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## **Gender and the New Economy: Regulation or deregulation?**

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# **Gender and the New Economy: Regulation or Deregulation?**

## **Introduction**

Globalisation has been implicated in two divergent processes. On the one hand, there is concern about the detrimental effect of globalisation on employment, which has been focused on the impact of de-regulation of working conditions (Crouch and Streeck, 1997; Standing, 1999). On the other hand, there has been enthusiasm for the development of a new knowledge based economy, which might have the potential to provide higher skilled jobs that are co-ordinated through flatter hierarchies and networks.

A key aspect of this debate has concerned the contribution of global processes to the de-regulation of economic markets. Yet, when a gender lens is used, we can see a significant rise in new forms of regulation, from equal opportunities policies to maternity leave and the regulation of working time, rather than simply de-regulation. Gender relations and employment relations are undergoing transformation in many countries as a result of processes of both de-regulation and of re-regulation of the workplace. The argument of this paper is that the conventional view does not adequately capture some of the forms of regulation or re-regulation that are also taking place at least partly because gender issues are out of focus in many of the accounts of globalisation and employment. There are many instances of development of regulations so as to make the workplace more hospitable to women workers. This is related to changes in the gender regime. This demands a re-thinking of the assumption that globalisation and de-regulation go together in a simple manner.

There are, of course, variations in nature and extent of these processes between countries. In particular, the EU has advanced some forms of regulation, to a greater extent than has the US. While this paper is grounded empirically in developments in the UK, it does so with an eye for such comparisons.

## **Globalisation**

The concept of globalisation is, of course, contested. The definition used here is minimal in order to avoid conflating it with a specific cause. Following Chase-Dunn et al (2000), globalisation is defined as an increase in social interactions and connections over space, especially internationally. This avoids conflating it with resurgent neoliberal capitalism, or with the rise of a new hegemon, or with new information and communication technologies. While sympathetic to the claim that what is really new is the increased importance of phenomena which are extraterritorial (Scholte, 2000), I think this view underestimates the extent to which most global processes at some point have a terrestrial connection (Sassen, 1999).

Two employment processes have been associated with the debates on globalisation: deregulation; and the rise of a knowledge-based economy. The process of deregulation and increased flexibility entails a process in which greater global interconnections can increase the power of capital relative to labour. This engages a process through which states reduce social protection and increase the flexibility of their workforces, in order to follow prevailing theories about the best way to compete in a global market place (Cerny, 1996). Martin and Schumann (1997) see global capital undermining conditions of working life, Crouch and



Streeck (1997) see capital undermining national welfare states, while Sennett (1998) argues that these changes are leading to a corrosion of character, since people need the stability of the old ways of working.

The claim is twofold, both that there is deregulation, reduced protection and increased flexibility, and secondly, that this is linked to globalisation. Evidence for the existence of deregulation, reduced protection and increased flexibility in the UK has been sought from the findings of three main UK surveys; the large cross-sectional Labour Force Survey, the longitudinal British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), and the specialised Workplace Industrial/Employment Relations Survey carried out every few years (Casey et al, 1997; Cully et al, 1999). On the basis of an analysis of the BHPS, Dex and McCulloch (1997: 187-8) conclude that 'Britain is sliding into being a low wage, low skill economy in which the quality of jobs is declining. It may be that women's skills are being lost more, disproportionately, than men's in this process. This loss of skill is not being replaced because non-standard jobs provide little training. The potential of the workforce is therefore being wasted.' Similarly, Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000: 224), on the basis of analysis of the series of Workplace Industrial/Employment Relations Surveys between 1980 and 1998, conclude that Conservative governments sought to 'weaken the power of the trade unions, deregulate the labour market and dismantle many of the tripartite institutions of corporatism in which trade unions played a major part. Subduing inflation was to be given priority over maintaining low employment. Reducing the role of government and levels of public expenditure were policy goals. The free play of the market was to replace the search for consensus between government and the 'two sides' of industry'.

The second, sometimes alternative view, is that we are experiencing the growth of a new knowledge based economy. This is taken to mean the development of new high skill knowledge based jobs which, further, involve less hierarchical and more networked forms of working (Flores and Gray, 2000; Seltzer and Bentley, 1999).

While some writers have focused on linking one rather than both of these processes to globalisation, others have noted how both processes co-exist in time, but not in space (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998; Standing, 1999). That is, individual's experience in the workplace depends on social location, either spatial in the sense of country, region or city zone, or social location, in the sense of class, education, ethnicity, nationality and gender. For instance, Huws, Jager and O'Regan (1999) argue that teleworking will relocate globally to those countries where there is board access to affordable telecommunications, relatively deregulated labour markets, appropriate household sizes and structures, a skilled workforce. It is also the conclusion of Castells' (1996, 1997, 1998) monumental trilogy in which he lays out the thesis of the coming of the information age. He argues that the growth of information and communication technologies is the basis of a form of globalisation that is transforming the nature of the social world. In a careful interweaving of the social and technical elements of the new computer based revolution in information processing, he presents a convincing argument that there are major consequences from this development which reach into all corners of social life. Castells notes that the consequences are likely to be beneficial to those who are able to access the relevant skills, but may be problematic to those who do not. Castells (1996, 1997) and Standing (1999) argue that those who have the skills needed in the new knowledge based economy, as a result of their social location, will be advantaged, while those who do not will suffer many disadvantages.

Castells (1997) does discuss gender, in one chapter, where he argues that the end of patriarchalism is nigh. He attributes these changes to globalisation, in particular the rise of the new service economy, and to globally interconnected social movements. In this way Castells treats the changes in gender relations ultimately as if they were produced by changes in the capital/labour relations at the heart of the globalisation process. Castells



hermetically seals this chapter from the rest of his trilogy so there is little possibility of gender affecting any other social relations. However, the increases in women's employment that Castells notes started long before his own dating of globalisation in the 1970s, so it is inappropriate to treat globalisation as the origin of these changes.

This paper will investigate the extent to which there are two different sets of social processes. First, the social processes that underlie these changes are understood in terms of the relations between capital and labour, between employers and employees. There is, however, a second process, that of changes in the gender regime, the modernisation of the gender regime. Here there is a change from a domestic to a public gender regime, in which women increasingly become engaged with the public sphere of employment and state, and decreasingly confined to the domestic (Walby, 1990, 1997, 2000).

The hypothesis of this paper is that some changes in the workplace, especially some forms of flexibility, sometimes associated with globalisation, are actually more importantly the result of the modernisation of the gender regime. That is, there are two processes, both shifts in capital labour relations related to globalisation, and also changes in gender relations, related to the transformation of the gender regime, from domestic to public (Walby 2000).

The paper proceeds by empirically assessing some of the changes in employment that have been associated with globalisation, especially de-regulation and the development of a 'new' economy. It investigates whether the nature and dynamics of these employment changes are consistent with the globalisation thesis or that of the modernisation of the gender regime.

## **The new economy?**

The empirical focus of this paper is on the 'new' economy and forms of flexible working, or, rather, the question of whether there is indeed a 'new' knowledge-based economy which creates skilled, enriched, jobs organised through flat hierarchies and networks.

Is there a new economy? If so, what is it and who are the new economy workers? Is there a creative destruction of traditional forms of employment, which are being replaced by more flexible, creative, and less hierarchical ways of working? Or is it merely a new name for the traditional exploitation of workers who have job insecurity and poor training and working conditions? Are recent changes in ways of working to be attributed to the new economy based on information technology and globalisation or are they actually based on changes in gender regime?

The empirical analysis is led by four questions.

- First, how is the content of work changing? Are we moving from an industrial economy to a knowledge and information technology based economy? What are the knowledge and information technology based jobs, and are they growing? Are there special sectors of new economy, or are the effects of knowledge-based work and of new information technology widely dispersed?
- Second, is work being organised in a more flexible way, that is, less based on permanent contracts with a working day of fixed, full-time, 9-5 hours, Monday to Friday?



- Third, are these changes in the organisation of work leading to the quality of working life improving or deteriorating on average? Are these changes experienced by all, or are these benefits and losses polarised?
- Fourth, are these changes in the organisation of work caused by the changing content of the work, or are they determined by other factors, such as, changes in gender relations or changes in the balance of power of labour and capital in either national situations or a globalising economy?

This paper addresses these questions through an analysis of employment in the UK. Much of the data used to explore these questions are derived from the Labour Force Survey. This is a large random sample survey of 60,000 households in the UK, carried out four times a year by the Office of National Statistics, the official government statistics agency (with findings reported in the monthly journal *Labour Market Trends*). It is clear from small-scale qualitative work that there are changes but, since such a methodology is less helpful in addressing the extent of the changes, the preferred data source in this paper is the Labour Force Survey which enables questions about proportion and representativeness to be answered.

The first step in the analysis is that of the definition and method of practical investigation of 'the knowledge based economy' or 'the new economy'. There are three main foci within this. One focus is to examine specific new occupations which are seen as either key or emblematic of this shift, in particular those directly using the new information and communication technologies, but perhaps also the creative industries. A second focus is to consider the upward shift in either the knowledge content or the use of information and communication technologies across most contemporary jobs. A third focus is to consider all the knowledge-based occupations, old as well as new. At stake is the question of the extent, nature and significance of the change in work organisation.

The second step in the analysis is that of the investigation of the extent to which any such technical developments in the nature of work have led to changes in the organisation of work. In particular, is the new economy a driving force behind more flexible ways of working and the flattening of workplace hierarchies? It is useful to distinguish a weak from a strong thesis on the new economy here. The weak thesis stops at the first step and is focused on the question of whether there are such technical developments. The strong thesis goes further and claims that the new economy impacts the nature of work organisation. However, there is an alternative hypothesis as to the causal factors behind these changes in work organisation – this is that they result from changes in the gender regime.

## **New economy occupations**

The three groups closest to the ideal type of new economy workers are: IT workers, teleworkers, and cultural industry creatives.

### ***Information and Communication Technologies.***

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are key to all versions of the new economy thesis. They can be considered as the basis of a specific occupational group, or as a phenomenon, which underpins a lot of contemporary working practices.

**Table 1. Information Technology occupations, UK, 1998**

thousands

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Computer systems and data processing managers	151	124	26
Computer analysts, programmers	250	196	53
Computer, data processing and other office machine operators	129	51	78
Computer engineers, installation and maintenance	53	50	*
Software engineers	132	125	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>168</b>
As a % of employees and self-employed	2.7	3.7	1.4
Percentage change since 1992			
Computer systems and data processing managers	+32	+27	+64
Computer analysts, programmers	+23	+22	+28
Computer, data processing and other office machine operators	-29	-10	-37
Computer engineers, installation and maintenance	+45	+45	*
Software engineers	+123	+140	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>+21</b>	<b>+36</b>	<b>-12</b>

Source: *Labour Market Trends*, December 1998, Table 1, p. 595.

In the UK in 1998, there were nearly three-quarters of a million workers in IT in 1998, which is 2.7 percent of those employed. By itself then, this is a small proportion of the economy. However, it is growing rapidly. As table 1 shows, this was an increase of 21 percent over 1992. Men hold most of the higher-grade jobs. The higher grade jobs, in particular that of software engineer, are the ones which have been growing most rapidly. Women were concentrated at the lower end, operating machines in offices, a set of jobs that is declining.

The supply of IT qualified people from the education sector is increasing, with a rise of 14 percent in the number of students graduating from higher education with a degree in computing between 1994/5 and 1996/7. Nevertheless, there is an IT skills shortage which is driving global processes, such as using programmers in India (Beard and Breen, 1998).

### Teleworking

Teleworkers are those who work in their own home and could not do so without using both a telephone and a computer. They are a diverse set of workers with varied characteristics. Three kinds of teleworkers are separately identified in the Labour Force Survey:

- Teleworker homeworkers: who work mainly in their own home in their main job;
- Home-based teleworkers: work in various locations in their main job using their home as a base;
- Occasional teleworkers: do not usually work at home or use home as a base, but spend at least one day in the reference week teleworking at home or other locations.





Teleworkers are a significant group of workers and their numbers are growing rapidly. There were around one and a half million teleworkers in the UK in 2000, which means that they constitute about 5 percent of the workforce. Of these, almost a third of a million were teleworker homeworkers. This is an increase from a quarter of a million in 1999. There were over 800,000 home-based teleworkers in 2000, up over a 100,000 on the previous year. There were nearly half a million occasional teleworkers, up a 100,000 on the previous year.

The three different groups have very different characteristics and they typically have different kinds of contractual arrangements. Self-employed teleworkers were as common as employees among teleworker homeworkers and home-based teleworkers, but rare among occasional teleworkers. Among teleworker homeworkers nearly a half worked part time (in 2000 this was 64 percent of the women and 22 percent of the men); about half the female home-based teleworkers, but less than 10 percent of the men; about one fifth of female occasional teleworkers and only 3 percent of men. The different groups of teleworkers were differently gendered. Slightly more of the teleworker homeworkers were women, while home-based teleworkers and occasional teleworkers were more likely to be men (80 percent and 67 percent respectively). Teleworkers varied as to the extent to which they worked part-time. More part-time working was found among teleworker homeworkers than the other groups (64 percent of the women and 22 percent of the men). Among home-based teleworkers 90 percent of the men and 60 percent of the women worked full-time. While among occasional teleworkers 21 percent of the women and 3 percent of the women worked part-time. The occupational distribution varied by the kind of teleworking. Home-based teleworkers were spread across a range of occupations. This included a significant group of men in the building trades, who only used their home as a base and not as a place of work. Occasional teleworkers were predominantly employees (83 percent), who worked in managerial, professional and technical occupations (90 percent) (*Labour Market Trends*, October 1999, p. 528; *Labour Market Trends*, October 2000, p. 438).

The strong version of the new economy thesis is not especially well supported by this data on teleworking. The high skill workers who might be considered to be closest to the thesis typically work from home as teleworkers only occasionally, as only as a supplement to their main job. Those who are using the home as a base include many in the old economy construction trades and who are using the new technologies to support their traditional manual self-employment. Those who work at home most of the time are not the most highly skilled, and include women with children working part-time.

### **Cultural industries**

Development of the 'cultural industries' is seen by Leadbeater and Oakley (1999) as a key occupational development in the growth of the knowledge economy. These are defined primarily in terms of the content of the work: innovative cultural production including independent television producers, computer games and animation, graphic designers, producers of pop videos, fashion designers, pop music, internet services and many more. They are considered to utilise the new forms of work organisation, such as being: self-employed or micro-enterprises, with many 'free-lancers'; consequent insecurity of employment, with project based work or temporary contracts; networked, rather than formal hierarchies. The forms of work are seen as intrinsic to the creative nature of the work. Leadbeater and Oakley draw on a report to the Department of Culture as to the size and nature of the cultural sector (which additionally includes the older cultural industries such as museums). The estimates of the total size of this group are between 2 percent and 8 percent of the workforce in most British cities, for example, 6 percent in Manchester, and probably more in London. However, the national estimate must be significantly lower than the estimate for cities. Leadbeater and Oakley repeat the claim that the numbers of such workers are growing at 4 percent to 5 percent each year, which is twice the rate for the economy as a



whole. The proportion of people who are self-employed in the cultural sector was 34 percent, more than double that of the economy as a whole. Self-employment rose by 81 percent in the sector during the 1980s as compared with 53 percent in the economy as a whole. Temporary contracts are held by 13 percent, twice the national average. Workers are young, a third are aged 20-34 compared with 26 percent nationally. They are well educated, about 31 percent to degree level and a further 12 percent have some higher education, a total of 43 percent as compared with 22 percent nationally.

The cultural creatives are the group that best supports the strong version of the new economy thesis. These workers utilise ICTs as an essential component of their work, are highly educated and skilled knowledge-workers, and the development of their flexible working styles also can be seen as significantly driven by the content of their work. However, it is a relatively small group but apparently growing.

## **The new economy as a whole**

A second approach to the content of the new economy focuses on the upward shifts in the knowledge requirements of the economy as a whole rather than in specific occupations.

Discussions of the impact of IT on the productivity of the economy have been concerned with the question of the extent to which it has impacted generally on the economy, or whether its effects are confined to that of the IT sector itself. Has the use of IT become generalised within the UK economy sufficient to affect general productivity levels, or not? The HM Treasury (2000) report on productivity presents evidence on both sides of this debate. This report concludes that IT has become generalised in the US, but that it is unclear as to whether this has happened in the UK, where the procedures to measure productivity are different from the US.

Evidence in support of the general effect of IT comes from estimates that there are at least 13 million end-users of IT, that 90 percent of the workforce was expected to interface with IT in 2000 (Beard and Breen, 1998), and that even in 1990, 94 percent of large manufacturing employers used microelectronics (Millward et al, 2000).

Seltzer and Bentley (1999) argue the strong form of the new economy thesis, that the increasing impact of information and communication technologies and economic globalisation has driven the shift from industrial to a knowledge-based economy in both content and organisational form. Information, organisational networks and human capital have newly become the primary sources of productivity and competitiveness. This is considered to drive changes in the work contract, such as the increase of part-time, temporary and fixed term contracts and self-employed workers and, further, to lead to a shift to networks as a basic organisational form. They note that this is not uniform, and that those without this knowledge will suffer marginalisation and social exclusion.

Seltzer and Bentley have a variety of data to support this argument. The value of firms is significantly less than their market value, implying that the difference is made up of human capital, information and organisational networks. The proportion of service work is growing as compared with manufacturing. The percentage of high skill jobs in the economy is growing, especially among professional, managerial and technical jobs and those in the 'intellectual property' sectors. Further, within more ostensibly traditional forms of employment standardised work routines are being replaced by more complex processes involving the application of higher order skills. They go on to argue that the new economy gives a central





role to networks – virtual, organisational and social. They argue that these networks are horizontal and can handle the needed information flows more readily than traditional forms of hierarchical management. They are clear that these processes are not uniform. A major issue is the uneven acquisition of the relevant skills within the UK, and those without will suffer marginalisation and social exclusion.

The end of the career is suggested by Flores and Gray (2000) as one of the impacts of the new economy on work organisation. The life-long expectancy of stability is undermined by the new technologies, the increasing customisation of products and services and the impact of globalisation.

Evidence to assess this strong version of the new economy thesis will be considered below.

### **New economy components in the old economy**

A third approach to the content of the new economy is to focus on those components of the old economy where there are already developments consistent with the new economy. This includes, in particular, the professions which have always been based on knowledge, even though this has been achieved without the benefits of modern information and communication technologies. Examples of this are medicine, nursing, the law, and teaching. Education, health and welfare are growing sectors of the economy. Thus the old professions of nursing, medicine, teaching and lecturing are growing in size in the UK. This is not least because of the growth in size of health and education. Health is growing for several reasons, chief of which is that people are living longer. The increase in longevity means that there is a higher proportion of the population in the older age groups whose health is less good and who thus make demands on health care professionals. A secondary reason for the growth of health is that developments in medical science have made possible more medical interventions, which, in times of growing economies, has also led to greater expenditure on health. The education sector is growing because education has been seen as the basis of a successful economy. There is an increased tendency to stay in school after the school leaving age, and an increase in the number of students in higher education. These developments have led to the increase in the demand for nurses, doctors, teachers and lecturers. These are clearly knowledge-based occupations. However, their use of IT, though extensive, was not necessary to their initial development. Thus it is inappropriate to attribute the development of the health and education professions to the new economy. However, in the age of the human genome project and the centrality of education to the new economy, there clearly are links and overlaps with some aspects the new economy.

The professions have always had distinctive modes of governance, at least in their own self-descriptions. They have ostensibly had more collegiality and flatter hierarchies. They have had more trust placed in individual decision-making based on professional expertise and less managerialist modes of operating (Friedson, 1970). However, this description is open to challenge, not least in relation to the forms of hierarchy which do exist within professions (Johnson, 1972). Nevertheless, the extent to which these forms of professional control have been challenged in recent years by governments keen to impose more conventional forms of managerial control, suggests that there has been something distinctive here (Clarke, Cochrane and McLaughlin, 1994; Harrison, Hunter, Mamoch and Pollitt, 1992).

The current growth in the health and education professions has interesting gender elements, not least because women constitute, and always have, the majority of the teaching and nursing professions which are the bedrock of these areas of work. Women are also entering the medical profession in equal numbers with men, and, though more slowly, increasing their



numbers in the academy. While these professions are undergoing profound restructuring, and there are new lower strata with lesser working conditions, we are not seeing the end of careers.

There is a question, however, as to the extent to which professionals are able to translate their high level of skill into a high level of autonomy at work. A specific example of nursing raises some interesting questions (Walby and Greenwell et al 1994). Nursing has been positioned on the boundary of being a profession for a long time, not least because qualified nurses are highly trained. In recent years there has been an upgrading of the training and skills of qualified nurses. In the UK the education and training of nurses is being re-balanced with a decline in the centrality of nursing training units attached to hospitals and the rise of University based education. Nurses have seized the opportunity to attempt to claim more of a professional status, in particular, recognition of more autonomous professional judgement, and less subservience to tight rules and to doctors. However, the responses to this move are complex. While the upskilling of nurses has been welcomed, there is less willingness, in the context of the increase of dedicated managers in hospitals, to concede more autonomous working. In this instance, greater technical skill has not led inevitably to more professional autonomy (Walby and Greenwell et al 1994). The reasons for this are complex, and one component of this is the gender of the nurses, which has been an important source of limitations to nursing professionalisation governance during the historical development of nursing, not least before women had political citizenship (Witz, 1992).

The professions are thus an interesting borderline case in relation to the new economy thesis. They have always been based on knowledge, but not information technologies. Is the knowledge basis sufficient to produce flexible working conditions and flat hierarchies? It now seems that this has only been the case for certain professions under certain circumstances, dependent upon other sources of social and political power.

## **New conditions of work**

The second major question about the new economy is that of the extent to which there are changes in the organisation of work. The strong thesis insists that it does have such consequences. Does the new economy signal the end of the career, the end of the permanent job, the end of full-time 9-5 working five days a week in an office or factory, and its replacement with self-employment, micro-enterprise, temporary contracts, working from home, and flexible hours? Do these constitute an improvement or deterioration in the conditions of work? Is there a necessary or contingent connection between the new content of work and the new organisational forms? Do the new kinds of work require new forms of work organisation? Or are the new forms of organisation caused by other phenomena, such as, the change in the gender regime, the change in the balance of power of labour and capital, and globalisation? These questions will be addressed through empirical evidence on the following issues: the self-employed and micro-enterprises, part-time working, temporary working, and flexible hours.

## **The self-employed**

There was an increase in the number of people who are self employed during the 1980s, though this has since stabilised. The numbers of self-employed grew strongly during the 1980s, by a third between 1984 and 1990, though since then there has been only a small amount of change. While there is considerable variation within the OECD as to the extent of self-employment, the UK is around the OECD average. There is very slightly more self-



employment in the UK than in Japan, Germany and more than in the USA (Beatson, 2000: 445; OECD, 2000). The numbers of people who are self-employed (rather than employees or unpaid family workers or on a government training scheme) have changed little during the 1990s (*Labour Market Trends*, October 2000, S18, Table B.1). According to OECD figures for 1999, the UK had 12.7 percent of workers self-employed, while the US had 7.7 percent (OECD, 2000). Women are less likely than men to be self-employed, in that 6.8 percent of women in employment in May-July 2000 were self-employed, as compared with 15.2 percent of men. (*Labour Market Trends* October 2000, S18, Table B.1).

A second source of data on the self-employed in the UK is the Family and Working Lives Survey, a nationally representative survey of 9,139 people aged 16-69, which was completed in 1994/5. While the sample size is smaller than that for the Labour Force survey, it has the advantage of asking about events over the whole life. The following is drawn from an analysis by Knight and McKay (2000) of this survey. Self-employment is more likely among the middle-aged than the young or old. Among those 16-29 only 5 percent were self-employed as compared with 13-15 percent of those aged 30-59 and 21 percent of those aged over 60 (Knight and McKay, 2000). This does not support the notion that the creative cultural industries constitute the bulk of the self-employed since, as Leadbeater and Oakley (1999) have noted, those working in these industries are predominantly young.

There is a greater polarisation of income within the self-employed than among those who are employed. The income spread of the self-employed is greater than that for the employed population as a whole, with more earning at the bottom end and at the top end of the wage distributions. Twenty-nine percent of self-employed reported earning less than £3,600 a year, as compared with 22 percent of employees. Indeed more than half of women, 55 percent, earned less than this amount. Twenty-one percent of self-employed earned £18,501 or more, compared with 7 percent of employees. Among the self-employed with employees the earnings were higher still, with 39 percent of men and 19 percent of women in this category earning more than £18,501. However, it should be noted that the income data on the self-employed are somewhat unreliable because of the relatively small proportion prepared to answer these questions (Knight and McKay, 2000).

Self-employment is insecure employment with many giving up or losing their businesses. At any one point in time there were as many people who were formerly self-employed as there were actually self-employed. This means that some 20 percent of men and 9 percent of women were self-employed at some point in their lives (Knight and McKay, 2000). There is considerable policy interest in the self-employed and a plethora of schemes to assist people to become self-employed, while their success is variable (DfEE, 1999; Kellard and Middleton, 1998; Metcalf, 1998).

There is a significant overlap between the self-employed and small enterprises. About 79 percent of enterprises were run by the self-employed (*Labour Market Trends*, October 2000, p.435). Small businesses are not new and exceptional, but have long been the mainstay of the UK economy. Small and medium sized enterprises account for over 99 percent of all businesses. Enterprises with less than 50 employees provide the jobs for 45 percent of non-governmental employment. The 7,000 largest businesses accounted for 45% of non-governmental employment. Ninety-six percent of companies had fewer than 50 employees. (*Labour Market Trends*, October 2000, p. 435). In the UK in 1999 there were 3.7 million enterprises of which 2.3 million have no employees. Of these 24% are in construction and 18 percent in business services. In construction small firms proved about 80 percent of employment. Most enterprises are small – only 31,000 have 50 or more employees. However, there has been an increase in business start-ups in the UK. The number of enterprises grew by over 50 percent between 1980 and 1996 (Flores and Gray, 2000).



The self-employed are very diverse and it is hard to draw conclusions as to any general link with the new economy.

## Part-time work

Part-time working is numerically the most important form of flexible hours working. As such its understanding is central to explanations of flexibility and to the theorisation of the new economy. Yet the development of part-time working in the UK significantly pre-dates the rise of the new economy. Additionally, the heavy gendering of part-time work means that the explanation of flexible hours working should not be attempted without building gender into the analysis. Nevertheless, many accounts of flexibility and of the new economy have included part-time working yet ignored gender as a significant component of the explanation. Further, most part-time work is at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy, not at the top end where new economy theorists have focused their attention. Thus the nature of part-time work stands as a serious qualification on the stronger versions of the new economy thesis.

Part-time work has been a very significant part of the UK labour market for some years and its importance continues to rise. It is not new. It originated in part-time working in the Second World War and has increased since then (Summerfield, 1984; Walby, 1986). It is still growing in the 1990s. In May-July 2000 25 percent of those in employment worked part-time, as compared with 23.3 percent in 1992 (*Labour Market Trends* October 2000, S18, Table B.1).

Part-time work is largely performed by women, especially in the UK. In 2000 80.1 percent of those working part-time were women, though this is a slight decrease from 1992 when 83.4 percent of those working part-time were female. Nearly half of women in employment do so part-time. In 2000 44.6 percent of women in employment did so part-time, a slight rise from 43.7 percent in 1992. The proportion of men working part-time is also increasing, indeed slightly more rapidly, from 6. percent in 1992 to 9.0 percent in 2000 (*Labour Market Trends* October 2000, S18, Table B.1).

Women are more likely to work part-time when they have dependent children. Of women in employment with dependent children 59 percent work part-time, rising to 63.9 percent when the youngest child is under 5 and 63.4 percent when the youngest child is 5-10, but falling to 51.9 percent when the youngest child is 11-15. However, the direct causative impact of childcare should not be exaggerated since among women with no dependent children 31.2 percent work part-time (*Labour Market Trends*, February 2000, p. 74, Table 3).

Both women and men are slightly more likely to work part-time if they are self-employed. Among self-employed women 50.1 percent worked part-time in 2000, while among women who were employees in employment in 2000 43.9 percent worked part-time. Among men, this is also the case. Among self-employed men, 11.7 percent worked part-time in 2000, while among employees in employment, 8.2 percent worked part-time (*Labour Market Trends* October 2000, S18, Table B.1).

Part-time working is heavily skewed to the lower level occupations for both women and men. For women, 17 percent of professionals worked part-time as compared with 85 percent of those in unskilled occupations. As a consequence, any posited link between part-time working and a notion of the new economy as built on high skill employment must be questioned (*Labour Market Trends*, September 1999, p. 449).



The initial growth of part-time work in the UK goes back several decades to the 1939-45 war. Thus, the explanation of the origins of this, the numerically most important form of flexible working, cannot be attributed to IT and the new economy. Rather its initial development should be linked to changes in the sexual division of labour and the politics of the regulation of the labour market, in short, to changes in the gender regime (Walby 1990, 1997). Part-time working is increasingly becoming common in developed economies, such as the OECD. However, Britain has a relatively high level of part-time working and a relatively high proportion of female workers engaged in part-time working as compared with other OECD countries. Table 2 illustrates this.

**Table 2. Part-time as % of employment**

Country	1983	1991	1999
U.S.	15	14	13
Japan	16	20	24
Germany	13	12	17
Ireland	8	10	18
Sweden	(17 in 1987)	15	15
U.K.	18	21	23

Source: OECD 2000

**Female part-time as % of female employment**

Country	1983	1991	1999
U.S.	23	21	19
Japan	30	34	40
Germany	31	25	33
Ireland	17	21	32
Sweden	(30 in 1987)	24	22
U.K.	40	40	41

Source: OECD 2000

**Female employment as % of total employment (civilian)**

Country	1983	1991	1999
U.S.	44	46	47
Japan	40	41	41
Germany	40	42	43
Ireland	31	35	41
Sweden	47	48	48
U.K.	41	44	45

Source: OECD 2000

**Female share of part-time employment**

Country	1983	1991	1999
U.S.	68	68	68
Japan	73	70	67
Germany	90	89	84
Ireland	72	71	76
Sweden	(85 in 1987)	80	74
U.K.	89	85	80

Source: OECD 2000

There are significantly different proportions and patterns of change in part-time working among developed economies. In 1999, the proportion of the workforce constituted by part-time workers was: 13.3 percent in the US, 24.1 percent in Japan, 17.1 percent in Germany, 14.5 percent in Sweden, and 23.0 percent in the UK. In the case of the US, part-time working rose from 13.9 percent in 1979 to 15.4 percent in 1983, and then declined to 13.3 percent in 1999. In Japan, there is an ongoing upward trajectory from 15.7 percent in 1980 to 24.1 percent in 1999. In Germany, there is an upward trajectory from 7.0 percent in 1983 to 17.1 percent in 1999. In Sweden, there is a downward trajectory from 16.0 percent in 1987 to 14.5 percent in 1999. In the UK there was an upward trajectory from 18.4 percent in 1983 to 23.0 percent in 1999 (OECD 2000, *Labour Force Statistics 1979-1999*). Of course, the nature and implications of the part-time/full-time distinction vary somewhat between countries and over time. For instance, before the EU Part-Time Workers Directive in 1999, this distinction was of much greater importance in the UK, where there was once a great divide in conditions of service for part-time and for full-time workers, than in Sweden. Further, there are in practice two definitions of part-time working in Japan, one based on hours and the other based on employer treatment, so that 10-20% of those who work over 35 hours a week actually receive 'part-time' conditions of service<sup>1</sup>.

In 1999, the proportion of those part-time workers who were female was: 68.4 percent in the US, 67.0 percent in Japan, 84.1 percent in Germany, 73.7 percent in Sweden, and 79.6% in the UK. This is a declining percentage in most countries, except for Ireland, where the proportion of women working part-time is rising, and the US, where this proportion is stable.

What are the implications of these patterns for the deregulation thesis? Among this group of countries (US, UK, Japan, Germany, Ireland and Sweden), the US and UK have the most deregulated economies and also share historic traditions of lighter state regulation of their economies than that found among the other countries. If there was a link between deregulation and working part-time, we would expect to see a grouping in which the UK and US shared a common pattern and that Japan, Germany, Ireland and Sweden shared another. This is not the case. The UK and the US have significantly different patterns of part-time working and trajectories of change in these. The UK has a high and continuing pattern of part-time working, especially concentrated among women. The US has a low and declining pattern of part-time working, which is less concentrated among women. These widely divergent patterns cannot be simply explained by reference to the same single phenomenon, deregulation or globalisation.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mari Osawa for this point about Japanese workers.





The key to the explanation of the difference, and of the early high rates of part-time working in the UK, is that UK part-time sector was, historically, selectively non-regulated. When the regulation of the UK labour market developed under pressure from the labour movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the part-time sector was routinely excepted. The new regulations such as those on unfair dismissal, redundancy payments and maternity leave typically applied to those working full-time hours. The UK is exceptional in this regard. After entry to the EU, but especially since the Part-time Workers Directive in 1999, there has been a process of increasing the regulation of the part-time sector so that it equals that of the full-time sector. Early steps included legal cases taken by British women, under EU law, which applies directly to all EU citizens, whether or not the Member State has revised its domestic legislation in light of EU Directives, so as to gain access to the right of equal treatment in employment provided for under Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome. This was successfully argued on the grounds that to treat part-timers worse than full-timers constitutes sex discrimination (Hoskyns, 1996; Pillinger, 1992; Walby, 1999). In practice this access to the right to equal treatment for part-time workers is very new and not yet reflected in these statistics for 1999.

How is this selective lack of regulation of part-time work in the UK followed by its regulation during the 1990s to be understood? It does not fit conventional conceptions of increasing deregulation as part of a process of globalisation. Indeed it is inverse, in that there was a lack of regulation before globalisation is often thought to have begun, followed by an increase of regulation during a period of globalisation.

This pattern can be understood only if the analysis includes the transformation of the gender regime, from domestic to public, as one not reducible to class dynamics. The increase in women in the public sphere has facilitated the growth of women's political voice, which has played an important role in the changed regulation of gender relations in employment.

## Temporary Workers

Temporary contracts are a form of flexibility that has been associated with the new economy. According to the Labour Force Survey, the proportion of people working on temporary contracts rose during the early 1990s, from 5.9 percent in 1992 to a peak of 7.7 percent in 1997, but now appears to have stabilised at around 7.1 percent of workers (*Labour Market Trends* October 2000, S18, Table B.1). Before 1992 the proportion in temporary work had been stable at between 5 and 6 percent (Beatson, 2000).

The UK appears to have a lower proportion of temporary contracts than many EU countries, 7 percent as compared with an EU average of 13 percent. During the 1990s less than a fifth of employment growth was due to temporary work, in contrast to much greater increases in other EU countries, including Germany (Beatson, 2000).

There is a slight gendering here in that at the beginning of the 1990s men were slightly less likely to work on temporary contracts, but by the end the gap was slightly narrower. In 1992 4.8 percent of men in employment were on temporary contracts as compared with 7.1 percent of women, while in 2000 7.1 percent of men and 8.1 percent of women were on them (*Labour Market Trends* October 2000, S18, Table B.1).

The presence of children, especially young children, is very slightly correlated with a lesser likelihood of working on temporary contracts. Among women with dependent children 6.6 percent worked on temporary contracts, falling to 5.8 percent when the youngest child was



under 5, as compared with 7.3 percent of those with no dependent children (*Labour Market Trends*, February 2000, p. 74, Table 3).

About half of the temporary contracts are fixed-period contracts. The growth area in temporary employment has been among agency workers, where there has been an increase of over 200 percent since 1992, though this remains a relatively small proportion of types (Beatson, 2000).

The Labour Force Survey is likely to underestimate the proportion of workers who are temporary, especially those employed by agencies. This is the conclusion drawn from a comparison of the LFS with a special dedicated survey by BMG, a survey by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation reported by Hotopp (2000). The reason for this is at least partly because people are not always very clear about the boundary between the category 'self-employed' and that of 'temporary worker employed by an agency'. In particular the LFS identifies 40,000 self-employed people in clerical and secretarial jobs and 8,000 nurses, sectors where temporary agencies are well established. While the LFS asks people for their own views on their employment status, the special survey by BMG asked agency employers. All agree that the agency business has been growing significantly during the 1990s. The LFS suggests that in 1998/9 there were 239,000 temps, BMG suggest there were 557,000 and the REC suggest 878,619. Hotopp suggests that the BMG figure may be the most accurate. If this is correct, then the conclusion drawn above, that the number of temporary workers in the UK is not increasing, should be qualified.

A special survey of 607 temporary workers, the Temporary Employment Survey (Tremlett and Collins, 1999) suggested that 70 percent of temporary workers were female, that half were aged 25-49, 15 percent were aged 16-24 and a third were over 50 years old, that they tended to work in professional, clerical, secretarial, associate professional and technical occupations, and in public administration, education, health, banking, finance, distribution, hotels and restaurants. Men were more likely than women to be found in construction. Those without educational qualifications were more likely to work in seasonal or casual jobs, while those with a degree were more likely to be employed on a fixed term contract (Tremlett and Collins, 1999).

Temporary workers are a very diverse group. While some may fit the new economy thesis, others do not. In particular, the old economy of the construction industry is based around temporary contracts, self-employment and indeed the range of forms of contract and flexibility that have been associated with the new economy.



## Flexible hours

There are many kinds of flexibility. The use of flexible hours working can take a variety of forms as detailed below in Table 3.

**Table 3. Percentage of employees with a flexible working arrangement, UK, 1999**

	All	Men	Women	Women with dep kids	Women without dep kids
Employees with flexible working arrangement	19.4	15.4	23.8	28.6	20.7
Type of flexible arrangement					
Flexible working hours	9.5	8.2	11.0	11.4	10.8
Term time working	4.4	1.5	7.5	11.5	5.0
Annualised hours	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.2	2.6
4.5 day week	1.8	2.4	1.1	0.8	1.4
Job sharing	0.9	0.1	1.7	2.9	0.9
Zero hours contract	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6
Nine day fortnight	0.3	0.4	0.1	*	0.2
Employees without a flexible work arrangement	80.6	84.6	76.2	71.4	79.3

Source: *Labour Market Trends*, based on the Labour Force Survey.

Notes on definitions:

- Flexible working hours: Employees can vary their daily start and finish times each day over an accounting period (usually four weeks or a calendar month). Debit and credit hours can be carried over into another accounting period. Variable start and finish times on their own are not enough for a flexitime system. There must be a formal accounting period.
- Term time working: Respondents work during the school or college term. Unpaid leave is taken during the school holidays, although their pay may be spread equally over the year.
- Annualised hours contract. The number of hours an employee has to work is calculated over a full year. For example, instead of 40 hours a week, employees may be contracted to work 1,900 hours a year (after allowing for leave or other entitlements). Longer hours are worked over certain parts of the year and shorter hours at other periods. Variation in hours is related to seasonal factors or fluctuation in the demand for the companies' good or services.
- Four-and-a-half-day week. Typically involves the normal working day and finishing early on Fridays. The short day need not necessarily be Friday but this is the most common day.
- Job-sharing. A full-job is divided, usually between two people. The job sharers typically work at different times, although there may be a change over period.
- Zero hours contract. A person is not contracted to work a set number of hours, and is only paid for the number of hours they work.



- Nine-day fortnight. Individual employees have one day off every other week. The actual day off may vary so long as the employee keeps to an alternating pattern of one five day week followed by one four day week.

The distribution of flexible hours is uneven by occupation. For both sexes it is most common in clerical and secretarial occupations. For women the next highest rate is managers and administrators, while for men it is associate professional and technical occupations (*Labour Market Trends*, October 1999, pp. 529-530).

As can be seen from the table above, women employees are more likely than men to work flexible hours. Such arrangements are most common among women with dependent children. This is especially the case where flexible working arrangements mean less than full-time annual hours equivalents.

A more traditional form of flexible working is that of shiftworking. This is found among 16 percent of employees and 2.5 percent of the self-employed in 1998. Men are slightly more likely to work shifts than women, 18.5 percent as compared with 13.7 percent. Among the men shift working was most common in the personal and protective services occupations, of whom 40 percent were police or security guards; additionally nearly 40 percent of male plant and machine operatives worked shifts. Among women the protective and personal services were again a high source of shift working, though the detailed occupations were quite different from those of men in that they were often care assistants or attendants. Additionally 30 percent of female associate professional and technical workers worked shifts, of which 70 percent were nurses (*Labour Market Trends*, November 1998, p. 546.)

## Education and Training

The new economy is an information economy; hence the extent to which people are becoming educated is pertinent. In the UK in recent years there has been an increase in the proportion of young people staying on longer at school and going to University. Nevertheless, workers in the UK are less well qualified and less well trained than in the US and Germany (HM Treasury, 2000).

The traditional gender gap between women and men in educational qualifications has closed and is beginning to reverse. Young women are now slightly more likely to be educationally qualified than young men both in terms of the examinations taken at school and undergraduate degrees at University. Further, while some subject segregation remains, this is in decline (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). Of course, the educational gap among older people remains.

Is on the job training more common among the flexible workers who might be thought the basis of the new economy, or is it concentrated among traditional workers? Rix et al (1999) assess whether there is a new deal for flexible workers in which, in exchange for flexibility, employers confer enhanced employability, or whether they are less likely to obtain training. They conducted a literature review, interviews with industry representatives and four case studies. They conclude that there is a bias towards training for traditional workers, that agency and contract workers receive less training, and that those in lower occupational groups, where much flexible working is concentrated, get less training than higher occupational groups. However, there is a trend towards increased training for part-timers. Overall, the pessimistic thesis that training is concentrated among traditional, not flexible, workers is confirmed, though with exceptions for the highest skill levels.



However, the gender and ethnic pattern of training on the job is interesting. Women are slightly more likely to be receiving on the job training than men, 13.8 percent as compared with 12.6 percent of employees in 1998. Black employees, at 17.1 percent, are slightly more likely to receiving training than white, at 14.7 percent, and Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi employees at 11.8 percent (*Labour Market Trends*, 1998, Table 4, p. 586).

The closing of the gender gap in education among young people will give young women better access to employment than ever before. However, the full implications of the closing of the gender gap in education among young people for the future structure of employment are as yet unclear. Potentially, there are tremendous implications for gender relations in a context in which the economy increasingly depends upon knowledge and young women hold more educational qualifications than men. There is a question of the extent to which this increase in women's educational qualifications will impact on their level of employment.

### **Regulation or deregulation: does gender make a difference?**

Traditionally, government regulations have been considered an important basis for ensuring the quality of employment. Standing (1999) argues that globalisation has been marked by forms of employment which are less regulated. The new economy writers concur that there is less regulation within the new economy (Flores and Gray, 2000; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). Yet there has been simultaneously a growth of regulation of the labour market within the European Union in relation especially to equal treatment of women and men in the workplace (Hoskyns, 1996; Pascual and Behning, 2000; Rees, 1998). To what extent has the regulation of workers in the UK changed?

For women workers there have been considerable increases in the regulation of their employment in the UK. This has been a matter of considerable contestation between the UK government's concern for light regulation, and that of the EU, which has sought greater regulation. This includes the legally binding directives from the EU on equal pay, equal treatment at work, and more recently on providing part-time workers with the same rights as full-time workers, and on the provision of parental leave (Walby, 1999). While much of the new economy literature has argued that we are in a period of global deregulation, there is contrary evidence when gender is examined.

### **Family friendly policies**

There are many kinds of flexibility; some more attuned to the needs of employers, some more for employees. The development of family-friendly policies to assist 'work-life' balance is an example of a kind of flexibility that is arguably of benefit to both. It is now official government policy to encourage the development of these policies among firms in addition to a regulatory framework. There is an extensive qualitative literature on this, but less systematic data on the extent or impact of the practices, for instance, Dency, Bevan, Tamkin and Cummings (2000), though see Marcus (1997).

### **Equality bargaining**

Women's voices are becoming increasingly heard in trade unions. While men's membership in trade unions has fallen significantly since 1989, from 44 percent to 31 percent of working men, that of women has fallen only slightly, from 33 percent to 28 percent (Hicks, 2000). This means that women have increased as a proportion of union membership over the last decade. Indeed women are increasingly improving their previously very low rates of representation in union governance. For instance, in UNISON, the largest union in the UK, the proportion of women on the national executive council rose from 42 percent in 1994 to 62



percent in 1999/2000 (Ledwith and Colgan, 2000). There is a developing equalities agenda within trade union bargaining strategies (Ellis and Fern, 2000). In short there is a new representation of women's interests in workplace bargaining as a result of these changes in trade unions and women's increased presence in the labour market (Gagnon and Ledwith, 2000).

## Legal Regulation by the EU

While there was extensive deregulation of some aspects of the UK labour market during the 1980s, there has during the 1980s and 1990s been a significant increase in the regulation of gender relations in the labour market. This includes a wide range of Directives issued by the EU which are legally binding. This has underpinned equal opportunities legislation, laying the foundations for equal treatment of women and men in employment and employment related matters. The range of the recent Directives has been wide, taking in the equal treatment of part-timers with full-timers, to parental leave (Pillinger, 1992; Hoskyns, 1996; Walby, 1999).

When gender is taken into account, the suggestion that the last 20 years in the UK has been solely that of de-regulation must be called into question. There have been contrary dynamics on class and gender issues related to the legal regulation of employment, with greater regulation of those dimensions of gender which pertain to equal treatment, even while there is de-regulation on many class based employment issues.

## Gender

The relationship of gender to the new economy thesis is complex. Indeed most new economy writers do not significantly refer to gender. There is a complex pattern in which changes in the gender regime have occurred during and before the separate development of the new economy.

During the course of the last century we have seen a major change in the nature of the gender regime, from a domestic to a public form. Women have increasingly entered the public sphere. Women's employment has increased. Women are increasingly represented in parliament and the state. Women are less confined to the family. There are changes in gendered culture and in patterns of sexual conduct. There are changes in the extent and nature of violence against women. These changes are inter-connected. There are systematic interconnections between these six domains of employment, household work, state, violence, sexuality and culture which mean that together they constitute a gender regime. There are two main forms of the gender regime: domestic and public. The form of the regime is analytically independent from the degree of gender inequality. The transition from domestic to public has been ongoing in many industrialised countries over the last century or so. The nature of this transition can vary significantly, producing path dependent outcomes of greater or lesser gender inequality. These vary especially in the extent of state involvement in the transition to a public form of gender regime (Walby 1990, 1997, 2002).

The gender gap in employment has been closing for some years in the UK, as women have increased their participation in employment and men have decreased theirs. In 2000 women constituted 44.0 percent of the economically active population, 44.3 percent of those in employment, 39.7 percent of the ILO defined unemployed, and 61 percent of the economically inactive. The female economic activity rate was 73.1 percent, up from 70.2 percent in 1988, as compared with the male economic activity rate of 84.4 percent, down from 88.6 percent in 1988. The female employment rate was 69.5 percent in 2000, up from 64.2 percent in 1988, while the male employment rate was 79.4 percent, down from 80.5 percent in 1988 (*Labour Market Trends*, October 2000, S6-8, Table A.1). There has been a steady reduction in the wages gap between women and men working full-time, but the gap between part-time women and men has remained large and steady (*New Earnings Survey, 1994-1999*).



**Table 4. Economic activity of women by age and highest qualification level attained and of men by highest qualification attained***Persons of working age not in full-time education**Great Britain: 1996*

<b>Age and economic activity status</b>	<b>Higher education</b>	<b>GCE 'A' level or equivalent</b>	<b>Other qualifications</b>	<b>No qualifications</b>	<b>Total</b>
Women	%	%	%	%	%
<b>16-19</b>					
<b>Working</b>	-	[82]	68	[46]	66
<b>Unemployed</b>	-	[6]	16	[25]	15
<b>Inactive</b>	-	[12]	16	[29]	19
<b>20-29</b>					
<b>Working</b>	90	80	68	35	70
<b>Unemployed</b>	2	3	5	8	4
<b>Inactive</b>	7	17	27	58	25
<b>30-39</b>					
<b>Working</b>	80	72	70	48	68
<b>Unemployed</b>	3	3	4	5	4
<b>Inactive</b>	16	24	26	47	28
<b>40-49</b>					
<b>Working</b>	83	79	75	60	72
<b>Unemployed</b>	2	3	4	5	4
<b>Inactive</b>	16	18	21	35	25
<b>50-59</b>					
<b>Working</b>	64	71	69	48	58
<b>Unemployed</b>	3	4	2	3	3
<b>Inactive</b>	33	25	30	48	39
<b>16-59</b>					
<b>Working</b>	81	77	70	51	67
<b>Unemployed</b>	3	4	4	5	4
<b>Inactive</b>	17	20	25	45	29




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Men, 16-64					
<b>Working</b>	89	87	80	62	79
<b>Unemployed</b>	3	6	8	11	7
<b>Inactive</b>	8	7	12	27	14

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Source: Adapted from *Living in Britain, 1996 General Household Survey*, Table 7.6

Young women have closed the education gap with young men and are now slightly better qualified, though there is still a gap among older people. This has contributed to the rise in female employment, as the table 4 illustrates. Highly educated women are much more likely to be in employment than those with no qualifications. A key question is how far young women can translate their educational qualifications into good jobs. Initial indications are that it makes a very significant difference to women's access to employment. Nevertheless, there is still a question as to the extent to which this increase in female education will lead women to the top of the employment hierarchies. For example, in the predominantly female profession of nursing, not all increases in education, training and skill have given rise to increases in autonomy in the work place (Walby and Greenwell et al, 1994). Additionally, Aalten (1996) has argued that women who do become entrepreneurs have a complex and potentially challenging relationship to conventional meanings of femininity.

The presence of young children still reduces women's participation in employment, as is shown in table 5. However, it is now only the presence of children under school age that has this impact on women's employment. The impact of young children on women's rate of employment is less the higher the social class of the woman. New government policies to introduce a National Childcare Strategy may further reduce the tendency of young children to reduce female employment.

There has been an increase in the number of women in upper level jobs, especially in professional and managerial jobs. This reduces the extent of occupational segregation in these areas. However, there has also been an increase in the number of women in the growing low-wage, insecure, part-time sector. This suggests a polarisation in the position of women in the economy (Walby, 1997). There is variation in the propensity to take employment which is related to social class, that is, women with access to better jobs are more likely to be employed, as table 4 shows. A key question for the future of work is whether those young women who have equal educational qualifications with young men will sustain their initial positions in upper level jobs or whether, if and when they reach motherhood, their position in the labour market will deteriorate.

**Table 5. Economic activity of women, percentages working full time, part time, and unemployed by own socio-economic group and age of youngest dependent child***Women aged 16-59**Great Britain: 1994-96 combined*

Age of youngest dependent child and economic activity	Socio-economic group					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>Percentages</b>						
<b>Youngest child aged 0-4</b>						
Working full time	39	17	20	9	2	17
Working part time	25	37	41	25	47	34
All working	64	54	61	34	50	51
Unemployed	3	6	3	6	4	5
Economically active	67	60	63	40	53	56
<b>No dependent children</b>						
Working full time	78	56	48	41	9	53
Working part time	8	22	25	25	50	23
All working	87	79	74	67	60	76
Unemployed	2	4	5	7	5	5
Economically active	89	83	78	74	65	81
<b>Total</b>						
Working full time	68	41	39	27	7	39
Working part time	14	32	32	31	51	31
All working	82	73	72	60	59	70
Unemployed	3	5	4	6	5	5
Economically active	85	78	76	66	64	75

1 Professional or employer/manager

2 Intermediate and junior non-manual

3 Skilled manual and own account non-professional

4 Semi-skilled manual and personal service

5 Unskilled manual

Source: Adapted from *Living in Britain (1996)*, *General Household Survey*, Table 5.5



## Conclusions

There is some evidence for a new economy, but only for the weak form, not the strong form of the thesis. There is dynamic growth in IT based employment, teleworking and creative cultural industries. However, the new cultural and IT industries, which lie at the heart of the thesis, are not yet large. There is also growth in the old knowledge based professions in education and health. Further, there is a general upskilling of the economy and the use of IT is becoming more widespread. However, the argument that there is a link between the new economy and new forms of working is less strong. The patterns of work in IT and teleworking are too diverse to provide evidence which supports the strong version of the new economy thesis. Cultural industries fit the strong version of the thesis better, because, not only do these workers utilise ICTs as an essential component of their work, and are highly educated and skilled knowledge-workers, but also the development of their flexible working practices can be seen as significantly related to the nature of their work. However, they are a rather small group of workers on which to rest the strong version of the new economy thesis.

Many of the flexible working practices are either located in the old construction industry, which by its nature has project based, temporary work sites, or they are associated with changes in the gender regime. The majority of the forms of flexible working are linked to ways to assist women who want to be employed while still taking care of home and children. This is the case in particular for part-time working and many of the forms of flexible hours. The proportion of workers who are temporary or self-employed are not large, and these groups are too diverse to be supported by the new economy thesis.

Many of the forms of flexible working are associated with a poor quality of working life experience, rather than the high quality end. There is only a small elite of jobs that are flexible, highly skilled and well paid.

A significant part of the new forms of working which have been attributed to the new economy are actually more the result of the changing gender composition of employment combined with women's increased political voice. Many of the writers mistakenly ignore or underestimate the significance of gender.

While there has been de-regulation of many aspects of working life, this can be exaggerated. This is because there is a tendency to look only at class relations and not gender relations. Indeed the narrow set of questions used in the authoritative Workplace Employment Relations Survey series is an example of this. Yet, there has been extensive regulation of the treatment of women in the economy. This has been pushed by women seeking equal treatment and to effect better home/work balance and facilitated by management willing to explore new ways of accommodating women in order to take advantage of their labour.

The newly found political voice of women has played a role in these changes. It has been raised in both the workplace and the state. In the workplace it has been expressed through trade unions and other workplace organisations and its strength is represented in the outcomes of bargaining over equality and over flexibility. In the UK state we have seen a very significant increase in the number of women elected to both parliament and to local government. More particularly, the representation of women's interests within the EU and the power of EU regulations to coerce the UK state into obeying its jurisdiction over equal opportunities issues in the workplace have been of significance.



There have been significant changes to the gender regime. These are neither directly attributable to globalisation, nor are wholly dependent upon it. Rather there are complex relations between these two processes.

The analysis of changes in the workplace needs to distinguish gender and class dimensions. While there is deregulation of some aspects of employment relations in relation to class (which affect both women and men), there has been regulation of other aspects in relation to gender. These are effected not only by processes of globalisation but also by the transformation of the gender regime.



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