meet these challenges and deliver a better world of work. But at present, there are signs that technological progress is taking us further away from the world of work we want. Pay is flatlining, work feels more intense and less secure for many, and workers have little opportunity to make their voices heard. In the next sections we examine how trade unions can help turn these trends around.

---

<sup>12</sup> ONS (2015) *UK Environmental Accounts: Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy Survey (2015 Final Estimates of Direct Delivery)*, available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/finalestimates/2015results>

<sup>13</sup>Data from the OBR – see <http://obr.uk/choose-long-term-projections/>

## Section Three

# The future for jobs and pay

In the middle of the longest pay squeeze since Napoleonic times, pay is at the top of workers' list of concerns about the future of work. When we asked both what workers were most worried about now, and in the next five to ten years, most workers picked the ability of pay to keep up with living costs.

Much of the debate about the future of work has skipped straight past pay, instead focusing on whether there will be any jobs at all in a future where technology has caught up with the ability of humans to perform many tasks. But if technology has the potential to make us richer, the question should be less whether there is enough wealth or work to go around, but how that wealth is distributed. And at present, too many workers are missing out.

We know from our history, and from widespread international research, that the best way to ensure that workers get a fair share of the rewards from technological progress is to enable them to come together and bargain with their employers. So expanding trade union presence and collective bargaining will be vital to ensure a fairer future for work.

## But will there be any jobs?

Two rival perspectives often dominate debates on the future of work. On the one hand, the sanguine approach that points to the rapid history of technological change in the past, as well as the UK's current record of high employment, and suggests that we have little to worry about.

As Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane put it in a speech to the TUC in 2015,

*Debates on the potentially negative impact of technology on jobs - so-called technological unemployment - go back at least to the invention of the wheel ... Certainly, the Ancient Civilisations of Greece and Rome wrestled with the problem of how to deal with the consequences of workers displaced by technological advance.<sup>14</sup>*

On the other side of the debate are those who claim that 'this time it's different'. This is perhaps best summed up by the much-quoted idea that the factory of the future will have just two employees: a man and a dog. The man will be there to feed the dog, and the dog will be there to stop the man from touching the machinery.

Economists have spent the last few years producing rival predictions on the potential impact of new technology on employment. In March 2018, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimated that around 14 per cent of jobs in OECD countries were highly automatable, and just over 30 per cent subject to substantial change in how they were

---

<sup>14</sup> Andy Haldane Speech to the TUC, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015  
<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/speech/2015/labours-share>

carried out.<sup>15</sup> It argued that those in more routine jobs, young people, and those with lower level educational qualifications were likely to be most at risk.

Estimates from Deloitte for the UK suggest that the sectors particularly at risk include wholesale and retail, where they estimate around 2.2 million jobs are at high risk of automation; transportation and storage (1.5 million jobs at risk); and human health and social work, with 1.4 million jobs at risk.<sup>16</sup>

However, the fact that some jobs may be automated does not mean that jobs will disappear. As Jason Furman and Robert Seamans set out in a recent paper<sup>17</sup>, there are a number of ways in which new technology could potentially impact the number and nature of jobs. Technology could:

- Displace jobs entirely, leading to a reduction in the amount of overall paid work in the economy
- Lead to a change in the tasks performed by workers, rather than a reduction in the number of jobs.
- Lead to changes in industrial make up; for example, a shift to more service sector industries.

The recent history of industrial change shows evidence of each of these:

- Over the last 150 years in the UK, increased productivity has led to shorter working hours, but we are currently experiencing the highest employment levels on record.
- Jobs have changed within sectors. The OECD highlights US research on the introduction of automatic telling machines in banks, which performed more routine tasks previously handled by human bank tellers, but freed up their time for more productive tasks, and employment in the sector rose
- There has been a large-scale shift away from manufacturing towards the service sector. As we showed in the last section, there's been rapid change in the industrial make up of the UK. To take just one example, there are half a million more people working in hospitality than in 1998.

Based on both long-term and recent history, we believe that the introduction of new technology has the potential to deliver good new jobs. The *Made Smarter* review of industrial

---

<sup>15</sup> OECD (2018) Putting faces to the jobs at risk of automation

<http://www.oecd.org/employment/future-of-work/Automation-policy-brief-2018.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Deloitte: Automation transforming UK industries (press release on 22 January 2016) available at <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/automation-and-industries-analysis.html>

<sup>17</sup> Jason Furman and Robert Seamans (2018) *AI and the economy* at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3186591](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3186591)



digitalisation, for example, estimated that industrial digitalisation could create a net gain of 175,000 jobs over 10 years.<sup>18</sup>

## **We need to talk about wages**

But while recent history might make us more confident that there will be enough work to go around, it also flags the importance of thinking about how that work is rewarded. The last thirty years of industrial change have seen working people lose out in general, with those working in industries hit by technological change often hit the hardest.

The OECD calculates that labour's share of income is in decline across the industrial world. Between 1990 and 2009, the labour share fell in 26 of 30 advanced economies.<sup>19</sup> In the UK, the biggest fall happened between the early 1960s and the mid-1990s (see chart 4).

Some of this loss was recovered over the next decade and a half, with rising employment rates and positive policy change (including the introduction of the National Minimum Wage). But the proportion of income going to workers in the UK is still 8 percentage points lower than at its peak.

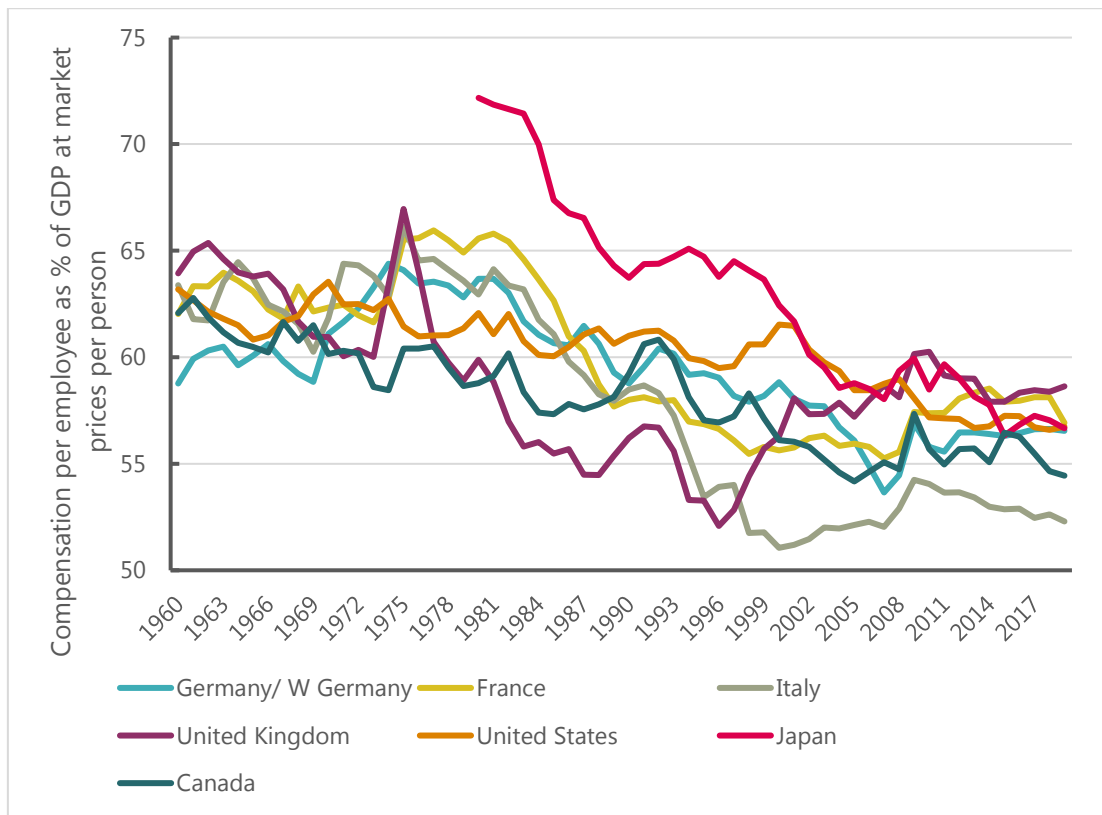
---

18

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/655570/20171027\\_MadeSmarter\\_FINAL\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655570/20171027_MadeSmarter_FINAL_DIGITAL.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/employment-and-social-policy/The-Labour-Share-in-G20-Economies.pdf>

Chart 4: The wage share has fallen across advanced economies



Source: AMECO and TUC analysis

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that half of the decline is the result of new technologies that have made it cheaper to replace workers with machines or computers, particularly for routine tasks.<sup>20</sup> But this ignores the question of why the benefits of these advances in technology have not been shared equally between capital and labour. Research has found that developments over recent decades that tipped the scales against workers are strongly linked to the fall in the labour share. A decline in union density, and particularly in collective bargaining at the sector level, has weakened workers' bargaining power. Cuts to social spending have reduced their fall-back options.<sup>21</sup>

Globalisation has also had an impact, as the ability of companies to move jobs between countries has eroded the bargaining power of workers in both high- and low-wage economies.

<sup>20</sup>

[Mai Chi Dao ; Mitali Das ; Zsoka Koczan ; Weicheng Lian \(2017\) Why Is Labor Receiving a Smaller Share of Global Income? Theory and Empirical Evidence -IMF Working Paper at https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2017/07/24/Why-Is-Labor-Receiving-a-Smaller-Share-of-Global-Income-Theory-and-Empirical-Evidence-45102](https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2017/07/24/Why-Is-Labor-Receiving-a-Smaller-Share-of-Global-Income-Theory-and-Empirical-Evidence-45102)

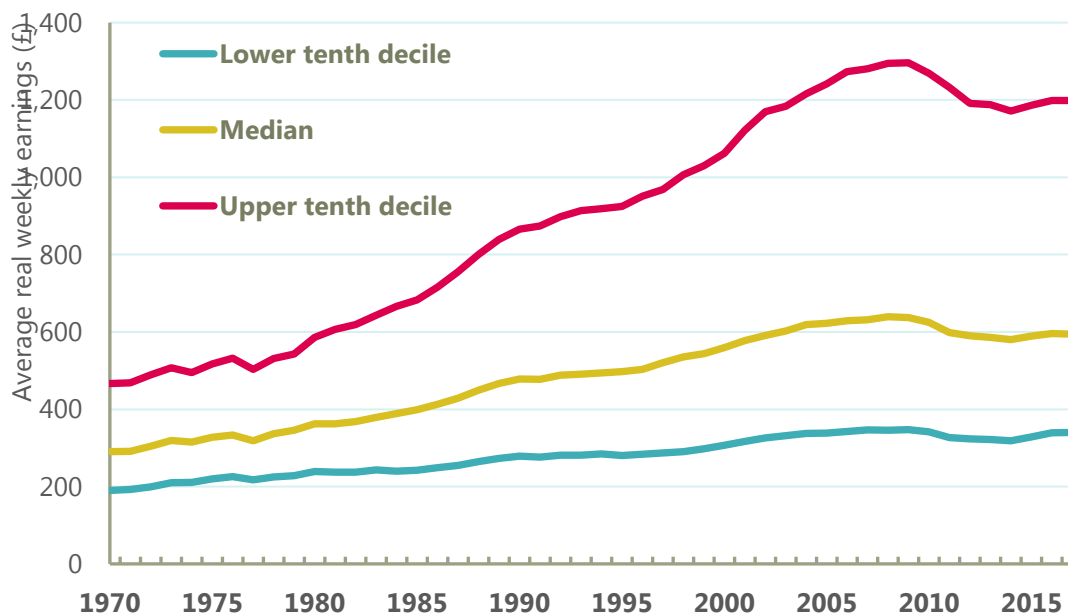
<sup>21</sup> Guschanski, Alexander and Onaran, Özlem (2017) The political economy of income distribution: industry level evidence from 14 OECD countries

<http://gala.gre.ac.uk/17518/>

On the other hand, introducing or increasing minimum wages has been shown to increase the labour share.<sup>22</sup>

Looking at pay trends within the working population in the UK over the past four decades, wage inequality has increased significantly, and those at the top have been able to capture more of the gains from growth – as shown in the chart below. In the last few years, there have been encouraging gains in the wages of the lowest paid workers following the introduction of the National Living Wage. But pay inequality in the UK remains extremely high. Those living in communities who have seen their industries decline have often been hit the hardest: the Industrial Communities Alliance estimates that male wages in former industrial areas remain 10 per cent below the UK median.<sup>23</sup>

Chart 6: The increasing inequality in male full-time worker's real weekly earnings since 1970



Source: ONS/ASHE/NES/TUC analysis

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Industrial Communities Alliance (2017) *Low Pay in Older Industrial Areas* at [http://www.industrialcommunitiesalliance.org/uploads/2/6/2/0/2620193/low\\_pay.pdf](http://www.industrialcommunitiesalliance.org/uploads/2/6/2/0/2620193/low_pay.pdf)

## Pay as a priority

In this context, it's little surprise that when we asked working people about how new technology could make their life better pay topped their list of concerns.

- Three quarters (75 per cent) of people said that higher pay was the thing that would most improve their working lives.
- Almost half (46 per cent) of workers said that 'pay not keeping up with living costs' was their biggest concern at work now (the most frequent choice).
- When we asked about the challenges of the next five to ten years, again half (48 per cent) picked pay falling behind.
- Workers were worried about job losses as a result of new technology too. Some 18 per cent said new technology replacing workers was one of their biggest three concerns in the next five to ten years. But this came behind pay, stress, and the impact of job losses due to company reorganisation (rather than technology) in the list of their concerns.
- This perhaps reflects the fact that while workers believe that, overall, technological change will lead to job loss (63 per cent agree compared to 26 per cent who disagree), far fewer think that their current job could be done by a robot or computer programme (26 per cent agree compared to 65 per cent who don't).

It was also notable that most workers feared that any gains from technology were unlikely to benefit them. Over half (51 per cent) are worried that the benefits of new technology will be hoarded by managers and shareholders.

## Trade unions delivering change

Ensuring that workers get their fair share of the rewards of economic growth has always been at the heart of trade unions' concerns. The TUC has been calling for greater government and business investment in the UK, including in the new technologies that could help deliver growth, in order to boost workers' pay, alongside an urgent boost to the national minimum wage.

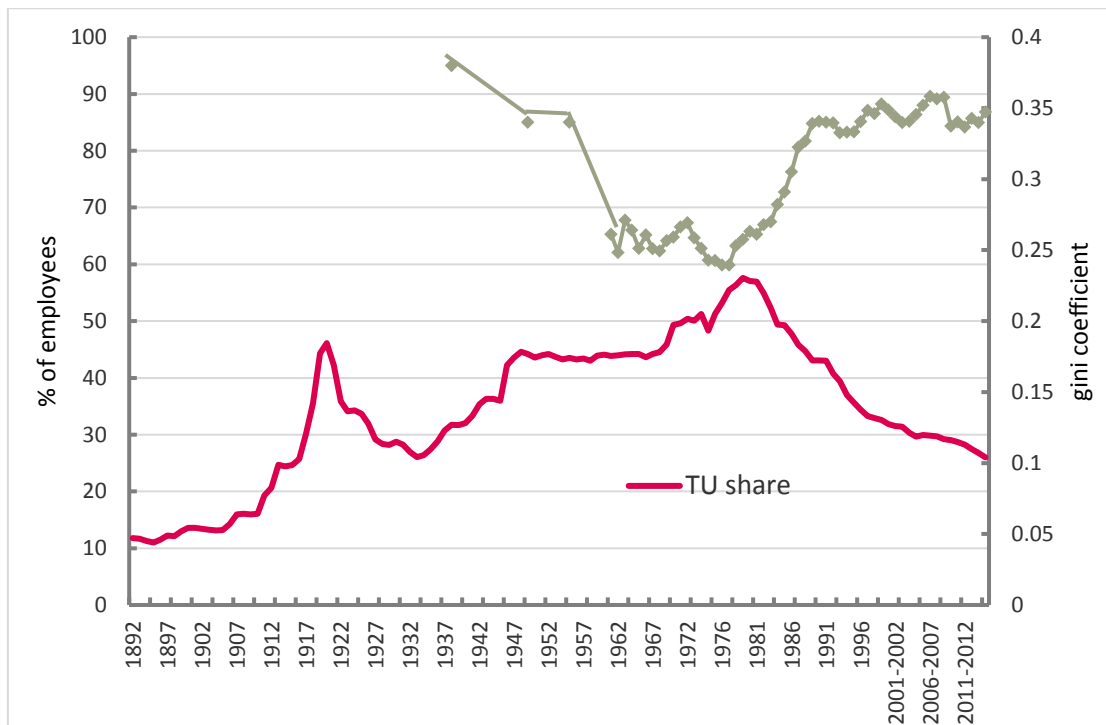
But an increasing body of evidence shows that strong collective bargaining is the best way to both deliver a fair share of growth to workers, and ensure that there's equality between them. Within the UK, there's clear evidence that the decline in trade union membership has coincided with a rise in inequality (see chart 7).

And international institutions are increasingly recognising that better trade union representation delivers greater equality across the board. A 2015 research paper for the IMF found that 'the evidence strongly indicates that de-unionization is associated with rising top earners' income shares and less redistribution, while eroding minimum wages are related to increases in overall income inequality'.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Jaurmotte, F. and Osorio, C. (2015) 'Inequality and Labor Market Institutions', *Staff Discussion Note No. 15/14*,

Chart 7: The decline in trade union membership has coincided with a rise in inequality



Source: TUC analysis of data from the world inequality database, ONS, and BEIS

And the OECD has found that it's when trade unions are able to co-ordinate their bargaining across sectors that they deliver the best results, finding that 'co-ordinated systems [of collective bargaining] are shown to be associated with higher employment, lower unemployment, a better integration of vulnerable groups and less wage inequality than fully decentralised systems'.<sup>25</sup>

Boosting collective bargaining to ensure that workers receive the fair rewards from any newly created wealth is therefore at the top of unions' agenda in responding to the future of work. We need a revival of collective bargaining in the UK, supported by a policy framework that gives working people more of a say in their workplace, in their sector and at national level.

Trade unions are determined to expand collective bargaining coverage across the public and private sector. This will be critical to delivering a fairer future for work.

<sup>25</sup> OECD (2018a) *Employment Outlook 2018*, available at: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2018\\_empl\\_outlook-2018-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2018_empl_outlook-2018-en)

## Section Four

# It's about time

The Factory Act of 1874 was the first to set a clear limit on the working day.<sup>26</sup> At ten hours it fell short of the union movement's demand of an eight-hour working day that would leave eight hours for rest and eight hours for leisure. It did, however, establish a precedent that limiting working time, or more importantly maximising time outside work, was a core element of ensuring a fair deal for workers.

Over the TUC's history we have seen further improvements in workers' ability to control their time. The average working week has almost halved since 1868, falling from 62 hours back then to around 32 hours today.<sup>27</sup> But we remain a long way from the 15-hour week prophesied by Keynes in 1930.<sup>28</sup> And large numbers are still trapped in the extreme end of overwork:

- 3.3 million employees work over 48 hours a week
- Almost half-a-million work more than 60 hours
- 1.4 million people still work on all seven days of the week

Technology also threatens to encroach into our non-working time too. One-in-seven workers in our polling said that new technology has increased working hours, as your boss can reach you even when you're not in the workplace. While remote working has the potential to increase work-life balance, an 'always on' culture, and the rise of 'on-demand' services requiring 'on-demand' workers, threaten to usher in an era of increasingly intense work. Many employers have also used technology as an excuse to revive old fashioned poor employment practices, such as piece-work that restricts workers' control over their own time. This includes unpredictable hours, zero-hour contracts and shifts cancelled at short notice.

We need to make sure workers have more control over their time. That means banning the zero-hour contracts that leave workers at the beck and call of their employers, ensuring fair scheduling practices that allow people better control over their lives, and resisting the demands of gig companies for a return to piece-work.

And if new technology makes us richer, we can be ambitious about how we use that wealth to give us more time to spend with family and friends. We think it's time to put time back on the agenda – and it's clear that the public agree. When asked for their ideal working week, most people pick four days. Shorter working hours – without a reduction in living standards – should be on our agenda for the twenty-first century.

---

<sup>26</sup> If only for women and children in the textiles industry

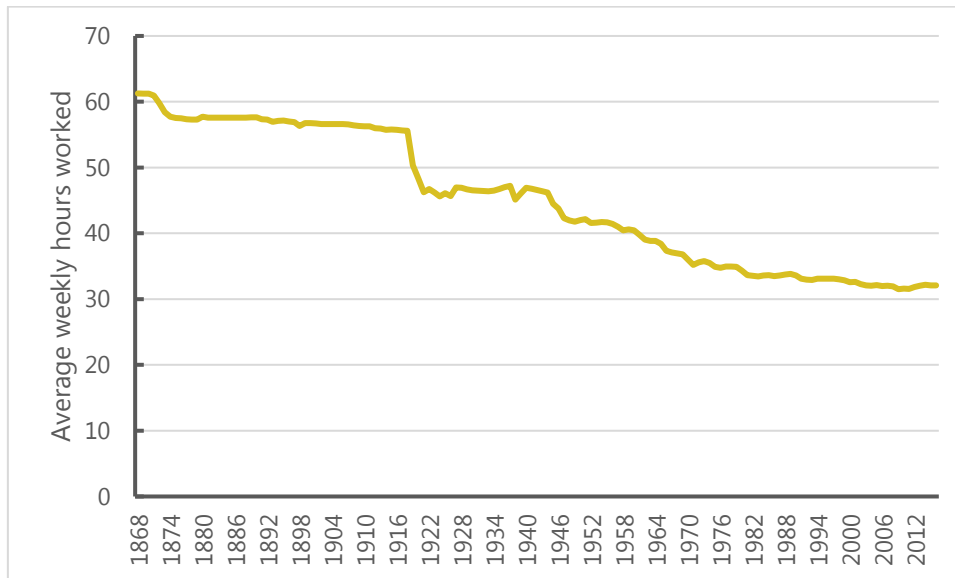
<sup>27</sup> Bank of England series 'A millennium of macroeconomic data' – composite series of average weekly hours worked.

<sup>28</sup> JM Keynes (1930) *Economic possibilities for our grandchildren* – see <http://www.econ.yale.edu/smith/econ116a/keynes1.pdf>

## Time over time

Improvements in productivity over the past 150 years haven't led to fewer jobs. But they have helped to ensure that people have been able to work fewer hours. Average weekly hours worked have fallen from 62 hours a week in 1868 – the year the TUC was founded – to 32 today.

Chart 8: Average weekly hours worked have fallen significantly



Source: Bank of England series 'A millennium of macroeconomic data' – composite series of average weekly hours worked.

Some of the falls in hours across the workforce over the last forty years are due to changes in who is working. The entry of large numbers of women working part time into the labour force has lowered average hours. However, it's also the case that when we look at normal hours for full-time workers they've fallen over the last twenty years – by 1.5 hours a week.<sup>29</sup>

Workers have also won some more control over their hours, with the introduction of the working time directive in the UK in 1998. The introduction of a right to request flexible working (first introduced in 2003 and subsequently expanded) has also helped some workers to gain a better fit between their working hours and their working lives.

But the UK's long hours culture clearly remains a significant problem:

- Over 1.4 million people have a normal working pattern that involves them working on all seven days a week

---

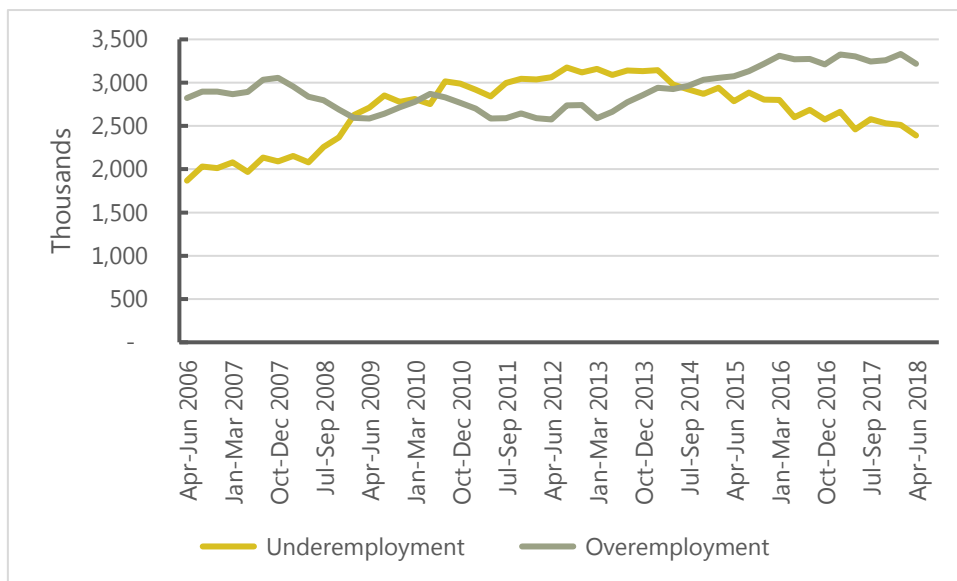
<sup>29</sup> ONS *Labour Market Statistics August 2018*, usual weekly hours of work – median hours for full time workers between 1998 and 2018.



- UK workers put in over two billion of hours of unpaid overtime in 2017, totalling £32 billion-worth of free labour<sup>30</sup>
- 3.3 million people still regularly work over 48 hours a week<sup>31</sup>

Concern about over-employment is clearly on the rise, with well over three million people now saying they would like to work fewer hours, even if this resulted in less pay, and ten million wanting to work fewer hours overall. This is clearly more of a real choice for the better paid, and working hours are already shorter for higher earners – by around five hours a week for male full-time workers according to research by the Resolution Foundation.<sup>32</sup>

Chart 9: The number of people over-employed has now overtaken those under-employed



Source: data from ONS (2018) 'Labour market economic commentary August 2018' at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomiccommentary/august2018>

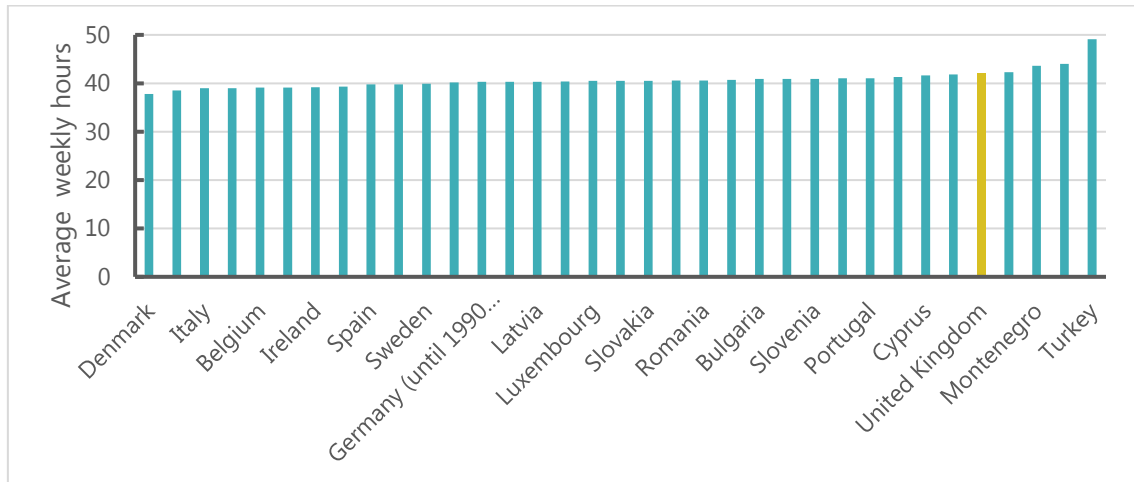
<sup>30</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/work-your-proper-hours-day-%E2%80%93-tackling-culture-unpaid-overtime>

<sup>31</sup> ONS *Labour Market Statistics August 2018*, usual weekly hours of work.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Clarke (2018) *Counting the hours* Resolution Foundation <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2018/01/Counting-the-hours.pdf>

Workers in the UK still work some of the longest hours in Europe – with no positive impact on our productivity or output. Full-time workers in the UK work two hours a week more than the European average, and over four hours a week more than their counterparts in Denmark.

Chart 10: Full time workers in the UK work some of the longest hours in Europe

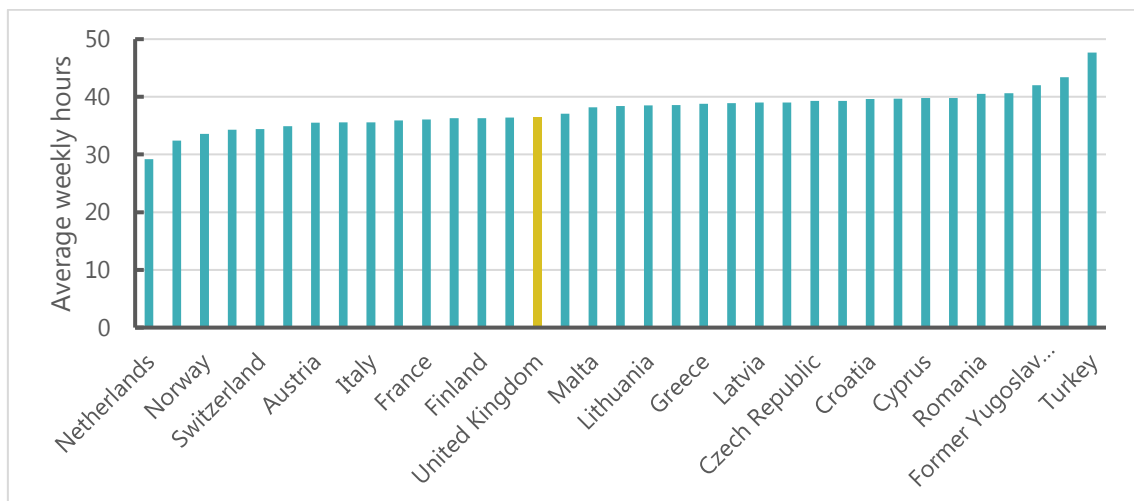


Source: Eurostat data on average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job, 2017, full time workers

And while the UK has a relatively high level of part-time working, bringing the average down when we look at both full- and part-time work, the average UK worker is still working:

- Two hours longer a week than their German counterpart
- Four more hours than a Danish worker
- Seven more hours than the typical worker in the Netherlands

Chart 11: Even taking into account the UK's high level of part time work, UK workers work longer hours than some of our most productive counterparts



Source: Eurostat data on average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job, 2017, total – full and part time workers

In our polling, long hours and stress were just behind pay in their list of worker's concerns – both now and in the future:

- 40 per cent say high pressure on people and stress at work are one of their three biggest concerns at work (second only to pay) and 28 per cent say working long hours/work overload (ranked third).
- Looking over the next five to ten years, 35 per cent say high pressure on people and stress at work are one of their biggest concerns (again second to pay), and 25 per cent say working long hours/work overload biggest is their biggest fear (this time just behind job losses due to a business slowdown).

These findings echo a large-scale survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). The survey found that the average (median) employee works five hours per week more than they would like, and that nearly two-thirds of employees (63 per cent) would like to reduce their hours. One-in-four people (27 per cent) work ten hours or more per week beyond what they would like.<sup>33</sup>

Long hours working reduces the time that people have to spend with family and friends. But poor employer practices can have the same effect, leading to a culture where people have insufficient work to live on, but are constantly at the beck and call of their employer.

There are still nearly 800,000 people on zero-hour contracts, with no guarantee of when or how many hours they'll work each week. We found that over half of workers on zero-hour contracts have had a shift cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, and three-quarters have been offered work within the next day.<sup>34</sup> Despite advances in legislation intended to give workers more rights to flexible work, TUC research with young parents in 2017 found that over half of them had an employer who had never spoken to them about how they could manage work and childcare, and one-in-four had also experienced short-notice shift changes.<sup>35</sup>

The 'on-demand' economy, where faster communications have raised expectations about when goods and services can be delivered, is also leading to a call for 'on-demand' workers, with no fixed boundary between their working and non-working time. This is a return to the old traditions of piece-work, where workers were paid by task rather than for their time – and employers seeking to avoid their obligations to pay workers a minimum wage or accept responsibility when these workers fall sick.

And the increased ability provided by communications software for employers to reach workers when they are not in the workplace does also seem to be leading to increased stress and pressure on workers. In our polling, one-in-seven say that the impact of new technology at

---

<sup>33</sup> CIPD (2018) *UK Working Lives: The CIPD Job Quality Index* at <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/uk-working-lives>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/nearly-million-people-are-zero-hours-contracts-it%E2%80%99s-time-government-act>

<sup>35</sup> TUC (2017) *Better jobs for mums and dads* [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Better Jobs For Mums And Dads 2017 AW Digital 0.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Better%20Jobs%20For%20Mums%20And%20Dads%202017%20AW%20Digital%200.pdf)

work has been to increase working hours as they can be reached more easily away from work. Research by CIPD in 2017 found that almost a third of workers believed that having remote access to the workplace means they can't switch off in their personal time.<sup>36</sup>

## Technical fixes?

Many of the demands placed on workers that disrupt their working lives have little to do with technology. Breaking work into small tasks, offered out to workers at small notice, requires only an employer with scant regard for their workers' terms and conditions, rather than any technological innovation. This is something that the trade unions who fought for guaranteed pay for dockers in the early part of the twentieth century knew well.

The most urgent action today to give workers back control of their time is for government to stand up to poor employment practices by banning zero-hour contracts, requiring employers to give decent notice of shifts, and to pay their workers when shifts are cancelled at short notice. Government should also resist calls to create a new category of 'worker' with fewer rights.

But the debate about the impact of technology on the future of work should enable us to be more ambitious about delivering a better balance between work and home. It's clear that over the long term, improvements in technology that deliver greater productivity have helped enable a reduction in working hours. The UK at present is clearly failing to realise those benefits. As the Chancellor Philip Hammond put it in 2016, the UK's poor productivity performance since the financial crisis means that 'it takes a German worker four days to produce what we make in five which means, in turn, that too many British workers work longer hours for lower pay than their counterparts'.<sup>37</sup>

This is not about British workers needing to work harder, faster or longer. It's about the need to improve productivity through better work organisation, technology and training. As set out in the first section, the government believes that robotics and autonomous systems could boost UK output by up to 15 per cent. If this is the case, a choice needs to be made about whether to bank the additional potential benefits in the form of greater output, or to think about how to use those gains to deliver the reductions in hours that so many workers say they want.

## Trade unions delivering change

When we polled working people on their views on the future of work, it's clear that working time was high on their agenda. Over a third said that shorter working hours would be what would most improve their working lives. This is second only to higher pay.

People are, however, sceptical about whether the future of work will deliver on their hopes. While over 70 per cent say that gaining more control over the hours they work would be

---

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/270417-remote-work-issues#>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/autumn-statement-2016-philip-hammonds-speech>

positive for them, only 39 per cent believe that this is likely to happen. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 65 per cent believe that working less for the same pay would be a positive development, but here only 40 per cent believe this is possible. Over half think this probably won't happen.

Yet we know that trade unions both in the UK and internationally are already helping to realise people's ambitions to have more control over their time.

Delivering better working time is a key part of our history. The eight-hour day was proposed at the International Workers Congress in Germany in 1866. The campaign featured heavily in the 'new unionism' of the late 1880s and made significant progress, as reported at the TUC's 1889 Congress. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention in 1919 – the first convention agreed.

The TUC was influential in establishing the post-1945 40-hour week. In 1944 trade union leaders called for a negotiated reduction as a part of the transition to a peace-time economy – with negotiations underpinned by threat of legal action by the Ministry of Labour. More recently, in the 1980s and 1990s a campaign by the engineering unions lowered the basic working week to 37.5 hours, with some employers going down to 35. From 1998 onwards unions have also used the working time regulations to help battle excessive working hours. As a result, average full-time hours have continued to move slowly downwards.

Today, unions continue to win significant gains. In France, trade unions have been at the forefront of negotiating a new 'right to disconnect', winning early agreements in the telecommunications and oil industry. From 2017, these principles have been included in national law, with a new obligation on companies with more than 50 employees to negotiate the use of ICT with a view to ensuring respect for workers' rest, holiday periods and personal lives.

German unions have also successfully negotiated similar agreements, for example at BMW, where in 2014, an agreement was reached that enables time spent outside the employers' premises to count as working time. This opens up the possibility of overtime payments for time spent replying to emails after the end of the working day.<sup>38</sup>

In 2016, the German Transport Union (EVG) and Deutsche Bahn reached an innovative agreement that gave workers a choice of three options: a wage rise, a reduction in weekly working time of one hour, or six more days of annual leave. And this year, the German Metalworkers union IG Metall won the right for their workers to voluntarily reduce their working week to four days – at the same time as winning a 4.3 per cent pay rise.<sup>39</sup>

Learning from trade union gains, the Commission on the Future of Work convened by the German government put working time at the centre of its policy recommendations. This year, it introduced legislation that allows workers in companies with more than 45 workers the right to request a reduction in their working hours. Unlike in the UK, workers retain a right to return

---

<sup>38</sup> See [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_544138.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_544138.pdf) page 50.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/e7f0490e-0b1c-11e8-8eb7-42f857ea9f09>

to their previous employment. The legislation also provided new protections for on-demand workers to stop them having their hours reduced or increased by more than 25 per cent.

As we set out above, ensuring that workers now have control over their time is a priority. That means new legislation to ban zero-hour contracts and tackle involuntary short-hour working. Too many employers use short-hours contracts as a form of control, enabling them to 'zero down' workers' hours as a disciplinary tool.

The tax and benefit system also encourages employers to keep their workers on shorter hours, avoiding the obligation to pay into a workplace pension. Workers should be guaranteed a contract that reflects their normal working week. Short notice shift allocation that leaves workers at the mercy of a poorly organised employer also needs tackling, with fair scheduling rules that give workers adequate notice of shifts and compensation when they're cancelled.

The first step to limiting excessive working time is enforcing the existing rules. Working time law is weakly enforced in the UK, with responsibility being split between a number of agencies. Some rights, including holiday pay, daily rest break, and a prohibition on seven-day working, are only enforceable by the worker taking a case to employment tribunal. The Health and Safety Executive and local authorities have responsibility for the 48-hour limit on weekly working time and the night-work limit, but neither sees this duty as a priority, leaving workers with nowhere to go.

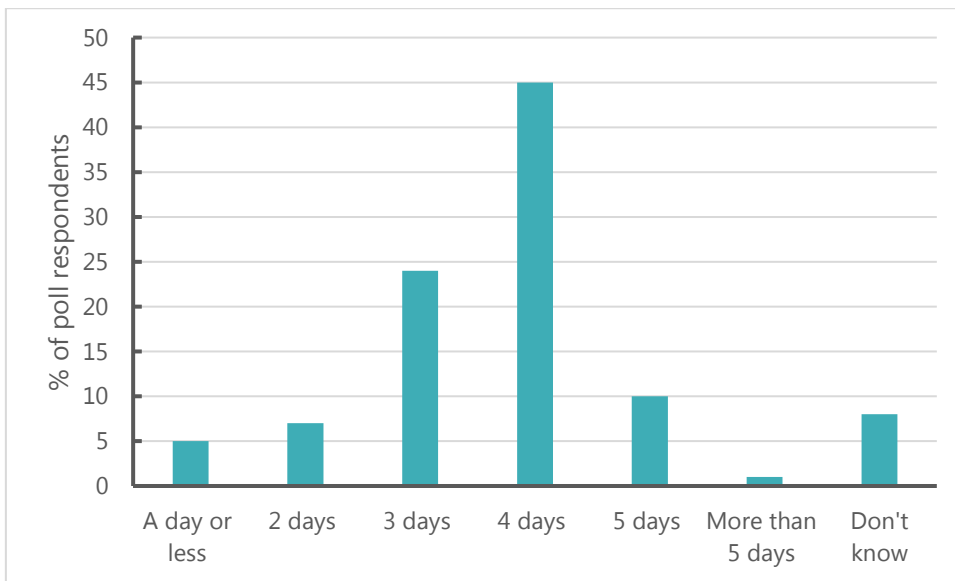
The TUC has called for working time rights to be protected by a dual enforcement model, so that the agencies gain responsibility for enforcing all working time rights, but it's also open to workers and their trade unions to take an employment tribunal case if they prefer to do so.

But the debate about the potential benefits of new technology should allow us to be more ambitious in our demands for a better distribution of our time between work and home, and to fight for shorter working hours alongside higher pay. When we asked working people what they viewed as the 'ideal' working week, there was a clear consensus around four days.

This doesn't mean that everyone has the same preferences about their working pattern. For some, the best option might be shorter hours spread over more days. And for existing part-time workers, a four-day week could be an unacceptable increase in current working hours. Others might prefer to take any reduction in working time in larger doses – perhaps at the end of working life.

But if the twentieth century saw the normalisation of the weekend while living standards rose, moving towards a typical four-day week seems like a useful way to think about what we could achieve in the twenty-first century.

Chart 12: Workers prefer a four-day week



Source: GQR poll for the TUC. Workers were asked:

Imagine a future where using machines and computer programs at work made Britain much more productive and wealthy, and we could fulfil all our needs with less work. If it was up to you to decide how long the maximum working week should be for everyone, what would you choose?



## Section Five

# Voice control

Technology is often held out as offering us greater control. From an app to control your sleep to 'smart fridges' that offer to take care of your shopping, we're increasingly told that we will be able to make greater choices about how to manage every aspect of our lives.

This should be true within the workplace too. Improved communications software offers greater choice over where work is done, and there's a proliferation of new apps to enable workers to more easily swap shifts or communicate at work.

But for too many workers, technological developments threaten to put more power in the hands of the boss. We found that over half of workers say they are being monitored at work, including through new software such as keystroke monitoring, and two-thirds worry that this data could be used in discriminatory ways.

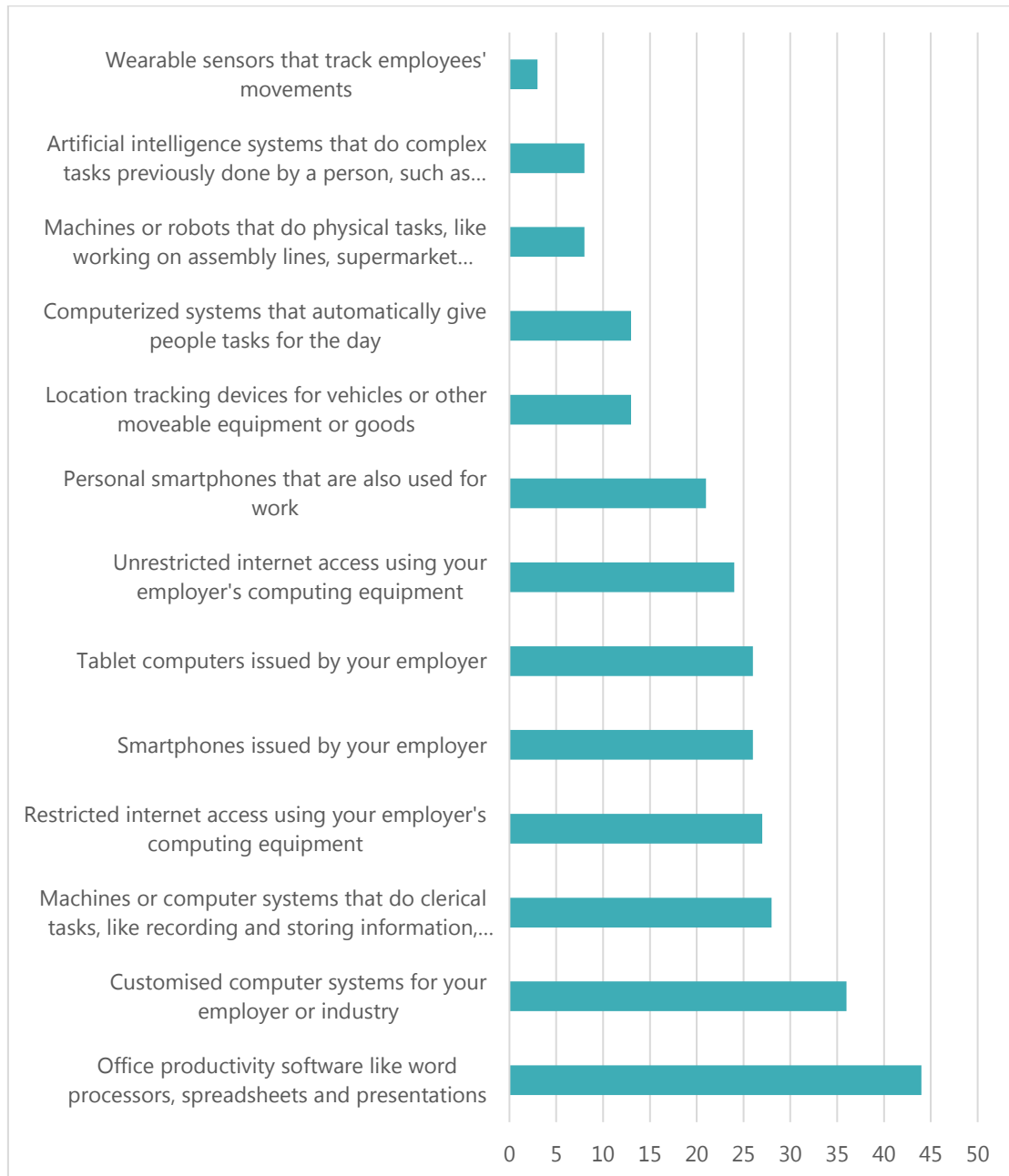
The lack of a voice in how technology is used at work extends beyond individual workplaces too. For many workers, industrial change has been managed in ways that have ignored their needs. The decline of collective bargaining, hastened by political attacks, has left many workers seeing change imposed on them, rather than shaped by them.

That's not only bad for workers, it's a missed opportunity. We know that we can best realise the potential for technology to improve work when workers have the chance to have a say on how it's used. Trade unions are best placed to deliver the skills uplift that can help deal with industrial transitions. And collective bargaining is the best way to ensure that the costs and benefits of change are fairly shared.

## Routers not robots?

For most people, software to speed up office tasks and communication has been the main way that technological progress has affected their work in the past ten years.

Chart 13: Many new forms of technology are already in use in the workplace



Source: GQR polling for TUC. Workers were asked: Which of the following types of technology are used at your workplace? Please check all that apply.

For many, these changes will have made work better. Some 37 per cent of people say that changes in the past ten years have increased the speed of communications, and 36 per cent say that they've enabled better use of data and analysis. Improved technology in the future could have the potential to further improve efficiency. It could also reduce the number of repetitive and mundane jobs; 62 per cent of people believe that this could happen, and over 40 per cent say that work could become more enjoyable in the future.

Technological fixes can also be used to help give people more autonomy at work. For example, Gap in the US introduced shift-swapping software that enabled employees to swap shifts between themselves as part of a wider experiment in shifting to more stable scheduling for workers across their stores.<sup>40</sup> And unions themselves are experimenting with new forms of digital organising – including the TUC's own young workers programme.

But there's a clear danger that without intervention, technology will be used more as a tool to control workers than to empower them. In separate research conducted over summer 2018, we found that over half of workers believed that they were subject to some form of monitoring at work. The most common forms of monitoring were:

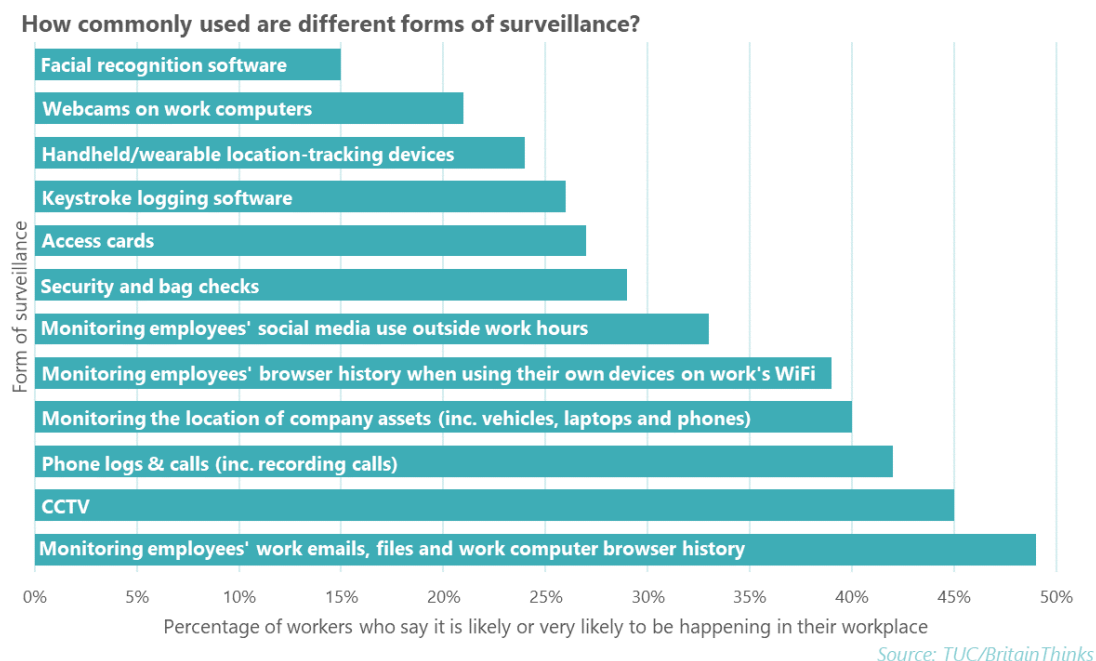
- Email monitoring (49 per cent of workers believed they experienced it)
- CCTV (45 per cent)
- Call logging (42 per cent)

But more advanced forms of technological surveillance were becoming more common too. In this research, asking a wider question than the polling reported above, one-in-four (24 per cent) said that location tracking devices, including wearable devices, were used in their workplace. One-in-seven (15 per cent) believed their employer was using facial recognition software.

---

<sup>40</sup> Joan C. Williams Susan Lambert and Saravanan Kesavan (2017) 'How The Gap Used an App to Give Workers More Control Over Their Schedules' *Harvard Business Review* at <https://hbr.org/2017/12/how-the-gap-used-an-app-to-give-workers-more-control-over-their-schedules>

Chart 14: Many forms of workplace monitoring are already commonplace



Source: TUC (2018) I'll be watching you: a report on workplace monitoring

Seven in ten workers (70 per cent) believed surveillance will become more common in the future. And two-thirds of workers (66 per cent) believed that unless carefully regulated, surveillance could be used as a tool to discriminate against workers. Workers felt they had little power over the use of monitoring at work. Just 38 per cent said that they would be able to challenge workplace monitoring if they felt uncomfortable with it.

### From the workplace to the wider economy

Employees' lack of confidence about their ability to tackle the unfair use of technology at work reflects a wider decline in workers' power over the last thirty years. Union coverage in the UK has declined significantly from its peak in the 1970s. In 1979 union density was 54 per cent<sup>41</sup> and collective bargaining coverage was over 70 per cent.<sup>42</sup> In 2016 (the most

41

<http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork/narrativedisplay.php?type=tradeunionorganisation>

42 This is approximate - analysis of the Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS) suggests that collective bargaining coverage in 1984 was 70%, and it is likely to have been higher in the late 70s. Source for 1984 figure available here

[http://www.niesr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publications/210808\\_110817.pdf](http://www.niesr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publications/210808_110817.pdf)

recent figures), they were 23.5 per cent and 26.3 per cent respectively.<sup>43</sup> This is a particular problem in the private sector, in which collective bargaining coverage is now just 15 per cent, and union density 13 per cent.

At the same time, the scope of the bargaining agenda has narrowed. In 1990, the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) found that aspects of managerial relations such as staffing levels and redeployment were subject to negotiation in over half of workplaces recognising unions. By 1998, this was the case in only around ten per cent of workplaces recognising unions. The 2011 WERS notes a 'significant diminution in the scope of negotiations' since 2004, with pay remaining the only issue covered in a majority of collective agreements.<sup>44</sup>

A wide range of factors lie behind this decline. Attacks on trade union rights by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 2015 have played a significant part. De-industrialisation and sectoral changes (including the shift to a more service-based economy, privatisation, and the fragmentation of employment relationships) have also made it harder for unions to organise.

But the result has been that workers have had far less say in shaping the world of work, as well as the industrial transitions that we have already experienced. As we set out above, this has left workers missing out on the benefits of change, with a decline in the labour share, and falls in wages for those most affected by industrial shifts.

Recent research from the OECD laid bare the costs of industrial change for workers, showing that in some countries 'displaced' workers can see their wages fall by 50 per cent in the year they lose their job, and remain up to ten per cent lower even four years after the job loss. As they point out,

*income losses can continue after displaced workers are re-employed, because wages in post-displacement jobs are often lower than those from the lost jobs. The risks of long-term joblessness and large earnings losses after re-employment are particularly significant for older and long-tenure workers in blue-collar jobs.*<sup>45</sup>

The decline in workers' power hasn't just affected those in declining industries; workers have suffered across the whole economy. Without action to ensure that the jobs that replaced heavy industry were secure and well-paid, we have seen the growth of new and innovative ways for employers to push risk onto workers. There are now just under 800,000 people on zero-hour contracts, millions of self-employed people who earn less than the national living wage, and around half a million people in insecure jobs who earn too little to qualify for sick pay. It's perhaps unsurprising that many people feel like they've lost control rather than gained it.

---

<sup>43</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/616966/trade-union-membership-statistical-bulletin-2016-rev.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/616966/trade-union-membership-statistical-bulletin-2016-rev.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/irru/publications/recentconf/pm\\_-\\_changing\\_collective\\_er\\_-\\_mirs.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/irru/publications/recentconf/pm_-_changing_collective_er_-_mirs.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> OECD (2018) *Employment Outlook 2018*, available at: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2018\\_empl\\_outlook-2018-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2018_empl_outlook-2018-en)

## Trade Unions delivering change

We know that unions are a critical means of ensuring that new technology is used in ways that benefit workers, both at workplace level and across the economy.

Where unions are strong, they have been able to negotiate the use of surveillance technology in ways that enable employers to boost productivity, and workers to maintain dignity and privacy at work. For example, CWU's agreement with the Royal Mail on the use of data states:

*Both parties recognise that new technology will improve Royal Mail's performance, and the service we provide to our customers. It is agreed that all individuals have a right to privacy at work, and it is accepted that there is a mutual obligation of confidence and trust applied to every contract of employment, and that all parties should act in a way so as not to break that relationship.*

*The use of data will be in the spirit of our agreements. It is recognised that the use of technology may increase levels of individual visibility and it is agreed that this new technology is not being deployed for, or will be used as, a disciplinary tool. As such it will not enhance the ability of managers, or the evidence available, to take disciplinary action.*

In the transport sector, Unite has secured agreement with employers that increased electronic surveillance of drivers cannot be used in disciplinary hearings, and can only be viewed by key managers.

And unions are piloting the use of 'new technology agreements' whereby any new technology can only be introduced with worker consent. Unite's draft technology agreement states, for example:

*The introduction and control of new technology on the shop floor will only be made with agreement of the employer and the union on behalf of its affected members. The employer will reinvest cost savings from any introduction of new technology into areas that promote and provide more and better jobs within the organisation. New skills or responsibilities will be recognised through negotiated pay increases... It is further agreed that wherever relevant new technology will be used to: reduce working time, not pay; and create new jobs.<sup>46</sup>*

Unions in Germany have achieved similar goals, with an agreement at Airbus that will see protections for the overall level of jobs, while accepting that job roles will change.<sup>47</sup>

But a greater say in the delivery of new technology isn't only good for workers. Research is increasingly showing that workers who have a say in the workplace, including in how new technology is introduced, are more likely to use it to deliver the productivity gains that have been so elusive in the UK. The recently published 'skills and employment' survey for 2017, for

---

<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.unitetheunion.org/uploaded/documents/0247-New%20Tech%20Agreement%20for%20print%2024101711-32663.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> See TUC (2017) Shaping our digital future <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Shaping-our-digital-future.pdf>

example, found that one-in-five workers had identified changes to their working practices that would make them ‘a great deal more productive’. These channels were most likely to be put in place where ‘their views and those of their colleagues were heard’, but the proportion of workplaces enabling workers to have a say has fallen over the decade.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, a recent survey of nearly 7,500 workers found that 87 per cent agreed with the statement ‘I am keen to embrace technology and maximise its benefits’, and 73 per cent agreed that technology would improve productivity. However, less than one-in-four (24 per cent) said that their employer gave them a say in how technology affects their work.<sup>49</sup> In our recent polling, only one-in-seven workers said that real change happened as a result of staff suggestions. And over a third (36 per cent) said that big changes at work happen with no consultation at all.

Trade unions have also shown they can play a vital role in helping workers manage the industrial shifts of the type that are likely if robotics and AI realise their potential in the next few years. Swedish Job Security Councils, delivered through collective agreements between employers and workers across a sector, have one of the best records in advanced economies of getting displaced workers back into jobs, with a 90 per cent success rate within a year. In the Netherlands, collective agreements agree financing for ‘O&O’ funds, which provide learning opportunities to workers to help them find new jobs in the future.<sup>50</sup>

And in the UK, the government has recognised the role of unions in delivering learning, with a commitment to pilot a National Retraining Partnership delivered in partnership between the government, the TUC and the CBI. This builds on the long-term success in the UK of Union Learning in boosting workers’ skills. Four-in-ten (80 per cent) of those who’ve undertaken union learning develop skills that they can transfer to a new job, and 62 per cent believe that their new skills make them more effective at their current role.<sup>51</sup>

We know that trade unions offer the best way to ensure that the future of work gives workers more control. In the next section, we set out what needs to change to make sure that happens.

---

<sup>48</sup> Felstead, A., Gallie, D., Green, F. and Henseke, G. (2018) *Productivity in Britain: The Workers’ Perspective – First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2017*, Cardiff University/Economic and Social Research Council/Department for Education, available at:

[https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1229833/1\\_Productivity\\_at\\_Work\\_Minireport\\_Final\\_edit\\_2.pdf](https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1229833/1_Productivity_at_Work_Minireport_Final_edit_2.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Smith Institute, The (2016) *The Productivity Puzzle: A View from Employees*, available at:

<http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/book/the-productivity-puzzle-a-view-from-employees/>

<sup>50</sup> OECD (2018) *Employment Outlook 2018*, available at: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2018\\_empl\\_outlook-2018-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2018_empl_outlook-2018-en)

<sup>51</sup> Unionlearn (2017) *Measuring the success of union learning* – based on

## A future that works

The trade union movement is optimistic about the future of work. Our history shows us that things can get better – few would choose 19th century working conditions over a job today. But we are a long way from our goal of ensuring decent work for everyone.

There are urgent steps we need to take to improve the world of today. These include:

- Renewed investment in the UK to help us deliver higher growth, raising the level of UK investment to at least the OECD average.
- Boosting the National Minimum Wage to £10 an hour as quickly as possible.
- A ban on zero-hour contracts.
- Fair scheduling rules that give workers decent notice of their shifts, and compensation when a shift is cancelled at short notice.
- Better enforcement of the working time directive, with all agencies able to enforce breaches of holiday pay and prevent excessive working hours.
- New protections from excessive surveillance at work, including protections for workers against unfair surveillance being used when bosses are trying to dismiss them.<sup>52</sup>

But we need to plan for the future too. Managed poorly, new technology could place more power in the hands of bosses, exacerbating the trends that have seen not only pay but productivity flatline over the last decade, an unacceptable rise in insecurity at work, and a workforce that may not have been replaced by robots, but is treated in ways that are less and less human.

We know that we can tackle these challenges using the technology that's served us for 150 years: representation and collective bargaining in the workplace. And it's not just our history that demonstrates this. International evidence shows that countries with better levels of trade union representation deliver lower inequality, better workplaces, and a fairer share for workers. As even the OECD, long a champion of deregulation has recognised, trade unions deliver for everyone:

*... new evidence ...shows that countries with policies and institutions that promote job quality, job quantity and greater inclusiveness perform better than countries where the focus of policy is predominantly on enhancing (or preserving) market flexibility.<sup>53</sup>*

---

<sup>52</sup> TUC (2018) *I'll be watching you: a report on workplace monitoring* <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/i%E2%80%99ll-be-watching-you>

<sup>53</sup> OECD (2018b) *Good jobs for all in a changing world of work: the OECD jobs strategy* available at: <https://www.oecd.org/mcm/documents/C-MIN-2018-7-EN.pdf>.



We need trade unions to play a key role in shaping the future of work, ensuring that workers share in the benefits of growth through shorter hours and higher pay. To achieve that we need:

- A renewed effort to expand collective bargaining, with trade unions aiming to renew collective bargaining coverage across the private and public sector – supported by a policy framework that gives working people more of a say in their workplace, in their sector and at national level.
- Government to establish a new Future of Work Commission that brings together trade unions, employers and independent experts. It would set out how the government can:
  - Ensure that new technology is introduced with the consent of workers – with new technology agreements agreed by trade unions in workplaces across the country.
  - Investigate how to boost productivity across the UK, by investing in new technology that can improve the quality of life.
  - Ensure that the gains from that productivity are shared with workers, setting out an ambition to move to shorter hours and higher pay. The commission should see moving to a four-day week with no drop in living standards as an ambition for the twenty-first century.
  - Provide skills training for those at risk of losing their jobs as the workplace changes – with a new learning entitlement for every worker, delivered with advice from a union rep.