

## The Value of Employment Rabbi Danny Rich

Israel Mattuck, Britain's first Liberal Rabbi, arrived to lead the LJS (which was then in Hill Street, Marylebone) in 1912. In the context of a time of industrial unrest –and with reference to Egyptian slavery- Mattuck preached the following in a sermon:

*...the dignity of labour far from being a cant phrase in the mouths of demagogues has come to be a living truth and inspiring reality to the man who lives by the toil of his hands. A man's value to society is much enhanced when he becomes conscious of his own powers and practices them for the achievement of some worth. The realisation that has dawned on the working man has changed him from a yoked ox into a serving man. He is no longer the machine without a soul that responds to the push of the lever or the turn of the wheel, but a child of God, aspiring, hoping, thinking and trusting...we must recognise the blessing of God in whatever raises the estate and condition of men.*

Note: The style of writing reflects the experience of the early twentieth century when the overwhelming majority of women were either not in paid employment or were engaged in 'domestic service'. In 1915 women were encouraged to take up 'men's' occupations as men left for the trenches of the First World War and the national was only first granted to women (over the age of 30 and holding property) in 1918.

Nevertheless what might Liberal Judaism today say about the value of employment? What has Liberal Judaism to teach about the conditions of work including long hours for admittedly good financial reward, zero hour contracts, and the minimum or living wage? What advice should Liberal Judaism proffer to those with power and responsibility concerning the small number of families who experience 'second generation' unemployment?