

Keeping your head

Precarious work is the new rock n roll for us dusty old academics. Since 2008, the whole field of employment relations has applied its geeky ways to the changes that have taken place in employment and our subsequent relations with it.

Question: Where have all the decent jobs gone?

Answer: In the UK, they've gone either to groups of white men who went to primary school together or turned into internships for the children of said white men.

We can of course debate the qualifiers around this statement but I am sparing you the bed time reading by summarizing the main gist in blunt form. This development is famously coined by Standing's idea of the "precarariat", chillingly defined as the dangerous new underclass of people who don't have much to lose. Au revoir employee engagement and that sweet-hearted dream of wellbeing at work, bonjour alienation, anger and youth led revolutions across the developed world. These days we no longer fear the fall out of a depleted ozone layer, rather the great human catastrophe immediately facing us is the self-destruction of people who feel they have been cheated. Apparently polar bears are doing a whip round to save the human race. Plus ca change non?

It's hard not to get all dramatic about precarious work given the realities of being a precarious worker. The emotional consequences of insecurity are sobering and real – with a massive rise in mental health problems since this now well-established recession started. The CIPD, the main

professional body for human being managers, estimates that mental health problems at work have doubled to 44% of the working population in the last three years. With only an estimated 70% of the public sector cuts having taken place, it's hard to see this as anything other than a human catastrophe.

Being a member of Team Neurotic, I'm used to spotting the catastrophe on the horizon and leaving it at that, secure in the knowledge that we're all doomed. Problem being is that economically it leaves me in the defenceless state of a young gazelle staring all Bambi eyed at the oncoming motorway traffic. It sounds mental to say at this point that in such situations probably the most efficient response is to think. Bit weird to suggest that when you're faced with an economic car crash you need to keep thinking but the reason is that without a certain level of brain activity Bambi dies. Without thought anger is just anger and if last year's tipping point is anything to go by, it does not result in real social change just more finely channelled hatred in the form of state funded injustice and scapegoating. Clearly Che Guevara does not live in Hackney.

Academics are random lot. They mostly don't do parties and I wouldn't leave one alone in the house with a power tool but my goodness, they know how to keep their heads. Academics have something important to say about this catastrophic pickle we're in and how to survive it so step one is a gentle suggestion to read something, starting [here](#).