

Can Less Work be More Fair?

We need to talk about UBI and shorter working hours

Does a world with more insecure work need to be a world of greater instability and fear? Are protectionism and nationalism appropriate responses? Are there alternative policy approaches which can bring people and communities together instead of driving them ever further apart?

With global politics in a state of flux, these are the urgent questions posed by a new Green Institute discussion paper, [Can Less Work be More Fair?](#) The paper is a collection of contributions from leading academics and social justice campaigners providing different perspectives on the ideas of shorter working hours and Universal Basic Income.

Green Institute Executive Director, Tim Hollo, said “It is completely understandable that, in a world riven by inequality and instability, the prospect of there being fewer and less secure jobs to go around is a frightening one. But it doesn’t need to be.

“What if, instead of trying to recreate an old world of abundant paid work, we embraced this phenomenon and built systems, institutions and cultures in which less paid work could lead to greater equity, reinvigorated democracy and civil society, better environmental outcomes, and a more caring, creative, connected community?

“What if we took it as an opportunity to recognise that reducing the value of human beings to what we can sell our labour for was a mistake, and that we could now redefine our relationships with each other, with ourselves, with our environment?”

The collection includes contributions from a suite of highly respected analysts and advocates: Jon Altman, Eva Cox, Elise Klein, Greg Marston, Godfrey Moase, Clare Ozich, Frank Stilwell, Louise Tarrant and Chris Twomey.

“Retreat into nationalist or protectionist politics, as both the Coalition and Labor, as well as many commentators, have done since Brexit and the election of Donald Trump – will not save or regenerate jobs which no longer exist due to automation or economic change. This attitude, at its worst, can lead towards a descent into the ugly far-right politics that we are witnessing around the world, which will help nobody and potentially hurt countless millions even more than the current system hurts them. We must not allow that to happen.

“Less work doesn’t need to fill us with fear, as long as we build systems of support,” Hollo said. “A Universal Basic Income may or may not be the best mechanism to provide such support, but an open conversation about the idea and how it might change our society, economy and politics is a vital part of grappling with the challenges we face.”