

Work, Leisure and Technology edited by R. Cassell, D. Lewis and J. Mangan (Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1986) pp. 273. ISBN 0 582 71151 7.

After the Second World War, governments all over the industrialised world made public their commitment to make full employment (or something like it) a top priority of state policy. In the heady days of the 1950s and 1960s, it appeared that this promise was going to be kept. Economic policies commonly associated with the theories of John Maynard Keynes had removed mass unemployment from the political agenda. It had apparently become a social problem of an earlier age; its eradication was yet another landmark on the road of human progress, much like the conquest of cholera and typhoid in industrialised countries in the previous century. This comforting conclusion has proved illusory. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, Keynesian solutions were unable to reconcile full employment with financial stability. As a result, unemployment, at levels reminiscent of the 1930s in some countries, has returned to haunt us. What is worse, there is little sign that future industrial or technological developments are going to produce a solution. Even economic growth is not going to be translated automatically into more jobs.

The consequences of this particular configuration concern the contributors of this book. Like most futurologists, the authors divide between those who are optimistic and those who are pessimistic about present trends and future possibilities, with rather more in the latter camp than in the former. This group tends to focus on Australia's current industrial ills, notably unemployment and its consequences, and to prescribe various traditional economic remedies to promote recovery. In so far as they assess the likely impact of new technology, they tend to follow Braverman¹ in emphasising its potential for deskilling work and destroying jobs. By contrast, the optimists emphasise the rewards of increased leisure offered by technological developments. Reduced time spent on waged work will apparently offer greater opportunities for personal fulfillment and self realisation, an approach epitomised by Mandeville's euphoric vision of the imminent return of the pre-industrial household as the basic economic unit of production and consumption, an attractive (if Utopian) proposition. What unites all the contributors, however, is the general sense that the government should "Do Something . . ." although there is little consensus about what that 'Something' might be.

A collection of essays on a broad subject area like this one invariably turns out to be a curate's egg. This volume is no exception. In some respects, the conjunction of themes that forms the basis for their collection is subject to criticism, not least by many of the contributors themselves, and this makes for a rather uneven end product when the book is viewed as a whole. Hence high unemployment in Australia is understood less as the consequence of technological restructuring than as a result of common or garden recession. Nor has the falling demand for labour been reflected in an overall increase of leisure opportunities. On the contrary, as Whittingham and Andraskelas point out, a reduction in working hours tends to generate lower levels of production (reflecting falling demand) or higher rates of productivity. It does not solve the problem by generating more jobs. Finally, as many early critics of Barry Jones' highly influential book pointed out, we must be beware of the trap of technological determinism.² The availability of new technology does not guarantee its immediate adoption (as Nightingale and Hall demonstrate here) and, if levels

of activity in the information economy do expand in response to new technology, the increase in services might well offset the initial loss of jobs caused by computerisation. Therefore both the pace of technological change and its consequence might prevent it having the dire impact on jobs so many assume it will. In other words, to understand the implications behind the recent rise in unemployment in Australia, it might be worth looking back to the 1930s rather than forward to the technology of the 1990s. It is a pity nobody does.

Certainly what is surprising here is the way in which certain assumptions remain unquestioned. The future of Australian employment is to be determined by new information technology and increasingly automated modes of production. High technology will be dedicated to raising productivity, thereby causing further reductions in the demand for labour. In this respect, developments in America are taken as the model of what will happen in Australia. However, such trends are not inevitable and merit closer scrutiny. It is acknowledged that technological innovation in the service sector makes feasible new services, thereby extending potential employment. One might think that this was particularly significant for the future of the tourist industry in Australia, a growth area which gets no mention here, but which is peculiarly labour intensive. Furthermore, it is wrong to assume that all manufactured goods will, in future, be made solely by large firms utilising highly automated techniques. While not seeking to deny a general tendency in this direction, the reviewer would like to point to the perverse way that the market, particularly in its upper echelons, seems to shun the mass-produced article in favour of its hand finished counterpart, even if the former is considerably cheaper. This is particularly evident in areas influenced by 'fashion', clothing, shoes, furniture, household ornaments, even cars. The flaws in the hand knitted jumper or a hand blown glass apparently bestow character, which is reflected in price. The status afforded the owners of a Maserati or Ferrari makes the car desirable, even if downtown Hong Kong or Sydney gives little opportunity of putting the thing through its paces. Even Australians respond to this peculiar stimulus: witness the price commanded by imported Italian knitwear or shoes in Sydney's larger stores. It is in some sectors of the economy of northern Italy that we find relatively small scale firms, utilising new technology, producing goods in a relatively labour intensive fashion which are in high demand all over the globe. Mass production in manufacture, in other words, is but one strategy. Given the geographical proximity of South East Asia, one might have thought Australia would do better to concentrate on these areas where mass production is less suitable by aiming at the luxury market.

Such an argument is, of course, contentious and it is perhaps unfair to raise it when discussing a collection of essays already embracing a very wide variety of issues. Some of them are well argued and well presented. The contributions by the editors themselves, especially an unusual comparison between the Australian and Swedish economies, are well worth reading for a basic analysis of Australia's economic problems. On the information technology side, Lamberton's pithy and well-rehearsed essay on the essence of information economics stands out, alongside the contribution of Nightingale and Hall.

On a different tack, Jamrozik's analysis of the nature and consumption of leisure is far more penetrating and thoughtful than that of others addressing the issue. On the minus side, it is annoying to find essays addressing the same issues (education and work sharing) which, for inexplicable reasons, appear in different sections of the book, and, in the latter case, there is no editorial effort

to reconcile the completely opposite conclusions reached by the contributors. Further, the analysis of the social consequences of unemployment is inadequate. It is not acceptable simply to ignore inconvenient literature which would undermine one's argument. And some of the contributors cannot write. Members of the Bureau of Labour Market Research are particularly at fault here. (Perhaps the BLMR's recent demise was due to their inability to communicate much with the outside world).

To end on such a sour note would, however, be inappropriate. This is a book to be dipped into and its best essays enjoyed. No doubt students will find certain chapters particularly useful. As for which contributor presents the most accurate version of what is going to happen, only time will tell. Buy it and remember to read it again in ten or twenty years' time.

REFERENCES

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2. B. Jones, *Sleepers Wake!*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985.

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Telecommunications and Equity: Policy Research Issues edited by James Miller (North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1986) pp. vii + 348, ISBN 0-444-70013-7.

This volume contains papers presented to the thirteenth annual Telecommunications Policy Research Conference held in Airlie, Virginia (USA) in April, 1985. These annual conferences have changed in character over time, from a small gathering, predominantly made up of economists, meeting to advise the White House's Office of Telecommunications Policy, to a larger and more interdisciplinary group attempting to identify and discuss issues and policy approaches. The theme chosen for the 1985 Conference 'Equity: Social and Economic Issues', gave ample scope for the interdisciplinary framework, with economists, sociologists, lawyers, engineers, regulators, industry and communications experts all contributing papers.

The book contains some 29 papers which are divided into four sections. The four sub-themes are: perspectives on equity; policy approaches to monopoly and competition; the provision of a universal telephone service; and the policy concerns of the 'cultural' media. The largest and most varied section is that on monopoly/competition policy, which is composed of fourteen papers, while the section on universal service contains some of the longer contributions to the volume.

The first section is described by the editor (p. 1) as discussing 'overarching thematic and disciplinary matters appropriate to the analysis of telecommunications policy'. This section is rather short, however, and does not really provide much which is of use in placing the other material into some sort of 'perspective'. Of the three papers included, the one by Edward Zajac is possibly the most helpful, being an explanation of economists' methodology and its need for supplementation when questions of equity and policy making arise. Zajac draws