

Nothing New Under the Sun?

Recent surveys have shown that British company executives have the highest earnings in Europe, whilst British workers have the lowest rates of pay in the developed world, and the longest hours in the EC (*Daily Mail*, 25th July). Perhaps Scripture has something to say about this...

Exodus 5.1-19 (my translation):

Afterwards Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'Let my people take a lunch break, so that they may go to the lunchtime service at St Helens.'"

Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know how it would affect our market position and I will not let Israel go."

Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a half-hour lunch break at St Helens, or he may strike us with stress ulcers or with ME."

But the Chief Exec of Egypt Construction said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labour? Get back to your desks!" Then Pharaoh said, "We're looking to downsize our workforce, and you are stopping them from working."

That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the line-managers and foremen in charge of the people: "To separate straw-procurement from brickmaking is not cost-effective. Let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us take a lunch-break.' Make the work harder for the men so that they increase output and pay no attention to tabloid propaganda."

Then the line-managers and the foremen went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'The straw-procurement department has been rationalised. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.'" So the people stayed all evening and came in on Sundays to gather stubble to use for straw. Line management kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required for you each day, just as when you had straw." The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's line-management had their bonuses stopped, and were asked, "Why is your productivity dropping below that of our Belgian operation?"

Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: "Why have you treated your employees this way? Your employees have inadequate staffing levels, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' Your employees have had their bonuses stopped, but the fault is with your own people, who award themselves 60% pay rises year on year in the name of market economics."

Pharaoh circulated a faxed memo. "Lazy, that's what you are – lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us take a lunch break.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks, so our shareholders get a decent return."

The Israelite foremen began to experience stress symptoms when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required from you for each day."