

EMPLOYMENT IN THE 1990s

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Foreword by the Rt Hon Michael Heseltine, MP

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For Geoffrey, Lewis and Rosie, who saw so little of their father whilst it was written, in the hope that more thought about the issues raised here may ensure that they, too, will have the right to work when the time comes

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Foreword

This is not a comfortable book. It is the more deserving for that. It forces those concerned by the present levels of unemployment in modern capitalist societies to confront questions without easy answers.

Can the market-place and the prudent management of the economy deliver jobs on the scale needed to provide work for those indicating a desire for it? To what extent will the changing demographic profile reduce the demand for work? What are the consequences of large numbers of people, particularly young, male and, often, black people, growing up with assumptions of hopelessness and uselessness?

Remorselessly the reader is exposed to the view that for the rest of this century – and that means for this political generation – any considered judgement delivers unacceptable answers. And the nostrum of a quick fix of extra public expenditure is exposed as of no permanent benefit.

Not everyone will agree with the book's answers, although I have much sympathy with them. The need to relate public policy to our industrial needs, to seek an interface between the nation's industry and our policy-makers that is as sophisticated as that of our competitors, seems to me self-evident. A greater access to leisure is a legitimate political ambition merely assuming a continuation of historic trends. For a century or more the inadequacy of our education system in an ever more sophisticated world has been a tolerated scandal – setting us progressively behind similar nations.

As Robbie Gilbert argues from his experiences in the private sector, in the academic world and close to government, there is much to be done and an urgent need to do it.

There will remain the uncomfortable political dilemma of how to combine the offer of training, further education or community service with the freedom of people to refuse to do it, in a society which pays them broadly the same whatever they choose.

MICHAEL HESELTINE

Preface

Few people have the opportunity of a break in mid-career to consider a subject of great interest to themselves and of great importance to society. I am grateful to the Wolfson Foundation for giving me the chance to examine prospects for employment in Britain at the point where my own experience as a Special Adviser at the Department of Employment had made me acutely aware of the lack of knowledge about this subject. At the end of my studies, I am moved to suggest that part of the answer to high unemployment may lie in making more generally available the opportunity to pursue other interests for some months in the middle of what we now regard as a normal working life.

In the years during which this project continued, I have been saved from innumerable pitfalls and *faux pas* by a hardworking and endlessly patient Committee. They have alerted me to countless possibilities that had not occurred to me and provided a constant leavening of experience, informed opinion, wit and plain common sense as we felt our way forward down a variety of difficult paths. Any bright idea which emerges from the report almost certainly originated with them, whilst the dubious lines of argument are assuredly of my own making.

It is invidious to thank some, when all have contributed so much, but I must record my particular gratitude to Richard Needham, MP, who chaired their discussions but did not seek to restrict my own interpretation of my remit; Trevor Spittle whose commitment was invaluable; and those colleagues who helped me during my time at the University of Oxford Institute of Statistics, Ken Mayhew and Derek Robinson.

ROBBIE GILBERT

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R.G.