

THE CASE FOR A SHORTER WORKING WEEK

Aidan Harper

New Economics Foundation

WORK TIME REDUCTION

WHY?

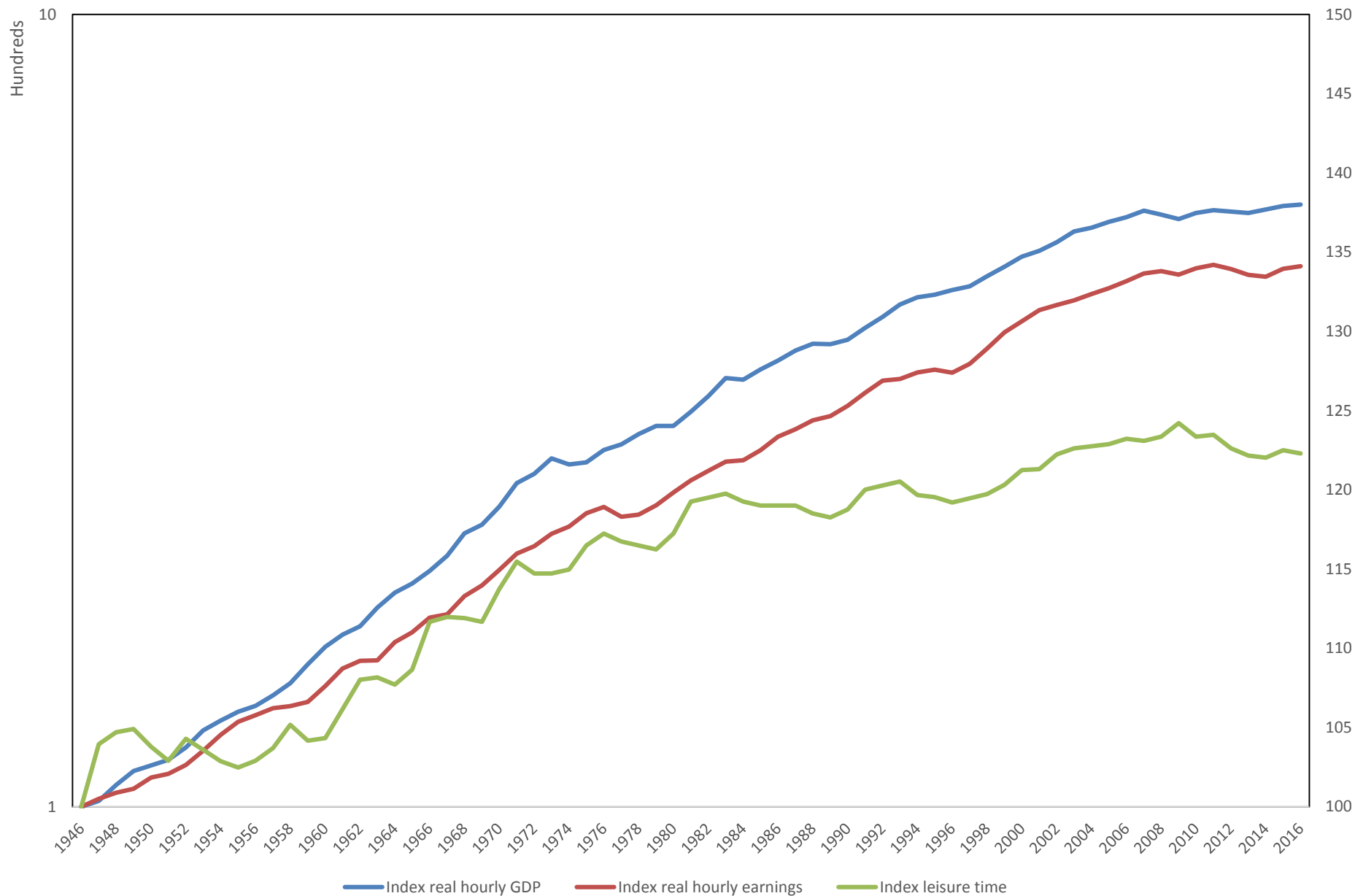
- Benefits for our economy, gender equality, for society, health, and wellbeing, and benefits for the environment.
- Seeks to address a diverse range of deeply embedded and interconnected issues.
- Revitalise the union movement.
- Increasing autonomy through collective action.

MAKE WORKING-TIME POLITICAL

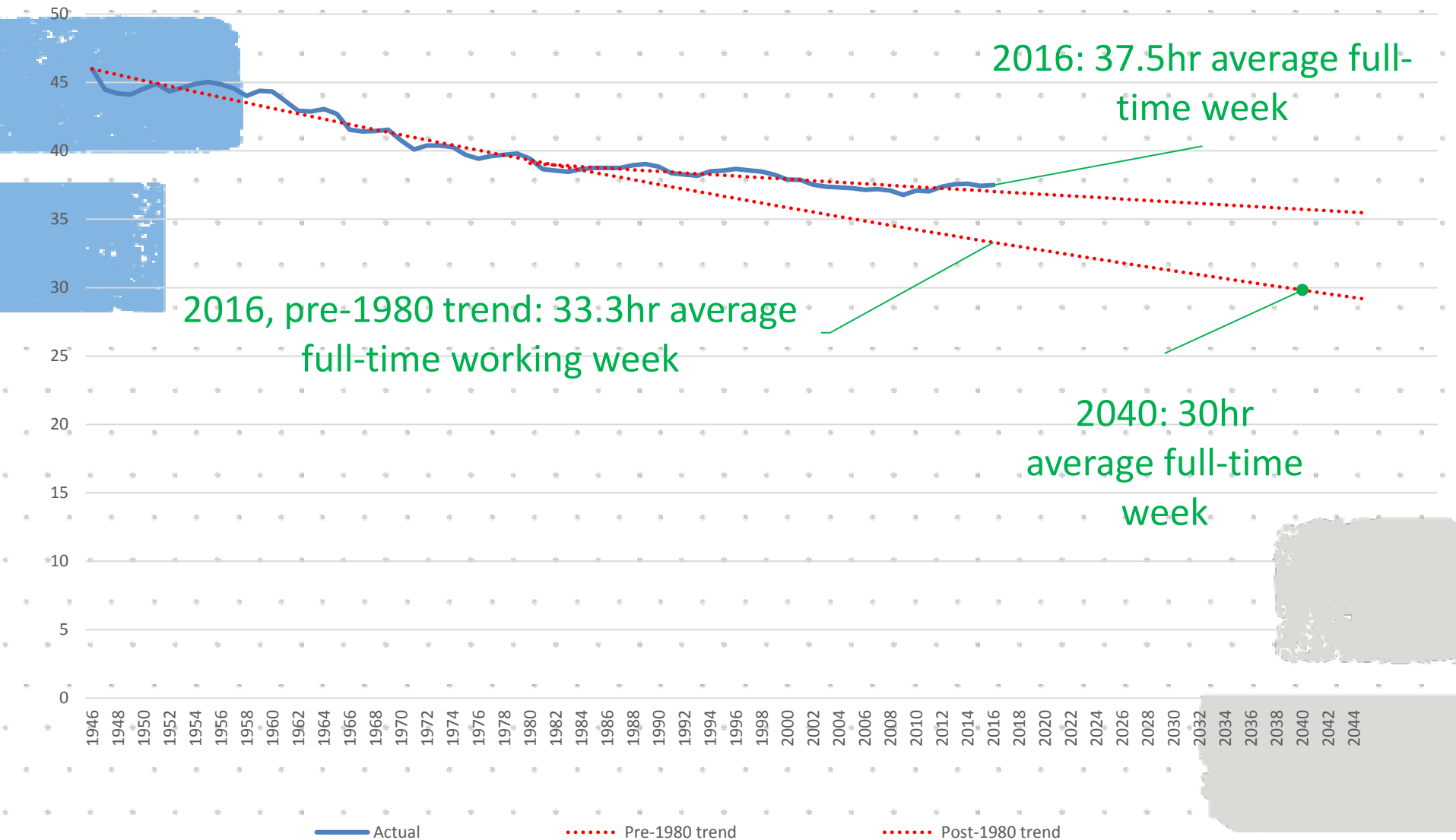
HOW?

- Show that working time has varied widely over history and was often a point of struggle.
- Show that working time currently varies widely between countries.
- Show that countries working fewer hours have stronger economies.
- Therefore – decisions made to reduce working time are ultimately political ones.

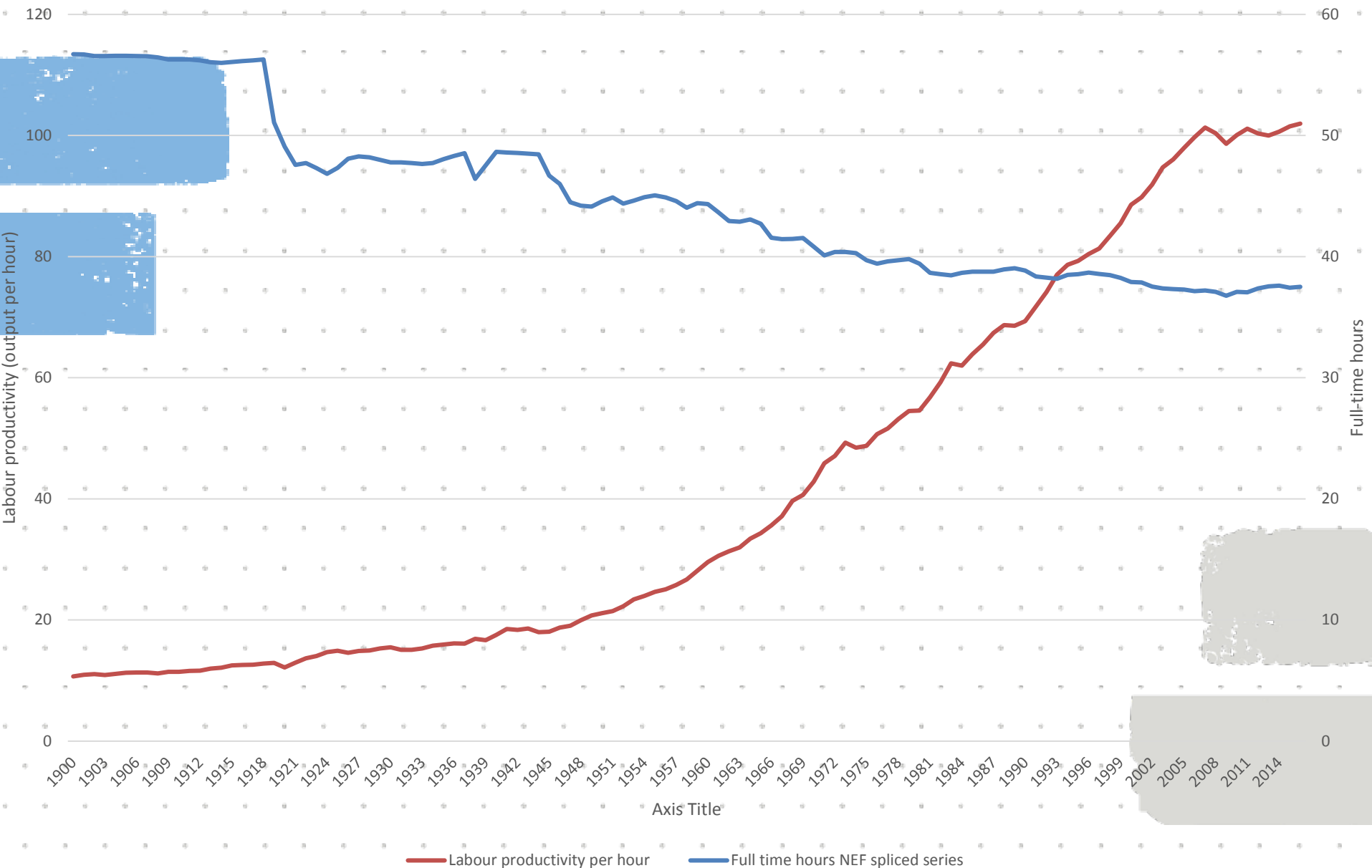
Productivity gains and leisure time 1946-2015



Imagining a continued trend towards a 30hr week by 2040

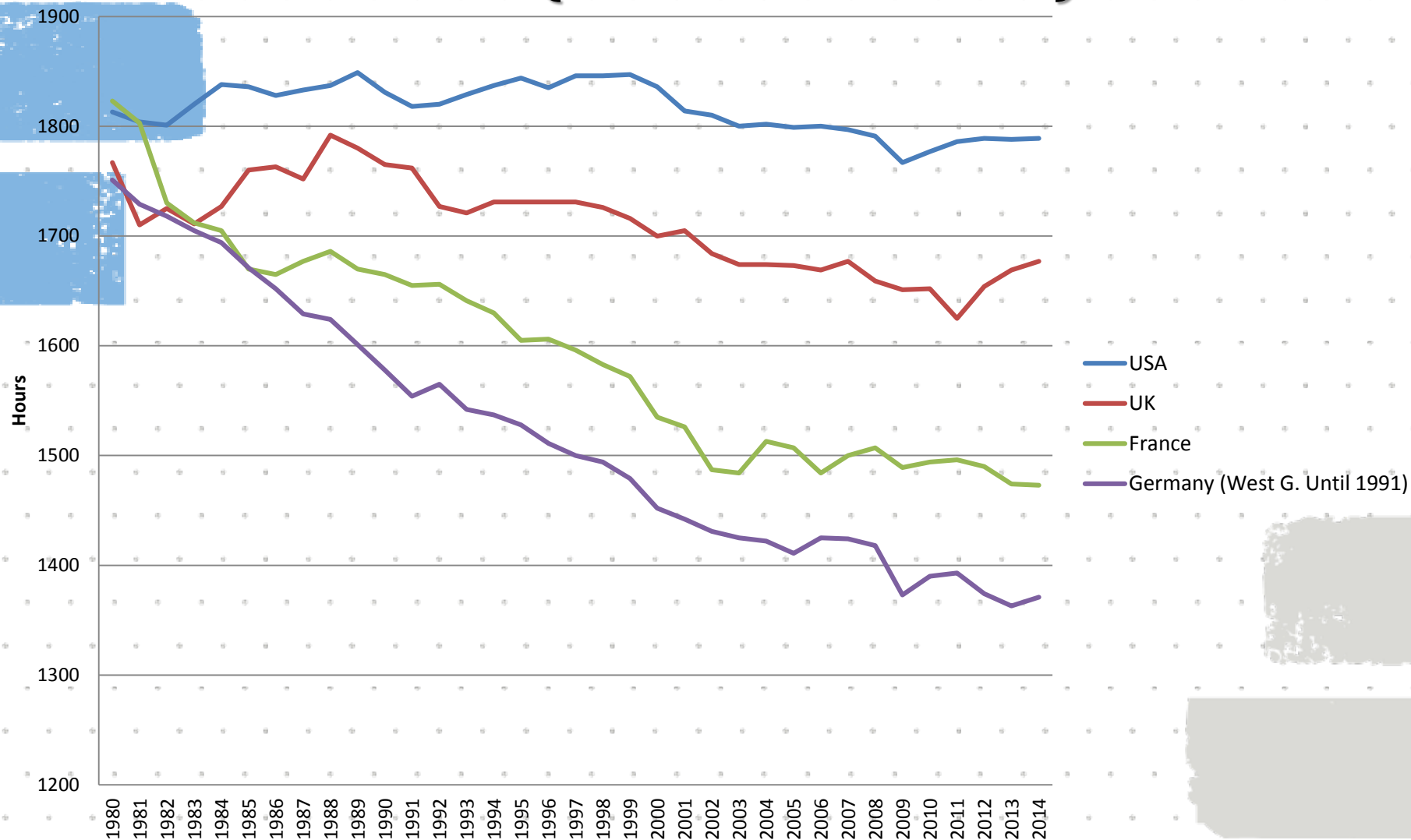


Full-time hours and productivity 1900 - 2015

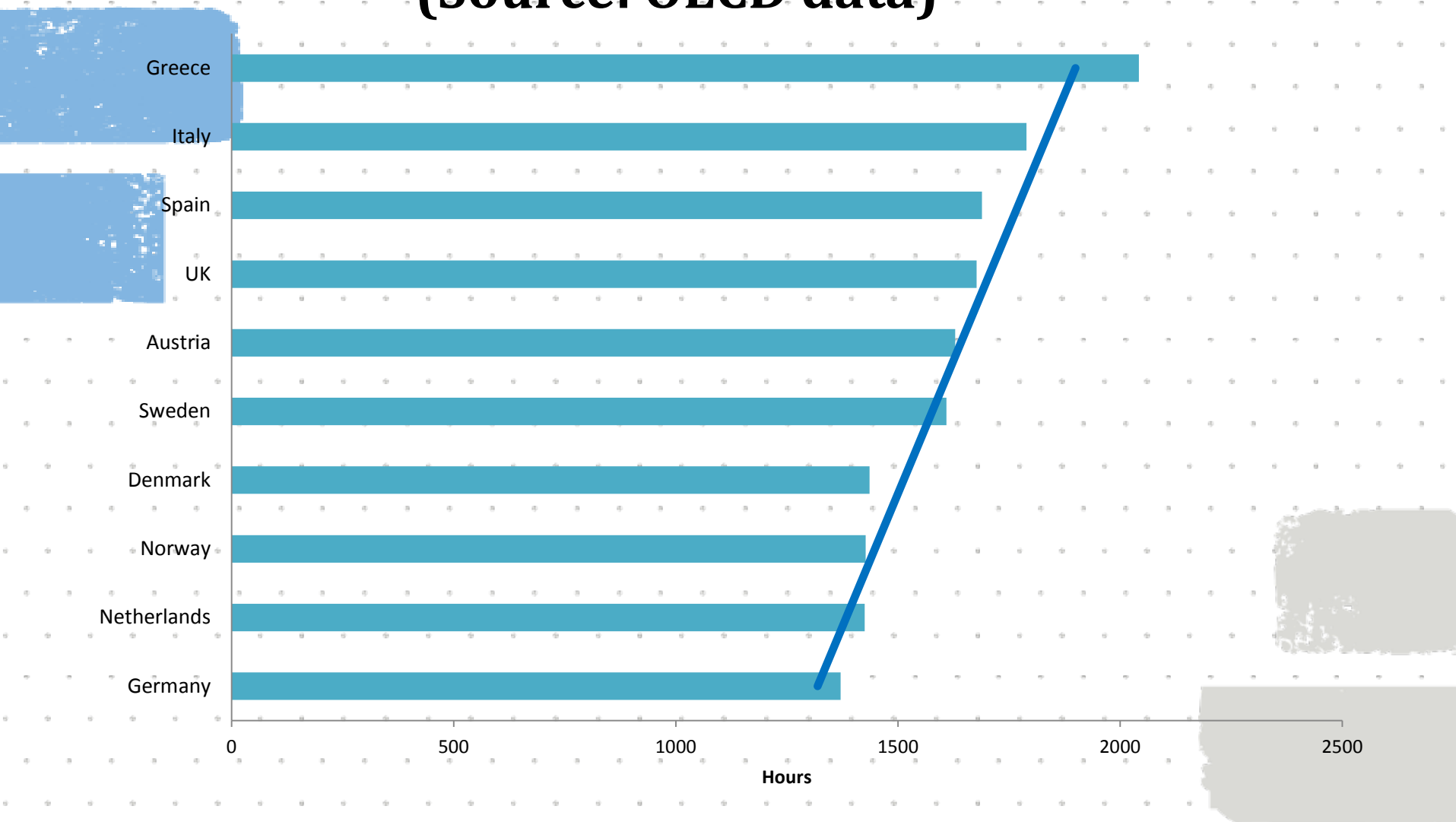


Average hours per capita 1980-2014

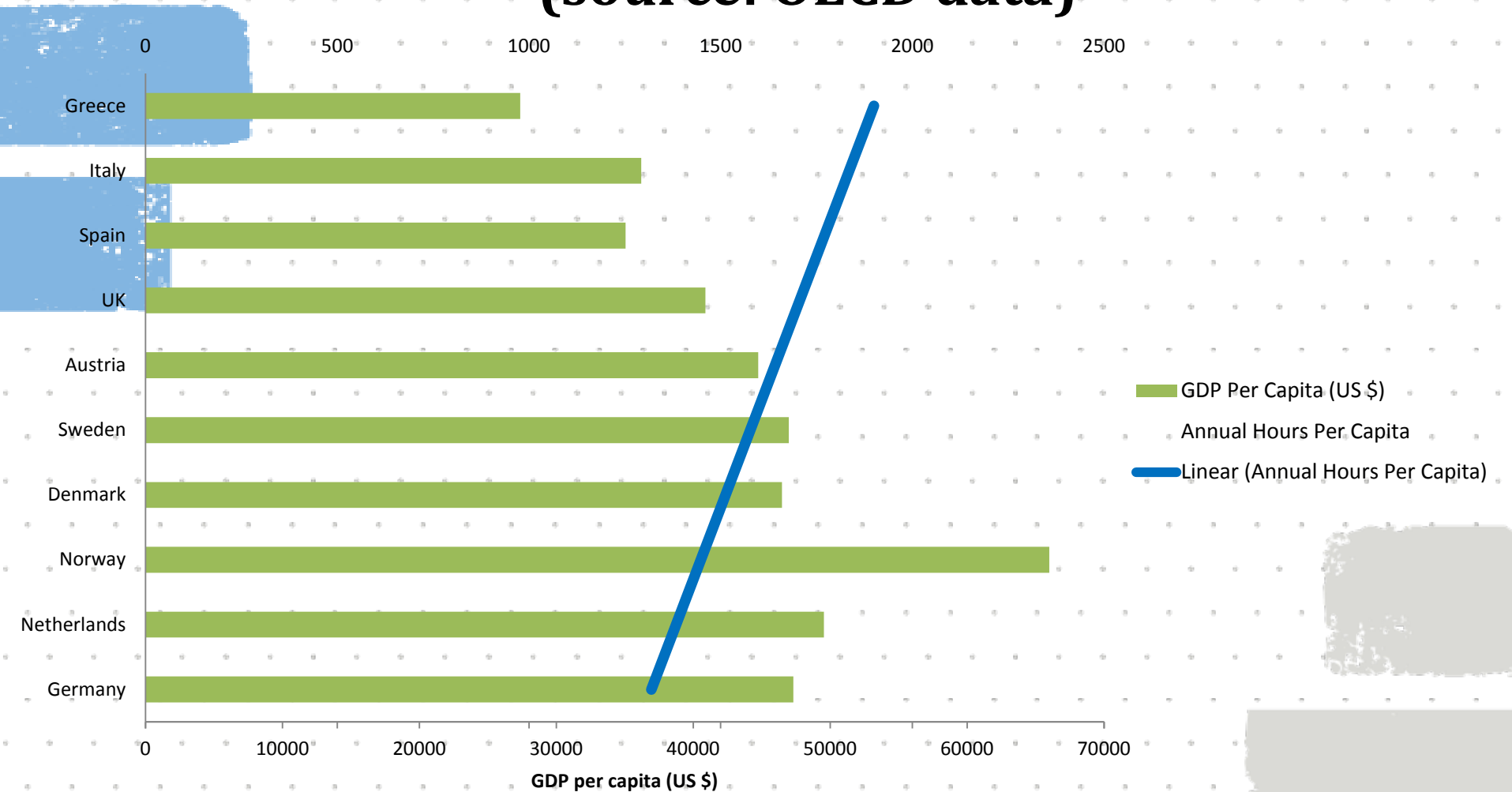
(source: OECD Data)



Annual Hours Per Capita (Source: OECD data)



Gross domestic product per capita (source: OECD data)



INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

- **MACRO-ECONOMIC ARGUMENT**
 - No clear positive correlation between long hours and wealth
 - Countries who work fewer hours tend to have higher levels of productivity, as well as greater amounts of wealth per person

ECONOMY

PRODUCTIVITY:

- Worker productivity relies not just on the number of hours put in, but on the *wellbeing, fatigue levels* and *overall health* of the worker.
- Shorter working weeks (and/or greater worker control over working time) can mean:
 1. fewer sick absences
 2. fewer in-work accidents and mistakes
 3. higher worker motivation on the job

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

WELLBEING & WORK:

- Annual cost for employers of poor mental health work is estimated to be £33-42 billion
- Work related stress, depression and anxiety account for 45 percent of all working days lost due to ill health
- Unevenly distributed: Over the last three years reported levels of workplace stress have been around a third higher for women compared to men

GENDER

UNPAID WORK:

- Majority of unpaid domestic and care work in the UK is done by women.
- In the UK women do:
 - 74 percent of all childcare
 - On average 26 hours unpaid domestic labour a week
- A shorter working week can help to redistribute unpaid work more evenly between men & women

GENDER

ECONOMIC COST FOR WOMEN:

- Unequal distribution of unpaid work hampers women's career progression
- Women far more likely to work part time (41 percent of women work part-time, compared to 12 percent of men)
- Part-time is less well-paid than fulltime counterparts regardless of qualification
- 77 percent of part-time workers feel trapped in their current job because of a lack of good quality part-time jobs

GENDER

WIDER ECONOMIC COST:

- A failure to use women's skills was costing the UK £36bn a year, equal to two-percent of GDP
- Bridging the UK gender gap in work has the potential to increase GDP by £150bn by 2025

THE ENVIRONMENT

CARBON EMISSIONS:

- Close link between high working hours and energy intensive, environmentally damaging patterns of consumption
- Countries with low working hours tend to have:
 - Lower carbon footprints
 - Lower ecological footprints
 - Lower carbon dioxide emissions

THE ENVIRONMENT

MEASURING THE IMPACT:

- *1 percent decrease in working hours could be followed by a 0.8 percent decrease in emissions.*
- (Based on this assumption, the general movement towards a four-day week would result in an accompanying reduction of *16 percent*)

THE ENVIRONMENT

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR:

- Reduced working hours could change the behaviour of households away from energy intensive behaviours, and toward more eco-friendly alternatives
- Creation of more free time outside of work creates the possibility for a general movement towards low-carbon 'soft' activities
- Added benefit of low carbon activities on wellbeing and community

AUTOMATION

MEASURING THE IMPACT:

- Predictions that between 30-50% of UK jobs at risk of automation by the 2030s
- Those without university education and further down the income scale are most at risk –danger of significantly exacerbating inequality
- The more worrying trend for some is the ‘hollowing out’ or polarisation of the job market

AUTOMATION

BOTH A PROMISE AND A THREAT:

- Productivity gains must be shared fairly with workers in the form of work-time reduction
- Urgency: without intervention, automation will exacerbate inequality

BARRIER: CULTURE OF OVERWORK

- Victorian work ethic still pervasive
- Fetishisation of overwork
- We must challenge the notion that it is only work that gives us value

TOWARDS A FUTURE OF REDUCED WORK...

- A reduction in work-time is entirely feasible with current levels of technology
- The benefits for society, gender equality, the economy, and the environment can be significant
- Time must become political once again