

Work

Protecting workers' rights in a sustainable economy

What are we all working for? Most of us would say a better quality of life, and an opportunity to do something fulfilling. But does the way we work provide these things?

Many are forced to work too hard or too long, leaving no time for children, home and the rest of life. Too much work is meaningless and unsatisfying, being little more than the chase for ever greater profits. Some work is unsafe, damaging workers' health. Other work is insecure, made vulnerable to redundancy often brought about by intense competition and globalisation.

Yet while many have too much work, others cannot gain employment because it is said they are too old, lack skills or live in the wrong place, or because it will not fit in with other commitments. Workers' rights, and in particular the right to membership of a recognised trade union, have been eroded. And society does not value the vital work of carers and volunteers, or properly protect their interests.

Greens see all our activity as a whole, rejecting a view that sees only paid

employment as creating value and the rest of life as just an opportunity for consumption.

We would

- pay everyone a basic Citizen's Income to allow everybody to make meaningful choices between paid employment, part-time work, self-employment, caring or volunteering and encourage a better balance between work and the rest of life;
- create a green economy with local jobs less vulnerable to changes in the world economy;
- restore the rights of workers and trades unions, and extend workers rights to part time, casual workers and the self-employed. In particular we support collective bargaining and would protect workers from the first day of employment. We support the Institute of Employment's Charter of Workers' Rights;
- encourage cooperatives and workplace democracy;
- value and protect carers and volunteers.

But only paid employment benefits the economy?

The economy cannot function without workers, all of whom depend upon their homes for food, rest and recreation. Are we really better off, for example, when parents pay others to look after their children, rather than doing so themselves, or cooperatively with others? And we see the value of those who care voluntarily for the elderly when we see the high price the market demands for such services.

Won't moving to a green economy mean that many will lose their jobs?

On the contrary, many will move from meaningless insecure jobs into new jobs – for example in energy conservation or more labour intensive organic agriculture.

Giving part-time and casual employees full rights will make them too expensive, especially for small employers.

Small employers would be given special help. Larger employers would no longer be able to exploit this vulnerable group of employees.

What about the minimum wage?

In the absence of a fully implemented Citizen's Income, we believe that the minimum wage is a necessary protection for the low paid.

Wouldn't restoring trade union rights, such as secondary picketing, cause chaos?

A proper balance needs to be struck between the rights of workers and those of employers when disputes arise. Employers have many resources at their disposal, and workers few.

Do you support compulsory union membership – the 'closed shop'?

No. While workers should always be able to join a union, they should not be forced to do so.

What about discrimination in the workplace?

We oppose any kind of discrimination in the workplace, whether on the grounds of sex, race, family status or responsibilities, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, political opinion or physical appearance.

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