

The investment we need is in people

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Keir Starmer is inviting the world to the UK to invest here, but he's looking for the wrong type of investment. We don't need his 'big ticket' schemes that will become white elephants as we head for a world where sustainability will matter most of all. What we really require is investment in the diverse skills that the people of this country have but which need development – and there's no sign he's going to deliver that.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW8PI7PRYzg?si=gMxfLmY2SBIhyGnQ>

The audio version is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=iwked-17075fd-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=c73a3a&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=ff6d00

The transcript is:

This week, Keir Starmer has had an investment summit. At that summit, he's been trying to induce foreign companies to come to invest in the UK. And my question is "Why hasn't he been talking about the investment that needs to be made by the UK in the people of this country?" Because that is most certainly not what was on the agenda at his investment summit.

He wants big new ports, he wants big new infrastructure, he wants digital warehouses, he wants whatever it is that makes things and despoils the countryside by the sound of

it, and he's going to scrap every regulation that stops him getting what he wants. Or so he says. But the reality is, I don't think that's going to make much difference to this country.

Why? Because the people of this country are not being invested in. Let me explain.

I had a very interesting eavesdropping session recently. I do eavesdrop when I'm sitting in things like coffee shops and so on. I quite enjoy listening to what people are talking about. It's how I learn what's going on in the real economy. And I think it's important to understand just what people are discussing about the local economy so that I can understand what is going on.

On this occasion, there was somebody who runs an employment agency talking to a potential employer. Only what became very clear was that the people the employment agency supplied were never going to be on the books of the employer.

They were always going to remain on the books of the employment agency, so it was going to be the employer who hired out the services of staff.

What sort of staff were we talking about? Tractor drivers. Now, I live in a particularly rural area, around Ely in Cambridgeshire, where there are an almighty lot of fields, and we still have a use, therefore, for tractor drivers, and they are immensely valuable people. Without them, our local economy would not work.

Their jobs have admittedly disappeared in large numbers over the years because of the increasing size of tractors and increasing mechanization. And these days they're even threatened entirely because of the rise of AI, because it is expected that at some time in the future, lots of work done on the fields by tractors, combined harvesters and so on, will simply be programmed into GPS and everything will run from there.

But right now, we definitely need tractor drivers; people with very decided skills working on very difficult farms around this part of the world because we have very soft soil which requires a particular ability.

And you have to know a whole range of skills. They have to know how to plough, how to seed, how to hoe, how to literally be involved in the harvest process and a great deal more. They also have to know how to handle complex chemicals because they will be in many parts of the year, literally applying those chemicals, and therefore have to be qualified in them and on and on.

My point is that this is a skilled job, which we really need. So, you would expect farmers to want to invest in the people who work for them so they would truly understand the needs of the organisation that they were working for.

Instead, they're going to hire people by the hour from an employment agency to come and sit in their tractor, whatever it might be, and do what is required of them for the

briefest period possible to maximise the return to the farmer. But as a consequence, the tractor driver won't know the peculiarities of that farm.

They won't know that that particular corner of the field, for example, is not ploughed because that's where the goldfinch nests, and the farmer wants to keep them.

They won't also understand the vagaries of the landscape. And there will be vagaries in all the landscapes around here. The bits that you need to take care of. The bits which can't be ploughed for all sorts of reasons. That won't be known because they won't have accumulated that knowledge. They won't have been invested in, in other words. They might know how to drive a John Deere or a New Holland or whatever it is - the things that always cause the traffic jams in my part of the world - but in reality, they will have not got the real skills that let them add value in the places where they work.

And that, to me, is actually quite frightening because that skill is being destroyed as a result. It isn't there anymore; it's not being passed on. And this skill is required. The landscape is not capable of being used in the way that it is being treated, as if it is merely a material input into the food production process. It is itself a living organism that needs to be cared for. And once upon a time, farmers and all their employees used to do that. But you can't if you're hired by an employment agency and charged out by the hour to somebody who wants to minimize their costs.

Now, as a result, key skills are being lost. And that will get worse when AI replaces the tractor driver altogether.

And the same problem is being replicated all over the place, throughout the economy. Skills that have been valuable for generations and which would still be valuable if we understood the true nature of worth - the thing that matters to us as human beings - are being destroyed by the financialization of all the relationships that go on around the workplace.

We aren't investing in the right things.

We are not investing in enduring knowledge.

We aren't investing in that deep understanding of process that lets anyone add value in the organisation in which they work.

Keir Starmer wants to bring in all those high-ticket items that look flash and can have big logos on them and which he can turn into videos which will, no doubt, at the next election, be broadcast to us all to try to persuade us to vote for Keir Starmer again.

It's much harder to feature investment in the tractor driver in that way. But we need investment in tractor drivers and everybody else with similarly unsung skills right across our economy. Because unless we do that, we do not have a future economy.

Starmer doesn't understand what really makes our economy, our society and our well-being tick. He's going for the wrong things. He's going, as I've said, for big ticket. And what we should be looking for is small, continual, ongoing investment in people, because that's what makes the difference to our society, and we've forgotten to do it.