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Living for the Weekend: The Shorter Hours Movement in International Perspective

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Living for the Weekend:

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David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (London and New York: Verso 1989).

Gary Cross, *A Quest For Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press 1989).

Gary Cross, ed., *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1988).

IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, a *Twilight Zone* episode written by a working-class historian, in which alien scholars from a distant galaxy land on the plant Earth in search of intelligent life. They are especially curious about how Earth people deal with the relationship between work and leisure. The first person they meet is a young assembly-line worker who tells the inquisitive visitors about everyday life on the planet. After describing the alienation and boredom she faces on the line each day, the aliens ask how she can stand it. "Oh, it does not matter too much," she responds, "my friends and I really live for the weekend." The aliens are taken aback by this statement. "Do you mean to tell us," they ask, "that Earth people are willing to sacrifice five days a week in order to 'live' for two days? This does not make logical sense. How did such a situation come to be? Did Earth people always think this way? Are you and your friends exceptions or do people in other countries share these views?"

The answer to these questions can be found in the three books reviewed in this essay. At the heart of these studies is the common desire to understand how and why workers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean have struggled for a shorter work day and work week. In the course of their investigations, the various authors also

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explore themes regarding worker quests for longer weekends, more frequent vacations, and the changing meaning of leisure held by workers, labour leaders, reformers, politicians, and capitalists. *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day*, by David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, focuses on American battles from the Colonial Era to the present, while *A Quest For Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1930*, by Gary Cross, examines the skirmishes and strategies employed by British and French workers during the height of their campaigns. The ten essays in *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History*, a collection edited by Cross, offer additional insights into the American, French, and British shorter hours movement, as well as a fine piece on worktime and industrialization in the Soviet Union. Taken collectively, these three works form an impressive foundation for understanding international class struggles over the meaning of work and leisure in western industrialized nations of the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, they offer us fresh and exciting perspectives on the old issue of American Exceptionalism and the extent to which we might reasonably begin to talk about an international working class.

The near simultaneous publication of three books so closely related — as well as a similar study by Benjamin Hunnicut — suggests that the issue of working hours, long subservient to labour history's concern over wages and control of work, has entered the centre stage of working-class history.[1] Indeed, one can see these works as part of a gradual movement by 20th-century scholars to embrace and legitimize the study of working-class leisure. For many years, Marion Cahill's *Shorter Hours: A Study of the Movement Since the Civil War* and John R. Commons, *et al.*, *History of Labour in the United States* formed the core of our knowledge on the subject for the United States.[2] During the 1970s and early 1980s, Daniel T. Rodgers, James B. Gilbert, and T. J. Clark expanded our horizons by offering important works that assessed changing ideological conceptions about the relation between work and leisure in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially as it pertained to middle-class and intellectual perceptions of the subject.[3] More recently, American and European historians have turned their attention toward understanding the ways in which working-class people spent their leisure time, either by preserving old ethnic cultures, participating in emerging forms of popular

[1]Benjamin Kline Hunnicut, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia 1988).

[2]Marion Cotter Cahill, *Shorter Hours: A Study of the Movement Since the Civil War* (New York 1932); John R. Commons, David J. Saposs, Helen L. Sumner, E.B. Mittelman, H.E. Hoagland, John B. Andrews, and Selig Perlman, *History of Labour in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York 1918-1935).

[3]Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850-1920* (Chicago and London 1974); James B. Gilbert, *Work Without Salvation: America's Intellectuals and Industrial Alienation, 1880-1910* (Baltimore and London 1977); T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York 1985).

culture, or transforming and using the latest mediums of mass culture to serve their own class needs.[4]

At the heart of the works by Roediger, Foner, and Cross is a common concern with understanding our own time — literally and figuratively. They are less intent upon exploring the concept of living for the weekend (which, I admit, is of more interest to me than the three authors), as they are in understanding how the thirst for more time away from work has shaped western culture over the past two hundred years. At a moment when everyone seems to be calling for grand synthesis in history, these sweeping concerns offer powerful insights into how such a synthesis might be structured. If we think in broad terms and allow for a few generalizations, then one might well argue that work and production were the hallmark concerns of the 19th-century industrializing West, while leisure and consumption have come to dominate the consciousness of our own century. The shift in emphasis from production to consumption brought changes in self-identity. In the 19th century, American workers thought of themselves largely as producers who belonged to a somewhat amorphous working class, while in the 20th century, that identity expanded to include the additional role of consumers who belonged to an even more amorphous middle class.[5] These new and changing identities, I would argue, were largely dependent upon workers' abilities to win more time away from the workplace and more money in which to enjoy that time.

[4]For recent works on American life, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge 1983); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia 1986); Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s," *American Quarterly* 41 (March 1989), 6-33; Steven J. Ross, "Struggles For the Screen: Workers, Radicals, and the Political Uses of Silent Film," *American Historical Review* (forthcoming). On the European side see Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton 1980); Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London 1981); Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge 1981); John Hargreaves, *Sport, Culture, and Power: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (Cambridge 1986); Stephen G. Jones, *The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918-1939* (London 1987); Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, eds., *Culture, Media, and Language* (London 1987); and the various publications of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.

[5]David Halle has seen no necessary contradiction between men and women who could talk about themselves as members of the working class while discussing workplace issues and as members of the middle class when talking in terms of life outside of work. David Halle, *America's Working Man: Work, Home, and Politics among Blue-Collar Property Owners* (Chicago 1984). A recent work that draws interesting links between class, consumption, and consciousness is Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge and New York 1989).

By focusing on an issue that workers throughout the western world fought for at roughly the same time, these three books allow us to move beyond national boundaries, beyond a single century and look at class struggles and the process of class formation on an international scale. The shorter hours movement was the common denominator of workers throughout the industrializing West. Whether it was in Massachusetts or Virginia, London or Paris, the United States, Great Britain, France, or the Soviet Union, working-class men and women heartily embraced the cause of a shorter work week. Taken collectively, the various authors offer a combination of five goals that prompted American and European workers to seek a shorter work day: (1) to escape from worsening conditions at work; (2) to secure greater control and authority over one's life; (3) to have more time for self-improvement, fun, family, and the obligations of citizenship (either attained or hoped for); (4) to reduce unemployment by hiring more workers to compensate for a shortened workday; (5) to protect women and children from unnecessarily long hours of arduous work. An analysis of the strategies and ensuing results of these campaigns allows us to draw some conclusions about the nature of the transatlantic working class and the aspirations of its constituent members.

Roediger and Foner begin their encyclopedic study in the colonial era and show how the initial drive for shorter hours was motivated not so much by a desire for more leisure as it was by a deep disdain for the new working conditions brought by merchant capitalism — conditions which undermined their authority and deprived them of time for civic and family obligations. Here, the authors tell a familiar story of how the shift from the traditional task work of the artisanal shop to the more disciplined time work of larger commercialized shops eroded workers' control and enjoyment of work and led them to escape from what they viewed as increasingly miserable conditions. As industrial capitalism evolved and sweeping transformations in production changed the nature and setting of work from commercialized shops to manufactories to factories to mass production industries with their infamous assembly-lines and the deplorable sweatshops of the garment trades, workers constantly battled to get out of a bad workplace as quickly as possible. During the 1830s, wage earners demanded to work ten hours instead of the more customary twelve hours; during the 1860s, they demanded to work eight hours instead of ten hours; during the 1880s they demanded to work five and a half days instead of six days; and during the 1930s, they demanded a thirty hour, five day work week.

Roediger and Foner are not merely content with charting the course of the shorter hours movement. They want to reorient the way we conceive the Big Picture in working-class history. "The length of the workdays," they argue, "has historically been the central issue raised by the American labor movement during its most dynamic periods of organization." (vii) Three special characteristics set the shorter hours movement apart from other working-class struggles: its tendency to foster unity among a diverse array of workers; its capacity to precipitate political and industrial struggles; and, its close relationship to larger issues of worker control.

The first characteristic serves as the leitmotif of the book. Whether it was the 1820s or 1920s, the authors show how demands for shorter hours repeatedly cut "across the lines of craft, race, sex, skill, age and ethnicity." (vii) In so doing, the hours movement was able to serve — especially during the 19th century — as the central issue around which broad-based city, regional, and national working-class movements could arise. The common quest for shorter hours, the authors argue, "energized the trade union movement, lending it the kind of unity which could undergird the efforts of young trade unions joined together in class-conscious protests." (41) This held true during the Jacksonian era, when the first city labour centrals were being organized, after the Civil War, when national unions emerged in greater number, and in the last decades of the 19th century, when the Knights of Labor and embryonic American Federation of Labor (originally known as the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions) launched the first series of national strikes on behalf of an eight-hour day. Shorter hours campaigns also heightened the egalitarian nature of the labour movement. Artisans, male and female factory workers, male and female sweated trades workers, and child labourers joined as equals in a common struggle.

Our Own Time also portrays the shorter hours movement as part of a central quest for workers' control over their lives. Roediger and Foner expand David Montgomery's notion of shop floor control to include struggles over the quantity as well as the quality of work time. The issue of how long wage earners worked for someone else was as important as the manner in which they worked. Indeed, shorter hours empowered wage earners by giving them more time and control over their lives outside of work. What workers actually did with their free time was less important than having more free time.

Roediger and Foner, like Cross and the various authors in *Worktime and Industrialization*, repeatedly emphasize the non-economic and often radical motivations behind the shorter hours movement. It was not, as earlier generations of labour economists and historians implied, simply a union bargaining tool for higher wages. Nor should we translate, as modern scholars sometimes do, workers' demands for more free time into more time for consumption. In its broadest sense, shorter hours promised to transform the very nature of working-class life. By the early 1800s, artisans understood that more time away from work, meant more time for "education, self-improvement, republicanism, and the right of labor to limit hours and exercise intelligent control over its own time." (41) Limiting the hours of children was especially important for not only did parents wish to protect the health of their family, but the future health of the republic; uneducated children meant an uneducated citizenry and vastly weakened nation. It was not until after the Civil War that workers "conceived of leisure as a separate category from work and wanted more of it." (83) From that point on, demands for leisure for leisure's sake were grafted on to earlier republican justifications for shorter hours. Time was not just about money; it was about the very quality of life.

The shorter hours campaign also provided a focal point that linked the economic and political identities of wage earners. There was no fundamental conflict between industrial organization and political action, as John Commons, Norman Ware, and an "older" school of labour historians once argued. As workers, men and women struggled against employers at the shops or on an industry-wide level. As citizens, men and women (the latter often active in the political process though not in the voting process) repeatedly pressured politicians and legislatures to pass shorter hours laws. From the 1830s to the 1940s, no other quest has continually merged the identities of worker and citizen more forcefully or has preserved the close links between class and citizenship.

So, how successful were American workers in shortening their workday? What were the keys to success? In answering these questions the authors lay out a general scheme that held true from the Jacksonian era to the present — in Europe as well as in the United States. Success was predicated upon a combination of workplace militance, support from politicians and reformers, and the ability of its advocates to convince employers that shorter hours would not decrease productivity or profits. During the 1840s and 1850s, direct confrontations between workers and employers led to a ten hour, six day work week for many wage earners. The shorter hours movement gained new momentum after the Civil War, as workers drew upon their patriotic wartime defense of the republic to legitimize their desire for an eight-hour day that would end "industrial slavery." Yet, despite some support from state politicians and federal officials, it was not until after the May Day strikes of 1886 that large numbers of wage earners secured a nine-hour day and "half-holiday" on Saturday (effectively a five and a half day work week).

The greatest progress in shortening hours came in the early 20th century as the movement gained widespread support outside of labour circles. Changes in bourgeois attitudes toward work and leisure, the growth of scientific management, the rise of Progressivism, and the flowering of labour economics and labour statistics as professions "contributed to an intellectual climate in which shortening the working day could be approached not as a class issue but as a reform worthy of consideration on the grounds of efficiency, uplift, and safety." (146) Progressive reformers and enlightened business leaders argued that modern industrial efficiency allowed the possibility of increased productivity within a shorter workday. Indeed, more time away from draining and debilitating work could actually increase productivity; proper forms of leisure could be used to "recharge" one's batteries for work. This equation of productive leisure and productive labour, adopted by the middle classes in the 19th century, was now applied to the working classes of the early 20th century.[6] The first two decades of the new century quickly emerged as the "most productive period of shorter hours agitation in United States history." (177) Between 1905 and 1920, labour and its new allies (which also

[6]The fullest description of 19th-century middle-class attitudes toward work and leisure can be found in Rodgers, *Work Ethic*.

included radical organizations such as the Industrial Workers of the World and Socialist Party) managed to shorten the average work week of nonagricultural workers from 57.2 to 50.6 hours; the manufacturing work week dropped from 54.5 hours to 48.1 hours. In 1910 only 8 per cent of the nation laboured forty-eight hours or less; by 1919 49 per cent did. War-time needs and state intervention during World War I also contributed to shortening work hours. Trade union cooperation on War Labor Boards, Wilson's proclamation of eight hours as a goal of society, and government adoption of an eight-hour day in war-related industries helped legitimize the shorter work day in the eyes of many politicians and capitalists.

The 1920s and 1930s marked turning points in labour's attitudes toward the shorter hours movement. Hours reductions slowed as labour found itself under bitter assault from anti-union employer associations. The average work week for manufacturing workers declined only one hour between 1921 and 1930. The 1920s also marked the emergence of modern demands for a 5 day work week, a demand articulated by seemingly strange bedfellows: the AFL and Henry Ford. The former redefined the rationale for shorter hours in a way that laid the foundation for modern perceptions of living for the weekend. Shorter hours were now seen as compensation for accepting alienated labour rather than as a necessity for protecting citizenship, health, and control. William Green, the AFL's new president, insisted that workers wanted "increased wages and increased leisure for 'recuperation' and 'readjustment'." (237) At the same time the AFL developed its new hours ideology, Henry Ford inaugurated the five-day work week. Ford also saw the shorter work week as a trade-off for alienated labour. Workers received a five-day work week, but in return greater speed ups and wage cuts made their labours even more alienating. Ford believed that a shorter work week would lead to greater productivity from his workers and an increased desire for consumption — which would translate into new demands for consumer goods, cars and otherwise. Yet, few other manufacturers shared Ford's vision and the five-day work week remained confined to a small percentage of wage earners.

The Great Depression and New Deal turned the dreams of the 1920s into the policies of the 1940s. Foner and Roediger describe the complex compromises and motivations that led Franklin Roosevelt to reject more radical political demands (from unions and politicians) for a thirty-hour work week in favour of a less threatening compromise. On 24 October 1940, the Fair Labor and Standards Act, passed in June 1938, made the forty-hour work week the law of the land. The eight-hour, five-day work week was finally achieved.

The remaining chapters of the book tell a depressing story. In the half century since 1940, there has been little or no increase in leisure time. The work week actually rose 1.3 hours between 1949 and 1973. The authors attribute this denouement to the "legacy of depression and war, alienated leisure, alienated work, the purging of union radicals, consumerism, and the strategies of labor's leadership." (259) The non-economic rationale for shorter hours, though not completely abandoned, was strongly eroded during the post-war era. Workers' desires for regular

vacations, higher wages, and well-paying overtime that would enable them to enjoy their free time and participate in the burgeoning consumer revolution superseded the longstanding desire for shorter hours. From the 1950s onward, income replaced hours as the greater goal in union bargaining. Indeed, the quest for shorter hours grew even more dismal in the atmosphere of givebacks surrounding collective bargaining in the post-1981 recession. In 1990, forty hours now seems an acceptable standard for American workers and management alike.

The Quest For Time, though focusing on France and Great Britain, tells a story remarkably similar to that recounted in *Our Own Time*. Like Roediger and Foner, Gary Cross sees the "politics of worktime" (ix) as one of the fundamental class struggles of the modern industrial world. Scholarly neglect or misunderstanding of the shorter hours movement, he argues, was rooted in three factors: (1) the dominance of economist explanations which saw the movement as a means of encouraging greater productivity, of redistributing wealth to workers, of increasing consumption by increasing workers' leisure time, and of creating more jobs to offset reduced work days; (2) the perception that labour leaders used shorter hours merely as a strategy for obtaining higher wages; and, (3) the presumption that shorter hours was a reformist campaign coopted by middle-class groups who imposed their vision of proper leisure on workers.

While never completely rejecting these explanations, Cross, like his American counterparts, stresses the non-economic aspects of the movement and its equation of time and liberty. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, the struggle for shorter hours was not ancillary to the struggle for higher wages, but was a fundamental goal in its own right. "The issue was not merely a reduction of working hours, but the reallocation of time, a shift that effected life beyond employment as much as the experience of work." (viii) Workers wanted greater liberty to determine social relations outside the workplace — a desire that became even more important at the turn of the century with the emergence of new forms of popular culture. And like Roediger and Foner, Cross stresses the importance of working-class agency in achieving more leisure time. Although French and British workers received valuable help from reformers and sympathetic politicians, no one gave them more time for leisure. "It was a century of contest," insists Cross, "that produced the norms of the eight-hour day, weekend, and annual vacation." (20)

The Quest For Time identifies three critical eras in the development of new attitudes about work and leisure. Recounting a story familiar to those acquainted with E.P. Thompson's writings, Cross argues that during the preindustrial era, work and leisure were intermixed in the course of a normal day. Work was defined by task rather than time, and the pace of the day was marked by alternate bouts of frenzied labour and playful leisure. The shift from task work to time work during the early stages of industrialization was accompanied by a dramatic shift in working-class understandings of the meaning and uses of leisure. In the early 19th century, the public rhetoric (though not necessarily the private practice) of working-class leaders linked the quest for more leisure and free time to workers' desires

for self-betterment, greater time for family life, and the pursuit of political rights. During the modern and increasingly alienating industrial world of the 20th century, another shift occurred wherein French and British workers placed greater emphasis on using leisure time for consumption and the purchase of pleasure.

Cross fills out these broad periodizations with the intriguing analysis of parallel developments in the "leisure ethos" of the bourgeoisie and working class. Nineteenth century industrialization brought not only a work ethic, but a bourgeois leisure ethic. This ethic was remarkably similar for bourgeoisie on both sides of the Atlantic: "long hours of work in youth were 'invested' in middle-age leisure and long holidays." (8) In contrast, workers built their "reformed leisure strategy around weekly days free from work and a reduction of daily hours." (8) They looked to immediate shortening of the workday rather then the more distant possibility of vacations. By the early 20th century, a common work and leisure ethic emerged for all classes. "The ideal increasingly became that of uniform durations of work, compressed into as few hours as necessary in order to maintain production and income; at the same time, leisure time was radically segmented from work and packaged into predictable, long blocks of personally disposable periods, distributed in doses over the day, week, year and life span." (9)

The bulk of Cross' book is concerned with fleshing out these themes and accounting for the successes and failures of British and French shorter hours movements. Along the way, Cross often debunks the myth that European workers, in contrast to their supposedly more timid American counterparts, always behaved in more farsighted class conscious ways. The shorter hours movement was actually much slower taking hold in France and Great Britain than in the United States. Explaining why, Cross observes: "Long clinging to the categories of the cottage workers and independent artisan, even clearly industrial workers sought to retain control over the process of work, including the use of time within the workday, rather than to modify the length of the day." (53) Only when it became clear that they were unable to defeat employers' control of production, did European workers emulate their American counterparts and seek greater control over the length of the workday.

In France and Great Britain, as in the United States, success in shortening the workday depended upon the constant agitation of workers and the ability of their leaders to attract state support and forge coalitions with a broad range of civic and religious reformers. During the 1830s and 1840s, workers in both nations relied heavily upon liberal state policies to achieve modest gains, while in the decades after the 1880s changing attitudes toward production brought more aggressive working-class campaigns for shorter workdays and workweeks. In general, British workers were more successful than their French counterparts. Cross attributes this to a combination of factors: the advanced development and greater efficiency of British industry, a stronger and more militant labour movement, a more powerful array of reform allies, and a more active and paternalistic central state.

Cross' early chapters contrast the different paths that led to Britain's landmark Ten Hour Act of 1847 and France's Twelve Hour Law of 1848. Like Roediger and Foner, Cross sees worker self-activity as a constant force during this era. But unlike the United States, politicians and the state in Britain and France played a much greater role in helping workers secure national hours' legislation. In both nations, politicians viewed these measures from economic and paternalistic perspectives. Shorter hours were a "means of enabling industry to control competition and eliminate marginal producers," (44) and, a means of protecting the family by limiting the workday of women and children. The French, however, were slower in translating these concerns into laws because of a weaker labour movement, the slow growth of liberal reform, and a more laissez-faire Orleanist Parliament. Indeed, even after the passage of their 1848 law, the French did little to guarantee its enforcement.

The decades between 1890 and 1940 marked a critical turning point in achieving an eight-hour day and establishing modern divisions of time. The impasse between employers, workers, and the state was eased by three key factors: the renewed efforts of a wide array of reform groups, the increasing power of the industrial efficiency movement, and the impact of World War I. Once again the English took the lead. The workers' movement for half-holidays on Saturday and later toward a full weekend free of work was joined by social and religious conservatives who saw the need for more free time to preserve the family and create more virtuous forms of recreation. In Britain, a powerful Sabbatarian movement supported the drive for half-Saturdays so that workers could enjoy their amusements that day and devote the Sabbath to rest, worship, and family togetherness. Religious reformers in France took a similar stance to their English counterparts, but were defeated by the opposition of politically powerful shopkeepers.

The industrial efficiency movement, which advocated the new science of work in England and the tenets of scientific management in France, was even more influential in convincing politicians of the fundamental economic soundness of a shorter work day. In both instances, efficiency experts called for a new workplace that would be governed by a universal standard of science and not by the sovereign will of the employer. They urged the government to think in terms of long range national economic growth rather than the short-term profits of employers. A reduced work day and work week, they argued, would strengthen industry by forcing it to become more productive and squeezing out less efficient manufacturers. Cross carefully argues against the idea that efficiency advocates or reformers coopted the shorter hours movement. Although their reasons for reform differed from those of workers, their ultimate goal was the same: less time at work. Cooperation was not cooptation. Indeed, by offering a "scientific" justification for their demands, French and British workers were able to attract greater support among politicians.

In the aftermath of World War I, the Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT) in France and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Britain were able to combine

the middle-class rationale of efficiency and moral reform, with their own themes of patriotic wartime service and post-war workplace militancy to win a state sanctioned eight hour day. Yet, the initial glow of victory quickly faded as trade unionists of the 1920s found themselves confronted by employer assaults, bitter internal divisions, state reluctance to press for absolute compliance of eight hour laws, and the failure of an international labour movement to establish eight hours as a universal standard. The Great Depression of the 1930s and coming of another World War put the hours movement on hold. New hours laws were occasionally adopted during this period, but they did not become fully effective until after the war.

During the last fifty years, the shorter hours movement in Europe, as in the United States, has taken a number of new directions. Since the 1940s, Cross points out, there has been little decline in the average workday. This occurred in large part because of the changed priorities of workers, or at least their leaders: "The decades following World War II saw both a sharp decline in interest in reducing the hours standard and the advent of more individualistic quests for free time such as the vacation." (215) Post-war workers have taken their share of enhanced productivity in the form of higher pay and longer paid vacations. Cross, like many contemporary wage earners, is less depressed by this new trade-off than Roediger and Foner. Workers and their leaders, he observes, "fully recognized that individuality could be expressed primarily in time away from work rather than in the work experience itself — even if leftists intellectuals sometimes did not." (228) It was this new consciousness that allowed the living-for-the-weekend mentality to flourish. Life might be better lived with longer blocks of free time (such as weekends and vacations) than a shorter workday and shorter blocks of free time. For modern workers, be they European or American, free time apparently offers greater opportunities for personal creativity than work time.

Many of the sweeping themes laid out by Cross, Roediger, and Foner are fine-tuned by the essayists contributing to *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History*. The collection focuses on the two main periods of shorter hours struggle: 1800-1850, the initial era of agitation, and, 1890-1940, when the shorter workday was achieved throughout most of the western industrial world. Howard Rock and Clive Behagg examine workers' responses to the initial shift from task to time work in the United States and England, respectively, while Stewart Weaver explores the political ideology of the early English Factory movement. Teresa Murphy and Kathyrn Kish Sklar offer fuller views of the efforts made by 19th- and early 20th-century American women wage earners and reformers on behalf of the shorter day. Essays by David Roediger, Gary Cross, and Benjamin Hunnicut bring us into the 20th century and focus, respectively, on Fordism, Taylorism and the limits of corporate reform in the United States, international efforts to win an eight hour day between 1886 and 1940, and the impact of the New Deal on reorienting modern attitudes toward work time and leisure time.

"Worktime and Industrialization in the USSR, 1917-1941," by William Chase and Lewis Siegelbaum, takes us outside the now familiar confines of the United States, France, and Great Britain, and looks at the attitudes and policies toward the work day in the Soviet Union. What is most striking about this piece are the similarities, not the differences, between Soviet and transatlantic experiences. Between 1917 and 1941, the Soviet government maintained a dual concern for shortening the workday and inculcating proper forms of leisure in the new Soviet man and woman. Prior to 1917, a ten hour six day work week was the legal norm in Russia. Four days after the October Revolution, the Soviet Union became the first western nation to mandate an eight-hour work day. However, during the next several decades, the concerns of the Soviet government remained remarkably similar to those of western employers. In return for granting shorter hours, the state expected increased intensity of work time, greater labour discipline within the factory, and higher productivity from the Soviet workforce — a set of expectations that remained largely unfulfilled.

Soviet leaders, like western reformers, also found it difficult to dictate how workers would spend their free time. "The Soviet government," the authors tell us, "found it easier to decree than to alter traditional values and behaviors." (183) Dreams of creating more productive leisure time were undermined by repeated shortages of food, fuel, and other necessities that forced people to spend their "free" time looking for these items or taking second jobs to earn enough to buy them. The fortunate few who did manage more free time, found the use of that time circumscribed by gender distinctions: women devoted more of their "leisure" to increased domestic work than males, who used their time for personal edification. Thus, despite its initial promise, the Soviet government was ultimately unable to realize its promises of real leisure for its citizenry — a failure that is all too obvious in 1991.

The enormous time span and number of themes covered by these three works means that even a long review essay cannot do justice to their individual arguments and nuances. In addition to telling an old story in a new and more complete manner, the books make three especially important contributions: (1) they deromanticize pre-industrial time; (2) they restore the radical thrust behind the hours movement; and (3) they offer prospects for the future. All three works try to move us beyond what they see as social history's romanticization of the pre-industrial age. Though paying homage to E.P. Thompson, the works either directly or indirectly question his ruling assumption that the merger of work and life in the pre-capitalist era was somehow better than the separation of work and life that accompanied industrialization.[7] Descriptions of task work in 18th-century America, France, and Great Britain offer sobering reminders that even with work and leisure mixed, the hours endured by farmers and artisans were incredibly long and ultimately linked to the

[7]See especially, E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 56-97.

completion of arduous work obligations. Perhaps this might be bearable if one were self-employed, but if one laboured for another that meant being under the eyes and authority of the boss for ten, twelve, or fourteen hours a day, six days a week. Instead of seeing the transition from task to time work as involving a sense of loss, as Thompson does, one might well see it as entailing very real benefits. Perhaps my thinking is conditioned by my 20th-century consciousness, but there seems something attractive about the demarcation of one's "personal" time from one's "work" time. In a world where not everyone is as happy with their vocation as most historians tend to be, a shorter work day means more time away from unpleasant labours; more time for personal autonomy and less time spent submitting to the authority of employers.

The relationship between work, authority, and autonomy leads into what is perhaps the single most important theme linking these three books: the attempt to stress the truly radical implications of the shorter hours movement. What was so radical about this movement? The authors answer this with three explanations. First, it was an attack on free-market, laissez faire capitalism and on the unbridled control of capitalists. By shortening the workday, especially when they could do so on a national rather than industry-by-industry basis, workers took away an important part of an employer's authority over his or her enterprise (and potential profits) and an industry's control over its future development. "Shorter hours," argues Cross, "might mean a decrease in the use of machines and thus the rate at which the textile industry accumulated glut-creating inventories; reduction of worktime was also an attempt to extract from employers a larger share of the economic gains of increased productivity by placing a higher price on an hour of work in overtime; and fewer daily hours would reduce seasonal employment by obliging capital to extend work over a longer period."[8] Secondly, the hours campaign contained a radical political dimension. In the United States, France, and Great Britain, it was often joined with efforts to obtain greater freedom as citizens as well as workers. The links between the quest for realizing political rights and a shorter work day are especially evident in the language of the English Chartist and American republican movements of the 19th century. A shorter work day limited an employer's control over a worker's life and enabled that worker to spend more time pursuing or exercising the rights of citizenship. Assessing the radical implications of Britain's Ten Hour Act of 1847, Stewart Weaver astutely reminds us: "For the first time in history, Marx was later to claim, 'the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class'."[9] Finally, the shorter hours movement represented the one issue that has joined workers throughout world in an international class struggle. Though these common moments have been few and largely unsuccessful in the past, they still hold promise for the future.

[8]Cross, *Worktime and Industrialization*, 8.
[9]Cross, *Worktime and Industrialization*, 79.

Prospects for future reductions of work time are another issue addressed by many of the authors. Despite their pessimism about hours progress since the New Deal, Roediger and Foner see future change coming from one of several sources: religious-labour cooperation, family farmers needing more time for second jobs, minority workers, and women. It is the last group that they see as the crucial agent of change. Women's dual role as workers and child rearers offers the greatest potential source of working-class militancy. Since 1940, housewives participation in the workforce has risen from 15 per cent to just over 50 per cent. "It may even be that women workers," they speculate, "used to self-paced work at home and responsibilities with children, will again inject control issues into struggles over the working day." (276) Similarly, Cross identifies the "two-income family with its burden of wage hours" as the most "likely site for the building of a new quest for time."[10]

As the tone of this review hopefully indicates, these three books represent an exciting and important contribution to the scholarship of work, leisure, and politics. Their collective strength far outweigh any individual weaknesses. Nevertheless, in covering such a sweeping range of time and nations, the books are bound to leave several points underdeveloped. Two issues emerge as central to both monographs and the collection of essays: (1) understanding the quest of a shorter work day — its successes and failures; (2) what people intend to do with increased free time. They are most successful when discussing the first theme and less successful on the second. The "bottom up" history of shorter hours struggles would be greatly strengthened by more careful attention to describing what ordinary workers actually did with their free time. Roediger, Foner, Cross, and the various essayists concentrate largely on the rationales for greater leisure articulated by labour leaders, reformers, and politicians. In so doing, the authors do not clearly differentiate between rhetoric used by labour leaders to win the support of politicians and middle-class reformers and the actual uses of leisure by workers — union and otherwise. Perhaps there was no difference. But that is never made clear. Indeed, it is uncertain whether wage earners held the same views about leisure as union leaders. What did workers want with their free time? How did they use it? Were wage earners as political in the deployment of leisure time as they were in their battles over work time?

My own research on Labor Day celebrations and working-class uses of mass culture suggests that there were often sharp disjunctions between the rhetoric of union leaders and the desires of rank-and-file members. Wage earners were willing to struggle at the workplace to gain more time away from work; but once away from work, they were less predisposed to link their leisure time to workplace struggles. Once Labor Day was established, local leaders found it increasingly difficult to get their members to participate in parades or rallies. Unless there was a strike or especially pressing cause, rank-and-file members generally preferred to

[10]Cross, *A Quest For Time*, 231.

spend the day relaxing with family and friends, even if that meant paying costly fines. More often than not, fun — not moral, political or personal uplift — was their immediate goal. Similarly, an independent working-class film movement launched during the era of silent films failed in part because American workers, often militant in their workplace struggles, were less committed to fighting cultural battles over entertainment. Not only did union members fail to pressure theatre owners into showing labour-made movies, but they often ignored the pleas of local movie operators' unions to boycott unfair houses.[11] Workers did no want to struggle over leisure during their free time; they wanted to enjoy it. This is not to say that workers were the dupes of mass culture or mass consumption. Rather, I would suggest that their attitudes toward leisure were far more complex than is generally assumed.

The rise of working-class vacations and how they were used by workers is another area that calls out for further study. Cross is more accurate than Foner and Roediger in reading the evolution of paid vacations — from the worker's point of view — as a major victory and not a sell-out or compromise. A recent paper by Ivan Greenberg on the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the origins of working-class paid vacations argues that vacations were "not a mere 'fringe benefit,' but were an important part of the militant labor struggles of the early CIO." Sounding a theme generally issued by Roediger and Foner (except on this issue), Greenberg explains: "[Vacations] were essentially a workers' control issue, a challenge to management's power to determine the terms and length of employment." Here was an issue that joined workers on both sides of the Atlantic. Paid vacations, like shorter hours, assumed critical international dimensions during the interwar years as twenty-three nations enacted legislation guaranteeing vacation benefits for industrial wage earners.[12]

The books also leave one wondering about the present relationship of work, leisure, and self-identity. Are work and leisure co-equals in the creation of modern self-identity or, as the authors seem to suggest, is leisure an important but weaker sibling? The quest for shorter hours, they all argue, has been historically linked to deteriorating conditions at work and the desire for greater personal autonomy. Yet, such an understanding downplays the importance of leisure for leisure's sake and assumes that attitudes about leisure are fundamentally shaped by the nature of work. If this is so, then we need to ask whether the thirst for leisure would be significantly altered if the nature of work was significantly improved? Would assembly-line workers want to escape the factory more quickly each day if radical changes in their control over work were instituted? Would their attitudes toward

[11]Michael Kazin and Steven J. Ross, "America's Labor Day: The Evolution of a Workers' Celebration, 1882-1950," paper presented at the Organization of American Historians' Convention, Philadelphia, April 1987; Ross, "Struggles For the Screen."

[12]Ivan Greenberg, "The Early CIO and the Origins of Working-Class Paid Vacations," paper presented at the Southwest Labor Studies Conference, 20 April 1990, Los Angeles, 3.

leisure change if work were made more meaningful? Might they then prefer to live for the "weekdays?" Is the dignity of work ultimately more important than the joy of leisure? It is not a criticism of the three works that they do not answer these questions. It is a testament to their thoughtfulness that they raise them. We now await national and comparative histories of leisure as good and as provocative as these histories of work time struggles.