



MCW National Conference 2016 Guest Speaker Tom Watson MP West Bromwich East

The theme of the National Conference held in Birmingham on November 12th 2016 was **Decent Work Still Matters: Decent Work; Decent Lives.**

Whatever the form of development or transformation taking place in the workplace, the MCW believes that, decent work and decent lives must remain the yardstick: For us it is an imperative.

Being aware of Tom Watson's (above right) concerns about the impact technology is and will have on our working lives we invited him to speak about the Independent Future of Work Commission. He was prompted to initiate this Commission being mindful that the transformations taking place will create wealth and opportunity but will also cause disruption and hardship for others. The problems of inequality are not new but Tom recognises that the solutions need to be hence his being instrumental in setting up the Future of Work Commission.

What is your or your family and friends' experience of new technology in the workplace? For some of us it may already have been introduced without us even thinking about it, yet it has already made our life easier, but what of the workers involved? For others the impact might have been job cuts and redundancies.

The MCW conference (chaired by Paul Edwards above left) provided a good platform for an interesting exchange of views and ideas between all those present. The technology and transformation of work was already evident in the emerging jobs in the so-called 'gig' economy with workers having their conditions and wages driven down whilst customers sought out, demanded even, ever quicker responses to their ordering of goods and services. For example if you are a retail worker in a low wages job how is technology changing your work? If you are in a warehouse is it enhancing your job by allowing you to use machinery giving the ability to lift things and so improving your health & safety or threatening your job and livelihood? Also important is to try and understand how it affects workers in relation to their sense of self. Tom used the example of pizza delivery. Just delivering from a shop to a home does not establish a commune with co-workers; little opportunity to talk and share experiences or how you are feeling the pressures of life like being able to pay the bills at the end of the month or ideas about how the service delivery of that company could be improved. These traditional notions of work and employment are disappearing. Tom's sense of this was like "sterilizing humanity and taking away people's power to change the world of work".

However, it is not just traditional skilled jobs that are feeling the effects but, so-called middle class jobs in the legal, science and medical professions too. Some of the questions arising from these changes were: What does this 'new technological revolution' mean in the short, medium and long term for us workers? What will be the

positive or negative impact? Who will be affected most? The questions go on. What questions come to your minds when you think about it?

The MCW is confronted and challenged by the Gospel. We look for the signs of hope so it was asked what our signs of hope are and what are our key messages? He described it as the age old struggle in trying to clarify the new ideas; to show that there is a different way; persuade people that we are not at the behest of fate, that we can change our lives through those values of tolerance and collective action. It was important to realise that we need not be powerless but can work together to make a difference to our lives and communities. Hope, he said, came from all present in the room, as we are all engaged; grappling with the issues discussed and continuing to help each other build bridges and bridging the gaps and difference that we are currently experiencing in society.

For a fuller report see the MCW Review newsletter, issue 61, February 2017