

INSTEAD OF WORK



BOB BLACK

INTRODUCTION BY **BRUCE STERLING**

Instead of Work
by Bob Black

with an introduction by
Bruce Sterling

Published by Aragorn Moser
Layout by Leona Benton
Printed at "The Compound"
1818 Carleton St. Berkeley, CA 94703-1908

no one should ever work on introductions i
by Bruce Sterling

I
the abolition of work 1

II
primitive affluence: a postscript to Sahlins 33

III
smokestack lightning 55

IV
no future for the workplace 77

V
what's wrong with this picture? 85

VI
zerowork revisited 103

VII
why not call a holiday? 111

VIII
what work is—and why that matters 127

IX
afterthoughts on the abolition of work 151

No One Should Ever Work on Introductions

Bob Black and I are contemporaries, and I rather dread writing my predestined reminiscence about this old book of his because of the spectral implication that neither he nor I will ever write anything better.

Still, I'll explain the vanished cultural surroundings of this book because historical context is always useful.

I'm a novelist and journalist, not one of Bob's own milieu of political theorists. I doubt our writerly paths would ever have crossed, except for our shared interest in the people Bob aptly called "marginals."

"Marginals" were basically self-published figures, the writers and distributors of "zines." Zines were amateur magazines, copied in small print runs, on various eccentric topics. Zines appeared in profusion because technical advances in paper photocopying had demolished many entry-barriers to small-scale publishing. The upshot was that a host of writers and propagandists spontaneously appeared: people from the margins of society, who had rarely been heard from in print.

Thanks to my journalism training, I had a very high tolerance for this sort of text. Instead of avidly reading great writers that I admired or envied (which is what novelists tend to do), I'd learned to acquire and sample texts more objectively, in a cultural search for newsworthy trends. J. G. Ballard, another novelist who was also a journalist like me, called this "invisible literature." Ballard used this radically non-literary material to refresh his own fictional work, and Ballard was a guru to writers of my generation.

Ballard worked for the chemical industry press in Britain, and he collected obscure, ultra-specialized material such as medical crash-industry reports. I was an Austin bohemian, so I specialized in outré fodder such as underground comics, obscure pop music, and woozy, cultish, drug experimentation. There were heaps of that stuff in the marginals milieu, big inky eruptions of it, for it had all been repressed by the forces of decency that owned the conventional media. Suddenly, you could have all of that you wanted, if you paid for postage.

So, I accumulated plenty of that, along with other prototypical "marginal" productions that were basically over-publicized diaries: the geek's trip to his archery contest, the teenager's grief on the death of her kitten, that sort of slush. Of

course it was mostly rubbish, but that was okay. I didn't mind. A writer needs to know these things. It was something of a worldly education.

Then there was Bob Black, another guy diligently exploiting this sub rosa form of publishing. Unlike most “marginals,” Bob Black was clearly a genuine dissident. He was a lucid writer with legal training, who was not a political crank or deluded mystic, but a coherent thinker who was really, truly, severely unconventional.

Bob's thesis was that he—and all of us really—existed in conditions of mentally mutilating, systematic oppression. We didn't know that, because we didn't dare name our oppressor, any more than Eastern European dissidents living at that time could boldly name the Communist Party and the KGB as the authors of their daily distress. But our oppressor was “work.”

“No one should ever work.” Bob was an essayist of rather broad interests, but this was the flagpole of the Black ideology. No Work. His analysis studied the actual deprivations of our freedom. Not the power-structures within various states, or the rights allegedly guaranteed by constitutions, or the effects of racial or gender prejudice, but really, just, life: the lived hours of your precious days. Where did your lifetime actually go? In the “free world,” most people

spent their lifetime working. They were “free” to work.

That's what this book is about. It is all about how work is much better conceived as a malignant, destructive condition called “forced labor.” It's not that people want to work by their nature. No, they're cajoled into work by moral suasion, then kept confined within their work by large, cumbersome, irrational, spirit-crushing, economic, legal, and police frameworks.

Bob pointed out that work is not about “doing your work,” because you are required to stay in the workplace during all work hours, whether the necessary tasks are completed or not. Workers were never allowed to leave work, any more than some child in school would be allowed go play once he learned the textbook lessons. Both the school and the workplace were mechanisms of discipline. They were vast apparatuses that had rather little to do with their alleged purposes of education or production.

It was “forced labor” that appalled Bob Black, not productive activity per se. Bob wasn't encouraging inert idleness. He had in mind a very different arrangement for civilization, a ludic “play labor” where society would maintain itself through people doing what they wanted to do.

Of course that prospect sounds rather silly:

Aristotle used to make fun of that idea way back in ancient times. Aristotle used to justify Greek slavery by stating that the shuttle won't weave clothes, and the lyre won't play music, by itself. So we have to be practical, tough-minded, and get those slaves.

It was clear to Bob Black, though, that in modern civilization our factory looms do weave autonomous clothes, and our radios do play music by themselves. Yet, despite all this huge productive capacity, wage slavery still abounded. So, forced labor was not about clothing Professor Aristotle. No, forced labor was all about the force. The slavery was its own justification.

Idle hands were the devil's workshop. With enough idleness, the churches would burn down. No priests, no masters. With “work” abolished, an entirely different economic order would spontaneously appear.

Everybody always claims that anarchists don't understand real-world economics. That's probably true, as tenured economists judge the truth, anyway. However, I'd point out that Facebook and Google today are colossal, super-rich commercial empires that don't pay most of their workers any salary. Google and Facebook are both free to millions of users, because the users are just inside there, playing around, pursuing

their own private interests, in very much a Bob Black ludic style.

So, yes, it turns out that unpaid, informal, unforced labor is in fact hugely productive economically. It's worth a hell of a lot of money. Every time you perform a Google search, you are invisibly aided by thousands of other people clicking buttons. These glossy, collective big-data empires are certainly the dominant economic titans of our modern era—if you don't count the domineering prisons, the lethal military, and the sinister, climate-wrecking oil companies.

However, I'm rather anticipating Bob's own narrative here; *Abolition of Work* was written ages ago, way back in the era of manual typewriters and Xerox machines. It's not Bob's fault that Facebook, Amazon, and Google exist (for the time being) and we all enrich them, and that's not called work, and we don't get any salary for it. Bob was a lone, marginal crusader in pursuit of his unique vision of freedom and social justice. He was never a disruptive venture capitalist.

However, there were useful, broad hints in his work that his area of the margin was a general avant-garde.

I never became a Bob Black disciple, although I used to write and post the occasional

paper letter to him. Mostly, I just admired and tried to emulate his conceptual freedom. I learned about the Situationists through Bob Black: those French ultra-leftists who believed that the apparently solid bourgeois world was mere spectacle. The Situationists liked to pretend that the streets of Paris weren't the real streets, that they were a mapless grid of absolute possibilities: you could drift through streets at random and discover wonders, you could dig up the hard cobblestones and there would be a beach underneath.

It was great that Bob so effortlessly understood this deeply alien philosophy, and also thought that the Situationists were befuddled Europeans that us Americans might somehow transcend. The Situationists were rather a lot like embittered, angry, Molotov-tossing science fiction writers. Spreading useful awareness of this kind to those who sought it, that was just one of Bob's many laudable public services.

In my own milieu of the American popular mid-list novel, there had always been a cadre of guys who thought that writing fiction should be hard work. These were the Gradgrind characters within my profession, the grim obsessives who rose at 5 a.m., ran four miles, took a cold shower, and wrote their 2,000 words every day without fail.

In their mode of labor, the Muse was for

sissies; creativity would come if you cracked the deadline whip; your mass-market paperback novel was an industrial entertainment product in direct competition for the consumer's beer money. These guys were basically artists who'd swallowed the poison of forced labor that Bob Black decried. They were self-employed, but cruelly keen to become their own abusive bosses.

I quite liked writing fiction, and I thought maybe there was something to this sternly disciplined workaday approach to it; having read Bob Black, I decided to knock that off. I resolved that my writing wouldn't be a commercial product to efficiently entertain the reader. No, it would be much more like the stuff that Bob Black wrote: weird, provocative, maybe radically wrong-headed, but something intelligent, fresh, and unconventional that didn't waste the reader's precious hours of allotted lifespan.

Like the writing of Bob Black, my writing might not be exactly pragmatic in intent, but it would have Bob's sense of cogency, his obscure urgency. In prose, I would go for his frankly-declarative sense of Orwellian precision:

"The reinventing of daily life means marching off the edge of our maps."

"In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working."

“You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you’ll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous.”

I had a day-job while I was first reading Bob Black. It was a pretty good job, but I gave it up. I realized that my work would always be in my way. Not just that work limited my free time for writing—I wrote my second novel at work, frankly, and I wasn't suffering all that much from my kindly boss and amusing co-workers—but the daily coercion of work was delimiting my imagination. *You are what you do*, and I liked to do freewheeling, imaginative novels.

So, I ended up with no job. And no particular resume or skill set. No house, no heaps of property, no particular home address. Nowadays my passport is bursting with stamps, and I'm probably best known these days, not for my novels that people pay me money for, but for free aphorisms that I toss onto social media.

So, it's not that unlikely a lifestyle, this Bob Black never-work scheme. It's what life is like for people the age of my own adult children. They're a “precarious” generation: they're semi-, under-, or unemployed, they don't have suburban white-picket houses, lunch buckets, and union cards.

So, nowadays, I just live like a modern person lives. It means that when I talk about

real life to people half my age, we can talk as contemporaries. I will always be very grateful to Bob Black for that.

Bruce Sterling
Belgrade, 2015

The Abolition of Work

No one should ever work.

Work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world. Almost any evil you'd care to name comes from working or from living in a world designed for work. In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working.

That doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a *ludic* conviviality, commensality, and maybe even art. There is more to play than child's play, as worthy as that is. I call for a collective adventure in generalized joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive. Doubtless we all need a lot more time for sheer sloth and slack than we ever enjoy now, regardless of income or occupation, but once recovered from employment-induced exhaustion nearly all of us want to act. Oblomovism and Stakhanovism are two sides of the same debased coin.

The ludic life is totally incompatible with existing reality. So much the worse for "reality,"

the gravity hole that sucks the vitality from the little in life that still distinguishes it from mere survival. Curiously—or maybe not—all the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchism, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else.

Liberals say we should end employment discrimination. I say we should end employment. Conservatives support right-to-work laws. Following Karl Marx's wayward son-in-law Paul Lafargue, I support the right to be lazy. Leftists favor full employment. Like the surrealists—except that I'm not kidding—I favor full *unemployment*. Trotskyists agitate for permanent revolution. I agitate for permanent revelry. But if all the ideologues (as they do) advocate work—and not only because they plan to make other people do theirs—they are strangely reluctant to say so. They will carry on endlessly about wages, hours, working conditions, exploitation, productivity, profitability. They'll gladly talk about anything but work itself. These experts who offer to do our thinking for us rarely share their conclusions about work, for all its saliency in the lives of all of us. Among themselves they quibble over the details. Unions and management agree that we ought to sell the time of our lives in

exchange for survival, although they haggle over the price. Marxists think we should be bossed by bureaucrats. Libertarians think we should be bossed by businessmen. Feminists don't care which form bossing takes so long as the bosses are women. Clearly these ideology-mongers have serious differences over how to divvy up the spoils of power. Just as clearly, none of them have any objection to power as such and all of them want to keep us working.

You may be wondering if I'm joking or serious. I'm joking *and* serious. To be ludic is not to be ludicrous. Play doesn't have to be frivolous, although frivolity isn't triviality: very often we ought to take frivolity seriously. I'd like life to be a game—but a game with high stakes. I want to play *for keeps*.

The alternative to work isn't just idleness. To be ludic is not to be quaaludic. As much as I treasure the pleasure of torpor, it's never more rewarding than when it punctuates other pleasures and pastimes. Nor am I promoting the managed time-disciplined safety-valve called "leisure"; far from it. Leisure is nonwork for the sake of work. Leisure is the time spent recovering from work and in the frenzied but hopeless attempt to forget about work. Many people return from vacation so beat that they look forward to returning to work

so they can rest up. The main difference between work and leisure is that with work at least you get paid for your alienation and enervation.

I am not playing definitional games with anybody. When I say I want to abolish work, I mean just what I say, but I want to say what I mean by defining my terms in non-idiosyncratic ways. My minimum definition of work is *forced labor*, that is, compulsory production. Both elements are essential. Work is production enforced by economic or political means, by the carrot or the stick. (The carrot is just the stick by other means.) But not all creation is work. Work is never done for its own sake, it's done on account of some product or output that the worker (or, more often, somebody else) gets out of it. This is what work necessarily is. To define it is to despise it. But work is usually even worse than its definition decrees. The dynamic of domination intrinsic to work tends over time toward elaboration. In advanced work-riddled societies, including all industrial societies whether capitalist or "Communist," work invariably acquires other attributes which accentuate its obnoxiousness.

Usually—and this is even more true in "Communist" than capitalist countries, where the state is almost the only employer and everyone is an employee—work is employment, i. e., wage-

labor, which means selling yourself on the installment plan. Thus 95% of Americans who work, work for somebody (or *something*) else. In the USSR or Cuba or the former Yugoslavia or any other alternative model which might be adduced, the corresponding figure approaches 100%. Only the embattled Third World peasant bastions—Mexico, India, Brazil, Turkey—temporarily shelter significant concentrations of agriculturists who perpetuate the traditional arrangement of most laborers in the last several millenia, the payment of taxes (= ransom) to the state or rent to parasitic landlords in return for being otherwise left alone. Even this raw deal is beginning to look good. *All* industrial (and office) workers are employees and under the sort of surveillance which ensures servility.

But modern work has worse implications. People don't just work, they have "jobs." One person does one productive task all the time on an or-else basis. Even if the task has a quantum of intrinsic interest (as increasingly many jobs don't) the monotony of its obligatory exclusivity drains its ludic potential. A "job" that might engage the energies of some people, for a reasonably limited time, for the fun of it, is just a burden on those who have to do it for forty hours a week with no say in how it should be done, for the profit of

owners who contribute nothing to the project, and with no opportunity for sharing tasks or spreading the work among those who actually have to do it. This is the real world of work: a world of bureaucratic blundering, of sexual harassment and discrimination, of bonehead bosses exploiting and scapegoating their subordinates who—by any rational-technical criteria—should be calling the shots. But capitalism in the real world subordinates the rational maximization of productivity and profit to the exigencies of organizational control.

The degradation which most workers experience on the job is the sum of assorted indignities which can be denominated as “discipline.” Foucault has complexified this phenomenon but it is simple enough. Discipline consists of the totality of totalitarian controls at the workplace—surveillance, rotework, imposed work tempos, production quotas, punching -in and -out, etc. Discipline is what the factory and the office and the store share with the prison and the school and the mental hospital. It is something historically original and horrible. It was beyond the capacities of such demonic dictators of yore as Nero and Genghis Khan and Ivan the Terrible. For all their bad intentions they just didn’t have the machinery to control their subjects as thoroughly as modern despots do. Dis-

cipline is the distinctively diabolical modern mode of control, it is an innovative intrusion which must be interdicted at the earliest opportunity.

Such is “work.” Play is just the opposite. Play is always voluntary. What might otherwise be play is work if it’s forced. This is axiomatic. Bernie de Koven has defined play as the “suspension of consequences.” This is unacceptable if it implies that play is inconsequential. The point is not that play is without consequences. This is to demean play. The point is that the consequences, if any, are gratuitous. Playing and giving are closely related, they are the behavioral and transactional facets of the same impulse, the play-instinct. They share an aristocratic disdain for results. The player gets something out of playing; that’s why he plays. But the core reward is the experience of the activity itself (whatever it is). Some otherwise attentive students of play, like Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*), *define* it as game-playing or following rules. I respect Huizinga’s erudition but emphatically reject his constraints. There are many good games (chess, baseball, Monopoly, bridge) which are rule-governed but there is much more to play than game-playing. Conversation, sex, dancing, travel—these practices aren’t rule-governed but they are surely play if anything is. And rules can be *played with* at least as readily as

anything else.

Work makes a mockery of freedom. The official line is that we all have rights and live in a democracy. Other unfortunates who aren't free like we are have to live in police states. These victims obey orders or-else, no matter how arbitrary. The authorities keep them under regular surveillance. State bureaucrats control even the smaller details of everyday life. The officials who push them around are answerable only to higher-ups, public or private. Either way, dissent and disobedience are punished. Informers report regularly to the authorities. All this is supposed to be a very bad thing.

And so it is, although it is nothing but a description of the modern workplace. The liberals and conservatives and libertarians who lament totalitarianism are phonies and hypocrites. There is more freedom in any moderately Stalinized dictatorship than there is in the ordinary American workplace. You find the same sort of hierarchy and discipline in an office or factory as you do in a prison or monastery. In fact, as Foucault and others have shown, prisons and factories came in at about the same time, and their operators consciously borrowed from each other's control techniques. A worker is a part-time slave. The boss says when to show up, when to leave, and what to

do in the meantime. He tells you how much work to do and how fast. He is free to carry his control to humiliating extremes, regulating, if he feels like it, the clothes you wear or how often you go to the bathroom. With a few exceptions he can fire you for any reason, or no reason. He has you spied on by snitches and supervisors, he amasses a dossier on every employee. Talking back is called “insubordination,” just as if a worker is a naughty child, and it not only gets you fired, it disqualifies you for unemployment compensation. Without necessarily endorsing it for them either, it is noteworthy that children at home and in school receive much the same treatment, justified in their case by their supposed immaturity. What does this say about their parents and teachers who work?

The demeaning system of domination I’ve described rules over half the waking hours of a majority of women and the vast majority of men for decades, for most of their lifespans. For certain purposes it’s not too misleading to call our system democracy or capitalism or—better still—industrialism, but its real names are factory fascism and office oligarchy. Anybody who says these people are “free” is lying or stupid. You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you’ll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous. Work is a much

better explanation for the creeping cretinization all around us than even such significant moronizing mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed off to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home at the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families *they* start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it.

We are so close to the world of work that we can't see what it does to us. We have to rely on outside observers from other times or other cultures to appreciate the extremity and the pathology of our present position. There was a time in our own past when the "work ethic" would have been incomprehensible, and perhaps Weber was on to something when he tied its appearance to a religion, Calvinism, which if it emerged today instead of four centuries ago would immediately and appropriately be labeled a cult. Be that as it may, we have only to draw upon the wisdom of

antiquity to put work in perspective. The ancients saw work for what it is, and their view prevailed, the Calvinist cranks notwithstanding, until overthrown by industrialism—but not before receiving the endorsement of its prophets.

Let's pretend for a moment that work doesn't turn people into stultified submissives. Let's pretend, in defiance of any plausible psychology and the ideology of its boosters, that it has no effect on the formation of character. And let's pretend that work isn't as boring and tiring and humiliating as we all know it really is. Even then, work would *still* make a mockery of all humanistic and democratic aspirations, just because it usurps so much of our time. Socrates said that manual laborers make bad friends and bad citizens because they have no time to fulfill the responsibilities of friendship and citizenship. He was right. Because of work, no matter what we do we keep looking at our watches. The only thing "free" about so-called free time is that it doesn't cost the boss anything. Free time is mostly devoted to getting ready for work, going to work, returning from work, and recovering from work. Free time is a euphemism for the peculiar way labor as a factor of production not only transports itself at its own expense to and from the workplace but assumes primary responsibility for its own

maintenance and repair. Coal and steel don't do that. Lathes and typewriters don't do that. But workers do. No wonder Edward G. Robinson in one of his gangster movies exclaimed, "Work is for saps!"

Both Plato and Xenophon attribute to Socrates and obviously share with him an awareness of the destructive effects of work on the worker as a citizen and a human being. Herodotus identified contempt for work as an attribute of the classical Greeks at the zenith of their culture. To take only one Roman example, Cicero said that "whoever gives his labor for money sells himself and puts himself in the rank of slaves." His candor is now rare, but contemporary primitive societies which we are wont to look down upon have provided spokesmen who have enlightened Western anthropologists. The Kapauku of West Irian, according to Leopold Posposil, have a conception of balance in life and accordingly work only every other day, the day of rest designed "to regain the lost power and health." Our ancestors, even as late as the eighteenth century when they were far along the path to our present predicament, at least were aware of what we have forgotten, the underside of industrialization. Their religious devotion to "St. Monday"—thus establishing a *de facto* five-day week 150-200 years before

its legal consecration—was the despair of the earliest factory owners. They took a long time in submitting to the tyranny of the bell, predecessor of the time clock. In fact it was necessary for a generation or two to replace adult males with women accustomed to obedience and children who could be molded to fit industrial needs. Even the exploited peasants of the *ancien regime* wrested substantial time back from their landlord's work. According to Lafargue, a fourth of the French peasants' calendar was devoted to Sundays and holidays, and Chayanov's figures from villages in Czarist Russia—hardly a progressive society—likewise show a fourth or fifth of peasants' days devoted to repose. Controlling for productivity, we are obviously far behind these backward societies. The exploited *muzhiks* would wonder why any of us are working at all. So should we.

To grasp the full enormity of our deterioration, however, consider the earliest condition of humanity, without government or property, when we wandered as hunter-gatherers. Hobbes surmised that life was then nasty, brutish and short. Others assume that life was a desperate unremitting struggle for subsistence, a war waged against a harsh Nature with death and disaster awaiting the unlucky or anyone who was unequal to the challenge of the struggle for

existence. Actually, that was all a projection of fears for the collapse of government authority over communities unaccustomed to doing without it, like the England of Hobbes during the Civil War. Hobbes' compatriots had already encountered alternative forms of society which illustrated other ways of life—in North America, particularly—but already these were too remote from their experience to be understandable. (The lower orders, closer to the condition of the Indians, understood it better and often found it attractive. Throughout the seventeenth century, English settlers defected to Indian tribes or, captured in war, refused to return. But the Indians no more defected to white settlements than Germans climb the Berlin Wall from the west.) The “survival of the fittest” version—the Thomas Huxley version—of Darwinism was a better account of economic conditions in Victorian England than it was of natural selection, as the anarchist Kropotkin showed in his book *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution*. (Kropotkin was a scientist—a geographer—who'd had ample involuntary opportunity for fieldwork whilst exiled in Siberia: he knew what he was talking about.) Like most social and political theory, the story Hobbes and his successors told was really unacknowledged autobiography.

The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, surveying the data on contemporary hunter-gatherers, exploded the Hobbesian myth in an article entitled "The Original Affluent Society." They work a lot less than we do, and their work is hard to distinguish from what we regard as play. Sahlins concluded that "hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society." They worked an average of four hours a day, assuming they were "working" at all. Their "labor," as it appears to us, was skilled labor which exercised their physical and intellectual capacities; unskilled labor on any large scale, as Sahlins says, is impossible except under industrialism. Thus it satisfied Friedrich Schiller's definition of play, the only occasion on which man realizes his complete humanity by giving full "play" to both sides of his twofold nature, thinking and feeling. As he put it: "The animal *works* when deprivation is the mainspring of its activity, and it *plays* when the fullness of its strength is this mainspring, when superabundant life is its own stimulus to activity." (A modern version—dubiously developmental—is Abraham Maslow's counterposition of "deficiency" and

“growth” motivation.) Play and freedom are, as regards production, coextensive. Even Marx, who belongs (for all his good intentions) in the productivist pantheon, observed that “the realm of freedom does not commence until the point is passed where labor under the compulsion of necessity and external utility is required.” He never could quite bring himself to identify this happy circumstance as what it is, the abolition of work—it’s rather anomalous, after all, to be pro-worker and anti-work—but we can.

The aspiration to go backwards or forwards to a life without work is evident in every serious social or cultural history of pre-industrial Europe, among them M. Dorothy George’s *England In Transition* and Peter Burke’s *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Also pertinent is Daniel Bell’s essay, “Work and its Discontents,” the first text, I believe, to refer to the “revolt against work” in so many words and, had it been understood, an important correction to the complacency ordinarily associated with the volume in which it was collected, *The End of Ideology*. Neither critics nor celebrants have noticed that Bell’s end-of-ideology thesis signaled not the end of social unrest but the beginning of a new, uncharted phase unconstrained and uninformed by ideology. It was Seymour Lipset (in *Political Man*), not Bell, who

announced at the same time that “the fundamental problems of the Industrial Revolution have been solved,” only a few years before the post- or meta-industrial discontents of college students drove Lipset from UC Berkeley to the relative (and temporary) tranquility of Harvard.

As Bell notes, Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, for all his enthusiasm for the market and the division of labor, was more alert to (and more honest about) the seamy side of work than Ayn Rand or the Chicago economists or any of Smith’s modern epigones. As Smith observed: “The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations... has no occasion to exert his understanding... He generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.” Here, in a few blunt words, is my critique of work. Bell, writing in 1956, the Golden Age of Eisenhower imbecility and American self-satisfaction, identified the unorganized, unorganizable malaise of the 1970s and since, the one no political tendency is able to harness, the one identified in HEW’s report *Work in America*, the one which cannot be exploited and so is ignored. That problem is the revolt against work. It does not figure in any text by any laissez-faire

economist—Milton Friedman, Murray Rothbard, Richard Posner—because, in their terms, as they used to say on *Star Trek*, “it does not compute.”

If these objections, informed by the love of liberty, fail to persuade humanists of a utilitarian or even paternalist turn, there are others which they cannot disregard. Work is dangerous to your health, to borrow a book title. In fact, work is mass murder or genocide. Directly or indirectly, work will kill most of the people who read these words. Between 14,000 and 25,000 workers are killed annually in this country on the job. Over two million are disabled. Twenty to twenty-five million are injured every year. And these figures are based on a very conservative estimation of what constitutes a work-related injury. Thus they don't count the half million cases of occupational disease every year. I looked at one medical textbook on occupational diseases which was 1,200 pages long. Even this barely scratches the surface. The available statistics count the obvious cases like the 100,000 miners who have black lung disease, of whom 4,000 die every year, a much higher fatality rate than for AIDS, for instance, which gets so much media attention. This reflects the unvoiced assumption that AIDS afflicts perverts who could control their depravity whereas coal-mining is a sacrosanct

activity beyond question. What the statistics don't show is that tens of millions of people have their lifespans shortened by work—which is all that homicide means, after all. Consider the doctors who work themselves to death in their 50s. Consider all the other workaholics.

Even if you aren't killed or crippled while actually working, you very well might be while going to work, coming from work, looking for work, or trying to forget about work. The vast majority of victims of the automobile are either doing one of these work-obligatory activities or else fall afoul of those who do them. To this augmented body-count must be added the victims of auto-industrial pollution and work-induced alcoholism and drug addiction. Both cancer and heart disease are modern afflictions normally traceable, directly, or indirectly, to work.

Work, then, institutionalizes homicide as a way of life. People think the Cambodians were crazy for exterminating themselves, but are we any different? The Pol Pot regime at least had a vision, however blurred, of an egalitarian society. We kill people in the six-figure range (at least) in order to sell Big Macs and Cadillacs to the survivors. Our forty or fifty thousand annual highway fatalities are victims, not martyrs. They died for nothing—or rather, they died for work.

But work is nothing to die for.

Bad news for liberals: regulatory tinkering is useless in this life-and-death context. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration was designed to police the core part of the problem, workplace safety. Even before Reagan and the Supreme Court stifled it, OSHA was a farce. At previous and (by current standards) generous Carter-era funding levels, a workplace could expect a random visit from an OSHA inspector once every 46 years.

State control of the economy is no solution. Work is, if anything, more dangerous in the state-socialist countries than it is here. Thousands of Russian workers were killed or injured building the Moscow subway. Stories reverberate about covered-up Soviet nuclear disasters which make Times Beach and Three-Mile Island look like elementary-school air-raid drills. On the other hand, deregulation, currently fashionable, won't help and will probably hurt. From a health and safety standpoint, among others, work was at its worst in the days when the economy most closely approximated *laissez-faire*.

Historians like Eugene Genovese have argued persuasively that—as antebellum slavery apologists insisted—factory wage-workers in the Northern American states and in Europe were

worse off than Southern plantation slaves. No rearrangement of relations among bureaucrats and businessmen seems to make much difference at the point of production. Serious enforcement of even the rather vague standards enforceable in theory by OSHA would probably bring the economy to a standstill. The enforcers apparently appreciate this, since they don't even try to crack down on most malefactors.

What I've said so far ought not to be controversial. Many workers are fed up with work. There are high and rising rates of absenteeism, turnover, employee theft and sabotage, wildcat strikes, and overall goldbricking on the job. There may be some movement toward a conscious and not just visceral rejection of work. And yet the prevalent feeling, universal among bosses and their agents and also widespread among workers themselves is that work itself is inevitable and necessary.

I disagree. It is now possible to abolish work and replace it, insofar as it serves useful purposes, with a multitude of new kinds of free activities. To abolish work requires going at it from two directions, quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand, on the quantitative side, we have to cut down massively on the amount of work being done. At present most work is useless

or worse and we should simply get rid of it. On the other hand—and I think this is the crux of the matter and the revolutionary new departure—we have to take what useful work remains and transform it into a pleasing variety of game-like and craft-like pastimes, indistinguishable from other pleasurable pastimes, except that they happen to yield useful end-products. Surely that shouldn't make them *less* enticing to do. Then all the artificial barriers of power and property could come down. Creation could become recreation. And we could all stop being afraid of each other.

I don't suggest that most work is salvageable in this way. But then most work isn't worth trying to save. Only a small and diminishing fraction of work serves any useful purpose independent of the defense and reproduction of the work-system and its political and legal appendages. Twenty years ago, Paul and Percival Goodman estimated that just five percent of the work then being done—presumably the figure, if accurate, is lower now—would satisfy our minimal needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Theirs was only an educated guess but the main point is quite clear: directly or indirectly, most work serves the unproductive purposes of commerce or social control. Right off the bat we can liberate tens of millions of salesmen, soldiers, managers, cops, stockbrokers, clergymen, bankers,

lawyers, teachers, landlords, security guards, ad-men and everyone who works for them. There is a snowball effect since every time you idle some bigshot you liberate his flunkys and underlings also. Thus the economy *implodes*.

Forty percent of the workforce are white-collar workers, most of whom have some of the most tedious and idiotic jobs ever concocted. Entire industries, insurance and banking and real estate for instance, consist of nothing but useless paper-shuffling. It is no accident that the “tertiary sector,” the service sector, is growing while the “secondary sector” (industry) stagnates and the “primary sector” (agriculture) nearly disappears. Because work is unnecessary except to those whose power it secures, workers are shifted from relatively useful to relatively useless occupations as a measure to assure public order. Anything is better than nothing. That’s why you can’t go home just because you finish early. They want your *time*, enough of it to make you theirs, even if they have no use for most of it. Otherwise why hasn’t the average work week gone down by more than a few minutes in the past fifty years?

Next we can take a meat-cleaver to production work itself. No more war production, nuclear power, junk food, feminine hygiene deodorant—and above all, no more auto industry

to speak of. An occasional Stanley Steamer or Model-T might be all right, but the auto-eroticism on which such pestholes as Detroit and Los Angeles depend is out of the question. Already, without even trying, we've virtually solved the energy crisis, the environmental crisis and assorted other insoluble social problems.

Finally, we must do away with far and away the largest occupation, the one with the longest hours, the lowest pay and some of the most tedious tasks around. I refer to *housewives* doing housework and child-rearing. By abolishing wage-labor and achieving full unemployment we undermine the sexual division of labor. The nuclear family as we know it is an inevitable adaptation to the division of labor imposed by modern wage-work. Like it or not, as things have been for the last century or two it is economically rational for the man to bring home the bacon, for the woman to do the shitwork to provide him with a haven in a heartless world, and for the children to be marched off to youth concentration camps called "schools," primarily to keep them out of Mom's hair but still under control, but incidentally to acquire the habits of obedience and punctuality so necessary for workers. If you would be rid of patriarchy, get rid of the nuclear family whose unpaid "shadow work," as Ivan

Illich says, makes possible the work-system that makes *it* necessary. Bound up with this no-nukes strategy is the abolition of childhood and the closing of the schools. There are more full-time students than full-time workers in this country. We need children as teachers, not students. They have a lot to contribute to the ludic revolution because they're better at playing than grown-ups are. Adults and children are not identical but they will become equal through interdependence. Only play can bridge the generation gap.

I haven't as yet even mentioned the possibility of cutting way down on the little work that remains by automating and cybernizing it. All the scientists and engineers and technicians freed from bothering with war research and planned obsolescence would have a good time devising means to eliminate fatigue and tedium and danger from activities like mining. Undoubtedly they'll find other projects to amuse themselves with. Perhaps they'll set up world-wide all-inclusive multi-media communications systems or found space colonies. Perhaps. I myself am no gadget freak. I wouldn't care to live in a pushbutton paradise. I don't want robot slaves to do everything; I want to do things myself. There is, I think, a place for labor-saving technology, but a modest place. The historical and pre-historical record is

not encouraging. When productive technology went from hunting-gathering to agriculture and on to industry, work increased while skills and self-determination diminished. The further evolution of industrialism has accentuated what Harry Braverman called the degradation of work. Intelligent observers have always been aware of this. John Stuart Mill wrote that all the labor-saving inventions ever devised haven't saved a moment's labor. Karl Marx wrote that "it would be possible to write a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class." The enthusiastic technophiles—Saint-Simon, Comte, Lenin, B. F. Skinner—have always been unabashed authoritarians also; which is to say, technocrats. We should be more than sceptical about the promises of the computer mystics. *They* work like dogs; chances are, if they have their way, so will the rest of us. But if they have any particularized contributions more readily subordinated to human purposes than the run of high tech, let's give them a hearing.

What I really want to see is work turned into play. A first step is to discard the notions of a "job" and an "occupation." Even activities that already have some ludic content lose most of it by being reduced to jobs which certain people, and

only those people are forced to do to the exclusion of all else. Is it not odd that farm workers toil painfully in the fields while their air-conditioned masters go home every weekend and putter about in their gardens? Under a system of permanent revelry, we will witness the Golden Age of the dilettante which will put the Renaissance to shame. There won't be any more jobs, just things to do and people to do them.

The secret of turning work into play, as Charles Fourier demonstrated, is to arrange useful activities to take advantage of whatever it is that various people at various times in fact enjoy doing. To make it possible for some people to do the things they could enjoy it will be enough just to eradicate the irrationalities and distortions which afflict these activities when they are reduced to work. I, for instance, would enjoy doing some (not too much) teaching, but I don't want coerced students and I don't care to suck up to pathetic pedants for tenure.

Second, there are some things that people like to do from time to time, but not for too long, and certainly not all the time. You might enjoy baby-sitting for a few hours in order to share the company of kids, but not as much as their parents do. The parents meanwhile, profoundly appreciate the time to themselves that you free

up for them, although they'd get fretful if parted from their progeny for too long. These differences among individuals are what make a life of free play possible. The same principle applies to many other areas of activity, especially the primal ones. Thus many people enjoy cooking when they can practice it seriously at their leisure, but not when they're just fueling up human bodies for work.

Third—other things being equal—some things that are unsatisfying if done by yourself or in unpleasant surroundings or at the orders of an overlord are enjoyable, at least for a while, if these circumstances are changed. This is probably true, to some extent, of all work. People deploy their otherwise wasted ingenuity to make a game of the least inviting drudge-jobs as best they can. Activities that appeal to some people don't always appeal to all others, but everyone at least potentially has a variety of interests and an interest in variety. As the saying goes, "anything once." Fourier was the master at speculating how aberrant and perverse penchants could be put to use in post-civilized society, what he called Harmony. He thought the Emperor Nero would have turned out all right if as a child he could have indulged his taste for bloodshed by working in a slaughterhouse. Small children who notoriously relish wallowing in filth could be organized in

“Little Hordes” to clean toilets and empty the garbage, with medals awarded to the outstanding.

I am not arguing for these precise examples but for the underlying principle, which I think makes perfect sense as one dimension of an overall revolutionary transformation. Bear in mind that we don't have to take today's work just as we find it and match it up with the proper people, some of whom would have to be perverse indeed. If technology has a role in all this it is less to automate work out of existence than to open up new realms for re/creation. To some extent we may want to return to handicrafts, which William Morris considered a probable and desirable upshot of communist revolution. Art would be taken back from the snobs and collectors, abolished as a specialized department catering to an elite audience, and its qualities of beauty and creation restored to integral life from which they were stolen by work. It's a sobering thought that the grecian urns we write odes about and showcase in museums were used in their own time to store olive oil. I doubt our everyday artifacts will fare as well in the future, if there is one. The point is that there's no such thing as progress in the world of work; if anything it's just the opposite. We shouldn't hesitate to pilfer the past for what it has to offer, the ancients lose nothing yet we are enriched.

The reinvention of daily life means marching off the edge of our maps. There is, it is true, more suggestive speculation than most people suspect. Besides Fourier and Morris—and even a hint, here and there, in Marx—there are the writings of Kropotkin, the syndicalists Pataud and Pouget, anarcho-communists old (Berkman) and new (Bookchin). The Goodman brothers' *Communitas* is exemplary for illustrating what forms follow from given functions (purposes), and there is something to be gleaned from the often hazy heralds of alternative/appropriate/intermediate/convivial technology, like Schumacher and especially Illich, once you disconnect their fog machines. The situationists—as represented by Vaneigem's *Revolution of Daily Life* and in the *Situationist International Anthology*—are so ruthlessly lucid as to be exhilarating, even if they never did quite square the endorsement of the rule of the worker's councils with the abolition of work. Better their incongruity, though, than any extant version of leftism, whose devotees look to be the last champions of work, for if there were no work there would be no workers, and without workers, who would the left have to organize?

So the abolitionists would be largely on their own. No one can say what would result from unleashing the creative power stultified by work.

Anything can happen. The tiresome debater's problem of freedom vs. necessity, with its theological overtones, resolves itself practically once the production of use-values is coextensive with the consumption of delightful play-activity.

Life will become a game, or rather many games, but not—as it is now—a zero/sum game. An optimal sexual encounter is the paradigm of productive play. The participants potentiate each other's pleasures, nobody keeps score, and everybody wins. The more you give, the more you get. In the ludic life, the best of sex will diffuse into the better part of daily life. Generalized play leads to the libidinization of life. Sex, in turn, can become less urgent and desperate, more playful. If we play our cards right, we can all get more out of life than we put into it, but only if we play for keeps.

No one should ever work. Workers of the world... *relax!*

Primitive Affluence

A Postscript to Sahlins

“The Original Affluent Society” by Marshall Sahlins is an essay of wide-ranging erudition whose persuasive power largely derives from two extended examples: the Australian Aborigines and the !Kung Bushmen. The Australian instance, omitted here, is developed from a variety of 19th and 20th century written sources. The data on the Bushmen—or San, as they call themselves—were the result of fieldwork in the early 1960s by Richard Borshay Lee, an anthropologist. Lee has subsequently published a full monograph on work in a !Kung San band in which he augments, recalculates and further explains the statistics relied on by Sahlins. As finally marshalled, the evidence supports the affluence thesis more strongly than ever—and includes a couple of surprises.

“Why should we plant,” asks Lee’s informant, /Xashe, “when there are so many mongongos in the world?”¹ Why indeed? Originally, Lee studied

¹ Quoted in Richard Borshay Lee, *The !Kung San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-

the San equivalent of what is conventionally accounted work in industrial society—hunting and gathering in their case, wage labor in ours. This was the comparison Sahlins cited. In terms of our standard eight-hour workday, a San adult works between 2.2 and 2.4 hours a day²—well below the provisional four hour figure Sahlins references. Not that the San work a seven- or even a five-day week at these ludicrously low levels of labor, for they spend “less than half their days in subsistence and enjoy more leisure time than the members of many agricultural and industrial societies.”³ For *many* Lee might better have said *any*. More often than not a !Kung San is visiting friends and kin at other camps or receiving them in his own.

Upon returning to the field, Lee broadened his definition of work to encompass all “those activities that contribute to the direct appropriation of food, water or materials from the environment”⁴—adding to subsistence activity tool-making and fixing and housework (mainly food preparation). These activities didn’t increase the San workload as much as their equivalents in our sort of society increase ours—relatively we fall even further behind. *Per diem* the manufacture

sity Press, 1979), p 204.

2 *Ibid.*, p 256.

3 *Ibid.*, p 259.

4 *Ibid.*, p 253.

and maintenance of tools takes 64 minutes for men, 45 minutes for women.⁵ “Housework” for the San means mostly cracking nuts, plus cooking—most adults of both sexes and older children crack their own mongongo nuts, the only activity where women do more work than men: 2.2 hours a day for men, 3.2 hours for women.⁶ Nor are these figures fudged by unreported child labor. Until about age fifteen San children do virtually no work, and if they are female they continue to do little work until marriage, which may be some years later.⁷ Our adolescents fare worse at McDonald’s, not to forget that women and children comprised the workforce for the brutal beginnings of industrialization in Britain and America.⁸

It is often asserted that in most societies women work more than men⁹ and this is probably, in general, true. In a perhaps not

5 *Ibid.*, p 277.

6 *Ibid.*, p 277-278.

7 *Ibid.*, p 265.

8 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp 308-309 & *passim*; Stephen A. Marglin, “What Do Bosses Do?” in *The Division of Labour*, ed. André Gorz (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1976), pp 37-38; American Social History Project, *Who Built America?* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), Vol. I, pp 251-256.

9 Harry C. Trandis, “Work and Nonwork: Intercultural Perspective,” in *Work and Nonwork in the Year 2000*, ed. Marvin D. Dunnette (Belmont, MA: Wadsworth, 1973), p 41 (based on Human Relations Area File data).

unrelated development, women in all known societies wield less political power than men, in fact usually none whatsoever. A thoughtfully strategic feminism should therefore eventuate in anarchism, not in fantasies of matriarchal table-turning; and in the abolition of work, not in caterwauling for equal pay for equal work.¹⁰ The only mathematically certain way to equalize, gender-wise, government and work is to get rid of both of them. In San society, however, men work more than women. Men do one-third more subsistence work than women, although they provide only 40% of caloric intake.¹¹

When the full tally of work as Lee expansively defines it is taken, the average workweek is 44.5 hours for men, 40.1 hours for women.¹²

Lee's original figures relied on by Sahlins were startling enough, but the later data enhance their value by allowing comparisons of housework as well as subsistence work. Our world of work has a dirty secret: wage-work rests on the indispensable prop of unpaid "shadow work."¹³ The arduous toil of housewives—

10 Cf. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (rev. ed: New York, Bantam, 1971), pp 200-202.

11 Lee, *op. cit.*, pp 205, 261-262.

12 *Ibid.*, p 278.

13 Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (Boston: Marion Boyers, 1981), especially ch 5.

cleaning, cooking, shopping, childcare—is so much uncompensated drudgery literally unaccounted for in statistics on work. With us as much as with the San such work is usually women’s work, to a much greater extent among us. How many husbands perform even two hours of housework a day? How many wives, like their San counterparts, less than three? Nor does San society exhibit any sight so sorry as the majority of married women working for wages or salaries *in addition* to the housework they always did—and at levels of pay which still reflect sexual inequality.

Lee’s later figures strengthen the affluence thesis in other ways—for instance, caloric intake, previously underestimated, is upped to a more than adequate level. The surplus is stored as body fat against occasional shortages, fed to the dogs or consumed to sustain people’s efforts at all-night trance-healing dances occurring one to four times a month.¹⁴ And despite the staggering variety of plant and animal sources in their diet, the San do not eat many items which other peoples find edible.¹⁵ Their work yields them so many consumer goods that the San as a society can and do exercise consumer choice. To assign such societies to the category “subsistence

¹⁴ Lee, *op. cit.*, p 270.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chs 6 & 8.

economy” is not only foolish phraseology—what economy is *not* a subsistence economy?—as Pierre Clastres argues, it passes an adverse value judgment in the guise of a statement of fact.¹⁶ The implication is that these societies have failed to be other than what they are, as if it were unthinkable anybody might prefer a leisurely life bereft of bosses, priests, princes, and paupers. The San have a choice. In the 1960s and 1970s, amidst a worsening political situation in Botswana and neighboring Namibia, many San gave up foraging for employment by Bantu cattle ranchers or South African farmers.¹⁷ All along they were able but not willing to work for wages.

As Ivan Illich observes, “Economists understand about work about as much as alchemists about gold.”¹⁸ In positing as twin fatalities infinite wants and finite (scarce) resources, they erect a dismal science on axioms every sensible person rejects out of hand. By their lifeways the hunter-gatherers give the lie to the Hobbesian hoax. Resources are bountiful and the San consume them with gusto, but since they are rational hedonists, not ascetic madmen, the San find satisfaction in satiety: they have

¹⁶ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp 6-9.

¹⁷ Lee, *op. cit.*, ch 14.

¹⁸ Illich, *op. cit.* p 105.

worked enough if there is plenty for everybody. So scandalous are the foragers for the economists and their addicts that they call forth paroxysms of pulpit-thumping prejudice, notably by libertarian economist Murray Rothbard and, in a hostile review of my book espousing the abolition of work, David Ramsey Steele.¹⁹ *Liberty* (as it styles itself) suppressed 90% of my rejoinder to Steele. Let me retaliate by quoting him only in quoting myself:

Steele, with unintended humor, explains why hunter-gatherers loaf most of the time: ‘If you have one animal carcass to keep you going for the next week or two, it’s a waste of effort to get another one, and what else is there to do but swap stories?’ The poor devils are *too rich to work*. Cruelly denied the opportunity to accumulate capital, what else is there

19 Murray N. Rothbard, *Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism, and the Division of Labor* (Menlo Park, CA: Institute for Humane Studies, Inc. 1971), a compendium of conservative clichés; David Ramsey Steele, “The Abolition of Breathing,” *Liberty*, Vol. II, No 4 (March 1989), pp 51-57, reviewing Bob Black, *The Abolition of Work and other essays* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, n.d. [1986]). I am told that Steele, a Briton, is an ex-Marxist. If so, he must have made the modish move from left to right more easily in that they are both ideologies of sacrifice and work, “unselfish people can always switch loyalty from one project to another” the way Steele did. For Ourselves, *The Right to Be Greedy* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, n.d. [1983] thesis 120.

for the benighted savages to do but create, converse, dance, sing, feast, and fuck? ²⁰

(*Liberty*, May 1989)

Behind Steele's braying ethnocentrism is a fear of wildness and wilderness, a yearning fear for the call from the Forest, a fear of freedom itself.²¹

Foragers like the San and the Australians²² are not the only prosperous primitives with ample leisure. Gardeners who practice shifting ("slash and burn") cultivation work a lot less than we moderns. In the Philippines, the horticultural

20 "Robbit Bites Duck," *Liberty*, Vol. II, No. 5 (May 1989), p 6, abridging a letter I entitled "Smokestack Lightning." *Liberty* edited out (but I have restored) the concluding reference to *fucking* presumably to lead the libertarians not into temptation and to deliver them from evil.

Steele's wisecrack reveals abysmal ignorance of really existing hunters whose bands are too large to subsist for two weeks on one carcass of anything except maybe a beached whale. He assumes the hunter is the husband and father in an isolated nuclear family, Dagwood Bumstead in a loincloth. Like Rothbard, he does not even mention the available, indeed, well-known works of Sahlins and Lee. Since I referenced them in the book Steele reviewed, his ignorance is a matter of choice. Originally I assumed he meant to insult me when he said I was "half-educated," *op. cit.*, p 51, now I see that, from him, that's a compliment. Until they do their homework on work there is no reason to pay the slightest attention to the economists and the market libertarians.

21 Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983).

22 Geoffrey Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1976), ch. 13 ("The Prosperous Nomads").

Hanunoo annually devote 500 to 1000 hours to the subsistence activity that sustains one adult.²³ At the higher figure, that works out to less than 2 hours and 45 minutes a day. Gardening, augmented by hunting and gathering, was the mode of production among most of the Indians in eastern North America when the Europeans arrived. The clash of cultures has been regarded from many perspectives, but not as insistently as it should be as a collision between worlds of work.

Far from living hand-to-mouth, the Indians produced a surplus—had they not, the settlers would have starved at Jamestown and Plymouth.²⁴ Far from exhausting themselves scrounging for survival, the impression the Indians left on early English observers like Captain John Smith was that their life was a paradise of all but workless plenty. He thought the settlers might enjoy a three-day workweek featuring the “pretty sport” of fishing.²⁵ In 1643, the magistrates of Massachusetts Bay received the submission of two Rhode Island sachems. “Giving them to understand upon what terms they

23 Harold C. Conklin, “An Ethnoecological Approach to Shifting Cultivation,” in *Environment and Cultural Behavior*, ed. Andrew P. Vayda (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press, 1969), p 229.

24 Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp 65-66.

25 Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp 3-4.

must be received under us,” as Governor John Winthrop put it, the Indians were told “Not to do any unnecessary work on the Lord’s day within the gates of proper towns.” Not to worry, replied the sachems: “It is a small thing for us to rest on that day, for we have not much to do any day, and therefore we will forbear on that day.”²⁶

According to one of the Roanoke colonists, to feed one Virginia Indian enough corn for a year required annually 24 hours of work.²⁷ (Morgan 1975) Of course the Indians ate more than corn; New England Indians enjoyed an abundant, varied “diet for superb health,”²⁸ more nutritious and less monotonous than what became standard fare in, say, the back country of the South; or in later industrial tenements.²⁹

“Whatever else early America was,” according to recent scholarship, “it was a world of work.”³⁰ Indian America was anything but, as that

26 Winthrop’s *Journal*. “History of New England, 1630-1649” ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), Vol. II, p 124.

27 Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p 56.

28 Howard S. Russell, *Indian New England Before the Mayflower* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1980), p 92.

29 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). pp 21-22, 38, 164-165.

30 Stephen Innes, “Fulfilling John Smith’s Vision: Work and Labor in Early America,” in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p 21; Rodgers, *op. cit.*, pp 4-5.

Roanoke colonist was not the only one to notice. No wonder that he and the others apparently went native, abandoning the earliest English settlement, leaving only a message carved on a tree that they were gone “to Croatan.”³¹ These first defectors from civilized toil to barbarous ease were not to be the last. Throughout the colonial period, hundreds of Euro-American agriculturalists joined the Indians or, captured in war, refused to return when peace came.³² Women and children were inordinately likely to take to the Indian life-style, readily casting off their restrictive roles in white society, but adult males also sought acceptance among the heathen.³³ Without a doubt work was a major motivation for the choices they made. At Jamestown, John Smith enforced a regimen of labor discipline so harsh as to approach concentration camp conditions. In 1613, some of the English were “apointed to be hanged Some burned Some to be broken upon wheles, others to be staked and some to be shott to death.” Their crime? An historian recounts that all “had run away to live with the Indians and had been recaptured.”³⁴

31 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), pp 137-139, 141.

32 James Axtell, *The Invasion Within* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), ch 13.

33 *Ibid.*; Morgan, *op. cit.*, p 56.

34 Morgan, *op. cit.*, p 74.

The anthropology of work does not suggest any reduction in the quantity or increase in the quality of work in societies of greater complexity. The trend or tendency is rather the other way. The hunt for Virginia Indian men, as for their San counterparts, was more like “sport” than work, but their wives seemed to have worked more than San women if less than their white contemporaries.³⁵ On the other hand, the gardeners work perhaps even less than the San but some of the work, like weeding and clearing new fields, is more arduous. The watershed, however, is the onset of civilization with its government, cities, and class divisions. Peasants work more because they are compelled to: because they have rents, taxes, and tithes to pay. Later the laboring class pays all that plus profits too which are taken by employers whose interests lie in prolonging and intensifying work. There is, in the words of the Firesign Theatre, “harder work for everyone, and more of it too.” Consider how many weeks of subsistence work an Englishman had to do over the centuries: in 1495, 10; in 1564, 20; in 1684, 48; and in 1726, 52.³⁶ With progress, work worsens.

So it was with the American worker. In

³⁵ Ibid., pp 51-52, 56.

³⁶ Joseph Eyer & Peter Sterling, “Stress-Related Mortality and Social Organization,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. (9)(1)(Spring 1977), p 15.

the eighteenth century, there was a general trend for labor, slave and free alike, formerly seasonal, to become continual.³⁷ Technical progress, as usual, made matters worse. Seamen, for instance, were something of an avant-garde of wage-labor. During the eighteenth century, the size of ships and their capacity for cargo greatly increased and the work became heavier and also harder to do. Seamen responded by collective action including strikes—they coined the word, they would *strike* the sails—mutinies, and the ultimate, piracy, the seizure of the workplace. Pirates simplified the management hierarchy, elected their captains, replaced wages with cooperative ownership and risk-sharing, and vastly reduced the hours of work since a pirate ship had a crew five times larger than the merchantmen they preyed upon. Aversion to work was a main motivation. For one pirate, “the love of Drink and a Lazy Life” were “Stronger Motives with him than Gold.” An admiral who impressed some suspected pirates into service on his man-of-war thought to rehabilitate them, “to learn them... working” which “they turned Rogues to avoid.” The governor of the Bahamas said, “for work they mortally hate it,” and another resident of those islands concurred: “Working does not agree with them.”³⁸

37 Innes, *op. cit.*, p 41.

38 Marcus Rediker, “The Anglo-American Seaman as Collective

It goes without saying that the next turn of the wheel, industrialization, made for more and more monotonous work than workers as a class ever endured before.³⁹ There were no volunteers in the industrial army. The earliest American factory operatives were not even, in most cases, formally free: they were women and children sent to work by their lawful superiors, their husbands and fathers.⁴⁰ The factories of the North, like the plantations of the South, rested, so to speak, on servile labor. For a time, much later, the hours of work did decline as organized labor and assorted reformers made shorter hours a part of their agenda. The eight-hour day which we officially enjoy is the cause for which the Haymarket anarchists of 1886 paid with their lives. But the new deal in legislating a forty hour week scotched proposals by then-Senator Hugo Black (later a Supreme Court Justice) for a thirty hour week and the unions dropped shorter hours from their shopping lists.⁴¹ In recent years, workers

Worker, 1700-1750," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, pp 252-286, especially pp 280-281.

39 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), p 276; Marglin, op. cit., pp 37-38. Pre-industrial American employers already preferred servile labor, i.e. slaves and indentured servants. John J. McCusker & Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p 236.

40 Fred Thompson, "Introductory Notes" to Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1975), p 23.

41 Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning*

have dropped unionization from *their* shopping list. Everything that goes around, comes around.⁴²

Not only have the hours of work not diminished, for all the technological progress of the last half century, the years of our lives devoted to work have actually gone up. The reason is that many more people are living to retirement age, which means that the system is getting more years of work out of us: the average American male works eight more years than his counterpart in 1900.⁴³ In the eighteenth century a worker ended his days, if he lived so long, in the poor-house;⁴⁴ in the twentieth, if he lives so long, in the nursing home, lonely and tortured by medical technology. Progress.

I have saved the worst for last: women's work. Today's working women (most women now work, outside the home, as employees) are worse off working than they have ever been. They still do most of the household work they have done since industrialism, and additionally they do wage-work.⁴⁵ Their entry in force into the workforce (they were working all along, *Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

42 John Zerzan, "Organized Labor vs. 'The Revolt Against Work,'" in *Elements of Refusal* (Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1988), pp 170-183.

43 Hunnicutt, *op. cit.*, pp 318-319 n.5.

44 E.P. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p 328 & *passim*.

45 Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp 201-216; Ivan Illich, *Gender* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp 45-48, 53.

but unpaid labor, insane to say, isn't counted as work) in the last twenty years has greatly increased their total toil and, as a result, the total toil altogether (since nobody thinks men are working less).⁴⁶ Even if sex discrimination were entirely eradicated, which is far from imminent, equalized women workers would still shoulder an unequal load of what Illich calls "shadow work," "the consumer's unpaid toil that adds to a commodity an incremental value that is necessary to make this commodity useful to the consuming unit itself."⁴⁷ Civil rights laws do not—cannot—penetrate the household. The history of work, if it has any evolving logic, is a history of the increasing imposition of exhausting toil on women. Any feminism which is not implacably anti-work is fraudulent.

The world of civilization, the world of history is above all, objectively and subjectively, a world of work. The jury is in on the verdict workers pass on what work means to them, subjectively: it hurts and they hate it.⁴⁸ Objectively, it just gets worse in terms of the ways it might imaginably

46 Hunnicutt, *op. cit.*, pp 2-3.

47 Illich, *Gender*, *op. cit.*, p 45 n. 30.

48 Richard Balzer, *Clockwork* (New York: Doubleday, 1976); Barbara Garson, *All the Livelong Day* (New York: Doubleday, 1975); Richard M. Pfeffer, *Working for Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); *Works 2: Twenty Personal Accounts*, ed. Ronald Fraser (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1969); Zerzan, *op. cit.*

get better. Since the late nineteenth century, most work has been “de-skilled,” standardized, moronized, fragmented, isolated, policed,⁴⁹ and made secure against piratical expropriation. To take and hold even one workplace the workers will have to expropriate them all.

Even hard work could be easier, and easier to take, than the bossed work most of us do. In Liberia the Kpelle, for instance, grow rice, which is work—strenuous work—by any definition. But these “neolithic farmers” conduct their work in a way that the organizers of our work can’t or won’t even consider. *Lii-nee*, “joy,” axiomatically accompanies any work the Kpelle

49 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); William Lucy, “Can We Find Good Jobs in a Service Economy?” in *Working in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. C. Steward Sheppard & Donald C. Carroll (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), pp 82-85; Joel Stein, “Automatic Production,” in *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers’ Movements*, ed. Root & Branch (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest Books, 1975), pp 158-173. As Stein notes, as skills decline, required education and credentials levels rise. Obviously, they are unrelated to performance, an inference substantiated in Ivar Berg, *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery* (New York: Praeger, 1970). Not that the bosses are irrational in imposing them: it’s a good guess that the more schooling a person puts up with, the more bullshit he’ll tolerate on the job. “A child must become accustomed to work, and where can the inclination to work be activated so well as at school?” Immanuel Kant, *Education* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p 70. “Children,” moreover, “are first sent to school, not so much with the object of their learning something, but rather that they may become used to sitting still and doing exactly as they are told.” *Ibid.*, p 3.

do, or they won't do any. Work is conducted in groups to the accompaniment of musicians whose rhythms pace the strokes of their hoes and machetes. Intermittently a woman throws down her hoe and dances to entertain her companions and relax muscles made sore by repetitious movements. At the end of the day the workers drink palm wine and sing and dance together.⁵⁰ If this is not Sahlins' original affluent society, it is still an improvement on our allegedly affluent one, workwise. The anthropologist adds that the government has compelled the Kpelle to switch from dry rice-farming to wet (irrigated) rice farming since it is more productive. They demur, but not out of any inherent conservatism: they accepted the advice of the same experts to raise cocoa as a cash crop. The point is that "paddy-rice cultivation will be just plain work without the vital leavening of gossip, singing, and dance"⁵¹—the traces of play which have been all but leached out of most modernized work.

As the 80s ended and the 90s commenced, working hours in America, where millions are without work, went up.⁵² The new two-income

50 David F. Lancy, "Work and Play: The Kpelle Case," *Play and Culture: 1978 Proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play*, ed. Helen B. Schwartzman (West Point, NY: Leisure Press, 1978), pp 324-328.

51 *Ibid.*, p 328.

52 Hunnicutt, *op. cit.*, p 3; Benjamin K. Hunnicutt, "Are We All

family has a lower standard of living than the one-income family of the 1950s. Housework has hardly been diminished by 20th century technology. Time studies suggest 56 hours of housework a week in 1912; 60 in 1918; 61 for families in 1925. In 1931, college educated housewives in big cities worked 48 hours a week, but by 1965 the average for all housewives was 54 hours, with college educated women putting in 19 more minutes a day than those with grade school educations. By 1977, wives without outside employment worked 50 hours a week, those with jobs, 35 hours *excluding* wage-work which at 75 hours “adds up to a working week that even sweat shops cannot match.”⁵³

Primitive productive life was neither nasty nor brutish, nor was it even necessarily short. Significant proportions of San men and women live past age sixty; the population structure is closer to that of the United States than to a typical Third World country.⁵⁴ With us, heart disease is the leading cause of death, and stress, a major risk factor, is closely related to job satisfaction.⁵⁵

Working Too Hard? No Time for God or Family,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 4, 1990, p A12.

53 Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp 159, 178-179, 199, 213; cf. Ann Oakley, *Women's Work* (New York: Vintage, 1974), ch 7.

54 Lee, *op. cit.*, pp 44-48.

55 *Work in America, Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), pp 79-81.

Our sources of stress hardly exist among hunter-gatherers.⁵⁶ (Cancer, the second greatest killer, is of course a consequence of industrialization.)

“Working conditions” for hunters can be hazardous, yet civilized work does not even here exhibit a clear superiority, especially when it is recalled that many of the 2.5 million American motoring fatalities to date involve one or more participants in wage-work (police, cabbies, teamsters etc.) or shadow work like commuting and shopping.

Sahlins had already remarked upon the superior “quality of working life” enjoyed by primitive producers, to borrow a catchphrase from the pseudo-humanist experts in job redesign and job enrichment.⁵⁷ In addition to shorter hours, “flextime” and the more reliable “safety net” afforded by general food sharing, foragers’ work is more satisfying than most modern work. We awaken to the alarm clock; they sleep a lot, night and day. We are sedentary in our buildings in our polluted cities; they move about breathing the fresh air of the open country. We have bosses; they have companions. Our work typically implicates

56 Eyer & Sterling, *op. cit.*, p 15.

57 See generally “Workplace of the Future” (symposium), *Wall Street Journal Reports*, June 4, 1990. I was the token dissident, Bob Black, “All Play and No Work,” *ibid.*, p R17, a severely re-“worked” version of Bob Black, “Why Work?” *Baltimore Sun*, Sept 3, 1990, p 5A [IV].

one, or at most a few hyper-specialized skills, if any; theirs combines handwork and brainwork in a versatile variety of activities, exactly as the great utopians called for. Our “commute” is dead time, and unpaid to boot; they cannot even leave the campsite without “reading” the landscape in a potentially productive way. Our children are subject to compulsory school attendance laws; their unsupervised offspring play at adult activities until almost imperceptibly they take their place doing them. They are the makers and masters of their simple yet effective toolkits; we work for our machines, and this will soon be no metaphor, according to an expert from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration: “In general, robots will work for men, but there may be exceptions in which some robots are higher in the hierarchy than some humans.”⁵⁸ The last word in equal employment opportunity.

⁵⁸ “Someday Your Boss Could be a Robot,” unattributed newspaper story excerpted in *Mallife* #19 (Summer 1990), p 1.

Smokestack Lightning

Bob Black is a revolutionary, smirks David Ramsey Steele, “the way Gene Autry was a cowboy.” (“The Abolition of Breathing,” *Liberty*, March 1989) A Marxist turned libertarian, Steele is miffed that to me his forward progress is just walking in circles. Steele's is the longest, harshest review ever received by *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*, and while no nit to my discredit is too small for him to pick,¹ my critique of work is the major target. Steele tries not merely to refute me but to make me out to be a gesticulating clown, by turns infantile and wicked (they are probably synonyms for Steele). “I'm joking *and* serious,” he quotes me in opening, but if I'm a sometimes successful joker I am serious only “in the sense that a child wailing for more candy is

¹ Since I took German in college, it so happens that I do know that “Nietzsche” doesn't rhyme with “peachy.” I am sure that Ray Davies of The Kinks, Steele's fellow Briton, likewise was well aware that “the Regatta” doesn't really rhyme with “to get at her,” not even in Cockney. We poets stretch the language, but not, like Steele, the truth.

serious.” Steele wants to bomb me back into the Stone Age, just where my ideas (he warns) would land the handful of humans who might survive the abolition of work.

For a fact I am, as accused, joking and serious. Because he is neither, Steele is fated never to understand me. Metaphor, irony, and absurdity play—and I do mean *play*—a part in my expression, which is, for Steele, at best cause for confusion, at worst a pretext for defamation. I write in more than one way, and I should be read in more than one way. My book is stereoscopic. Steele complains I failed to make “a coherent case for some kind of change in the way society is run.” But I did not (as he implies) make an incoherent case for what *he* wants—new masters—I made a coherent case for what *I* want, a society that isn’t “run” at all.

When a libertarian who ordinarily extols the virtue of selfishness calls me “self-indulgent,” he shows he is prepared to sacrifice secondary values if need be to meet a threat of foundational dimensions. Emotionally, the review is equivalent to an air raid siren. Do *not* (repeat), do *not* take this “half-educated” mountebank seriously!

Steele careens crazily between accusing me of snobbery and, as when he calls me half-educated, exhibiting it himself. If with three

academic degrees I am half-educated, how many does Steele have? Six? Who cares? Most of what I write I never learned in school, certainly not the Austrian school. Steele says I am “out of my depth” in economics, oblivious to my vantage point exterior and (if all goes well) posterior to the dismal science of scarcity. I never dip into that malarial pool, not at *any* depth—I drain it. I am not playing Steele's capitalist game, I am proposing a new game. I am not a bad economist, for I am not an economist at all. Freedom ends where economics begins. Human life was originally pre-economic; I have tried to explore whether it could become post-economic, that is to say, free. The greatest obstacle, it seems to me—and Steele never does overtly disagree—is the institution of work, especially I think in its industrial mode. Like most libertarians, Steele so far prefers industry to liberty that even to pose the problem of work as a problem of liberty throws a scare into him.

Much toil must have gone into Steele's only serious criticism that does not depend on a previous faith in *laissez faire* economics, the attempt to reveal my definitions of work and play as confused and contradictory. He quotes my book (pp 18-19) thusly:

Work is production enforced by economic

or political means, by the carrot or the stick... Work is never done for its own sake, it's done on account of some product or output that the worker (or more often, somebody else) gets out of it.

Steele comments: "This seems at first to say that work is work if you do it because you have to or because you will be paid for it. Then it seems to say something different: that work is work if you do it for the sake of an anticipated goal." The first sentence is roughly accurate, the second is not. *All* human action is purposive, as our Austrian Schoolmarm would be the first to agree, which is to say all human action is goal-directed—work, play, everything. Play too has an "anticipated goal," but not the same one work has. The purpose of play is process, the purpose of work is product (in a broad sense).

Work, unlike play, is done *not* for the intrinsic satisfaction of the activity, but for something separate resulting from it, which might be a paycheck or maybe just no whipping tonight. The anticipated goal of play is the pleasure of the action. Steele, not me, is confused when he glosses my definitions to collapse the very distinctions I set out to draw with them.

Elsewhere in this little essay I offer an abbreviated definition of work as "forced labor,"

as “compulsory production.” Predictably, a libertarian like Steele contends that the economic carrot is not coercive as is the political stick. I didn't argue against this unreasonable opinion because only libertarians and economists hold it, and there are just not enough of them to justify cluttering up the majestic breadth and sweep of my argument with too many asides. Steele, I notice, doesn't argue about it either. All this proves is that I am not a libertarian, a superfluous labor since I make that abundantly clear in another essay in the book, “The Libertarian as Conservative.” On this point Aristotle, a philosopher much admired by libertarians, is on my side. He argues that “the life of money-making” is “undertaken under compulsion.” (*Nic. Eth.* 1096a5) Believe it, dude. But even if Ari and I are mistaken, we are neither confused nor confusing. There is nothing inconsistent or incoherent about my definitions, nor do they contradict ordinary usage. A libertarian or anybody else who can't understand what I'm saying is either playing dumb or he really is. People who are maybe not even half-educated understand what I say about work. The first time my essay was published, in pamphlet form, the printer (the boss) reported “it got quiet” when he took the manuscript into the back room; he also thought the workers had run off some

extra copies for themselves. Only miseducated intellectuals ever have any trouble puzzling out what's wrong with work.

Work is by definition productive and by definition compulsory (in my sense, which embraces toil without which one is denied the means of survival, in our society most often but not always wage labor). Play is by definition intrinsically gratifying and by definition voluntary. Play is *not* by definition either productive or unproductive, although it has been wrongly defined by Huizinga and de Kovens among others as necessarily inconsequential. It does not have to be. Whether play has consequences (something that continues when the play is over) depends on what is at stake. Does poker cease to be play if you bet on the outcome? Maybe yes—but maybe no.

My proposal is to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work—the production of use-values—with the best of play, which I take to be every aspect of play, its freedom and its fun, its voluntariness and its intrinsic gratification, shorn of the Calvinist connotations of frivolity and “self indulgence” that the masters of work, echoed by the likes of Johan Huizinga and David Ramsey Steele, have labored to attach to free play. Is this so hard to understand? *If productive*

play is possible, so too is the abolition of work.

Fully educated as he must be, Steele thus flubs my discursive definitions of work. I am no define-your-terms Objectivist; I announce definitions only as opening gambits, as approximations to be enriched and refined by illustration and elaboration. Work is production elicited by extrinsic inducements like money or violence. Whether my several variant formulations have the same *sense* (meaning) they have, in Frege's terminology, the same *reference*, they designate the same phenomenon. (Ah picked up a l'il book-larnin' after all.)

According to Steele, what I call the abolition of work is just “avant-garde job enrichment.” I display “no interest in this body of theory” because it has none for me (I am as familiar with it as I care to be).

“Job enrichment” is a top-down conservative reform by which employers gimmick up jobs to make them seem more interesting without relinquishing their control over them, much less superseding them. A job, *any* job—an exclusive productive assignment—is as “Abolition” makes clear, an aggravated condition of work; almost always it stultifies the plurality of our potential powers. Even activities with some inherent satisfaction as freely chosen pastimes lose much

of their ludic kick when reduced to jobs, to supervised, timed, exclusive occupations worked in return for enough money to live on. Jobs are the worst kind of work and the first that must be deranged. For me the job enrichment literature is significant in only one way: it proves that workers are sufficiently anti-work—something that Steele denies—that management is concerned to muffle or misdirect their resentments. Steele, in misunderstanding all this, misunderstands everything.

I have never denied the need for what the economists call production. I have called for its ruthless auditing (how much of this production is worth suffering to produce?) and for the transformation of what seems needful into *productive play*, two words to be tattoo'd on Steele's forehead as they explain everything about me he dislikes or misunderstands. *Productive play*. Plenty of unproductive play too, I hope—in fact ideally an arrangement in which there is no point keeping track of which is which—but play as paradigmatic. *Productive play*. Activities that are, for the time and the circumstances and the individuals engaged in them, intrinsically gratifying play, yet which, in their totality, produce the means of life for all. The most necessary functions such as those of the “primary

sector” (food production) already have their ludic counterparts in hunting and gardening, in *hobbies*. Not only are my categories coherent, they are already operative in every society. Happily, not many people are so economically sophisticated that they cannot understand me.

If Steele really believes there can be no bread without bakeries and no sex without brothels, I pity him.

Whenever Steele strays into anthropology, he is out of his depth. In “Primitive Affluence” I drew attention to the buffoonery of his portrait of prehistoric political economy, a few cavemen on loan from “The Far Side” squatting round the campfire shooting the shit for lack of anything better to do and every so often carving a steak out of an increasingly putrid carcass till the meat runs out. Racism this ridiculous is sublime, as shockingly silly as if today we put on an old minstrel show, blackface and all. The hunters didn't do more work, he explains, because “they saw little profit in it because of their restricted options.” For sure they saw no *profit* because the concept would be meaningless to them, but their options weren't as restricted as ours are. If the San are any example, they normally enjoyed a choice we only get two weeks a year, the choice whether to sleep in or get up and go to work. More than

half the time a San hunter stays home. What Steele considers “options” are not choices as to what to do, but choices as to what to consume: “when such hunter-gatherer societies encounter more technically advanced societies with a greater range of products, the hunter-gatherers generally manifest a powerful desire to get some of these products, even if this puts them to some trouble.”

This generalization, like the others Steele ventures, only appears to be empirical. In fact it is a deduction from an economic model that assumed away, from the start, any possibility that anybody ever did or ever could act as anything else but a more or less well-informed rational maximizer. Historically, it is insupportable. While the hunter-gatherers (and horticulturalists and pastoralists) often did take from the European toolkit, they wanted no part of the work-subjugation system by which the tools were produced. The San like to turn barbed wire stolen from South African farmers into points more effective and more easily fashioned than those of stone, but they do not like to work in the diamond mines. “Most of humankind,” Steele supposes, “has been practicing agriculture for several thousand years, having at some stage found this more productive than hunting.” The “at some stage” betrays the contention

for what it is, a deduction from the axioms, not historical reportage. Steele would have a cow if someone said, "Most of humankind has been practicing authoritarianism for several thousand years, having at some stage found this more free/orderly/stable/satisfying than libertarianism."

The parallelism is not fortuitous. Overwhelmingly, stateless societies are also classless, marketless, and substantially workless societies. Overwhelmingly, market societies are also statist, class-divided, work-ridden societies. Am I out of line in suggesting there just *might* be a challenge for libertarians in all this that is not fully met by Steele's red-baiting me?

Steele's pseudo-factual contention assumes the consequent, that what everybody everywhere wants is higher productivity. Although Steele characterizes my goal (a little less inaccurately than usual) as something like anarcho-communism or "higher-stage" communism (he remembers the jargon of his Marxist phase), it is Steele who sounds like the collectivist, reifying "humankind" as some kind of organism that "at some stage" *chose* to go for the gold, to take up the hoe. Just when and where was this referendum held? Supposing that agricultural societies are more productive (of what?) per capita, who says the surplus goes to the producers? Steele may no

longer agree with what Engels said in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, but he surely remembers the issues raised there and cynically suppresses what *he* knows but his intellectually impoverished libertarian readership doesn't. Peasants produced more, working a lot harder to do it, but consumed less. The wealth they produced could be stored, sold and stolen, taxed and taken away by kings, nobles, and priests. Since it could be, in time it was—"at some stage" what was possible became actual, the state and agriculture, the parasite and its host. The rest is, literally, history.

If agriculture and the industrial society that emerged from it mark stages in the progress of liberty, we should expect that the oldest agricultural civilizations (now busily industrializing) are in the vanguard of freedom. One stretch of country enjoyed the blessings of civilization twice as long as the next contender. I speak of course of Sumer, more recently known as Iraq. Almost as libertarian is the next civilization, still civilized: Egypt. Next, China. Need I say more?

And once one or more of these agricultural slave societies got going it expanded at the expense of its stateless workless neighbors whose small face-to-face societies, though psychologically gratifying and economically abundant, couldn't

defeat the huge slave armies without turning into what they fought. Thus they lost if they won, like the nomadic armies of the Akkadians or Mongols or Turks, and they also lost, of course, if they lost. It had nothing to do with shopping around for the best deal.

Steele fails (or pretends not) to understand why I ever brought up the primitives at all. It's not because I've ever advocated a general return to the foraging way of life. If only because the specialized stultification of the work we have to do unfits us for the variegated *skilled play* which produces the abundance the hunter-gatherers take for granted. Donald Trump worries a lot more about his economic future than a San mother worries about hers. A hunter-gatherer grows up in a habitat and learns to read it. I've quoted Adam Smith to the effect that the division of labor, even if it enhances productivity diminishes the human personality. Now if there is anything in my entire book a libertarian ideologue ought to answer or explain away it is what the old Adam said about work, but Steele is careful to cover up this family scandal altogether. (How many libertarians, for that matter, know that Smith was a Presbyterian minister? Or that he advocated compulsory schooling precisely in order to counteract the debasing impact of work?)

Hunter-gatherers inform our understanding and embarrass libertarians in at least two ways. They operate the only known viable stateless societies. And they don't, except in occasional emergencies, *work* in any sense I've used the word. They, like we, must produce, but they don't have to work usually. They enjoy what they do on the relatively few occasions they are in the mood to do it; such is the ethnographic record. Some primitives have no words to distinguish work and play because there is no reason to draw the distinction. We're the ones who need it in order to understand what's befallen us. Remarkably, I agree with Steele that we moderns cannot "approximate that lifestyle very closely and still maintain advanced industry, though we could gradually approach it by reduced hours and more flexible work schedules, and a few individuals [this is a dig at me] approximate it fairly closely by a combination of occasional work and living off handouts." Very well then, let's *not* "maintain advanced industry." I want liberty; Steele, in *Liberty*, prefers industry. I think the rag should rename itself *Industry* if that is where its deepest loyalty lies.

In "Abolition" I was deliberately agnostic about technology because I wanted to make the abolitionist case in the most universal terms. It

is not necessary to agree with my actual opinion of industrial technology (very skeptical) to agree with my opposition to work, although it helps. Steele himself doesn't trouble to keep his accusations consistent, on one page charging me with "the ambitious missing of stamping out social cooperation and technology," thus effectuating "the elimination of more than 95 per cent of the world's population, and the reduction of the remnant to a condition lower than the Stone Age" (even *lower!*)—and on the next page saying I repeat "the usual communist claims" that " 'automation' can do almost anything." What Steele quaintly calls the Stone Age is the one million years in which all humans lived as hunter-gatherers, and we have already seen there is much to be said for a lifestyle most of us have sadly been unfitted for. For Steele "the usual communist claims" serve the same diversionary function "the usual suspects" do when rounded up.

At least two science fiction writers who likely know a lot more about high tech than Steele does, the cyberpunks Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner, have drawn on "The Abolition of Work" in sketching zero-work lifestyles that variously turn on technology. In *Islands in the Net*, Sterling extrapolates from several anti-work stances: the "avant-garde job enrichment"

(as Steele would say) of the laid-back Rhizome multinational; the selective post-punk high tech of Singapore's Anti-Labour Party, and the post-agricultural *guerrilla* nomadism of Tuareg insurgents in Africa. He incorporates a few of my phrases verbatim. Shiner in *Slam* recounts an individual anti-work odyssey expressly indebted to several Loompanics books, including “a major inspiration for this novel, *The Abolition of Work* by Bob Black.”

If I am skeptical about liberation through high tech it is mainly because the techies aren't even exploring the possibility, and if they don't, who will? They are all worked up over nanotechnology, the as-yet-nonexistent technology of molecular mechanical manipulation—that SF cliché, the matter transformer—without showing any interest in what work, if any, would be left to be done in such a hypertech civilization. So I find low-tech liberation the more credible direction for now.

It is false, but truer than most of what Steele attributes to me, that I think “the tertiary or services sector is useless.” I view most of this sector—now the largest—the way a libertarian views most of the government bureaucracy. Its dynamic is principally its own reproduction over time. The services sector services the

services sector as the state recreates the state. In *I Was Robot*, Ernest Mann carries forth a long utopian socialist tradition by recounting all the industries that exist only in order that they and others like them can continue to exist and expand. According to the libertarian litany, if an industry or institution is making a profit, it is satisfying “wants” the origins of which are deliberately disregarded. But what we want, what we are capable of wanting, is relative to the forms of social organization. People “want” fast food because they have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn't taste much better anyway, because the nuclear family (for the dwindling minority who have even that much to go home to) is too small and too stressed to maintain much festivity in cooking and eating—and so forth. It is only people who can't get what they want who resign themselves to want *more* of what they can get. Since we cannot be friends and lovers, we wait for more candy.

The libertarian is more upset than he admits when he drops his favored elitist imposture, the lip uncurls, the cigarette holder falls and the coolly rational anti-egalitarian Heinlein wannabe turns populist demagogue. In *Scarface*, Edgar G. Robinson snarls, “Work is for saps.” In *Liberty*, David Ramsey Steele yelps that the *saps* are for

work. When it says what he wants to hear, *Vox Populi* is *Vox Dei* after all—not however when the talk turns to Social Security, farm subsidies, anti-drug laws, and all the other popular forms of state intervention. Steele assures us that workers prefer higher wages to job enrichment. This may well be true and it certainly makes sense since, as I have explained, job enrichment is not the abolition of work, it is only a rather ineffective form of psychological warfare. But how does he know this is true? Because, he explains, there has been virtually no recent trend toward job enrichment in the American workplace. This is blatant nonsense, since for the last fifteen years or more workers have not had the choice between higher wages and *anything* for the simple reason that real wages have fallen relative to the standard of living. Payback is the kind of trouble the prudent worker does not take to counsellors in the Employee Assistance Program.

What I espouse is something that money can't buy, a new way of life. The abolition of work is beyond bargaining since it implies the abolition of bosses to bargain with. By his delicate reference to the standard “job package,” Steele betrays the reality that the ordinary job applicant has as much chance to dicker over the content of his work as the average shopper has to

haggle over prices in the supermarket checkout line. Even the mediated collective bargaining of the unions, never the norm, is now unavailable to the vast majority of workers. Besides, unions don't foster reforms like workers' control, since if workers controlled work they'd have no use for brokers to sell their labor-power to a management the function of which they have usurped. Since the revolt against work is not, could not be, institutionalized, Steele is unable even to imagine there is one. Steele is an industrial sociologist the way Gene Autry is a cowboy. He commits malpractice in every field he dabbles in; he is a Bizarro Da Vinci, a veritable Renaissance Klutz. Surely no other anthropologist thinks "The Flintstones" was a documentary.

With truly Ptolemaic persistence Steele hangs epicycle upon epicycle in order to reconcile reality with his market model. Take the health hazards of work: "If an activity occupies a great deal of people's time, it will probably occasion a great deal of death and injury." Thus there are many deaths in the home: "Does this show that housing is inherently murderous?" A short answer is that I propose the abolition of work not the abolition of housing, because housing (or rather shelter) is necessary, but work, I argue, is not. I'd say about housing what Steele

says about work: if it is homicide it is justifiable homicide. (Not all of it, not when slumlords rent out firetraps, but set that aside for now.) And the analogy is absurd unless *all* activities are equally dangerous, implying that you might just as well chain-smoke or play Russian roulette as eat a salad or play patty-cake. Some people die in their sleep, but not because they are sleeping, whereas many people die because they are working. If work is more dangerous than many activities unrelated to work that people choose to do, the risk is part of the case against work. I have no desire to eliminate all danger from life, only for risks to be freely chosen when they accompany and perhaps enhance the pleasure of the play.

Steele asserts, typically without substantiation, that workplace safety varies with income: "As incomes rise, jobs become safer—workers have more alternatives and can insist on greater compensation for high risk." I know of no evidence for any such relationship. There should be a tendency, if Steele is right, for better-paid jobs to be safer than worse-paid jobs, but coal miners make much more money than janitors and firemen make much less money than lawyers. Anything to Steele's correlation, if there is anything to it, is readily explained; elite jobs are just better in every way than grunt jobs—safer,

better paid, more prestigious. The less you have, the less you have: so much for “trade-offs.”

Amusingly, the only evidence that is consistent with Steele's conjecture is evidence he elsewhere contradicts. Occupational injuries and fatalities have increased in recent years, even as real wages have fallen, but Steele is ideologically committed to the fairy tale of progress. He says “workers have chosen to take most of the gains of increased output in the form of more goods and services, and only a small part of these gains in the form of less working time.” It wasn't the *workers* who took these gains, not in higher wages, not in safer working conditions, and not in shorter hours—hours of work have *increased* slightly. It must be then that in the 80s and after, workers have “chosen” lower wages, longer hours, *and* greater danger on the job. Yeah, sure.

Steele, or Ramsey-Steele, as he used to sign off when he wrote for the hippie paper *Oz* in the 60s—is, if often witless, sometimes witty, as when he calls me “a rope stretched over the abyss between Raoul Vaneigem and Sid Vicious.” My leftist critics haven't done as well. After I called *Open Road* “the *Rolling Stone* of anarchism” it took those anarcho-leftists a few years to call me “the Bob Hope of anarchism,” obviously a stupendous effort on their part. “The Abolition

of Breathing” (what a sense of humor the guy has!) is, its hamhandedness aside, an especially maladroit move by a libertarian. I am in favor of breathing; as Ed Lawrence has written of me, “His favorite weapon is the penknife, and when he goes for the throat, breathe easy, the usual result is a tracheotomy of inspiration.”

As it happens there is light to be shed on the libertarian position on breathing. Ayn Rand is always inspirational and often oracular for libertarians. A strident atheist and vehement rationalist—she felt in fact that she and three or four of her disciples were the only really rational people there were—Rand remarked that she *worshipped* smokestacks. For her, as for Lyndon LaRouche, they not only stood for, they *were* the epitome of human accomplishment. She must have meant it since she was something of a human smokestack herself; she was a chain smoker, as were the other rationals in her entourage. In the end she abolished her own breathing: she died of lung cancer. Now if Sir David Ramsey-Steele is concerned about breathing he should remonstrate, not with me, but with the owners of the smokestacks I'd like to shut down. Like Rand I'm an atheist (albeit with pagan tendencies), but I worship nothing—and I'd even rather worship *God* than *smokestacks*.

No Future for the Workplace

The best future for the workplace, as for the battlefield, is no future at all. With belated notice taken of a crisis in the workplace, the consultants surge forth with faddish reforms whose common denominator is that they excite little interest in the workplace itself. Done to—not won by—the workers, their tinkering is very much business as usual for business, as usual. They may raise productivity temporarily till the novelty wears off; but fiddling with the who, what, when and where of work doesn't touch the source of the malaise: *why* work?

Changing the place of work to the home is like moving from Albania to Somalia in search of a better life. Flextime is, as the Microsoft office joke goes, for professionals who can work any sixty hours a week they want to. It is not for the service sector where the greatest numbers toil. It will not do for fry cooks to flex their time at the lunch hour nor bus drivers at rush hour. Job

“enrichment” is part pep rally, part painkiller—uplift and aspirin. Even workers’ control, which most North American managers find unthinkable, is only self-managed servitude, like letting prisoners elect their own guards.

For Western employers, *glasnost* and *perestroika*—how soon we forgot those unforgettable words!—are too little and too late. Measures that would have been applauded by 19th and 20th century socialist and anarchist militants—indeed, it was from them that the consultants cribbed them—at best now meet with sullen indifference, and at worst are taken as signs of weakness. Especially for North American bosses, relatively backward in their management style as in most other ways, concessions would only arouse expectations they cannot fulfill and still remain in charge.

The democracy movements worldwide have swept aside the small fry. The only enemy is the common enemy. The workplace is the last bastion of authoritarian coercion. Disenchantment with work runs as deeply here as did disenchantment with Communism in Eastern Europe. Indeed, many were not all that enchanted with either of them in the first place. Why did they submit? Why do we? Because, as individuals, we have no choice.

There is far more evidence of a revolt against work than there had been of a revolt against Communism. Were it otherwise, there would be no market for tranquilizers like job redesign, job enrichment, the quality of working life, etc. The worker at work, as to a tragic extent off the job, is passive-aggressive. Not for him (and especially not for her) the collective solidarity heroics of labor's storied past. But absenteeism, job-jumping, embezzlement of goods and services, self-sedation with drink or drugs, and effort so perfunctory that it may cross the line to count as sabotage—these are the ways the little fish emulate the big fish who, flush from peddling junk bonds, looting savings and loan associations, and extending home loans indiscriminately (let government bail them out if they can't collect)—they triumphantly downsize, outsource and Toyota-ize along with new requisitions and repressions which await their neologisms.

What if there were a general strike—and it proved permanent because it made no demands, it was *already* the satisfaction of all demands? There was a time when the unions would have thwarted anything like that, but they don't count any more. Someday the bosses may miss them.

The future belongs to the *zerowork* movement, the revolt against work—should one

well up—unless its object is impossible because work is inevitable. Do not even the consultants and the techno-futurologists take work, and so much else, for granted? Indeed they do, which is reason enough to be skeptical. They never yet foresaw a future which came to pass. They prophesied moving sidewalks and single-family air-cars, not computers or recombinant DNA. Their American Century was Japanese before it was half over. Futurologists are always wrong because they are only extrapolators. The limit of their vision is more of the same—although history (the record of previous futures, the graveyard of previous predictions) is replete with discontinuities, with surprises like the personal computer (try to find it anticipated in *any* science fiction), or Eastern Europe (try to find any academic and/or intelligence community anticipations of the imminent demise of Communism).

Attend to the utopians instead. The difference between the utopians and the futurologists is the difference between more of the same and something different. Since the utopians believe life could be different—and it will—what they say just might be true.

“Work,” referring to what workers do, should not be confused with exertion, “work” in the physicists’ sense. Play can be more strenuous

than work. In a social sense, work is compulsory production, something done for some other reason than the satisfaction of doing it. That other reason might be violence (slavery), dearth (unemployment) or an internalized compulsion (the Calvinist's "calling," the Buddhist's "right livelihood"). Unlike the play impulse, none of these motives even maximizes our productive potential; work is not very productive, although production is its only justification.

Enter the consultants with their toys.

Although it does not have to be, play can be productive, so forced labor may not be necessary. When we work we produce without pleasure so as to consume without creating—containers drained and filled, drained and filled, like the locks of a canal. Job enrichment? The phrase implies a prior condition of job impoverishment which debunks the myth of work as a source of wealth. Work devalues life by appropriating something so priceless it cannot be bought back no matter how high the GNP is.

Life enrichment, on the other hand, consists of the suppression of many jobs and the recreation, in every sense, of the others as activities intrinsically enjoyable—if not to everyone for any length of time, then for some people, at some times, in some circumstances. Work standardizes

people as it does products, but since people by nature strive to produce themselves, work wastes effort lost to conflict and stress. Play is pluralistic, bringing *into play* the full panoply of talents and passions submerged by work and anaesthetized by leisure. The work-world frowns on job-jumping; the play-oriented or *ludic* life encourages hobby-hopping. As their work-conditioning wears off, more and more people will feel more and more aptitudes and appetites unfolding like the colorful wings of a brand-new butterfly, and the ludic mode of production will be the more firmly consolidated.

You say you love your job? Fine. Keep doing it. Your sort will help to tide us over during the transition. We feel sorry for you, but we respect your choice as much as we suspect that it's rooted in your refusal to admit that your present prodigious efforts made life (especially yours) no better, they only made life seem to go by faster. You were coping in your own way: you were hurrying to get it over with.

With the abolition of work, the economy is, in effect, abolished also. Replacing today's Teamsters hauling freight will be Welcome Wagons visiting friends and bearing gifts. Why go to the trouble to buy and sell? Too much paperwork. Too much *work*.

Although the consultants are inept as reformers, they might make magnificent revolutionaries. They rethink work, whereas workers want to think about anything but. But they must rethink their own jobs first. For them to transfer their loyalties to the workers might not be too difficult—it's expedient to join the winning side—but they will find it harder to acknowledge that, in the end, the experts on work are the workers who do it. And especially the workers who refuse to.

What's Wrong with This Picture?

A critique of a neo-futurist's vision
of the decline of work

*The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force
and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*

by Jeremy Rifkin*

Futurists have announced the new post-industrial epoch almost as often as Marxists used to announce the final crisis of capitalism. Admitting as much, Jeremy Rifkin insists that this time, the future is finally here, and here to stay. He may be right.

No original thinker, Rifkin is a lucid concatenator and popularizer of important information, served up for easy digestion. Almost anybody would come away from reading this book knowing more about trends in technology and the organization of work which have already transformed everyday life worldwide and, whatever their ultimate impact, are certain to effect profounder changes still. Along the way,

though, Rifkin makes enough crucial mistakes for his reform schemes, prosaic though they are, to assure their consignment to the utopian scrapheap.

Although Rifkin provides plenty of details, they never detract from the big, basic message. The world as we have known it throughout historic time has been a world of work. For all but an elite few (and even for most of them), their work has (as Rifkin says) “structured” their lives. For all the revolutionary transformations since the dawn of civilization, work as quotidian fatality has (to lift a line from William Faulkner) not only endured, it has prevailed. Indeed, work was longer, harder and duller after the Industrial Revolution and after the Neolithic Revolution before it. Political revolutions have worked profound changes, but not profound changes in work.

That’s all beginning to change, according to Rifkin.

The global economy has never been more productive, but worldwide, unemployment is at its highest since the Great Depression. New technology, especially information technology, is always capital-intensive. It’s blind faith and sheer fantasy to suppose that new technology always replaces the jobs it destroys. All the evidence, as

Rifkin relentlessly and rightly insists, is to the contrary. It's nonsensical and cruel to retrain ten workers for a job only one of them might get (but probably won't, since a young new entry into the workforce is probably healthier, more tractable, and unburdened by memories of the good old days). We're moving toward a "near-workerless world." Out of 124 million American jobs, 90 million "are potentially vulnerable to replacement by machines."

As Rifkin reveals, the tech-driven downsizing of the workforce spares no sector of the economy. In the United States, originally a country of farmers, only 2.7% of the population works in agriculture, and here—and everywhere—"the end of outdoor agriculture" is foreseeable. The industrial sector was next. And now the tertiary sector, which had grown relative to the others and is now by far the largest sector, is getting pared down. Automatic teller machines replace bank tellers. Middle management is dramatically diminished: the bosses relay their orders to the production workers directly, by computer, and monitor their compliance by computer too.

We approach what Bill Gates calls "frictionless capitalism": direct transactions between producers and consumers. Capitalism

will eliminate the mercantile middlemen who created it. In Proletarian Heaven, the handloom weavers must be snickering.

What's wrong with this picture? Fundamentally this: the commodities so abundantly produced in an almost workerless economy have to be sold, but in order to be sold, they must be bought, and in order for them to be bought, consumers require the money to pay for them. They get most of that money as wages for working. Even Rifkin, who goes to great lengths not to sound radical, grudgingly admits that a certain Karl Marx came up with this notion of a crisis of capitalist overproduction relative to purchasing power.

There are other difficulties too. The work of the remaining workers, the knowledge-workers, is immensely stressful. Like text on a computer screen, it scrolls around inexorably, but for every worker who can't take it, there's another in "the new reserve army" of the unemployed (another borrowing from you-know-who) desperate to take her place. And the redundant majority is not just an insufficient market, it's a reservoir of despair. Not only are people going to be poor, they're going to know that they're useless. What happened to the first victims of automation—southern blacks displaced by agricultural technology ending up as a permanent underclass—

will happen to many millions of whites too. We know the consequences: crime, drugs, family breakdown, social decay. Controlling or, more realistically, containing them will be costly and difficult.

If that is the futurist future, seemingly so menacing even to those who are forcing us forward, what's wrong with this picture? Employers should be clamoring for the reform which underpins all the others Rifkin proposes: a shorter work week.

That would put more people on the payroll, giving them something to do besides feeling sorry for themselves or, worse yet, figuring out who's to blame, and providing the purchasing power to buy the commodities the employers are in business to sell. But—to Rifkin's apparent amazement—those Americans still enjoying the dubious privilege of working, work longer hours than they did in 1948, although productivity has since then more than doubled. Instead of reducing hours, employers are reducing their fulltime workforces, intensifying exploitation and insecurity, while simultaneously maximizing the use of throwaway temp workers, momentarily mobilized reservists.

Rifkin is obviously frustrated by the bosses' failure to appreciate what he has ascertained to be

their long-term, enlightened self-interest. His own modest proposal for a kinder, gentler high-tech capitalism accepts as given that a lot of people will continue to work while a lot of others will not. For those who work he proposes shorter hours, but he frets that they may fritter away their free time. Still more worrisome are those whom the economy has demoted to idleness. For both classes, he has a solution. The still-employed are to enter “the third sector,” the volunteer sector (as opposed to the market and government sectors), encouraged by “a tax deduction for every hour given to legally certified tax-exempt organizations.”

And the permanently unemployed will get a government-supplied “social wage,” channelled through “nonprofit organizations to help them recruit and train the poor for jobs in their organizations.”

Hold it right there! Hasn’t Rifkin repeatedly insisted that the early decades of the 21st century, if not sooner, will be a nearly workless future? That productivity will increase as producers dwindle?

Why does this imperative govern the for-profit sector but not the nonprofit sector?

If there’s still so much work to be done, be it ever so feel-good and “community-based,” and if people are to be paid to do it—whatever the

“creative accounting” by which their wages are paid—then this is no nearly-workless world at all. Rifkin is assigning the otherwise unemployable to the workhouse or the chain-gang. That’s, to say the least, an awfully odd conclusion to a book titled *The End of Work*.

What’s wrong (something obviously is) with this picture?

Just this. Rifkin misunderstands, or recoils from, the implications of his very powerful demonstration that work is increasingly irrelevant to production. Why is work getting ratcheted up for those who still do it even as it’s denied to those who need to work to survive?

Are the bosses crazy?

Not necessarily. They may understand, if only intuitively, their interests better than a freelance demi-intellectual like Rifkin does. That supposition is at least consistent with the observed facts that the bosses are still running the world, whereas Jeremy Rifkin is only writing books about it. Rifkin assumes that work is only about economics, but it was always more than that: it was politics too.

As its economic importance wanes, work’s control function comes to the fore. Work, like the state, is an institution for the control of the many by the few. It preempts most of our waking hours.

It's often physically or mentally enervating. For most people it involves protracted daily direct submission to authority on a scale otherwise unknown to adults who are not incarcerated. Work wrings the energy out of workers, leaving just enough for commuting and consuming. This implies that democracy—if by this is meant some sort of informed participation by a substantial part of the population in its own governance—is illusory. Politics is just one more, and more than usually unsavory manifestation of the division of labor (as the work-system is referred to after its tarding-up by academic cosmetologists). Politics is work for politicians, therapy for activists and a spectator sport for everybody else.

If we hypothesize that work is essentially about social control and only incidentally about production, the boss behavior which Rifkin finds so perversely stubborn makes perfect sense on its own twisted terms. Part of the population is overworked. Another part is ejected from the workforce. What do they have in common? Two things—mutual hostility and abject dependence. The first perpetuates the second, and each is disempowering.

Rifkin wonders how the system can deal with vast numbers of newly superfluous people. As he's himself disclosed, it's had plenty of practice.

The creation and management of an underclass is already a done deal. The brave new world of techno-driven abundance—if by abundance you mean only more commodities—looks to look like this:

THE ALPHAS

This would be a relatively small number of tenders of high-tech, allied with essential tenders of people (entertainers, politicians, clergy, military officers, journalists, police chiefs, etc.). They will continue to work—harder, in many cases, than anybody—to keep the system, and each other, working.

THE BETAS

In lieu of the old-time middle class and middle management which, as Rifkin explains, are obsolete, there will be a social control class of police, security guards, social “workers,” schoolteachers, daycare workers, clinical psychologists, with-it parents, etc. It merits special attention that the more robust and aggressive members of what used to be the working class will be coopted to police those they left behind (as one Gilded Age robber baron put it, “I can hire one-half the working class to kill the other half”). Thus the underclass loses its leaders even as it’s distracted by the phantasm of upward mobility.

THE GAMMAS

Here are the vast majority of the population, what Nicola Tesla called “meat-machines,” what Lee Kuan Yew called “digits,” what Jeremy Rifkin is too embarrassed to call anything. They cannot be controlled, as the other classes can, by work, because they don’t work. They will be managed by bread and circuses. The bread consists of modest transfer payments maintaining the useless poor at subsistence level as helpless wards of the state. The circuses will be provided by the awesome techno-spectacles of what, in the wake of the Gulf War, can only be called the military-entertainment complex. Hollywood and the Pentagon will always be there for each other.

Gammas form a mass, not a class, a simple aggregation of homologous multitudes, as Marx characterized the peasantry, “just as potatoes in a bag form a bag of potatoes.” They enjoy certain inalienable rights—to change channels, to check their email, to vote—and a few others of no practical consequence. Wars, professional sports, elections and advertising campaigns afford them the opportunity to identify with like-minded spectators. It doesn’t matter how they divide themselves up as long as they do. As they really are all the same, any differentiation they seize upon is arbitrary, but any differentiation will do.

They choose up teams by race, gender, hobby, generation, diet, religion, every which way but loose. In conditions of collective subservience, these distinctions have exactly, and only, the significance of a boys' tree-house with a "No Girls" sign posted outside. Gammas are essentially fans, and the self-activity of fans is exhausted in their formation of fan-clubs. They are potatoes who bag themselves.

THE DELTAS

This set-up will engender its own contradictions; class societies always do. Bill Gates to the contrary notwithstanding, frictionless capitalism is an oxymoron. There'll be plenty of potholes on the information superhighway. Every class will contribute a portion of drop-outs, deviants and dissidents. Some will rebel from principle, some from pathology, some from both. And their rebellion will be functional as long as it doesn't get out of hand. The Deltas, the recalcitrants and unas-similables, will furnish work for the Betas and tabloid-type entertainment for the Gammas. In an ever more boring, predictable world, crazies and criminals will provide the zest, the risk, the mystery which the consciousness industry is increasingly inadequate to simulate. VR, morphing, computer graphics—all very impressive, for awhile, but there's nothing like a whiff of fear,

the scent of real blood, like the spectacles nobody did better than the Romans and the Aztecs. The show they call “America’s Most Wanted”—that’s a double entendre. Societies don’t necessarily get, as some say, the criminals they deserve, but nowadays they get the criminals they want.

“Whether a utopian or dystopian future awaits us depends,” concludes Rifkin, “to a great measure on how the productivity gains of the Information Age are distributed.” None of his evidence substantiates this ipse dixit, announced so early on that by the time the reader has made it to the policy proposals, he probably assumes that the proof must have been lurking amidst all those facts lobbed at him along the way. In fact, Rifkin’s credibility in predicting the future is strained by his poor performance predicting the past.

Rifkin asserts, almost as an aside, that the American experience of the last 40 to 50 years—higher productivity and longer hours of work—is an aberration without historical precedent. (And thus, presumably, a wrinkle easily ironed out by our statesmen once it’s drawn to their attention by Jeremy Rifkin, tribune of the people.) Both the Neolithic (agricultural) and the Industrial Revolutions spurred productivity and also lengthened the hours of work (as well as degrading work qualitatively, as an experience).

Productivity gains never ushered in utopia before, why should they now? More equitable distribution of the wealth never ushered in utopia before, why should it now? It's not that Jeremy Rifkin knows something he isn't telling us. Rather, he doesn't know something he is telling us.

Rifkin's utopia turns out to be the New Deal. The state-certified, state-subsidized third sector is just the WPA: public works projects. Shortening the workweek by a mere ten hours amounts to no more than bringing New Deal wages-and-hours legislation up to date just as the minimum wage has to be raised from time to time to adjust for inflation. It's far from obvious that these reforms would do much if anything to reverse the trickle-up redistribution of wealth which took place in the 80s. It was World War II, after all, not New Deal social legislation, which effectuated this country's most recent—and quite modest—economic levelling. What Rifkin calls the “social wage” smacks of what Republicans call “workfare.” And using tax breaks to encourage socially responsible enterprise is about as utopian as allowing charitable deductions, but probably not as radical as reducing the capital-gains tax.

Rifkin, like all futurists, is incapable of prophesying a plausible utopian future. A futurist is by definition a forecaster of the continuation of

present trends, but if the present isn't utopian, why should the future-as-the-same-only-more be utopian?

Not to say it can't possibly be, just to say that Rifkin has some explaining to do. He hasn't taken seriously or even acknowledged the possibility that a real end of work is a practical utopian possibility, not just an eye-catching title for a pop-futurist book. But that would involve rethinking work in a radically different way.

Thomas Edison said (but probably knew better) that genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. Utopia is 1% perspiration and 99% inspiration. Its practical possibility was never determined by technology or productivity, although technology and productivity have something to do with it, for better or for worse. Huxley and Orwell in tandem, with the advantage of not knowing nearly as much as Bill Gates and Jeremy Rifkin, long ago saw further than they do. Tech was the dependent, not the independent variable—the consequence, not the cause. There's one and only one profoundly important conclusion of Rifkin's, and the irony is, he doesn't really mean it. It's his implicit equation of utopia with the end of work. But Rifkin has no idea what the end of work would mean because he's given no thought to what work means.

Otherwise he could hardly have thought work is ended by being performed in a different “sector” of the economy. That’s like saying that exploitation is ended once everybody’s employer is a workers’ state.

To speak of the “end” of work is to speak in the passive voice as if work is ending itself and needs only a nudge from progressive policies to wind down without a fuss. But work is not a natural process like combustion or entropy which runs its course of itself. Work is a social practice reproduced by repeated, multitudinous personal choices. Not free choices usually—“your money or your life” is, after all, a choice—but nonetheless acts of human intention. It is (the interaction of many) acts of will which perpetuate work, and it is (the interaction of many) acts of will which will abolish it by a collective adventure speaking in the active voice. Work will end, if it does, because workers end it by choosing to do something else—by living in a different way.

What, after all, is work? Nuances aside (as insightful as exploring them can be), work is production forced by and for survival. Its objectionable aspect isn’t production, it’s forced labor to live. Production without coercion is not only possible, it’s omnipresent. Rifkin points out that half the adult population already does

volunteer “work” (a misnomer) with no economic encouragement at all. That’s not a bad place to start to think about how to reconcile production and freedom.

As Rifkin complains, people who volunteer money to charities can take tax deductions, but people who volunteer their services cannot.

So why are they donating their services? To oversimplify, two main motives are probably operative. The first is benevolence. Many people derive satisfaction from helping other people. The second is satisfaction in the activity itself: the scoutmaster who enjoys the company of kids, the food-kitchen cook who enjoys cooking, or anybody with a craft or skill he cherishes so much he wants to pass it on to others. And these motives often overlap and reinforce each other. Often you can’t help people better than by imparting your skills to them. Most people have more ability than money, and sharing their abilities, unlike sharing their money, doesn’t deprive them of anything. They gain satisfaction, and they lose nothing. Might there be a clue here to really ending work?

Rifkin only discerns, and only vaguely, that the voluntarist spirit has a part to play in the end of work. He doesn’t notice that self-interested activity does too—that play has a part to play. Mary Poppins perhaps exaggerated in saying that “in

everything that must be done, there is an element of fun”, but in many things that must be done, there could be elements of fun. Production and play aren’t necessarily the same, but they’re not necessarily different either. Income and altruism aren’t the only springs of action. Crafts, sports, feasts, sex, games, song and conversation gratify by the sheer doing of them. Rifkin’s no radical, but he’s certainly a leftist, with the Judeo-Calvinist presumption that if you enjoy doing something, especially with others, it must be immoral or frivolous.

We finally know what’s wrong with this picture: we’ve seen it before, and we know how it ends. The future according to the visionary Rifkin is the present with better special effects. Putting people out of work does nothing to put an end to work. Unemployment makes work more, not less important. More makework does not mean less work, just less work it is possible to perform with even a vestige of self-respect. Nothing Rifkin forecasts, not even rising crime¹, offers any promise of ever ending work. Nothing Rifkin proposes does either. So strongly does he believe in the work-ethic that he schemes to perpetuate it even after the demise of the toil it hallows. He believes in ghosts, notably the ghost in the machine. But a spectre is haunting Rifkin: the

¹ The crime rate was falling then, and still is.

spectre of the abolition of work by the collective creativity of workers themselves.

Zerowork Revisited

This year (2005) marks the 20th anniversary of the first publication, in San Francisco, of “The Abolition of Work.” What a long, wild ride it’s been! It’s been republished many times, usually without my knowledge, but always with my consent. It’s been translated into over a dozen languages.

I suspect that part of its success is that it was inadvertently well-timed. It appeared at a time when working hours were getting longer, work was being intensified, AND unemployment was high. If you needed proof that our society is fundamentally irrational, there it is.

This is not the occasion for a formal, systematic, well-organized lecture such as I delivered last year at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Instead, I’ll draw on that one for my informal, unsystematic, disorganized, and much briefer remarks tonight.

You have likely seen the comment by the English economist John Maynard Keynes that "in the long run, we will all be dead." And he was as good as his word. But in 1931, amidst the Great Depression, he did forecast the future of work in the long run. He believed that ever greater capital investment and technological progress would all but abolish work within a hundred years. There will be, he predicted, "an age of leisure and abundance." The only problem would be finding enough work to satisfy the inherent human craving for work—from which you all suffer, no doubt.

Well, we are 82% of the way to almost work-free abundance. As you have, no doubt, noticed. There has been, if anything, even more capital investment and technological innovation than Keynes expected. Keynes thought that in a century we would be working 3 hours a day, so if we were on schedule, we should now be working less than a 4 hour day, which is what Kropotkin said we would work in the anarcho-communist utopia. But the only people working 4 hours a day—or who were, until recently—are anarchist hunter-gatherers like the San (Bushmen) who are entirely spared the labor-saving benefits of capital investment and high technology.

One lesson I take from this is that experts should always be viewed with suspicion, and

experts on work should be presumed to be wrong unless proved to be right. As Ivan Illich put it, “Economists know about as much about work as alchemists do about gold.” I have some more examples.

In “The Abolition of Work,” I wrote that every year 14,000 to 25,000 workers die while working. I can’t remember where I got that.¹ But when I went to update the estimate last year, I found estimates ranging from 1,000 to 90,000. The US Department of Labor estimate for job-related deaths in the years 1993 to 1996 was over 10,000 annually.

What these vastly disparate estimates do tell us is that nobody is bothering to compile these statistics accurately. The government can tell us with fair accuracy how many tons of soybeans were produced last year. But it can’t tell us, apparently nobody can tell us, how many people died in order to produce and market soybeans, automobiles, cell phones or anything else.

Government and business have reasons to want to know production statistics. But government and business, I suggest, have reasons why they would rather not know, or at least that they would rather the public didn’t know, the

¹ I do now (2015). Jeanne M. Stillman & Susan M. Daum, *Work Is Dangerous to Your Health* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 3.

death-toll from work. People might wonder if work is worth the cost in deaths, injuries and illnesses.

Another point, which I made 20 years ago, is that the death toll *from* work must be much higher than the death toll *at* work. I've read that many coroners don't recognize any homicides or car crash deaths as work-related, although we've all read news stories about workers who kill their bosses, their fellow workers, and/or themselves. And surely any death while commuting is a death because of work.

Here's a truly shameless fraud. Since about 1948, the hours of work have increased. But in the same period, productivity has more than doubled. Lord Keynes of course predicted exactly the opposite. From 1969 to 1989, the average annual working hours of fulltime workers rose by 158 hours, which is an astonishing one month a year of extra work. In the following 20 years, it has gotten even worse.

The 1999 annual report on the American workforce by the US Department of Labor is very smug about the coexistence of low unemployment and low inflation. But the government was nervous about claims that Americans are overworked. For instance, in a book by Julia Schor, *The Overworked American*. I often cite this book myself. The

Department of Labor blandly asserted that hours of work have been in general stable since 1960.

This conclusion is based on three glaring methodological flaws.

#1: The data on working hours are based on reports from employers, not by workers. Employers have many reasons to understate working hours, for example, to conceal illegal overtime, or their employment of illegal aliens. I also suspect that many businesses, especially small businesses, don't report in at all, and the ones that don't are probably the ones with the longest working hours, the sweatshops.

Although it would involve a little more trouble and expense, there's no reason why the government, which has the identity of workers through Social Security, can't survey a sample of them and compare their reports to their employers' reports. That would probably show that the employer statistics are worthless.

#2: If a worker has more than one job—get this—only the hours worked on the main job are counted! The most overworked workers of all are the ones with two or more jobs, obviously. And there's been a vast increase in workers like this. It's one of the major developments since I first wrote on this topic. But the working hours of these overworkers aren't counted properly.

#3: If you thought that those were crass deceptions, I've saved the worst for last. One of the major trends in work is longer hours for fulltime workers. Another is a spectacular increase in part-time work, mainly among people who can't find fulltime work. These are completely different categories of workers. So what does the government do? It adds together the workers doing too much work with the workers not doing enough work, splits the difference, and announces that workers are working, on average, the usual hours, and in some cases even less. For the state, two wrongs *do* make a right, or they make everything all right.

In concluding, or anyway ending this talk, I'd like to draw your attention to an aspect of "The Abolition of Work" which nobody seems to have noticed. It is not an explicitly anarchist essay. In fact, I mentioned anarchism only once, and not favorably. I wrote that "all of the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchism, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else."

When I mentioned authors whom I considered relevant I did include anarchists such as Kropotkin, Paul Goodman and even Murray Bookchin. I was pretty mad at anarchists in 1985.

Chris Carlsson and his fellow Marxist thugs at *Processed World* had just run me out of town. Most local anarchists, except for Lawrence Jarach and Brian Kane, played footsie with *Processed World* or else looked the other way. Some of them are still looking the other way. It was years before I would again identify myself as an anarchist.

And yet, “The Abolition of Work” is an anarchist essay. Most anarchists understand that the state didn’t come out of nowhere. The state is connected to particular forms of society. So is anarchy. Most anarchists understand that you can’t abolish the state without abolishing capitalism. That’s true, but I took the argument further. I say that you can’t abolish the state without abolishing work.

I wasn’t the first anarchist to identify the abolition of work as an anarchist issue. John Zerzan’s writings in the 1970s about the revolt against work influenced me and they at least imply the abolition of work. (Although John wasn’t calling himself an anarchist then.) What I think I did do was define work as a basic anarchist issue. I forced even the pro-work anarchists like anarcho-syndicalists and Platformists to defend work instead of just taking it for granted. They ridicule the zero-work idea instead of trying to refute it, so, the idea goes unrefuted. Naturally,

that means that more people will agree with it. The number of intellectually serious critiques I've received in the last 25 years is shockingly small. And I don't think any of them came from an anarchist.

I like to think that, after my essay, anarchist thought is not quite the same and never will be quite the same. Anyway, that anti-copyrighted essay, and this one, is my gift to all of you.

This text (here slightly revised) was intended to be delivered as a speech at Gilman Street in Berkeley, California, in late March 2005, but I was unable to get there.

Why Not Call a Holiday?

a review of *GRAND NATIONAL HOLIDAY AND CONGRESS OF THE PRODUCTIVE CLASSES* by William Benbow*

In 1832, the National Union of the Working Classes published this once-notorious pamphlet. The author, William Benbow, then 48, was an English artisan and lifelong agitator whose historic contribution to radical political thought was the Grand National Holiday of the Working Classes—later and better known as the General Strike. He called for a one-month universal work stoppage during which the producers would send representatives “to establish the happiness of the immense majority of the human race, of that far largest portion called the working classes,” just as the elite assembles to secure its happiness in Parliament.

Benbow was not very specific about what

* Edited and Introduced by S.A. Bushell. London: Pelagian Press. Pbk. £2.50.

the Congress would do, but he was essentially a leveler. English society was rotten because of “too much idleness on the one hand, and too much toil on the other.” Every wealthy idler “must be made [to] work in order to cure his unsoundness.” But unlike the syndicalists, who later took up the call for a general strike, Benbow, though he rather romanticized workers as the repository of virtue, did not glorify work or summon the masses to prodigies of production. It was a simple matter of equal rights and responsibilities, including “equal toils” and “equal share of production.” If anything, Benbow anticipated the anti-work standpoint:

Every portion must be made work, and then the work will become so light, that it will not be considered work, but wholesome exercise. Can any thing be more humane than the main object of our glorious holiday, namely, to obtain for all at the least expense to all, the largest sum of happiness for all?

In other words, no Calvinist-Marxist nonsense here about work as a calling from God (or History) or labor as the realization of the human essence: the less work, the better. There is only a hint, if even that, of his contemporary Fourier’s argument for the transformation of work into productive play (it is highly unlikely Benbow had heard of Fourier by 1832). But William Morris

would later produce a sophisticated synthesis of, in effect, Benbow's and Fourier's approaches to the transformation of work.

Much more original, and interesting, than his proposal for a Congress was Benbow's proposal for the Grand National Holiday. As we have seen, for Benbow the proper ends of society—purposes it failed to serve except for "the idle, dronish few"—were "ease, gaiety, pleasure and happiness." The people "have not even existed, for they have not enjoyed life," others have done the enjoying, the living, in their stead. "The people are nothing for themselves, and everything for the few." (And still are.) The Grand National Holiday was how Benbow proposed to kick off this revolution of egalitarian hedonism, but it was also something else: it was revolutionary egalitarian hedonism. No need to agonize and moralize whether the ends justify the means when they are one and the same.

Benbow's Holiday hearkens back to pre-capitalist revelry in ways lost to his syndicalist successors. He does not shrink from saying the Holiday is "a holy day, and ours is to be of holy days the most holy," for it "is established to establish plenty, to abolish want, to render all men equal!" He is (he insists) no innovator. "The Sabbath was a weekly festival" for the

ancient Hebrews when they fed upon manna, in abundance, when “no servile work was done, and servants and masters knew no distinction.” Then every seventh year was “the year of release,” a “continued—unceasing festival; it was a season of instruction; it was a relief to poor debtors.” Benbow (a Christian, although he hosted “infidel chapels” where blasphemous rituals were performed and was prosecuted for publishing pornography) clearly drew upon, and sought to reactivate deep, and deeply buried Protestant plebeian dissident tendencies which went back to the English Civil War and even earlier. His vaguely communist economic program goes back to the Diggers. His hedonism, his longing to revive “not only religious feasts, but political ones,” and (as we know from his soft-core porn—examples of which are appended to this edition) his aspiration to sexual freedom place him squarely in the counter-cultural tradition of the Ranters.

The Holiday, that is, prefigured the permanent revolution its delegates to the extra-Parliamentary Congress were supposed to institutionalize. Indeed those on Holiday were not to wait on their delegates. Benbow suggested that working people store up enough food and money to get them through the first week of the

Holiday without working. By then they should be organized enough to requisition what they need to make it through the next three weeks.

Rich liberals, he slyly suggests—the rich liberals who had just won the vote for themselves thanks to working-class agitation, then turned around to deny the vote to the same workers—would be happy to act on their liberal reform convictions by sharing out what they have to those embarked upon so worthy a cause, “all the great reformers are to be applied to, and the people will have no longer any reason to suspect reformers’ consistency. The reformers will hold out an open hand to support us during our festival... Until they are tried no one can imagine the number of great men ready to promote equal rights, equal justice, and equal laws all throughout the kingdom.” On a point of detail, the Congress will assemble somewhere in the middle of England under the auspices of “some great liberal lord”:

It should be a central position, and the mansion of some great liberal lord, with its out houses and appurtenances. The only difficulty of choice will be to fix upon a central one, for they are all sufficiently vast to afford lodging to the members of the Congress, their lands will afford nourishment, and their parks a beautiful place for meeting.

It may be relied upon, that the possessor of the mansion honoured by the people's choice, will make those splendid preparations for the representatives of the sovereignty of the people, that are usually made for the reception of a common sovereign.

Benbow was no theorist or seer. He held a rather simplistic sub-Enlightenment opinion that the people were enslaved by their elite-enforced ignorance (there's a lot more to it than that). Into the 1850s (when he is lost to view) he agitated mainly for universal suffrage, something which, once won a decade later, never did level the class system in Britain. In other capitalist class societies—the United States, for instance—there never existed the monarchs, aristocrats and bishops Benbow mostly (but not, to be sure, entirely) blamed for the oppression of the people. The American experience proves that exploitation is very effective (perhaps more effective) without these archaic social residues.

The Grand National Holiday is an exemplary resolution of what might be called, echoing the Prisoner's Dilemma, the Revolutionary's Dilemma. To make a social revolution, people as they now are must make a revolution out of existing materials. Revolution requires continuity. But for it to count as a social revolution, people

must live in a new and qualitatively different way. Revolution requires discontinuity. Rapidly and radically, what is living in the existing order—where, to live at all, it is probably latent, disguised or deformed—has to be freed of what is dead. Miscalculating which is which is disastrous. Marx and the syndicalists, for instance, thought that what was living in capitalism was the development of the productive forces with the concomitant emergence of the first universal class, the proletariat. The Revolution therefore implied the socialization, rationalisation and intensification of industrial development, as well as the generalisation of the proletarian condition. It is by now obvious, except to a handful of sectarians, that the development of the productive forces perennially renews capitalism. And proletarianization has eliminated enclaves of working-class community and elaborately segmented the labor force to the detriment of class consciousness. Productivism and workerism proved to be ideologies of capitalism.

Benbow's resolution of the Dilemma, in contrast, in retrospect appears Revolutionary if incomplete. The Holiday tapped collective memories of cooperative accomplishment and communal festivity. It tapped individual memories of shorter hours of work, many more

holidays, and relative autonomy in production. The Sabbath the workers remembered was indeed, as Benbow reminded them, a sacred time—but the sacred was by then a contested concept. For the Dissenters (heirs to the Puritans) the Sabbath was a day of abstinence from work, certainly, a day of rest, but it was also a day of prayer, public worship and abstinence from enjoyment. For most workers, rest and recreation in fellowship with one another was the essence of the sacred. Its religious character was diffuse, permeating ordinary enjoyments like eating, drinking and dancing, not concentrated in specialized, discrete activities unrelated to the rest of life. For the Dissenter or the Methodist, when he was not performing explicitly and exclusively religious functions on Sunday he should not be doing anything at all. It was only partly in mockery that workers referred to their unauthorized Monday holiday as “St. Monday”—the bane of employers—when they either resumed or slept off Sunday’s revels. The name also implied that this work-free day, like Sunday, was a holy day.

So far the Holiday is continuous with a still-remembered and not entirely vanished past. What then is revolutionary and discontinuous about it? Mainly this. Traditional community was a matter of custom, not conscious contrivance,

and it was local, parochial. As such it was dismantled piecemeal by enclosure acts, having already been divided by class differentiation and perhaps religious disunion. It was difficult to perceive, from within, that the unique fate of a local community, which might be generations in the unfolding, was a moment in a national trend. Under these circumstances, Benbow's insistence that "ignorance is the source of all the misery of the many" is more than merely a naive relic of Enlightenment optimism. (Although it echoed another current of thought—the "Jacobinism" of Thomas Paine and the Corresponding Societies of the 1790s—which still influenced radical thinking.) It was now necessary for "the many," "the people," the "productive classes" to think of themselves on a national scale in order to act for themselves on a national scale: "When they fight for themselves, then they will be a people, then will they live, then will they have ease, gaiety, pleasure and happiness; but never until they do fight for themselves." The remedy "is simply—UNITY OF THOUGHT AND ACTION—Think together, act together, and you will remove mountains—mountains of injustice, oppression, misery and want."

The Holiday recreates community on a national scale, the only scale on which it is

now possible—but this means simultaneous, generalized local actions. It recovers the festive, sacral content of holy days at the same time that it consciously withdraws labor from the nonproducing classes who enjoy its fruits. It is the General Strike and a party, the longest "rave" ever, all rolled up in one, freedom as necessity, necessity as freedom. Benbow is quite insistent that the Holiday precede and, at its own pace, produce the Congress. Only in conditions of unhurried leisure and unrestrained play is it reasonable to expect the people to deliberate upon the shape of the future and choose trustworthy delegates to the Congress.

Benbow's scheme unwittingly acknowledges—and at the same time gets around—the insight, at least as old as Plato and Aristotle and very much meaningful to the English ruling class, that wage-laborers, like slaves, are unfit to vote because they lack the economic independence to vote their own minds. Today, of course, it is not a question of bosses telling workers how to vote but rather the way work preempts the time and often warps the faculties necessary for responsible citizenship. The Holiday could hardly undo the damage already done to workers by wage-labor in general and factory work in particular (to which even Adam Smith attested). But it could

relieve the workers for a not negligible period of the need to work and concern for subsistence (“committees of management of the working classes” were to have requisitioned provisions sufficient to last the Holiday). The Holiday interrupted the vicious circle of self-perpetuating proletarian political incapacity orchestrated from above.

Benbow was not just a plebeian putting a proletarian spin on scraps of utilitarian doctrine as so many “Radicals” then did. He espoused the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but he had his own ideas what that entailed, and share-the-wealth and the overthrow of inherited privilege were only part of the program. Benbow appreciated that the quality of life was more than a matter of redistributing the wealth and enfranchising the workers. Sounding very much like the “Young Marx” or some other Left Hegelian, Benbow says: “The existence of the working man is a *negative*. He is alive to production, misery, and slavery—dead to enjoyment and happiness.” In the worker there is (as Croce said there was in Marxism) something living and something dead. What was dead in the worker was what made him a worker, his work, “production,” and what it entailed, misery and slavery. What was alive was whatever the

worker preserved in the shrinking sphere of life apart from work. But what happened at work affected the worker on the job and off: "By saying what the people *do*, we explain what they are. By saying what they *can* and *ought* to *do*, we explain what they *can* and *ought* to *be*." Fundamentally, it comes down to the possibility of self-activity (whether individual or collective or what combination of the two is an important but secondary concern).

We now know that as to means to the end, Benbow was mistaken in several respects. Universal suffrage never ushered in the Revolution—on occasion, as Proudhon put it, "Universal suffrage is the counter-revolution." As for redistributing the wealth, it has never been tried, although it's been approximated for brief periods, in small areas, during the Russian and Spanish and other modern Revolutions. But significant redistribution of wealth has taken place, in Britain, for instance, and in the Scandinavian social democracies. Benbow would doubtless be delighted that the descendants of the "liberal lords" he despised (and the conservative lords too) have been stripped of most of their wealth and reduced, in some cases, to charging admission to tourists to view their stately homes. But this has not changed the fact that, as all

Britons are well aware, Britain is still a capitalist class society, if not a particularly prosperous progressive one. The working class is still, in current argot, *knackered*.

Benbow's enduring interest is not as a prophet—although, as prophets go, he compares favorably to Marx—but as formulating, for his time and place, a solution to the Revolutionary's Dilemma. Whether it would have worked, we'll never know. As Benbow's modern editor S.A. Bushell explains, there was serious opposition to Benbow's proposal even within the organization which published it, and efforts to commence the Holiday proved abortive. Although what Benbow expected of the Holiday and the Congress is rather vague, they were clearly to redress both political and economic injustice, which the Radical Whig tradition had always regarded as interrelated (this was "corruption," not a generic term of moralistic abuse but a term of art in radical libertarian ideology). Benbow's ideas lost relevance when radical and/or working-class activism diverged into discrete political and economic channels (and into more than one of each). Benbow himself seems to have devoted the rest of his life to political reform—specifically, to enlarging the electorate. Others pursued economic improvement through trade-union organization. The politically- and the

economically-oriented in turn split into reformist and revolutionary currents, a distinction Benbow would not have considered meaningful, although it was soon to become crucial.

What is living in Benbow's celebrated tract? Maybe more than there ever has been between his time and ours. It is a concrete and plausible resolution to the Revolutionary's Dilemma in the form it assumed at that conjuncture and, as such, an example which makes the Dilemma vivid for us, although the dilemma assumes other forms today. But, as editor Bushell contends, the Holiday might actually be worth trying today, if the General Strike were reconceived as an unauthorized Holiday: perhaps "the old strike idea might gain in popularity if we reverted to the old description." After all, the counter-cultural revolutionaries have never had any objection to a universal work stoppage. Indeed, they are rather more into it than the syndicalists, for they see no reason why it should ever end. Productive activity, to be sure, would eventually have to resume, but work might not have to. Something Benbow said about the Holiday—something no advocate of the General Strike ever seems to have said—is that it is an opportunity for *reflection*, "to get rid of our ignorant impatience, and to learn what it is we do want." To think freely, unhurriedly.

The Holiday is everything the General Strike could be and more. It's something all anti-authoritarians should be able to agree on, as they all want at least that much to happen to eviscerate corporate and state power. That much accomplished, the people can decide if they want to go back to work under workers' councils or federated trade-unions or never go back to work at all. Probably some people will make one choice, other people others. Maybe, after an initial phase of experimentation, some arrangement will shake out which accommodates what is living in these various systems. Anyone who genuinely desires universal freedom ought not to shrink from a real opportunity to test what form (or lack thereof) she thinks freedom would take. Why not take a Holiday and see what happens?

What Work Means— And Why That Matters

In the beginning of David H's "What Do We Mean by Work?"¹ he writes: "In the beginning of Bob Black's 'The Abolition of Work,' he calls work an ideology. This use of the word ideology in relation to work is one that has never been previously used. This semantic misuse by traditional standards is a reflection of what is to come." Later, H will fake quotations. Here, he fakes a paraphrase. Toward—not right at—the beginning of my essay [I] (in its fourth paragraph), I say that "all the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchism, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else." (17) David H's falsification "is a reflection of what is to come."

This does not say that work is an ideology. It says that *belief* in work is *part* of several ideologies—including, as David H soon makes all

¹ Available online at <http://libcom.org/library/>.

too clear, his own: anarcho-leftism. A text whose thesis is my “semantic misuse” should not, “in the beginning,” or anywhere, falsify meanings. As is obvious throughout my essay, for me work is an activity, indeed an institution, not an ideology. The noun “work” goes with the verb “work.” “No one should ever work,” my *real* beginning (17) is nonsense otherwise. But even if my ideas are nonsense, they aren’t semantic nonsense.

Someone like H, who doesn’t understand the difference between “its” and “it’s”—*it’s* taught in grade school, or *it* used to be—and who is largely unfamiliar with the use of commas, shouldn’t criticize anybody’s use of language.² Also, “independent” does not mean “different,” as H supposes: “Work however in the myriad of ways the term is used”—come on, not *that* many ways—“is in many of its usages [redundant] independent of the way Black defines it.” Later, he

2 Speaking of punctuation: H notes my ironic use of “scare quotes” around the word “communist.” I have long since concurred in Adorno’s condemnation of quotation marks used as ironic devices. I quote Adorno at length (without irony, and without quotation marks) on this point in *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997), 38: Theodor W. Adorno, “Punctuation Marks,” *The Antioch Review* (Summer 1990): 300-305, at 303. Left anarchists are among the worst offenders (thus I am usually an “anarchist,” not an anarchist, etc.). These punctuation marks as used by my enemies have also been called “sneer quotes.” J.O. Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1968), 123-24.

says, “Use values are things we make because we need to use them... “—the same redundant tautology. It is not the case that “farm work is use value work,” because “use value” is not an adjective and it does not mean “useful”—by the way, is tobacco farming “use value work”? And who is the “socialist’s Marx”? Is there yet another Marx Brother? The *anarchist’s* Marx—would that be Groucho or Harpo?³ Here I can’t even guess at what H is trying to say. And that’s why some of these points, regarded one by one, might seem to be quibbles, but the cumulative impact of these blunders is not only wearisome, it either obscures meaning or invites the suspicion that there is none to obscure.

Actually, H himself repeats, without disapproval, my real definition of work (the short version): “forced labor that is compulsory,” except that my version isn’t redundant: I refer to “*forced labor*, that is, compulsory production.” (18) Thus he contradicts his initial accusation. If this “minimal definition” (as I call it)—dare I say, my working definition?—does not agree substantially with commonsense or dictionary definitions of work, H never says so, or if so, why it does not. After all, H agrees with it. It is easy to

3I have implied as much. Black, “Theses on Groucho Marxism,” *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*, 41-43; Bob Black, “In Defense of Marxism,” *Friendly Fire* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 69.

find definitions of work which resemble mine.⁴ I complete the definition by saying that “Work is never done for its own sake, it’s done on account of some product or output that the worker (or, more often, somebody else) gets out of it.” (18-19) The “more often” comment acknowledges my awareness of such work-systems as slavery and wage-labor.

Work, then, can mean what I say it means. I wasn’t trying to be original, I was just trying to be understood. But the word can also mean, says H, “*fulfilling* work.” Now, as a definition of work, or one of them, this will not do. It’s like saying that a definition of “dog” is inadequate if it does not include “brown dog”—in the definition. A definition isn’t usually a catalog of all the attributes that the *definiendum* may have. There are brown dogs, big dogs, rabid dogs, running dogs, etc., but these adjectival facts about certain dogs have no place in the definition of dog.

All my careful efforts to define and distinguish work and play are lost on David H. I sharply repudiated those who, like Johan Huizinga and Bernie de Koven, *define* “play” as inconsequential, as inherently unproductive, by

4 E.g., Ralf Dahrendorf, *On Britain* (London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1982), 183; John White, *Education and the End of Work: A New Philosophy of Work and Learning* (London & Herndon, VA: Cassell, 1997), 10.

the same sort of “semantic misuse” I fault in H: “The point is not that play is [necessarily] without consequences. This is to demean play. The point is that the consequences, if any, are gratuitous.”⁵ (20) I made clear that while work and play are not the same thing, it’s possible for them to have something in common, and it is what they *can* have in common that could form the, for lack of a better word, “economic” basis of a ludic way of life.⁶ (28-31) In this respect I am not too far from Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman, and I am closer still to Charles Fourier and William Morris. But I am very far from today’s organizationalist,

5 This tenet of Huizinga’s is inconsistent with what his book is mostly about: the identification of a “play element” in, among other activities, law, war, poetry, philosophy, art, and even business. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955). I don’t know about DeKoven—I got his phrase (play as the “suspension of consequences”) from the late Gary Warne, whom I harshly criticized in “The Exquisite Corpse,” *Abolition of Work*, 139. It was at Warne’s Gorilla Grotto, “an adult play environment,” that I gave my original speech on the abolition of work. The only thing I’ve since learned about DeKoven is that he is a major figure in the New Games movement which designs noncompetitive games (everybody wins). My position is that there is more to play than playing games. The quoted expression may come from Bernie DeKoven, *The Well-Played Game: A Player’s Path to Wholeness* (3d ed.; San Jose, CA: Writers Press Club, 2002) (originally published in 1978), to which I have no access.

6 The Latin word, *ludi*, refers to games. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 174. But the dictionary definitions of play are much more encompassing. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 2: 2244-2245.

workerist anarchists.

In a rather exasperated reply to a libertarian conservative critic—who is, I am sorry to say, to this day my most intelligent critic—I wrote: “My proposal is to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work—the production of use-values—with the best of play, which I take to be every aspect of play, its freedom and its fun, its voluntariness and its intrinsic gratification... Is this so hard to understand? *If productive play is possible, so too is the abolition of work.*”⁷ Well, David H? Is it so hard to understand?

David H is therefore trivial, and irrelevant, in saying that some people like their work. I acknowledged this phenomenon. Even a job, I said, can have “intrinsic interest.” (19) H probably overestimates the number of such people. How many people who say this would do the same work without pay? Here I agree with Nietzsche: “Looking for work in order to be paid: in civilized countries today almost all men are as one in doing that. For all of them work is a means and not an end in itself... But there are, if only rarely, men who would rather perish than work without

7 See “Smokestack Lightning,” in this volume [III] (emphasis in the original). For another restatement of the basic idea [IV]: “No Future for the Workplace,” *Friendly Fire*, 16. The latter text was first published in a daily newspaper, the *Baltimore Sun*—the paper H.L. Mencken was involved with for most of his professional life. I like that.

any *pleasure* in their work.”⁸

Some people like to *think* they like their work, into which they put so much of themselves, because, if they didn’t think so, their self-esteem would suffer. They don’t want to think that they’re being played for suckers (and I never said that they were: I pass judgment on no individuals). People try to make the best of things, and to rationalize the inevitable. David H, in 2013, understands work almost as well as Friedrich Nietzsche understood it in 1882, but not nearly as well as I understood it in 1980.

Since H has reminded me of the Marxist concept “alienation,” let me in turn remind him of the Marxist concept “false consciousness.” In general, it’s H, not I, whose grasp of Marxist economics is weak. Thus there is no such thing as “Marx’s distinction between a use value and a commodity.” Marx’s distinction is between use-value and exchange-value. Many commodities have use-value. That makes them more saleable.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 108 (§ 42). Nietzsche also discusses how nearly all European men have to accept an occupational role, a job: “The result is rather strange. As they attain a more advanced age, almost all Europeans confound themselves with their role; ... they themselves have forgotten how much accident, moods, caprice disposed of them when the question of their ‘vocation’ was decided—and how many other roles they might perhaps have been *able* to play; for now it is too late.” *Ibid.*, 302 (§ 356).

Use-values are not “things that we make” because use-values are not things. To say so is, as Marx would say, “reification.”

H must have no idea what my thesis is, since he never mentions it. H has just not thought through what it would take to separate and consolidate what can be fulfilling in work from what cannot. One of us has given some thought to the matter, and it isn't him. Isn't this a place where the class struggle anarchists might lend a hand, instead of running around pestering workers and organizing each other? They champion the worker, but they don't know much about what makes a worker a worker: work.

H implies that he is that kind of anarchist—“a Salt”—who takes a job in order to “organize it.” This still happens? Another shot in the foot (the left foot) from language... H doesn't want to organize the *job*—the boss has already done that!—he wants to organize the workers in the workplace. I would like to see some success stories from Salts (taken with a grain of Salt?). Do they call themselves Salts because they think they are the Salt of the Earth? Anyone who can afford to take a job which he can expect to be fired from should not be speculating about whether I am “privileged,” as H reports “some people” do. In this way, H interjects false, irrelevant and derogatory gossip about

me while disclaiming responsibility for it.

“Curiously,” H says, “it isn’t evident that Black has read Marx enough to know that Marx already has a term for this. Marx’s term is alienation which is his word for when we are abstracted from the products we create, or even more generally it means how we are disconnected from our work through the wage system.” I know something of Marx on alienation, thank you so much, to the extent that he is comprehensible. What he discussed, infrequently, is mostly not what I discuss: not out of ignorance, but by choice. There is more about work *as such* in “The Abolition of Work” than there is in all three volumes of *Theories of Surplus Value*. But then Marx never held down a job for the last 35 years of his life. *He* was never a Salt.⁹

Marxists, including anarcho-Marxists like H, regard work *under capitalism* as an institution of exploitation. But they neglect what I highlight: work as an institution of domination, and not only under capitalism. I have often heard workers complain about work. I have never heard workers complain about alienation. Work was repressive for several thousand years of civilization before capitalism. What worries me is that, administered by Marxists or syndicalists, work will still be repressive *after* capitalism. “In all previous revolutions

9 Nor was Engels. He owned factories.

the mode of activity always remained unchanged and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labour to other persons, whilst the communist revolution is directed against the hitherto existing *mode* of activity, does away with *labour*, and abolishes the rule of all classes with the classes themselves... “¹⁰ This is Karl Marx. If H doesn’t believe me, maybe he will believe Karl Marx.

I see no reason to pour the critique of work into Marxist molds. Much would spill over. In fact, I see no reason for anarchists to respect Marxism at all. Marxists have mocked us, defamed us, betrayed us and slaughtered us, but they have never respected us. Marxism is anti-anarchist, through and through. Anarchism should be anti-Marxist, through and through.¹¹ Not only out of principle, but out of expediency: “The anarchists *are* at a turning point. For the first time in history, they are the *only* revolutionary current. To be sure, not all anarchists are revolutionaries, but it is no lon-

10 Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (3d rev. ed.; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 60.

11 Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” *Defacing the Currency: Selected Writings, 1992-2012* (Berkeley, CA: LBC Books, 2012), 131. I have said the same about anarchists who think that Murray Bookchin is an anarchist. Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, esp. ch. 5; Bob Black, *Night mares of Reason*, available online at www.theanarchistlibrary.org. Bookchin—uncharacteristically honest—eventually announced that he was not an anarchist, and never had been. I wait, with more hope than expectation, for Chomsky to follow suit.

ger possible to be a revolutionary without being an anarchist, in fact if not in name.”¹²

Lecturing on, H informs us that “some people [who *are* these people? is H one of them?] say that Black lets capitalism ‘off the hook’ because he ignores the specific exploitative nature of capitalism. By saying just work and not distinguishing work that is capitalist wage work, which is the majority of the work done in a capitalist society and less forced ‘activists’ [huh?] that we also call work.” This is either a sentence fragment or a sentence which, toward the end, dissolves into gibberish. What are “forced ‘activists’”?

Black, by this reasoning, also lets dogs off the hook (or off the leash?) because he leaves out the specifically “brown” nature of brown dogs, the specifically “big” nature of big dogs, and the specifically “rabid” nature of rabid dogs. By H’s reasoning, one can’t say anything serious about work, only about wage-labor, which is only one of the forms work assumes, even in late capitalism, as even H eventually gets around to admitting. Marxists and other workerists can talk about brown dogs—about exploitation, wage-labor, surplus value, the falling rate of profit, etc.—all they want to. I might agree with some of it. But there’s an undistributed remainder. It is work itself.

¹² Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, 140.

In 1985 I chose to write about dogs (as in “working like a dog”)—not brown dogs—partly because almost nobody else was.¹³ To some extent, I’ve changed that. H’s own criticism is evidence of that.¹⁴ I think the zero-work idea was in the air in the mid-1980s. It must have been, because Andre Gorz, who never had an original idea in his life, wrote a book espousing a watered-down version of the abolition of work which was published in English in the same year (1985) that my essay was first published.¹⁵ In 1995, perennial trend-surfer Jeremy Rifkin published a stupid book, *The End of Work*, which I savaged.¹⁶ And now—this proves that I’ve really

13 An exception: *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1983). I did read this book before writing my essay, although not before delivering the speech the essay is based on (that was in 1980). My copy was a gift (in 1984) from Gregor Jamroski, who shoplifted it from Left Bank Books in Seattle. The anthology is very uneven, but includes some good stuff, such as Tony Gibson’s “Who Will Do the Dirty Work?” which I alluded to in my essay. Some academics borrowed the title, probably unwittingly: Robin Patric Clair *et al.*, *Why Work? The Perceptions of a “Real Job” and the Rhetoric of Work Through the Ages* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

14 My argument is taken over in its entirety by James Bowen, “The Curse of the Drinking Classes,” in *Twenty-First Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for the New Millennium*, ed. Jon Purkis & James Bowen (London: Cassell, 1997), 151-169—who doesn’t cite me.

15 Andre Gorz, *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work*, tr. Malcolm Imrie (London: Pluto Press, 1985). I didn’t see his text until much later, and I’m sure he didn’t see mine.

arrived—there’s a book by a Marxist-feminist college professor which has “antiwork” and “postwork” in its subtitle!¹⁷

Among those in the post-left anarchist tendencies, the critique of work is widely acknowledged, even taken for granted, for the very good reason “that this monster called WORK remains the precise & exact target of our rebellious wrath, the one single most oppressive *reality* we face (& we must learn also to recognize Work when it’s disguised as ‘leisure’).”¹⁸

On this point, one of H’s misquotations of

16 Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995); Bob Black, “What’s Wrong with This Picture? A Critique of a Neo-Futurist’s Vision of the Decline of Work,” in this volume [V].

17 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). I haven’t seen this one.

18 “Immediatism vs. Capitalism,” in *Immediatism: Essays by Hakim Bey* (AK Press, Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, CA: 1994), 20-21. See also Alfredo M. Bonanno, *Let’s Destroy Work, Let’s Destroy the Economy*, tr. Jean Weir (London: Elephant Books; Berkeley,

CA: Ardent Press, 2013); CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’ Collective, *Work* (n.p.: self-published, 2011). I had already made the point about leisure: “Leisure is nonwork for the sake of work.” (18) Someone else who has made the point is White, *Education and the End of Work*, 11-12, 62-63. So did Karl Marx: “Free time—which includes leisure time as well as time for higher activities—naturally transforms anyone who enjoys it into a different person, and it is this different person who then enters the direct process of production.” Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, ed. & tr. David McLellan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), 148.

me is a little more serious than most of his fuck-ups: “Black says that many leftist [leftists?] and anarchists are so obsessed with work they ‘talk about little else.’” Ironically, H is trying, for once, to be nice and agree with me here. But what I *really* said, and which I have already quoted, is that “all the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchism, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else.” (17) I didn’t say that leftists and most anarchists *talk about little else* than work, I said that they *believe in* work all the more fiercely because they *believe in* so little else. Leftists, including left anarchists, were, with rare exceptions, *not* talking about work in the 1980s. It wasn’t a conspiracy of silence, but it might as well have been. Leftists were thinking about workers (in the abstract) without thinking about work, and certainly without talking about work. But work needed to be thought about, and talked about, critically. So I thought about work and talked about work, critically.

As is more apparent from my essay than from H’s, work assumes various forms. There is wage-labor, but there is also chattel slavery, serfdom, peonage, housework, and self-employment. The last two are still very important in “capitalist

society.” I’d say that capitalist society couldn’t do without them, even if “most work” is wage-labor. But you can’t organize *those* workers! H even says so! This is, for left anarchists, a source of sadness. Indeed, it condemns them to futility. As so often, H (his fourth paragraph) takes back his previous criticism (that “alienation” jazz) and agrees with me.

A critique of work is necessarily a critique of capitalism, but a critique of capitalism is not necessarily a critique of work. That is why the critique of work is more radical. A critique of work is more of a critique of domination than of exploitation. A critique of wage-labor is more of a critique of exploitation than of domination.

If all you object to is exploitation, it might seem that workers’ liberation is complete in a workers’ state where state ownership has supplanted private ownership of the means of production, and wages are equalized. Nobody is exploited, and everybody is dominated. No anarchist ever believed in this. H isn’t sure, but he has this bad feeling that I might have objections to workplace democracy. And I do. Since I reject work, I necessarily reject workplace democracy. But I also reject democracy itself in every way, shape and form—full stop. I reject self-managed servitude. That was only an incidental consider-

ation in “The Abolition of Work,” although it is in there. But the critique of democracy is increasingly salient in much that I have written since 1985. I summarize it in “Debunking Democracy.”¹⁹

I’m sorry (well, not really) to draw attention to another David H fabrication. He quotes me thusly: “He also makes the separate and more damning claim that in a work place run by the workers the ‘people become the tyrant and what the fuck is the point.’” This supposed quotation does not appear in “The Abolition of Work” or in anything else I have ever written. Anybody moderately acquainted with what I write, and how I write, knows that I would never say this. I was never a snotty little (“what the fuck is the point”) art school punk.

H has trouble with quotation. He commenced with a fake paraphrase. Later he invented fake quotations. But even when he honestly tries to quote me, he fails every time. *Every quotation*

19 Black, “Debunking Democracy.” *Defacing the Currency*, 3-33. It’s also available as a pamphlet from C.A.L. Press. H writes: “What if Black’s critique is a critique of democratic decision making in the work place specifically?” No, my critique of democracy is a critique of democracy. “If we wanted to start this conversation”—who’s stopping him?—“we would have to discuss the difference between democratically controlled workplaces under capitalism and under capitalism.” They would probably not be very different, inasmuch as they would be the same. H must have meant to contrast democratically controlled workplaces with undemocratically controlled workplaces, but that’s not what he says. Instead he says that “under capitalism” there exist “democratically controlled workplaces”!

H attributes to me is inaccurate. He can't even copy words accurately.

Contrary to H, his "fulfilling work" is *not* what I mean by play. Most play is now indeed inconsequential: it's unproductive in an economic sense, and, I hope, most play always will be. All or some of what H calls fulfilling work, might be transformable into free activity *in a free society*. I might have been at fault for contributing to H's confusion when I wrote: "Such is work. *Play* is just the opposite." (20) Believe it or not, I haven't noticed this inconsistency in 28 years. Apparently nobody has, including H. As I define work, work is indeed "just the opposite" of play but only insofar as the one is voluntary and the other is not. The rest of the essay is clear on this crucial point. What I really meant, as is apparent from my next sentence, was to identify *one respect* in which work and play are opposites: "Play is always voluntary. What might otherwise be play is work if it's forced." (20)

In 1885, William Morris, who was a British Marxist and communist, wrote: "As long as the work is repulsive it will still be a burden which must be taken up daily, and even so would mar our life, even though the hours of labour are short. What we want to do is to add to our wealth without diminishing our pleasures. Nature will not be

finally conquered till our work becomes part of the pleasure of our lives.”²⁰ That is *exactly* the thesis of “The Abolition of Work,” although I did not, and would not, speak of the conquest of Nature, which sounds more like Francis Bacon than the way Morris usually sounded. The only difference is that Morris would continue to call “work” what I would prefer to call, to avoid confusion and to emphasize the difference, something else. Morris in his essay (like mine, originally a speech) made quite clear what he meant by “useful work”—just as I was quite clear in contrasting work, with or without traces of fulfillment, with productive play.

Morris and I—and, before us, Charles Fourier, and others—discussed, and tried to identify, principles for the social transformation of what is now work, or rather some of it, into free productive play.²¹ Another way to put it, which may appeal to

20 “Useful Work versus Useless Toil,” in *Political Writings of William Morris*, ed. A.L. Morton (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 95, reprinted in *Why Work?* (Richards ed.), 35–52. Morris’s essay was first published, by an anarchist publisher (Freedom Press), in 1896. Morris also wrote the utopian novel *News from Nowhere* and some minor classics in the fantasy genre.

21 I mentioned some names, but I deliberately didn’t provide references, or an assigned reading list, because, unlike today’s class struggle anarchists, I was not writing primarily for white middle class college students. I tried to write something that real-life workers might read and appreciate, and, in the many years since 1985, I’ve received many testimonials suggesting that I’ve had a limited measure of success. A number of people have told me, or told others, that I changed their lives. I receive

certain tastes, is that we all aspire to the realization and suppression of work. David H doesn't discuss this most important dimension of my argument, probably because he doesn't understand it.

H's proposal to call fulfilling work "work," and to call unfulfilling work "Work," serves no purpose. It will be universally ignored. It's not that we are, in H's words, "lacking in terminology." We have too much terminology! We have lots of words. It's just that some people don't know "how to do things with words."²² H is one of these people. We have so many words that William Morris and I can say the same thing in different words. H has trouble saying what he has to say in any words. Words are a snare for H. They're a source of splendor for me.

At some remote future time, an anarcho-leftist—supposing, as I doubt, that there will be anarcho-leftists at some remote future time—might produce an intellectually respectable critique of my critique of work. The left has had thirty years to try. Naturally, in my vanity I like these reports with mixed feelings. However, for the footnotes not provided in "The Abolition of Work," there are now the footnotes provided in Black, "Primitive Affluence: A Postscript to Sahlins," and the references provided in "Zerowork Revisited," both in this volume.

22A book title: J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson & Marina Sbisa (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). The book is short, interesting, and refreshingly free of politics, and it has nothing to do with the issue at hand.

to think that the reason is that my argument is unanswerable.

There might be other explanations. Anarcho-leftists own all the anarchist bookstores and these all ban my books. They were, until recently (I refer to AK Press and PM Press), the only ostensibly anarchist distributors, although you might not suspect that they were anarchist if you look at the stuff in their catalogs.²³ Leftists also operate most of the anarchist websites. The leftist leaders know what I am capable of in the way of polemics. They know how I dealt with Murray Bookchin, among others. To respond to me, as they know, only affords me opportunities in reply to make fools of them even as I publicize my own ideas, which they don't want to get around. So they try to ignore me, which complements their censorship of my writings. But, as I observed a few years ago, what I think I did do was define work as a basic anarchist issue. I forced even the pro-work anarchists like anarcho-syndicalists and Platformists to defend work instead of just taking it for granted. They ridicule the zero-work idea instead of

23 Bob Black, "Class Struggle Social Democrats, or, The Press of Business," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 64 (Fall/Winter 2007): 26-29, available online at www.theanarchistlibrary.org. There is now a consistently anarchist/autonomist publisher/distributor, Little Black Cart, and several other genuine anarchist publishers, such as C.A.L. Press, Eberhardt Press, and Elephant Editions.

trying to refute it, so, the idea goes unrefuted. Naturally that means that more people will agree with it.²⁴

I may have exaggerated the extent to which, by 2005, I'd forced the leftists into defending work, but David H is an example of how my challenge to the left can no longer be ignored.

Although the critique of the left was not a main theme in "The Abolition of Work," it openly appears there, and it's a critique of the left so far as work is concerned. Other aspects of my critique of the left appear in other, previously published texts which are also in *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* or in later books. With the collapse of European Marxism some years later, to universal rejoicing, the question arose as to where this left the left. Capitalist and democratic triumphalists proclaimed—as we now know, prematurely—the end of history. This was a chastening time for leftists—not only the utterly discredited Marxist-Leninists—because they had all, even if they were anti-Marxist (as most anarchists then were), assumed that history was on their side. History doesn't take sides.

All leftists, it turned out, were more Marxist than they thought they were. That's why left anarchists like David H cling to scraps of Marxist

24 Black, "Zerowork Revisited," this volume [VI].

doctrine (as does, among others, Noam Chomsky) which were never entirely plausible even within the whole Marxist ideological apparatus, and which mean nothing outside of it. The Marxist economics which anarcho-leftists still dabble in has been discredited in theory and in practice. But they have nothing to replace it with. I don't think there has ever been an anarchist economist, unless you count Proudhon, and he is now even more irrelevant than Marx, when it comes to economics.

Leftists, although they have lost all theoretical bases for doing so, still stand firmly on the ground of *the economy* (the "base," as the Marxists used to say). And base it is. The left shares with the ideologues of capitalism the myth of productivism.²⁵ What I call the abolition of work, what Charles Fourier called attractive labor, what William Morris called useful work vs. useless toil, amounts to a call for *the abolition of the economy*. Leftist anarchists who laugh at that, might ponder that what they supposedly call for, the abolition of the state, would get just as many laughs. Although the economy is even less popular than the state. Work is not popular at all. Every proposal that's worthwhile, starts out being considered crazy or scandalous.

25 Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, tr. Mark Poster (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1975).

The abolition of work, the abolition of the state, the abolition of the economy, and even the abolition of art: these abolitions all arrive at the same place. They don't all mean the same thing, but they designate the same social condition. In that condition, there is no place for institutions of coercion, such as work and the state. In that place, there is no place for workers. Instead, there's a place (every place) for playful creators and producers and their friends, and even a place for the lazy. In that place, art, for instance, isn't a specialized activity. It could be part of the life of anybody who wants it there, and almost everybody will want it in their lives, I believe, when they can believe in that possibility. The revolution of everyday life is the only revolution that's worth the trouble. And the abolition of work is central to the revolution of everyday life.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE ABOLITION OF WORK

The dawn of civilization was the dawn of work. In southern Mesopotamia (Iraq), almost 6,000 years ago, “elites came to view and use fully encumbered laborers in the same exploitative way that human societies, over the immediately preceding millennia, had viewed and used the labor of domesticated animals. This represents a new paradigm of social relations in human societies.”¹ It’s time for a new paradigm. Buddy, can youse paradigm?²

I’ve been writing about (and against) work, on and off, for thirty years. Somewhat to my dismay, the abolition of work is still the idea that I am most often associated with. My original essay [I] has been reprinted many times, and translated into at least fifteen languages, including Esperanto. It is even briefly excerpted in a Canadian textbook

1 Guillermo Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia and the Dawn of Civilization: The Evolution of an Urban Landscape* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 128. “Scribal summaries dealing with the composition of groups of foreign and native born captives used as laborers describe them with age and sex categories identical to those used to describe state-owned herd animals, including various types of cattle and pigs [citations omitted].” Ibid., 129.

2 Bob Black, “Let Us Prey!” *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* (Port Townsend, WA: n.d. [1986]), 73.

on industrial relations!³ That's more attention than I've received in most of the anarchist press. Even the *Wall Street Journal* published a lobotomized version of "No Future for the Workplace" [IV].⁴

I wish that my ideas about social order and dispute resolution under anarchy received more attention.⁵ I wish that my ideas about a post-left anarchism, which are widely shared, received more attention.⁶ I wish that my critiques of anarchist celebrities who aren't anarchists at all, such as Murray Bookchin and Noam Chomsky (others have noticed this too), received more attention.⁷ Most of what little now remains of the

3 John Godard, *Industrial Relations: The Economy and Society* (Toronto, Canada: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1994), 425.

4 Bob Black, "All Play and No Work," *Wall Street Journal Reports*, June 4, 1990, R17. The original version, "No Future for the Workplace," is in Bob Black, *Friendly Fire* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 13-18.

5 Bob Black, "Justice: Primitive and Modern," available online at www.theanarchylibrary.org; Bob Black, "An Anarchist Response to 'The Anarchist Response to Crime,'" *Defacing the Currency: Selected Writings, 1992-2012* (Berkeley, CA: Little Black Cart, 2013), 193-216. The first essay appears, in Russian translation, in my second Russian book, *Anarchy and Democracy*, published by Hylaea.

6 Bob Black, "Notes on 'Post-Left' Anarchism," available online at www.theanarchistlibrary.org; see also Wolfi Landstreicher, "From Politics to Life: Ridding Anarchy of the Leftist Millstone," *Anarchy: A Journal Armed No. 54* (20(2) (Winter 2002-2003): 47-51.

7 Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," *Defacing the Currency*, 61-172; Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997); Bob Black, *Nightmares of Reason* (2005-), available online at www.theanarchistlibrary.org & Academia.edu. On Chomsky, see also "Noam Chomsky's Anarchism," *Anarchism and*

anarchist periodical press⁸ doesn't publish me, nor does it review my books or refer to my writings. Their loss as much as mine. A lot of anarchists need some smartening up.⁹ If anarchism is a room, I am the elephant in that room.

However, I have always insisted that my critique of work, like my critique of democracy,¹⁰ is not addressed only to anarchists. It would be pretty useless if it were. Work is more important than anything the anarchists are complaining about, except—possibly—the state. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of work in the lives of everybody, although, I may have done so, when I wrote [I]: “Work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world.” And yet, in the 19th century, Paul Lafargue—son in law of Karl Marx!—could write this: “All individual and social misery is born of the passion for work.”¹¹

Anarchists: Essays by George Woodcock (Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Quarry Press, 1992), 224-228; John Zerzan, “Who Is Chomsky?” in *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2002), 140-143.

8 Jason McQuinn, “What Happened to the Anarchist Press?” *Modern Slavery* No. 2 (Fall-Winter 2012/2013), 6-7.

9 “That the range of anarchists includes the clowns from protest alley, micrometer-toting specialists of oppression-identification, and Marxists who wear black flags isn't a condemnation of anarchist ideas but is a significant reason for pause.” [Aragorn!], *Boom: Introductory Writings on Nihilism* ([Berkeley, CA]: n.p., 2013), 93.

10 Black, “Debunking Democracy,” *Defacing the Currency*, 3-33.

11 Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, trans. Len Bracken (Ardmore, PA: Fifth Season Press, 1999), 5. He also stated: “In

My anti-work writings are addressed to everybody, but especially to everybody who works, or who wants to work, or who doesn't want to work. That includes just about everybody. I would like more people to consider my critique of work—people who are not anarchists, Marxists, liberals, or any other kind of ideology.

I have never lost interest in the subject of work. The essays collected in this book, in more or less chronological order, demonstrate my ongoing interest. Whether they also demonstrate any improvement in my critique of work, is for the reader to decide. Rereading them has given me a lot to think about. It has also encouraged me to do a lot of other reading and some rereading. Frankly, I think that, in general, I got it right the first time. I stand by every idea about work in “The Abolition of Work” and in my subsequent writings. Usually, I prudently refrained from prophecy. But there are some points which require clarification, such as the meaning of “leisure.”

I have received a little ridicule, but *very* little serious criticism. The major critiques, one from the right and one from the left, are debunked here [III & VIII]. Hopefully this book will provoke a fresh round of rash criticism for me to annihilate. I just *love* to do that.

capitalist societies, work is the cause of all intellectual degeneracy and all organic deformities.” Ibid., 3.

The Definition of Work

This is from Bertrand Russell: “First of all, what is work? Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth’s surface relatively to other matter; second, telling other people to do so.” He adds: “The first kind is unpleasant and ill-paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid.”¹² Although one academic mistook this for a definition of work, it is actually just a witty way of criticizing work.

Debating definitions is always boring, and “‘Work’ is harder to define than you might think.”¹³ My original definitions of work (a short version and a long version) [I] were intended only to cover what I consider work and what most people consider to be work. Nothing fancy. It includes servile labor—chattel slavery, serfdom, indentured servitude, and peonage—although these forms of labor are absent in modern industrial and so-called post-industrial societies. It includes work for wages or a salary. It includes much, maybe nearly all self-employment and contract work—contract work, especially, being nowadays often disguised wage-labor. Work includes housework, paid or unpaid. The fact

12 Bertrand Russell, “In Praise of Idleness,” *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1935), 14-15.

13 Keith Thomas, “Introduction,” *The Oxford Book of Work*, ed. Keith Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiii.

that my critique is equally applicable to slavery, wage-labor and housework should embarrass believers in work.

Whether work includes schooling, is an important issue which I will continue to neglect, aside from pointing out again [I] that much schooling is work-related. It consists (sometimes) of vocational training or, minimally, training in pre-work practices such as showing up on time, subjection to the clock, sitting still for almost an hour at a time, and acquiring minimal reading and arithmetic skills. After all, “employers’ most common and general rules have to do with regular attendance and being on time.”¹⁴ Apparently schooling doesn’t do even that very much anymore. School is mainly daycare and preventive detention.

In primitive societies and in many utopias, just as work can hardly be distinguished from play, the education of children can hardly be distinguished from play. Children observe work, imitate work, and gradually begin to work. Ivan Illich identified students’ cramming for finals as “shadow work,” because it is unpaid and rarely done for the fun of it.¹⁵ In the feminist utopia

14 Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 155.

15 Ivan Illich, “Shadow Work,” *Shadow Work* (Boston, MA & London: Marion Boyars, 1981), 100.

Herland, “it was all education but no schooling.” Education there consists of playing games.¹⁶ In Restif de la Bretonne’s 18th century utopia, “work is almost a game and games are forms of education.”¹⁷ The advocates of learning-by-doing, such as John Dewey and Maria Montessori, are correct as far as they go. But they fall short of the utopians for whom education was not just a preparation for life, it is integrated into life. This idea is at least as old as Thomas More’s *Utopia*.¹⁸ Few schools practice what Dewey, Montessori and A.S. Neill preached.

Whether or not my definitions completely succeed in covering all my enumerated types of labor, my objective is to identify, as work, all the activities to which my critique of work

16 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 106. “... ‘child’s play’... may in fact represent an optimum setting for children’s learning.” Edward C. Devereux, “Backyard versus Little League Baseball: Some Observations of the Impoverishment of Children’s Games in America,” in *Contemporary Issues in Sociology of Sport*, ed. Andrew Yiannakis (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 2001), 66.

17 Nicolas Edme Restif de la Bretonne, “The Pursuit of Happiness Through Rules and Regulations,” in *French Utopias: An Anthology of Ideal Societies*, ed. Frank E. Manuel & Fritzie P. Manuel (New York: The Free Press & London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1966), 171.

18 Thomas More, *Utopia: A Revised Translation, Backgrounds, Criticism*, trans. & ed. Robert M. Adams ((2d ed.; New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 36 (originally 1516). A modern argument is in Paul & Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (2d ed.; New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 157 (originally 1947).

applies. I have never claimed that every one of my criticisms of work applies to every work situation. For instance, not all work is unhealthy or monotonous, and not every worker works long hours. But whether I am talking about lack of autonomy (being bossed and supervised), lack of privacy (cubicles, surveillance and snitches), lack of creativity, boring and repetitious work, lack of variety in work, unsafe work, painful work, underpaid work, unpaid work, or just too much God damn work, most of these criticisms are more or less applicable to everything I call work. So, no quibbling, please. Work is too important to be trifled with. Call it what you please, for your own purposes, but, if you discuss my ideas, you have to use the words the way I do.

I've also used words such as *leisure* and *play*. The abolition of work certainly implicates leisure and play. I don't think that I've misused these words, but, I haven't always used them precisely. From my recent reading, I know that nobody is using these words precisely or consistently. Thus I am going to discuss more explicitly what *I* mean by *leisure* and *play*, insofar as I contrast them with *work*. I am still inclined to largely ignore certain degradations of leisure and play such as *recreation*¹⁹ and *sport*. I think they lead us away

¹⁹ Richard Neville, *Play Power: Exploring the International Underground* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 274: Play has

from the central question, which is whether the satisfactions of recreation and sport (satisfactions which are taken for granted) are only after-work diversions, or whether there is something about them which might be incorporated into work itself. If that could be done, the result might not be work at all.

Then there is free time, which is not necessarily idle time. You might or might not be doing something during your free time. One writer refers to “subsistence activities,” which include certain uncompensated but necessary activities—such as “the minimums of sleeping, eating, and related activities like cooking and shopping.”²⁰ But while “No one should ever work” [I] might, after some explaining, make some sense to some people, “No one should ever poop” does not. One might identify these activities as work, as has been done,²¹ but I would distinguish biological functions from cooking, shopping, and commuting, which are shadow work. Cooking and eating are activities which have great ludic potential: but cooking can be a job and eating can be just refueling. Sex can be done for pleasure

been replaced by “recreation,” the function of which is to “re-create” the worker for work: to repair him.

20 Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1962), 91.

21 Stanley Parker, *Leisure and Work* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 4.

or, as the Catholic Church advocates, for making Catholic babies. For Charles Fourier, whose meals were usually the poor fare of a traveling salesman, “Harmony” was a society where people enjoyed five meals a day in good company.²² In Thomas More’s *Utopia* and many others, including William Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, meals are core social occasions.²³ I can relate to that. But in a work-dominated society, “any time *after* work is ‘free,’ but even *that* time, if work must be clocked, is work-bound.”²⁴

From Work to Play

My critics hitherto have been simple-minded, or pretended to be. First I define work and play as antitheses: then (they wail) I call for their synthesis! A Hegelian dialectician would take that

22 *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, trans. & ed. Jonathan Beecher & Richard Bienvenu (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), 251. “Fourier loved, but could seldom afford, his country’s best wines.” Jonathan Beecher & Richard Bienvenu, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, 26. No doubt Fourier occasionally ate better food than he usually got in cheap cafes, if only because he was the brother in law of the famous gourmand Jean Anthelm Brillat-Savarin, author of *The Physiology of Taste*, trans. M.F.K. Fisher (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1986). Brillat-Savarin called for “gastronomy”; Fourier called for “gastrosophy.” Brillat-Savarin is best known for his maxim, “you are what you eat.” Who suspected, until now, that there is a remote link between utopian socialism and “Iron Chef”?

23 Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (London: Freedom Press, 1982), 77-78, 115 (originally 1950).

24 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 326.

in stride, but, I don't require dialectical acrobatics to be understood. If I did, I wouldn't understand myself either. In terms of Scholastic logic, work and play are contraries but not contradictories. They are different but not necessarily opposed, unless by definitional fiat. Right from the start I've identified several predecessors—especially Charles Fourier and William Morris—who were saying substantially what I am saying, but in their own words. To put it another way, I am saying substantially what they were saying, but in my own words. Anything worth saying should be sayable, and is best said, in multiple ways. Like the Situationists, my goal is simply “replacing work with *a new type of free activity...*”²⁵ We can worry about what to call it, after we live it.

Since 1985, I have come across more and more versions of the idea which is central to my thesis: the possibility of the abolition of work by replacing it with generalized productive play. I'm not going to amass the citations here. But, as an illustration, here is something from an unexpected source: the Pragmatist philosopher and educator, John Dewey. He was a pillar of the intellectual Establishment, and a moderate socialist—although

25 “Ideologies, Classes, and the Domination of Nature,” *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & trans. Ken Knabb (rev., exp. ed.; Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 32 [from *I.S. #2* (1962)].

he didn't go out of his way to say so. He is so respectable that one or two of his books are still in the curriculum for education majors, including a book (originally published in 1916) which I now quote: "Work is psychologically simply an activity which consciously includes regard for consequences as part of itself; it becomes constrained labor when the consequences are outside of the activity, as an end to which activity is merely a means. Work which remains permeated with the play attitude is art."²⁶

I continue to reject definitions of play, such as those of Johan Huizinga and Adriano Tilgher,²⁷ which exclude by fiat the possibility of productive play. The dictionary definitions are much broader.²⁸

26 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 241-42 (originally 1916), quoted in Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 287-88.

27 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955), 13; Adriano Tilgher, *Homo Faber: Work Through the Ages*, trans. Dorothy Canfield Fisher (Chicago, IL: Gateway Books, 1965), 194. B.F. Skinner defined play as "serious behavior with non-serious consequences." B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York, Bantam Books, 1972), 170. Skinner at least understood that people who play, take play seriously: "Said most generally, play draws its energies from real life. Something must be there to be played with." Thomas S. Hendricks, *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression* (Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 131.

28 E.g., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 2: 2244-2245. "The English word 'work' has so wide and rich a range and so varied a past that a mere

Tilgher went so far as to say: "There is something else in play than action for the mere pleasure of action. Play—if it is real play—always has something of triviality about it. Play is not serious, there can be no passion about it."²⁹ Huizinga at least understood that play can be serious.³⁰ Only someone who has never seen children at play could say that play is never serious [I]. Only someone who has never played, or who has forgotten what play is like, could say that. Plenty of *work* has "no passion about it." There can be, obviously, productive play—there are weekend hunters, fishers, gardeners, and successful poker players. I am not going to let definitions get in the

catalogue of its senses would be several pages long." De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 40. Huizinga was a medievalist and, like most historians, he liked the period he studied. That imparted "aristocratic, idealist sensibilities," nonetheless, there is "no reason to separate so strictly the material incentives and consequences of play from the symbolic ones." Hendricks, *Play Reconsidered*, 216, 217.

29 Tilgher, *Homo Faber*, 194. Rather, Professor Giuseppe Rensi, whom he quotes (at 191), is surely right to say (with much redundancy) that play is engaged in "for itself because of the pleasure or interest which it inspires in us intrinsically considered in itself, as an end in itself, with no ulterior views."

30 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 5-6. In fact, he discerned the play element in activities which, by his definition, could not include it: art, war, law, even business. "It seems not so much that civilization lives through play, but rather that play lives despite civilization. Huizinga himself says that as culture develops and civilization becomes more complex, the element of play recedes." Alex Trotter, review of *Homo Ludens*, *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 46 ((16)(2) (Fall-Winter 1998-1999), 12, 15.

way of what I say, especially definitions which are wrong.

I have previously quoted [I] the Romantic poet Friedrich Schiller: “The animal *works* when deprivation is the mainstream of its activity, and it *plays* when the fullness of its strength is its mainstream, when superabundant life is its own stimulus to activity.”³¹ For Schiller, man has a twofold nature: a “pure intellect” (Reason) in the world of the mind, and an “empirical intellect” (Nature) in the world of sense experience.³² They are reconciled, and man fully becomes all that he is, in play: “So the play impulse, in which both combine to function, will compel the mind at once morally and physically; it will therefore, since it annuls all mere chance, annul all compulsion too, and set man free both physically and morally.”³³ Schiller’s language is a bit flowery

31 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 133.

32 Ibid., 43–45, 70 n. 1. Obviously Schiller was heavily influenced by Kant.

33 Ibid., 74; see also Alasdair Clayre, *Work and Play: Ideas and Experience of Work and Leisure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), ch. 2, esp. at 20–21. “The true end of Man,” according to Wilhelm von Humboldt, “is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.” Its two conditions are freedom and “a variety of conditions.” *The Limits of State Action*, ed. J.W. Burrow (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1993), 10. This part of the book was published—by Schiller—in *New Thalia* (1792). The book itself was published posthumously.

for modern tastes, but his point is well-taken. It has practical implications. As Charles Fourier wrote: “Our pleasures have no connection with industry, and are consequently unproductive; whereas in the combined order they will be connected with productive industry, which will itself be a succession of pleasures, when rendered attractive.”³⁴ The synthesis of work (production of useful output) and play (activity for its own sake) is what I call the abolition of work [III].

Here is a quick summary of the distinctions. What work and play have in common is that they are activities, whereas leisure (my next topic) is a period of time. What play and leisure have in common is that they are voluntary, whereas work is not. Of these three, work is by definition productive; play is not necessarily productive or unproductive; and leisure is by definition unproductive, because it is not an activity. “Leisure” is short for leisure *time*. Or, leisure time may be used in productive or unproductive activities, or merely allowed to pass (this is idleness³⁵). To put it another way: “At some point, less work plus better work ends up as activity it no longer makes sense to call work at

34 Fourier, *Harmonian Man*, 181.

35 In William Morris’s utopia, idleness is considered a medical condition. *News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 33.

all, although it furnishes the means of life.”³⁶

It was my good fortune that in 1985 I was largely ignorant of the immense academic literature on work, play and leisure. Had I examined very many of those trees, I might never have noticed the forest.

Leisure

Leisure is a period of time in which one does not work, although not all time in which one does not work is leisure. The Greek and Latin words for “work” are negative terms, “non-leisure.”³⁷ Thus the words work and leisure are antonyms, whereas the words work and play are not. As such, leisure is a “residual” category—it is “free time,” in the sense of being some of the time that remains when working time is subtracted. But people are not at leisure when they are sleeping or commuting.³⁸ A more useful definition would exclude biological functions and also activities which are immediately undertaken in the furtherance of work, such as commuting or the coffee break—if there is still such a thing as a coffee break.

Work is something you have to do, but not

36 Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, 43.

37 Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 5.

38 Parker, *Leisure and Work*, 3-4; Charles K. Brightbill, *The Challenge of Leisure* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 4.

everything you have to do is work. The original meaning of leisure was time apart from work: “The term *leisure* comes from the Latin *licere*, meaning ‘to be permitted,’ and is defined in the modern dictionary as ‘freedom from occupation, employment, or engagement.’”³⁹ That was the classical understanding. Aristotle (he tells us) “believed that happiness depends on leisure, because we occupy ourselves so that we have leisure...”⁴⁰ Mechanics, slaves, freed slaves, foreigners, women, and children are not to be admitted to citizenship: “The necessary people are either slaves who minister to the wants of individuals, or mechanics and labourers who are the servants of the community... for no man can practice excellence who is living the life of a mechanic or labourer.”⁴¹

For Aristotle and his class, leisure was not, as we think of it, time after work. There was no such time for them, because they didn’t work. For Aristotle, everything in the universe had a purpose or an innate tendency: a goal. The purpose of leisure was, broadly speaking, happiness: the happiness

39 Brightbill, *Challenge of Leisure*, 3.

40 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.H.K. Thomson, rev. Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 271. He also thought that contemplation was the best use of leisure.

41 “Politics,” *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2: 2028.

of the cultivated few. It was time to be devoted to civic duties but, above all, to philosophy and contemplation. This must have had a particular appeal for Aristotle because, unlike Plato, he was not an Athenian citizen. He had no civic duties.

There is still a current of traditional thought which carries on the idea that leisure has a purpose: a higher purpose than work, certainly,⁴² and something higher than television, gaming, texting and spectator sports. Leisure is said to be the basis of culture. But the prevalent understanding is still what I wrote in 1985 [I]: “Leisure is nonwork for the sake of work.” It’s also true that some leisure-time behavior “may be, in part, a response to social pressure or powerful inner drives, and may not therefore be a preferred form of behavior.”⁴³ (Among other reasons.) But that does not help to define leisure, as the same thing might be said of work, play, and almost any social activity. It is also idle to complain: “To look upon leisure *only* as a respite from work is never to discover its full potential.”⁴⁴ This is a tacit admission that, in fact, leisure *is* only a respite from work. Leisure’s full potential is realized only when leisure is realized

42 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 5-6; e.g., Pieper, *Leisure*, chs. 1-5 (Pieper was a Catholic theologian).

43 Noel Pitts & Sylvia Fleis Fava, *Urban Society* (New York: Crowell, 1963), 411.

44 Parker, *Leisure and Work*, 6.

and suppressed.

As we shall see, working hours have increased—and therefore leisure time has decreased—for over 60 years in the United States. Leisure in the modern sense has to be, first, rest—a respite from work—otherwise the worker is in no condition to do much of anything. There may be no time left over for anything else except passive consuming. After a certain point—which most workers have surely reached—according to Max Weber, “one does not work in order to live, but one lives for the sake of one’s work.”⁴⁵

It is difficult to believe, but, for many years, intellectuals, such as academics and clergymen, as well as politicians and businessmen, considered leisure (not their own, of course) to be a social problem. Working hours did fall from 1900 to 1920, and more slowly in the 1920s, and at a faster rate in the 1930s, slipping below 35 hours a week.⁴⁶ Hence books from prestigious publishers with titles like *The Problem of Leisure* and *The Threat of Leisure*.⁴⁷ Incredibly, as late as 1960

45 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 264 n. 24, quoted in Pieper, *Leisure*, 4.

46 Benjamin Kline Hunnicut, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1988), 1.

47 Henry W. Durant, *The Problem of Leisure* (London: Routledge, 1938); George Barton Cutten, *The Threat of Leisure* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1926). Leisure was not a problem in 1938!

or so, “aside from the thoughts of a few stray persons, all see the ‘leisure problem’ narrowly, as too much, badly spent time.”⁴⁸ As late as 1963, a book could be published with the absurd title *The Challenge of Leisure*. There exists an excellent recent survey of theories of “the leisure society”—aptly said to be “elusive”—from the last decade of the 19th century to the first decade of the 21st.⁴⁹

But in the 1950s, working hours were going up, as they have continued to do ever since. In the 1920s and 1930s, when the cause of shorter hours was still a major political issue, the fear was that, by increased leisure time, the working classes would be debauched and demoralized. The workers should be kept busy working for their own good and, incidentally, for the good of the bourgeoisie. These same gentry had, through Prohibition, already eliminated the working man’s solace and social center—the saloon—and television had not yet come along to occupy his leisure hours. “Recreation” was the proposed solution, or part of it, as in addition to the provision of edifying cultural pursuits: but the better sort of people was not very optimistic about these stratagems.

In a previous, parallel development, in

48 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 276.

49 A.J. Veal, *The Elusive Leisure Society*, Working Paper 9, School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia (4th ed. 2009), available online at www.leisuresource.net.

Britain, “in the late 1820s and 1830s quite a number of [middle class] people began to perceive working-class leisure as a problem, and to think of the expansion of rational recreational ideals from their own ranks.”⁵⁰ The idea was to accomplish class conciliation by the reform of leisure. It failed. Class consciousness persisted.⁵¹ It is interesting that this reform cause arose in Britain, as later in America, 40 or 50 years into their respective Industrial Revolutions. That was just when, in both countries, a substantial minority of the working class had achieved shorter hours (hence more leisure) and higher wages (hence more money for leisure activities)—while at the same time, work was intensified and deskilled. Work became more like work and less like play. Workers were encouraged to find satisfaction, not in their work, but after work. But even leisure was potentially troublesome.⁵²

Many commentators used to assert that leisure is one of the most important issues facing society in the coming decades. But, the decades came and went, yet it is still the case that leisure is not a central issue in “live politics.”⁵³ It’s not a

50 Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, c. 1780-c. 1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 91.

51 *Ibid.*, 137.

52 *Ibid.*, 184-85.

53 A.J. Veal, *Leisure and the Future* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 123.

political issue at all.

Now I do think that one constructive use of increased leisure time would be—not to use it at all, but rather to “treasure the pleasure of torpor” [I]. I am all for the joy of loafing. Relaxed, well-rested people are sane, peaceful, sociable, happy, healthy people, even if they don’t do a lick of work or even watch the History Channel.⁵⁴ I’ve been reading a lot of utopias lately. I was struck by the fact that in several of them, one of their greatest asserted advantages was that people were no longer *in a hurry*.⁵⁵ William Morris, who was working himself to death agitating for socialism, subtitled his utopia “An Epoch of Rest.” Work worth doing, he wrote elsewhere, has several characteristics, but he “put the hope of rest first because it is the simplest and most natural part of our hope.”⁵⁶ I would not be unduly upset if, with increased leisure, workers mostly did not attend lectures on foreign trade, or take courses in basket weaving, or volunteer at the food co-op, or join study groups reading the World’s Great Books. I think that, sooner or later, some workers *will do some* of these things, but, what they do

54 Or as a former girlfriend called it, “the War Channel.”

55 E.g., W.D. Howells, “A Traveller from Altruria,” *The Altrurian Romances* (Bloomington, IN & London: Indiana University Press, 1968), 158, 167 (originally 1894).

56 Morris, “Useful Work,” 87; *Why Work?* 36.

with their leisure time is none of my business or anybody else's.

None of those anxious about what workers would do with more leisure time ever intimated that *they* themselves would fritter away *their own* leisure time—if they had even more of it—on drinking, or going to the cinema, or going to the track. Curiously, they never worried that those *other* people might fritter away their time in the ways they wasted a little of their own, such as attending church. I suspect that there were deeper, unspoken anxieties: such as that people would have sex more often, and enjoy it more. Or, they might just sit down and think things over. But there's no danger of that any more. Our society has not moved at all toward the abolition of work. But it is taking mighty strides toward the abolition of leisure.

The Poverty of the Professors

The large academic literature on work, play, leisure, recreation, sport, etc. is distinguished only in being undistinguished. Long ago (by which I mean, over 50 years ago), a few eminent social scientists—David Riesman, Daniel Bell, C. Wright Mills—said some important things about work and its discontents. They all leaned left, at the time, in their politics, at a time when it was not fashionable to lean left, not even a little. They

even called for a revival of utopian thinking⁵⁷—not realizing, just before the 1960s, what they were getting themselves into. Currently, prominent social scientists seem to have abandoned the field, although, I admit that I'm not really current on prominent social scientists. I am pretty sure that they are not again calling for a revival of utopian thinking. The burnt child avoideth the fire.

But, especially starting in the 1970s, leisure, play, recreation, and even sport—I might say, especially sport—have been academic growth industries. Entire academic journals are devoted to these quotidian topics: *Society and Leisure*, *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Play and Culture Studies*, *International Review of Sport Studies*, etc. There exists a North American Society for Sociology of Sport. There are frequent conferences, and many books. It is, after all, easier and more pleasant to study golfers or Little League baseball than migrant workers, prisoners, or housewives. A French Maoist gym

57 Paul Goodman, "Utopian Thinking," *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 3-22 (Goodman, an anarchist and a genuine utopian, was skeptical about this intellectual fashion). "The Age of Complacency is ending. Let the old women complain wisely about 'the end of ideology.' We are beginning to move again." "Letter to the New Left," *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving L. Horowitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 259, quoted in Fredy Perlman, *The Incoherence of the Intellectual: C. Wright Mills' Struggle to Unite Knowledge and Action* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 1970), 95-96.

teacher wrote a Structuralist critique of sport.⁵⁸ Postmodernists have deconstructed the history of sport.⁵⁹ They should deconstruct each other.

However, these scholars are, at their best, mediocre. They publish the kind of social research which C. Wright Mills condemned as “abstracted empiricism.”⁶⁰ One study (1979), for example, based on survey research, discovered that most workers report that most of them would not work if they didn’t have to (55%, in that survey). 47% also report that they express their talents more in leisure than at work.⁶¹ No kidding! Other research suggests that the owners of the means of production may have higher incomes than their employees... These findings are only slightly more informative than the scientific law announced by The Firesign Theatre: “If you push something hard enough, it falls over.”

It is these academic scribblers who quibble about the meaning of words and phrases like

58 Jean-Marie Brohm, *Sport—A Prison of Measured Time*, trans. Ian Fraser (London: Ink Links, 1978).

59 *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis*, ed. Murray G. Phillips (Albany, NY: State University of New York at Albany Press, 2006).

60 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), ch. 3.

61 R.E. Allen & D.K. Hawes, “Attitudes Toward Work, Leisure and the Four-Day Week,” *Human Resources Management* (Spring 1979): 5-10. 14% thought that they had sufficient leisure time; 36% did not. 50% were uncertain! I’ll bet a lot of them have made up their minds by now.

work, play, leisure, recreation, sport, free time, idleness, etc.⁶² They are tenured, or aspire to tenure, at notable centers of learning such as—to mention only where the sport professors disport themselves—the University of New Haven, Brighton Polytechnic, the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, Illinois Wesleyan University, the State University of New York at Fredonia,⁶³ Curtin University of Technology, the University of Northern Colorado, and Loughborough University. These scholars know even less about work than do undergraduate anthropology majors. They may even know less about work than do undergraduate economics majors, although, that is a harsh judgment which I am reluctant to pass prematurely. Still I have to agree Ivan Illich that “economists know as much about work as alchemists know about gold.”⁶⁴ Long ago, economists such as Adam Smith, Karl

62 Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, c. 1780–c. 1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 12 (referring to the word “leisure”).

63 Movie buffs will recall Fredonia from the Marx Brothers movie *Duck Soup*. The mayor of Fredonia (a different spelling) wrote in, demanding that they change the name of the movie, as there had never been a “blot” on the town’s good name. Groucho Marx replied: “Your Excellency: Our advice is that you change the name of your town. It is hurting our picture.” Quoted in Joe Adamson, *Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Sometimes Zeppo* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973). The Marx Brothers had not heard of the town until after the release of the movie.

64 Illich, *Shadow Work*, 105.

Marx, John Stuart Mill and Thorstein Veblen knew something about work besides its being one of the factors of production. Generally, the academics devise distinctions which aren't always obviously relevant even to their own low-range theorizing. But they have made me think more carefully about leisure. They need to think more carefully about work.

I now reconsider some of the points I've made—or rather, scored—over the years. Let the games begin!

Primitive Affluence Vindicated

What better place to begin than before the beginning—before work? I've already discussed what I mean by the phrase “primitive affluence” in [I], [II] and [III]. Many cultures, including our own, have myths about a work-free Golden Age in the timeless past, or in an undiscovered country. One of them, from medieval Europe, is the dream of a Land of Cockaigne, where rivers flow with beer and wine, the mugs and glasses “come on their own,” houses are made of food, wheat fields are fenced with “roast meat and ham,” people have sex in the street if they feel like it, they have eternal youth, and “he who sleeps most earns most.”⁶⁵ Some have speculated that these myths

65 Paul N. Morris, *Roasting the Pig: A Vision of Cluny, Cockaigne and the Treatise of Garcia of Toledo* (Boca Raton, FL: Dissertation.com, 2001), Appendix A: “The Land of Cockaigne in Medieval

and fantasies are based on remnants of folk memories. I doubt it. These are just the dreams of tired and hungry people. But there is ample source evidence of primitive affluence in ethnographies, the reports of explorers and travelers, historical records, and even from archaeology.

I refer to what Murray Bookchin, in his sagacity, called “the preposterous theory of an ‘original affluent society.’”⁶⁶ Even a critic of the theory admitted that it “appears to have carried the day and has come to represent the new enlightened view of hunting-gathering societies.”⁶⁷ It appears in textbooks.⁶⁸ I’ve reviewed the

Poetry,” 92-106. A famous American example of the genre is “The Big Rock Candy Mountains.” “A Tramp’s Utopia,” in Berneri, *Journey through Utopia*, 318-19. I worry that they might be strip-mined. “There used to be a kind of person in America who openly proclaimed his aversion to work”: the hobo. De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 50; see also Nels Anderson (himself a onetime hobo), *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1923).

66 Murray Bookchin, “Whither Anarchism? A Reply to Recent Anarchist Critics,” *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998* (Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1999), 187. Bookchin is like the Catholic prelate who refused to look through Galileo’s telescope at the moons of Jupiter because he knew they weren’t there.

67 David Kaplan, “The Darker Side of the ‘Original Affluent Society,’” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56(2) (Summer 2000), 303. Another anthropologist speaks of it, resentfully, as a “fashionable idea.” David Riches, *Northern Nomadic Hunter-Gatherers: A Humanistic Approach* (London: Academic Press, 1982), 9.

68 E.g., Carol R. Umber, Melvin Umber & Peter N. Peregrine, *Anthropology* (10th ed.; Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 273.

178 afterthoughts on the abolition of work

literature in several places.⁶⁹ Richard Borshay Lee's monograph on the San (Bushmen) remains the most thorough quantitative study of hunter-gather subsistence.⁷⁰ Other San ethnographies confirm his conclusions.⁷¹ So do studies of other peoples. In East Africa, the Hadza spend less than two hours a day gathering food; the men spend more time gambling than working. They explain that they do not like hard work.⁷² They are surrounded ("encapsulated") by farmers. They refrain from agriculture by choice. Another such society is the Guayaki Indians of Paraguay.⁷³

69 Bob Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, 139-150; Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, ch. 8; see also John Zerzan, "Future Primitive," *Future Primitive and Other Essays* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1994), 29-32 & accompanying footnotes.

70 Richard Borshay Lee, *The !Kung San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), ch. 9; see also Richard Borshay Lee, *The Dobi Ju/'Hoansi* (2d ed.; Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers, 1993), 56-60 (there is a 4th ed. 2012).

71 Jiri Tanaka, *The San: Hunter-Gatherers of the Kalahari: A Study in Ecological Anthropology* (Tokyo, Japan: University of Tokyo, 1980), 77; Lorna Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) (based on fieldwork in the 1950s, before Lee and the other Harvard anthropologists arrived); Susan Kent, "Hunting Variability at a Recently Sedentarized Kalahari Village," in *Cultural Diversity Among Twentieth-Century Foragers*, ed. Susan Kent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

72 James Woodburn, "An Introduction to Hadza Ecology," in *Man the Hunter*, ed. Richard B. Lee & Irvin DeVore (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1968), 54; Sahlins, "Domestic Mode of Production I," 55.

73 Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: The Leader as Servant and the Humane Uses of Power Among the Indians of the Americas*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Urizen Books, Mole Editions,

Abundance and leisure were the norm in pre-contact Australia.⁷⁴ In the Philippines, the Manobo, who practice shifting cultivation, work 4-5 hours a day. There are two months when they do not work at all.⁷⁵ Even sub-Arctic Indians in Canada led an affluent life, easily meeting their basic needs.⁷⁶ The original affluent society thesis is generally taken for granted in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunter-Gatherers*.⁷⁷

I have only just come upon a monograph on the Monobo tribesmen of Mindanao, Philippines, which, at the risk of my publisher's impatience, I cannot forebear from quoting. The author, a Filipino anthropology graduate student, is openly exasperated by these lazy subsistence farmers:

1974), 164.

74 Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society," *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972), 1-39; Sahlins, "The Domestic Mode of Production I," *ibid.*, 51-69; C.W.M. Hart & Arnold R. Pilling, *The Tiwi of North Australia* (2d ed.; New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), 39, 45.

75 Rogelio M. Lopez, *Agricultural Practices of the Manobo in the Interior of Southwest Cotabato (Mindanao)* (Cebu City, Philippines: The University of San Carlos (Divine Word University), 1968), 23, 73. They produce a surplus of rice and corn. *Ibid.*, 23, 74. "The working time of the Manobo is affected by two factors: climatic conditions and the Manobo take-your-time attitude." *Ibid.*, 23. Like the Kpelle, the Manobo practice dry rice farming.

76 Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 72, 115, 126.

77 Ed. Richard B. Lee & Richard Daley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

“As a primitive group, the Manobo seem to have an inadequate idea about the cost of production as an economic phenomenon as conceived by [ta-da!] *modern societies*.”⁷⁸

This will remain as long as their present way of life is unchanged. The cost of labor and the length of time needed for work seems to them no more than the expenditure of energy and succession of one activity after another. ... Working time is also valueless to them. They may sit down and chat with friends all day long, or work without wanting to finish it in order to save time for other matters. It is only when the season is fast ending that the frenzy of work is aroused in them.⁷⁹

Now this was written, apparently in 1966 or earlier, by someone whose religions were Catholicism and modernization. Lopez was innocent of all influence from the counter-culture, the Harvard Kalahari anthropologists, French

⁷⁸ Lopez, *Agricultural Practices of the Manobo*, 49-50 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50. The concept of “profits from the farm [is] unknown to them. A direct inquiry regarding this matter cannot be answered by them satisfactorily.” How strange. Lopez manfully tried to estimate costs of production but he was against thwarted: “Land rent is not included in the table as the Manobo get their land free. Management cost is also not included because actually, the one who is supposed to manage the farm is just like any ordinary worker. Everyone in the working group knows how to proceed and does not need any overseer.” *Ibid.* I’m not making this up!

intellectuals, and everyone else hated by Murray Bookchin and Noam Chomsky. He saw primitive affluence where he would rather have seen progress. That makes it more plausible to believe that he really did see it.

There is more than one way to shorten working time. One way is early retirement. In Edward Bellamy's utopia, *Looking Backward* (1887), work begins at age 21 and the age of retirement is 45.⁸⁰ Another way to shorten working time is to delay the onset of doing serious work. Among the San, young people are not expected to provide food regularly until they are married, which is usually between ages 15 to 20 for girls, and about 5 years later for boys, "so it is not unusual to find healthy, active teenagers visiting from camp to camp while their older relatives provide food for them [citation omitted]."⁸¹ Similarly, in H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905), "study and training last until twenty; then comes the travel year, and many are still students until twenty-four or twenty-five."⁸² That sounds familiar. I attended law school. I

80 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), 47-48.

81 Richard B. Lee, "What Hunters Do for a Living, or, How to Make Out on Scarce Resources," in *Man the Hunter*, 36, quoted in Sahlins, "The Domestic Mode of Production I," 53.

82 H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), 315.

have found many fascinating parallels between the stories in literary utopias and the stories in modern ethnographies. Maybe someday I can return to this.

A composite table of physical energy ratios has been calculated for foragers. This refers to the daily rate of energy expenditure (both work and nonwork). For foragers, it is 1.78 for males, 1.72 for females; for horticulturists, 1.87/1.79; for agriculturists, 2.28/2.31.⁸³ Such statistics say nothing about the character of the work done. By all indications, hunting, gathering and even gardening are more fun than farming. The statistics are not very comparable to statistics on work in an industrializing society, where work is long and hard, nor to work in an advanced industrial society, where work is also long and hard, but much of it does not involve much physical activity. Nonetheless, these calculations add more to all the other evidence that foragers work less than anybody else, and that the more complex the society, the longer its workers work.

The much shorter working hours of primitives only begin to indicate the relevance

83 Mark R. Jenike, "Nutritional Ecology," in *Hunter-Gatherers: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Catherine Painter-Brick, Robert H. Layton & Peter Rowley-Conwy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 220-21. It is interesting that women work less than men (on average, of course) in every category of pre-industrial work.

of primitive societies to the anti-work argument. As I've often said, the work there is usually more varied and challenging than modern work, to such a degree that the line between work and play often cannot be sharply drawn. Their languages may not recognize the distinction, as with the Yir Yiront in Australia.⁸⁴ "Working conditions" are better for hunters and gatherers because the greater part of their work is done out of doors, not at assembly-line stations, or in office cubicles, or standing up all day in banks and supermarkets, or driving trucks or taxis, or walking around all day in restaurants [II]. They don't have to commute: for them, going to work is the same thing as being at work. It is also the same thing as taking the scenic route. Every route is scenic. As they move round, they are learning. The work may be individual or cooperative, but it is never subordinate to a hierarchy.

Not all these advantages apply to horticulture or agriculture. Agriculture sustains much higher populations—but not in style. But, as I've pointed out [II], even less than interesting work, especially if there is not too much of it, is much better conducted in a healthy environment, by parties of friends and neighbors, with ample

84 Lauriston Sharp, "People without Politics," in *Systems of Political Control and Bureaucracy in Human Societies*, ed. Verne F. Ray (Seattle, WA: University of Seattle Press, 1958), 6.

intervals of rest, and in a festive atmosphere often including singing. I provided the example of the dry-farming of rice by the Kpelle in Liberia. Here is another example, the Basuto in southern Africa:

In all phases of agricultural work great use is made of co-operative work parties called *matsema*. These are gay, sociable affairs comprising from about ten to fifty participants of both sexes. Ordinary people invite their close friends and neighbours to help them, headmen and chiefs call on their followers as well. Uninvited guests are welcome provided they do some work. These *matsema* are useful if not very efficient. They assemble in the morning about 9 o'clock and work, with frequent breaks for light refreshment, until about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, to the accompaniment of ceaseless chatter and singing... When the host thinks they have worked enough, they adjourn to his house where food and drink are provided and the party becomes purely social.⁸⁵

When I read accounts like this, Fourier's concept of "attractive labor" does not seem so fantastic after all. The Basuto example is not far removed from Morelly's utopia: "No one believed himself exempt from labor which, undertaken in

85 Hugh Ashton, *The Basuto* (2d ed.; London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1967), 131.

concert with everybody, was rendered gay and easy.” The harvest, which demands the longest and hardest work in agriculture, was festive:

All these labors were followed by games, dances, country feasts. The succulent meals consisted of a copious variety of delicious fruits. Keen appetite greatly enhanced enjoyment of them. Finally, the days devoted to these occupations were days of merry-making and rejoicing, succeeded by a sweet repose which we, after our gaudy and riotous pleasures, have never tasted.⁸⁶

In Tommaso Campanella’s 1602 utopia *The City of the Sun*, “All the people go out into the fields with banners flying, with trumpets and other instruments sounding, equipped according to the occasion, whether to plow, reap, sow, gather, or harvest. Everything is accomplished in a few hours.”⁸⁷ In primitive societies, life isn’t divided into work and everything else.⁸⁸ It isn’t

86 Morelly, “Nature’s Domain,” in *French Utopias*, 94.

87 Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun: A Poetical Dialogue*, trans. Daniel J. Donno (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 83 (originally 1602).

88 Ann Oakley, *Woman’s Work: The Housewife, Past and Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 11. A basic utopian theme: “The distinction between work and non-work seems to be eroding away in Ecotopia, along with our whole concept of jobs as something separate from life.” Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 173 (originally 1975). You can’t tell when a Utopian is working or at leisure. *Ibid.*, 172.

that the work isn't occasionally strenuous or dull. But the primitives are spared time-discipline. At any particular time, they don't *have* to do anything.⁸⁹ And nobody tells them what to do. As anthropologist Lucy Mair wrote concerning the Nuer, who are Sudanese cattle herders: "No Nuer will let any other address an order to him."⁹⁰ Or as Marshall Sahlins describes the tribal chieftain: "One word from him and everybody does as he pleases."⁹¹

The Transitional Period

William Morris had some trouble reconciling his Marxism with his utopianism. His thinking on work was much more advanced than what then prevailed among Marxist politicians and intellectuals. It still is. He knew that what most politically-minded workers wanted was state socialism to abolish exploitation and inequality. That was the full content of socialism for Edward Bellamy, August Bebel, V.I. Lenin and, I suspect, Friedrich Engels. Morris regarded it as the

89 Polly Wiessner, "Risk, Reciprocity and Social Influences on !Kung San," in *Politics and History in Band Societies*, ed. Eleanor Leacock & Richard Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press & Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences d l'Homme, 1982), 79.

90 Lucy Mair, *Primitive Government* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 65, quoted in Bob Black, "More Modesty All Around: on Barclay's *The State*," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 63 (24)(2) (Spring-Summer 2007), 56.

91 Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 21.

minimum program, a transitional program. He thought it was sure to be tried.⁹² It was. It failed.

Even if it had succeeded, on its own terms, Morris would not have been satisfied:

Some Socialists might say we need not go any further than this; it is enough that the worker should get the full produce of his work, and that his rest be abundant. But though the compulsion of man's tyranny is thus abolished, I yet demand compensation for the compulsion of Nature's necessity. As long as the work is repulsive it will still be a burden which must be taken up daily, and even so would mar our life, even though the hours of labour are short. *What we want to do is add to our wealth without diminishing our pleasure. Nature will not be finally conquered until our work becomes part of the pleasure of our lives.*⁹³

I call that the abolition of work.

There would have to be some sort of transition. It's impossible to foresee what it would be like, because the circumstances in which a revolt against work could succeed are unforeseeable and, some may say, inconceivable.

92 "Under an Elm-Tree; or Thoughts in the Countryside," Political Writings of William Morris, ed. A.L. Morton (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 225.

93 "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," in *ibid.*, 95 (emphasis added).

Obviously the mass refusal of work would be necessary. But it need not be universal. The interdependence of the economic institutions will prove to be their fatal weakness. Contrary to Noam Chomsky, I don't believe that, for a "meaningful" revolution, "you need a substantial majority of the population who recognize or believe that further reform is not possible within the institutional framework that now exists."⁹⁴ Rather, I agree with Lewis Mumford: "The notion that no effective change can be brought about in society until millions of people have deliberated upon it and willed it is one of the rationalizations which are dear to the lazy and the ineffectual."⁹⁵ The point might be put more strongly. For the Marxist worker-intellectual Joseph Dietzgen, "the ruling class must necessarily base itself upon the deductive principle, on the preconceived unscientific notion that the spiritual salvation and mental training of the masses are to precede the solution of the social question."⁹⁶

This future will be worse than the present in many, many ways. The world will be hotter,

94 Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (Brooklyn, NY: Zuccotti Park Press, 2012), 59, quoted in Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 164.

95 Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), 307 (originally 1930).

96 Joseph Dietzgen, "Scientific Socialism," *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Eugene Dietzgen & Joseph Dietzgen, Jr. (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 89 (originally 1873).

more polluted, with more severe weather, and with reduced biological and cultural diversity. The rich will be richer and the poor will be poorer. There will be too many people. Democracy will appear ever more obviously as a façade for oligarchy. “But if the President were Catholic (or black) (or female) (or Jewish) (or gay)... “-- that bag of tricks is almost empty. As discussed below (“The Precariat”), trends in the workplace, all of which are bad, will get worse. Considering the ubiquity (and iniquity) of the National Security State, conspiracies will be impossible, except at the highest level, where they are business as usual. Considering the immensity of the military and the militarized police, insurrection in the traditional sense would be mass suicide. Nonetheless, if there is generalized resistance, there will be bloodshed and plenty of destruction. After the Revolution the world will be a wreck, even if the catastrophe falls short of the destruction of civilization, for which certain people long.

Nonetheless, the new work-free society, or society working free of work, will be different from what Marx called primitive communism, even if it has devolved from civilization. No matter how widespread the destruction or how degraded the environment, the world will still be filled—cluttered, even—by buildings, highways

and industrial products. These will present both problems and opportunities. Kropotkin and Malatesta sternly warned that the apparent abundance of food in the stores won't last long. But there will be non-perishables aplenty, for awhile. We will all be scroungers—dumpster divers—and I salute the lumpen vanguard which is already showing us the way. Recycling will assume greater urgency. And who knows what all is in the landfills? They may turn out to be treasure troves. It might be a long time before iron mines and steel mills have to be reopened. Maybe that time will never come.

This new world will not be unaware of the old world from which it emerges. It is all too unforgettable. There will remain technical knowledge, in the widest sense: knowledge which was unavailable to primitive societies and, indeed, unnecessary for them—literacy, for instance. Neither literally nor figuratively will the new world have to reinvent the wheel. Nor rely for its history only on oral tradition. I don't care how alienating certain primitivist intellectuals, whose own literacy and numeracy skills are sometimes of a high order, regard these skills. In practice, the primitivists work them hard.

You will make your new world, if you do, mostly out of what you inherit from it, not

only materially, but culturally. Unless you use it selectively, and often in radically original ways, you will almost by definition recreate the old world which created it, and which it created. I want my ideas to be part of the legacy: a useable part of it.

The Work Ethic

In my first paragraph I quoted Paul Lafargue—writing in 1883—who viewed, with alarm and disdain, “a strange madness,” “the love of work, the passion for work to the point of exhausting one’s vitality and that of one’s progeny.”⁹⁷ This much is certain: the work ethic was not devised by workers.⁹⁸ The ancient Greek and Roman writers never bothered to promote a work ethic in their workers. Their workers worked on an or-else basis. In the European West, the idea began to begin, so to speak, with the Christian teaching to obey your masters and accept your miserable lot in life. Hence the many observations—by H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell, for instance—that the work ethic is a morality for slaves.⁹⁹ That was

97 Lafargue, *Right to Be Lazy*, 3.

98 “True enough we live in a time when labor is praised in a most fantastic manner. But these panegyrics seldom come from the working class.” Sadakichi Hartman, *White Chrysanthemums*, ed. George Knox & Harry Lawton (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), 69 (originally circa 1905).

99 Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, 154; Russell, “In Praise of Idleness,” 17.

how, in the early stages of British industrialism, it was deployed, especially in the Methodist version, to pacify the working classes.¹⁰⁰ Even in that vulgar religious form, it is not entirely defunct. But the idea of work eventually acquired a life of its own, first when it was freed from religion, and then when it was freed from morality.¹⁰¹

Adriano Tilgher's book on "work through the ages"—which is actually about elite attitudes toward work—is short and to the point. To the ancient Greeks, work—in the sense of physical labor—was a curse and nothing else. Their word for it, *ponos*, has the same root as the Latin *poena*, "sorrow." For their contemporaries, the Hebrews, work was also painful drudgery—and on top of that, it was punishment or expiation for sin. But work was meritorious if it was done so as to be able to share its fruits with one's needy brethren. Christianity drew from both sources. St. Thomas Aquinas considered work to be a duty imposed by nature. We begin to drift into dangerous territory. Luther kicked it up a notch. Work was, explicitly, a moral duty for all those capable of work, and legitimate work was a service to God: "Luther placed a crown on the sweaty brow of labor. From his hands work came forth endowed with

100 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 354-59 & *passim*.

101 Tilgher, *Work through the Ages*, 88-89.

religious duty.”¹⁰²

For the Calvinist, work was to be done to fulfill a holy purpose and for no other reason: Calvin “is an anchorite of the market-place.” Work is not for “wealth, possessions, or a soft living”: its fruits are for investment. From the bourgeois point of view, as Engels observed, “where Luther failed, Calvin won the day.”¹⁰³ The 19th century (this is a cavalier history) is the Golden Age of Work. Then, and since, many work for the sake of work.¹⁰⁴ But, Tilgher thought that, in his time (the 1920s), the will to work began to wane.¹⁰⁵ He may be right. But in the 20th century, at just that time, the foremost exponents of the work ethic, as H.L. Mencken noted, were the Fascists and the Communists. The doctrine of the inherent virtue of work

lies at the heart of all the new non-Euclidean

102 Ibid., 3-50 (quotation at 50). Luther was “the true inventor of the modern doctrine that there is something inherently dignified and praiseworthy about labor, that the man who bears the burden in the heat of the day is somehow more pleasing to God than the man who takes his ease in the shade.” H.L. Mencken, *A Mencken Chrestomethy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 107.

103 Frederick Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,” in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 388. “Calvin’s creed was fit for the boldest of the bourgeoisie of his time.” Ibid. In discussing the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, Engels antedates Weber by a generation.

104 Tilgher, *Work through the Ages*, 71.

105 Tilgher, *Work through the Ages*, 57-90, 141-48 (quotations are at 57, 58).

theologies, for example, Bolshevism and Fascism,—though they reject certain of its traditional implications. They are all hot for labor, and reserve their worst anathemas for those who seek to shirk it. Says the Charter of Labor of the Italian Fascists: "Work in all its forms, intellectual, and manual, is a social duty." To which the Constitution of the USSR replies in sonorous antiphon: "The Union of Socialist Republics declares labor to be the duty of all citizens."¹⁰⁶

According to anarchist hagiography, the anarchists during the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939) were the most noble, the most heroic,¹⁰⁷ and the most revolutionary workers whom the world has ever seen: "For Spanish Anarchism remained above all a peoples' movement, reflecting the cherished ideals, dreams, and values of ordinary individuals, not an esoteric credo and tightly knit professional party far removed from the everyday experiences of the villager and factory worker" (Murray Bookchin).¹⁰⁸ The factory

106 H.L. Mencken, *Treatise on Right and Wrong* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 28. "'Socialist man' looked suspiciously like Taylorism run wild." Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 87.

107 As evidenced by a book title: Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868-1936* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978). This is his least bad book.

108 *Ibid.*, 2.

workers of Catalonia were the heart and soul of the Revolution and the pride and joy of what remained of the international anarchist movement.

I speak in clichés because that's how the anarchists speak on this topic, among others. Official anarchism, although officially atheist, exalted the work ethic, industrial technology, productivism, and an ideology of solidarity and sacrifice. Also workers' self-management of industry.¹⁰⁹ Official Spanish anarchism promoted these principles maybe even more insistently than anarchism elsewhere: "By glorifying labor as emancipatory, the dominant forms of anarchism and, later, anarchosyndicalism led not only to the acceptance of industrialization but to its promotion."¹¹⁰ Much of contemporary anarchism is the same way.

However, shocking evidence has come to light which suggests that the Barcelona workers themselves, whether they were anarchists or not, often failed to share the ideology of their organizations and militants. They had no work ethic under any circumstances. In practice, workers' control in Barcelona meant control of workplaces by union militants, who wanted

109 Michael Seidman, *Workers Against Work: Labor in Paris and Barcelona During the Popular Fronts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), chs. 2-3.

110 Ibid., 42.

nothing—not even the interests of the working class—to get in the way of increasing production for the war. Prior to the Revolution, the Barcelona workers enjoyed some success in gaining higher wages and shorter hours. During the Revolution, they defended these gains and sought even higher wages and even shorter hours. After all, shouldn't a working-class revolution benefit the workers? If you thought so, you do not understand workerism. The government (which included some anarchist militants) and the unions—both the anarchist CNT and the socialist UGT—called for wage cuts and longer hours. As historian Michael Seidman writes, there were two sides to the prewar CNT, which was not only a union fighting for the immediate gains of its constituency but also a revolutionary organization struggling for control of the means of production. During the Revolution these two functions of the Confederación would come into conflict because the Barcelonan working class would continue to fight, even under more unfavorable circumstances, for less work and more pay.¹¹¹

The result was class conflict between the workers and the representatives of their class, which is exactly what anarchists like Bakunin

¹¹¹ Ibid., 80.

predicted would happen if a socialist government ever came to power. The workers resisted work in the same ways they always had: by absenteeism, sabotage, theft, work slowdowns, the refusal of overtime, taking unauthorized holidays, unilateral adoption of a shorter workweek, and even by going on strike. The bosses—what else is there to call them?—responded as bosses always do: with exhortations, threats, firings, sending their agents out to investigate suspected cases of malingering, fines, and criminal prosecutions.¹¹²

Still, there were also new responses, probably inspired by the Soviet example. The CNT Minister of Justice in the central government, García Oliver—a prominent militant from the anarchist vanguard organization, the FAI—established labor camps (sometimes then referred to, even by their proponents, as concentration camps) as penal institutions: “an extreme, but logical, expression of Spanish anarchosyndicalism.”¹¹³ The guards were

¹¹² Ibid., chs. 6 & 7.

¹¹³ Ibid., 99. “Most who were sent to prisons or work camps were convicted on political charges—which included violating public order, possessing arms [!], and engaging in fascist activities.” Ibid., 101. Forced labor for criminals and class enemies still has its anarchist advocates today. Black, “An Anarchist Response to ‘The Anarchist Response to Crime,’” *Defacing the Currency*, 193-216. I wronged Scott W of the Insurgency Collective when I wrote that no anarchist before him ever advocated prisons and forced labor for criminals.

recruited from the CNT.

Seidman's book was published in 1991.¹¹⁴ I've mentioned it here and there. Maybe I should have reviewed it, because, as far as I know, no anarchist or leftist ever has. But, as a *Luftmensch*, I can't do all the heavy lifting. I do too much already. For present purposes, I put forward the Spanish example as the ultimate dramatization of the fact that the work ethic is for bosses, not for workers.

One thing has never changed, "the necessity of keeping the poor contented. Which led the rich, for thousands of years, to preach the dignity of labor, while taking care themselves to be undignified in this respect" (Bertrand Russell).¹¹⁵ As William Morris put it in 1884, "it has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself—a convenient belief to those who live off the labour of others."¹¹⁶

Max Weber's original theory about Protestantism and capitalism was not about the work ethic of workers. It was about the work ethic of merchants. It is doubtful whether any

114 In addition to the chapters on Barcelona workers (chs. 1-7), Seidman wrote about the parallel struggle by the Parisian workers against a Popular Front government with a Socialist head of state (chs. 8-13).

115 Russell, "In Praise of Idleness," 27.

116 "Useful Work versus Useless Toil," *Political Writings of William Morris*, 86; reprinted in *Why Work?* 35.

work ethic ever dominated the consciousness of most workers anywhere.¹¹⁷ Most workers aren't as dumb as intellectuals sometimes make them out to be. And most intellectuals aren't as smart as they think they are. According to labor historian Herbert Gutman: "At all times in American history—when the country was still a preindustrial society, while it industrialized, and after it had become the world's leading industrial nation—quite diverse Americans, some of them more prominent and powerful than others, made it clear in their thought and behavior that the Protestant work ethic was not deeply engrained in the nation's social fabric."¹¹⁸

Gutman's other research interest was African-American history. Not too surprisingly, he found evidence that the slaves, although they were almost all pious Protestants, did not subscribe to the Protestant work ethic.¹¹⁹ I largely

117 Daniel Bell, "Work and Its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America," *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960); de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 54-55.

118 Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 4.

119 Herbert G. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of "Time on the Cross"* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 14-41, reprinted in Herbert G. Gutman, *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: The New Press, 1987): 312-325.

agree with this judgment: "When one looks at the situation from the very historical perspective that ostensibly gave rise to it, explanations in terms of the Protestant Ethic emerge as little more than an invention of twentieth-century social science, with unwarranted pretensions to an ancient lineage."¹²⁰ Weber cites little evidence, and too much of it consists of insipid, avuncular maxims from *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Its author, the one-time Benjamin Franklin, was not a Calvinist, and he was probably not a Christian. He was a completely modern man: maybe the first.

There's one thing that Protestant Christianity did do: it took the fun out of the Sabbath, the day of rest. It decreed refraining from work, certainly, but refraining from play too, and it mandated listening to long sermons. Even work might be, as Nietzsche remarked, a more satisfying use of time: "Industrious races find it very troublesome to endure leisure: it was a masterpiece of *English* instinct to make the Sabbath so holy and so boring that the English begin unconsciously to lust again for their work- and week-day."¹²¹ But the English weren't always that way. They were made that

120 Peter Kelvin & Joanna E. Jarrett, *Unemployment: Its Social Psychological Effects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104.

121 "Beyond Good and Evil," *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 292.

way, partly perhaps by religion, but mostly by industrial discipline itself.

Even now there are efforts, mainly by academics at third-tier schools, to use religion to justify work, and to use work to justify religion. I have come across an oversized book, an anthology, 524 pages, entitled (get this) *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*.¹²² Many of its 32 essays assert categorically that “spirituality”—their euphemism for religion—boosts productivity. They cite some studies. None of their own studies, however, provides any direct evidence of cause and effect. They think that’s what *should* happen. The godly are forever confusing “is” with “ought.”

But maybe they’re right. The traditional function of slave morality is to reconcile the poor, the weak, the weary, and especially the workers, to their wretched fates. If the downtrodden are patient, they will enjoy pie in the sky when they die. It should not be too hard for these social scientists and professors of management to survey and compare the work performance of spiritual and non-spiritual workers. Instead, their claims and, when they attempt any, their arguments are

122 Ed. Robert A. Giacalone & Carole L. Jurkiewicz (Armonk, NY & London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). One might make crude jokes about their names, but I am above all that. I stopped doing that sort of thing several weeks ago.

based on sleight of hand so crude that it would embarrass any competent card sharp or Supreme Court Justice.

Their topic is not, after all, the individual workers' subjective experience of spirituality (or what the academics, or the workers, mistake for the sacred or supernatural). Their subject is *workplace* spirituality, a nonsense phrase. Generally the purpose of the workplace is to make money for the owners. There are no spiritual workplaces. Workplace spirituality refers to some sort of workplace culture. Their definition: "Workplace spirituality is a framework of organizational values evidenced in the [firm's] culture that promotes employees' experiences of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy."¹²³

Thus defined, there is no workplace spirituality—first, because there are no experiences of transcendence; second, because, even if there were, there would be no such experiences "through the work process." Not even the Christians have hitherto preached or practiced any such spiritual exercises. Jesus was anti-work,

¹²³ Robert A. Giacalone & Carole L. Jurkiewicz, "Towards a Science of Workplace Spirituality," *ibid.*, 13 (screaming italics omitted). A science!

although contemporary Christians don't dwell on that. Verily I say unto you, servants, obey your masters, yes (St. Paul): but don't expect epiphanies at work. "Culture" means many things—too many things—but unless it might have something to do with *work*, it can have no relation to "organizational performance." None of the contributors to the anthology reports his *own* personal experiences of transcendence, or her own feelings of completeness and joy, in working on the anthology.

By their work shall ye know them. There are certain "spiritually-related work practices such as gainsharing,¹²⁴ job security in encouraging calculated risks, narrower wage and status differentials, processes for effective input into the organization's decision-making processes, and guarantees on [sic] individual workers' rights [which] have been widely correlated with higher rates of growth in labor productivity... "¹²⁵ Doing well by doing good.

If these practices increase productivity, they increase productivity whether or not anybody is experiencing transcendental transports. They are all among the reforms previously promoted by the "Progressive human resource management (HRM)" perspective in

¹²⁴ Tying wages to productivity.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 10.

industrial relations studies,¹²⁶ which never had a word to say about workplace spirituality. The progressive paradigm was never adopted by most employers.¹²⁷ It has no place in the current world of work with its longer hours, falling real wages, deskilling, downsizing, outsourcing, and the looming abolition of the career, in the sense of a permanent, full time job with benefits. It's easier to increase productivity with new technology, by intensifying work, and by imposing longer hours. These writers are all disconnected from workplace reality, and probably from reality in general. The word "unions" does not appear in the index to the *Handbook*. Workplace spirituality is the final, debased version of the Protestant ethic, contaminated with business boosterism, New Age mysticism, the 12-Step shuffle, even Transcendental Meditation.

Workers may not have generally accepted the work ethic, but the workerist leftists did—and they still do.¹²⁸ They were the real if implicit target of Paul Lafargue's ire. The exaltation of work was not peculiar to the Stalinists and

126 Godard, *Industrial Relations*, 146-152. It's amazing how it's is all coming together.

127 Ibid., 157.

128 Georges Clemenceau said that war was too important to be left to the generals. Work is too important to be left to the workerists. I am willing to leave it to the workers, but not to the workerists.

Fascists, although they may still be unsurpassed at it. Bakunin proclaimed the dignity of labor and the shamefulness of living without working.¹²⁹ “*Labour* is the fundamental basis of dignity and human rights, for it is only by means of his own free, intelligent work that man becomes a creator in his turn, wins from the surrounding world and his own animal nature his humanity and rights, and creates the world of civilization.”¹³⁰ He was

129 Michael Bakunin, “Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood,” *Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (New York: Grove Press, Evergreen Books, 1974), 79 (originally 1866).

130 Ibid., 78. Those adults able but not willing to work would be deprived of their political rights. Ibid., 68. They “shall likewise lose the right to rear and keep their children.” Ibid., 69. “But compulsory labour is the last road that can lead to Socialism. It estranges the man from the community, destroys his joy in his daily work, and stifles that sense of personal responsibility without which there can be no talk of Socialism at all.” Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 97 (originally 1938). The “Platformist” anarchists in the 1920s, invoking Bakunin, advocated universal forced labor. The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organizational Platform (Questions and Answers) November 2, 1926,” reprinted in Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organization from Proudhon to May 1968*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh, Scotland & Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002), 223. On the Organization Platform, see Bob Black, “Wooden Shoes or Platform Shoes: On The Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists,” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 54 (20)(2) (Winter 2002-2003): 14-15, 19; Lawrence Jarach, “Anarcho-Communism, Platformism, and Dual Power: Innovation or Travesty?” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 54. (20)(2) (Winter 2002-2003): 41-45. On AK Press, see Bob Black, “Class Struggle Social Democrats or, The Press of Business,” *Anarchy: A*

right about work as the creator of civilization, but it was accomplished by servile labor.¹³¹ As for the anarchists Kropotkin and Malatesta—according to Malatesta, they both “exalted, with good reason, the moralising influence of work”¹³²—further confirming my opinion that the critique of moralism and the critique of work are closely related, because moralism and work are closely related. They are both to be rejected unconditionally, for, if only one of them is rejected unconditionally, the other one will bring it back.

Hours of work have gotten longer continually since 1940 (my next topic) without work becoming, in general, more satisfying—quite the contrary. Work is as easy as ever to believe in as a harsh fact, but harder than ever to believe in as an ideal. The work ethic probably survives only in a few bourgeois enclaves, such as law firms and executive suites, where the hours of work are longer than anywhere else, although the money is better. In a survey from the 1950s, almost 90% of executives reported that they would continue

Journal of Desire Armed No. 64 (25)(2) (Fall-Winter 2007): 26-26-29.

¹³¹ See fn. 1 & accompanying text.

¹³² “Peter Kropotkin: Recollections and Criticisms by One of His Old Friends,” *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*, ed. Davide Turcato (Oakland, CA & Baltimore, MD: AK Press, 2014), 518.

to work even if they had an independent income supporting their current standard of living.¹³³ Some of the yuppies of the 1980s and 1990s, who are caricatured for their self-indulgence, worked for 60, 80, even 100 hours.¹³⁴

No doubt this is still going on. Once one is broken into the work routine, and then takes on more and more work, at the expense of the rest of your life, at the same time that you are making a lot of money, you have to tell yourself that you are not the self-destructive fool that you seem to be. You are better than other people, who are idlers compared to you—you, the proud hipster Stakhanovite. You can afford \$6 lattes at Starbucks, and you will need a lot of them to keep you awake that long. That's not an ethic: it's an obsession. You are insane.

I've mentioned this anecdote before. An old friend of mine—Tom Conlon—who worked as a computer programmer at Microsoft in its salad days, and retired early. He told me that—Bill Gates being a liberal boss (and now the richest

133 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 136.

134 Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 18. "One out of every three professional and technical employees, managers, and administrators works 49 or more hours a week [as of 1977], compared with one out of six blue-collar craft and kindred workers and operatives." Levitan & Belous, *Shorter Hours, Shorter Weeks* (Baltimore, MD & London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), 75.

man in the world)—the office joke was that you could work “any 60 hours that you like.” Some clinical psychologists recognize the workaholic to be, in fact, an addict.¹³⁵ Whatever is motivating workers at all levels to work nowadays, it’s probably not any work ethic. Rather, it’s probably the traditional needs for food, clothing, shelter, and respectability, also force of habit, well-founded insecurity, or else some insane obsession. In Japan, it is so common for workers to work themselves to death—60-70 hours a week, 10,000 deaths a year—that there is a word for it: *karoshi*.¹³⁶

Hours of Work

I have already discussed, here and elsewhere [I, II], the duration of work in primitive societies. Work in pre-industrial societies, although sometimes hard, was not always long, because there was a lot of down time for peasants at least in temperate climates. As John Stuart Mill observed, discussing agriculture: “The same person may perform them all [plowing, sowing and reaping] in succession, and have in most climates, a considerable amount of unoccupied time.”¹³⁷ In medieval Europe, there were, by one

¹³⁵ Bryan E. Robinson, *Chained to the Desk: A Guidebook for Workaholics, Their Partners and Children, and the Clinicians Who Treat Them* (3d ed.; New York & London: New York University Press, 2014), 18.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁷ John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (8th ed.;

count, 115 holidays and 52 Sundays which were free of work.¹³⁸ For *ancien regime* France, Paul Lafargue counted 52 Sundays and 38 holidays.¹³⁹ By comparison, working hours have gone from bad to worse for contemporary Americans and, I expect, for most people everywhere.

Working hours went way up in the early stages of industrialization, and, because the work was degraded, so were the workers. This was why the eight hour day was perhaps *the* most important issue in the late 19th century for industrial workers. It was the cause for which the Haymarket anarchists in Chicago paid with their lives [I]. As I will discuss later, shorter-hours was American labor's most important demand until the late 1930s, as unthinkable as that now seems.¹⁴⁰ From 1900 to 1920, "working hours fell sharply from just under 60 hours to just 50. During the 1920s, the process slowed, but accelerated again as weekly hours fell below 35."¹⁴¹ "From 1900 to 1940 the average workweek of full-time employees fell by roughly 8 percent for decade."¹⁴²

London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1878), 1: 163.

138 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 89.

139 Lafargue, *Right to Be Lazy*, 39 n. 13.

140 Benjamin Kline Hunnicut, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 9, 147.

141 *Ibid.*, 1.

142 Levitan & Belous, *Shorter Hours, Shorter Weeks*, 74-75.

The 40 hour week was at that time enacted into law, although it did not apply to many workers who needed it the most, such as farm laborers. It still doesn't apply to farm laborers.

During World War II, understandably, working hours increased, because millions of men were conscripted into the military (my father, for instance). At the same time industrial production had to be greatly increased, because the United States became the Arsenal of Democracy, supplying war materiel, not only to its own military, but to our allies. Some of them—the Soviet Union and China, for instance—fell somewhat short of being democracies. Women—inspired, perhaps, by the iconic “Rosie the Riveter”—or perhaps by the need to earn a living without a working husband, replaced the men and, remarkably, it turned out that women could do anything that men could do. The unions took a “no strike pledge” in return for high wages, including higher overtime wages, although some workers rebelled against the no strike pledge with wildcat strikes¹⁴³ (a wildcat strike is a strike not authorized by a union).

Under rationing, there was nothing to spend all this increased income on—no private automobiles, for instance, were produced

¹⁴³ Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No Strike Pledge During World War II* (London: Bewick Editions, 1980).

from 1942 through 1945. Similarly, there was nothing for our GIs to spend their accumulated pay on, except English girls, who came cheap. These are the reasons why, after the war, there was a massive increase in consumer spending, launching the consumer society which we still have. Many workers prospered. Almost all of the unions were pushing for higher wages and more fringe benefits, not shorter hours. I'll have more to say about that later.

Here I am interested in what happened with respect to the hours of work after World War II. At first the work week stabilized at 40 hours.¹⁴⁴ According to all the theorists of productivity, it should have then have continually gone down. According to all the evidence, it continually went up. It has, in fact, gone up since 1940—temporarily, because of the war—but then permanently. It went up by *one month*: by 163 hours, in the 1980s and 1990s. This is because of both longer working days and more weeks of work.¹⁴⁵ Working hours are still going up. Yet in 1961, and later, the pundits were still saying: “The prospect is more leisure and less work in the future.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Hunnicut, *Work Without End*, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Schor, *The Overworked American*, 8-32.

¹⁴⁶ Nels Anderson, *Work and Leisure* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 156. And this from a hobo turned sociologist!

I've been discussing the working hours of wage-workers. They aren't the only workers. There are also housewives. Because most housewives are by now also wage-laborers, there is a tendency to neglect the housework part of their toil as if it were residual. Liberal feminists think that the massive proletarianization of women since the 1970s is a progressive development for women. How wrong they are! These liberal feminists are not, I notice, themselves proletarians. Some of them, I suspect, are not housewives. Wage-labor has not, for women, replaced housework. It has only added the burden of wage-work, for most women, to the burden of housework. Some of the husbands may be doing a little more housework, but working wives are certainly doing a lot more wage-work. They are working longer hours than ever. This is not a topic which has received enough attention.

There were, however, a few studies in the first half of the 20th century. One of them, comparing housework for urban housewives, in 1930 and in 1947, found that the work week *increased* from an already extremely high 63.2 to 78.5 hours in smaller cities, and to 80.5 hours in larger cities. Another study of rural housewives in homes which did not yet have electric power found that these housewives "spent only [!] 2

percent more of their time on household chores than women whose homes were electrified and who had the benefit of many labor-saving devices.”¹⁴⁷ Other studies found that housewives in rural communities worked 62 hours in 1929, and 61 hours in 1964. Another study, of urban areas: in 1929, 51 hours. In 1945, in small cities, 78 hours: in large cities, 81 hours.¹⁴⁸

It doesn't matter that these studies disagree in their details, or that their methodologies might be faulted, by the exalted standards of 21st century survey research. I am trying to sketch the big picture. The clear conclusion is that the hours of housework have long been even longer than the hours of wage-work, often much longer. And now it's worse: "Housewives are sharply aware of the fact that, however much or little husbands may share domestic tasks with them, the responsibility for getting the work done remains theirs."¹⁴⁹

In 1965, a study found that the average American woman spent 4 hours a day on housework (28 hours a week) and 3½ hours a day on housework (26½ hours a week) for a

147 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "A Case Study of Technological and Social Change: The Washing Machine and the Working Wife," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary Hartmann & Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 248-49.

148 Oakley, *Women's Work*, 7.

149 *Ibid.*, 92.

total of 54½ hours a week.¹⁵⁰ There was more work for mother, among other reasons, because she no longer had the help of maids, laundresses and dishwashers.¹⁵¹ She never had much help from father, who was also working longer hours. He looked forward, after his tiring, tedious and humiliating day, to when his wife meets him at the front door, wagging her tail, with a newspaper in her mouth.¹⁵² Not much later, women went out of the house to do wage-work. But the housework was still waiting for them when they came home: “A thirty-five hour week (housework) added to a forty-hour week (paid employment) adds up to a working week that even sweatshops cannot match.”¹⁵³ Thanks to capitalism, with a little boost from feminism, the modern woman enjoys the worst of both worlds. But she is allowed to vote.

Shorter Hours

Here I would like to recount some history which was not well-known to me in 1985 or for many more years. In the 19th century, shorter-hours

150 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (n.p. [New York]: Basic Books, 1983), 199.

151 Ibid., 201; see also Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., Holt Paperbacks, 2013) (originally 1982).

152 Cf. Alexander Trocchi, “Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds,” *Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, ed. Andrew Murray Scott (Edinburgh, Scotland: Polygon, 1991), 180-81.

153 Ibid., 213.

was *the* foremost issue for organized labor.¹⁵⁴ It was what the Haymarket agitation was about: anarchist-led workers demanding the 8 hour day. It was not just a demand for shorter hours, which would be a demand for less pay. It meant shorter hours so that workers would work less, but receive the same wages, or higher wages, than when they worked more. It was understood to be a wage demand. And, as noted, working hours did go down.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, shorter-hours became an even more urgent labor demand, with unions demanding both a five-day week (which they got) and a 30 hour week (which they did not get).¹⁵⁵ You didn't have to be a utopian crazy to find something irrational, not to say immoral, about a situation where some workers worked long hours while tens of millions of other workers were unemployed. (Curiously, that is exactly the situation now.) Even some politicians, journalists and college professors thought that something was amiss. It was obviously necessary to share the wealth and share the work. In 1933, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President, the shorter work week was generally thought to be on the verge of adoption.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Hunnicut, *Work Without End*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

The President, however, decided otherwise. After temporizing about the issue, he soon came down in favor of another solution to the economic crisis. The answer was, not shorter hours of work, it was more jobs, and more work.¹⁵⁷ This has been the conventional wisdom ever since. In his administration, the 40 hour week was enacted, and so was a (very low) Federal minimum wage. And also Social Security (retirement pensions)—which is a different kind of shorter-hours measure.¹⁵⁸ Organized labor continued to press for shorter hours, but it eventually fell into line.¹⁵⁹

One of the ironies here—in addition to the fact that FDR was elected, and repeatedly re-elected, with strong labor support—is that his policies, which did not greatly reduce working hours, did not greatly reduce unemployment either. Another is that the 40 hour week was an empty gesture at a time when the average workweek was less than 35 hours. Even a legislated 35 hour work week would have meant something. After World War II, the workweek stabilized at 40 hours.¹⁶⁰ A 35 hour work week would mean a lot now, when the 40 hour week has become a farce. Two economists have estimated that, “Under the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., ch. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., ch. 8

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

best of conditions a reduction in the workweek from 40 to 35 hours would result in an increase of at least fourteen percent in hourly wage rates if workers are to maintain their income levels.”¹⁶¹

Labor’s defeat at the legislative level didn’t have to be the end of the matter. Another of FDR’s measures, the National Labor Relations Act, legalized and domesticated labor unions. The Act legalized at-work union organizing, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. Labor might have renewed the fight for shorter hours in collective bargaining negotiations with particular employers. But the unions never did that, not in a serious way. Here I summarize a case study of one important union whose rank and file, but not its leadership, continued to fight the good fight. But lost.

After World War II, continuing into the 1950s and 1960s, in at least in one large United Auto Workers local—Local 600, at the Rouge plant in Detroit—the rank and file kept up constant pressure on the leadership to demand shorter hours in the collective bargaining agreement.¹⁶² There’s a long and sordid story here about how the union bosses—above all, Walter Reuther, whom the left

¹⁶¹ Levitan & Belous, *Shorter Hours, Shorter Weeks*, 2.

¹⁶² Jonathan Cutler, *Labor’s Time: Shorter Hours, the UAW, and the Struggle for American Unionism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004), 6.

regards as a saint—deceived the union members. They faked putting the shorter-hours demand on the bargaining table, only to trade it off first, every time, meanwhile doing everything possible to diminish shorter-hours sentiment among the workers. In 1958 contract negotiations with the Ford Motor Company, the UAW did not even bother to make a shorter-hours demand.¹⁶³

Walter Reuther, nominally a socialist, agreed with FDR that what American workers needed was, not shorter hours, but more work. Throughout his union dictatorship, although he sometimes lied about it, he consistently opposed demands for shorter hours.¹⁶⁴ How to ensure a steady supply of work, and lots of it, for factory workers? In the same way that FDR did: by war production. Reuther was a Cold War, anti-Communist, militarist liberal, much like many contemporary liberals, such as Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, only now the menace is supposedly Islamism, not Communism. The war economy which began in World War II, continues to this day, although, war production has not been enough to prevent unionized factory workers from being laid off in vast numbers. Their jobs have been abolished or exported.

Labor-management negotiations are

¹⁶³ Ibid., 159.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 15.

no longer about how much more money and benefits labor should get out of vastly increased productivity and vastly increased profits. Now they are about how much labor will give back. When the unions abandoned the demand for shorter hours, it was the beginning of the end for the unions.¹⁶⁵ This was not the only reason for the decline of unions, but there is no doubt about their decline. In 1953, 35% of the workforce was unionized. In 1975 it was 25%. By 2009, it was less than 12%—and only 7% of the private-sector labor force.¹⁶⁶ Probably most unionized workers are now government employees who are forbidden to go on strike. The NLRA does not apply to them. In my childhood (in the Detroit area), strikes were routine news, reported in the media from time to time, without any suggestion that there was anything unusual about strikes. Now they are rare. Considering the fragmentation of work by contingent work (see below), it is inconceivable that the unions will ever again accomplish anything for the working class. So much for syndicalism.

I am not especially sorry about that. All unions are oligarchic.¹⁶⁷ All unions are counter-

165 Ibid., 181.

166 Stanley Aronowitz & William DeFazio, *The Jobless Future* (2d ed.; Minneapolis, MN & London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2010), xviv.

167 Seymour Martin Lipset, "Introduction" to Robert Michels,

revolutionary. All unions have cooperated with management and the police to suppress unauthorized “wildcat” strikes, as they still did in the 1970s, when unions still had some power.¹⁶⁸ We will never abolish work without some kind of a revolution. The unions, if they still exist, will have nothing to do with that. Anything that puts business out of business, puts unions out of business too. Unions are, in fact, businesses. They are much more like insurance companies than social movements.¹⁶⁹

As a political issue, or even a labor issue, shorter-hours is long dead. Yet it’s remarkable how long the spectre of shorter hours haunted the power elite. President John F. Kennedy, a liberal, in 1963 rejected the 35 hour week. In 1964, his successor Lyndon B. Johnson, another liberal,

Political Parties (New York: Dover Books, 1959), —; Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin A. Trow, & James S. Coleman, *Union Democracy* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1956), 3; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 357-99; Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” 152-53.
168 John Zerzan, “Organized Labor vs. ‘The Revolt Against Work,’” *Elements of Refusal* (2d rev. ed.; Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press/Paleo Editions & Eugene, OR: A.A.A., 1999), 185-198; Ken Weller, *The Lordstown Struggle and the Real Crisis in Production* (London: London Solidarity, [date unknown]), available online at <http://ratical.org/corporations/linkscopy/weller.html>.

169 Stanley Aronowitz & Jonathan Cutler, “Quitting Time: an Introduction,” in *Post-Work: The Wages of Cybernation*, ed. Stanley Cutler & Jonathan Cutler (New York & London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

also rejected it in his State of the Union speech.¹⁷⁰ And nobody was even advocating shorter hours then! As far as I know, no American politician has ever mentioned the issue any time since. Shorter-hours is the elephant in the workroom, and in the stateroom.

Now shorter-hours is not the abolition of work. It's not utopian.¹⁷¹ But if there is such a thing as a radical reform, shorter-hours is a radical reform. Aristotle was right: a life of labor does not leave time for better activities. Nor does it cultivate capacities for better activities, it represses them. Adam Smith knew that too. William Godwin added: "The poor are kept in ignorance by the want of leisure."¹⁷² We know that much shorter hours are feasible, even within the context of industrial capitalism, because hours have been much shorter in that context. Unfortunately I have no idea how to bring about this radical reform.

And how long is too long? Most utopian writers since Plato (who couldn't care less how long the slaves and artisans worked¹⁷³) have

170 Cutler, *Labor's Time*, 1-2.

171 Schor, *The Overworked American*, 141.

172 William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 423 (originally 1793).

173 "In the economic foundations of the Republic we look in vain for a recognition of the labor problem." Mumford, *Story of*

included shorter hours in their plans. For Thomas More (1516), who was really the first genuine utopian: 6 hours.¹⁷⁴ Later utopias often promise 4 hours.¹⁷⁵ So did several anarchists and utopian socialists. William Godwin, in 1793, thought that half an hour a day of equal manual labor would suffice.¹⁷⁶ For Étienne Cabet (1840): 7 hours in summer, 6 hours in winter.¹⁷⁷ For Henry Olerich and Joaquin Miller (both in 1893): usually 2 hours.¹⁷⁸ For W.D. Howells (1894): 3 hours a day

Utopias, 34.

174 More, *Utopia*, 37; see also Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, 66. But there would be annually only 62 holidays. *Ibid.*, 79. Contrary to some modern interpretations, his *Utopia* was not a satire (what was he satirizing?), nor was he just playing a clever intellectual game with his Humanist friends. His critique of private property is as sincere as it is devastating. J.H. Hexter, *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

175 Tomasso Campanella, *The City of the Sun: A Poetical Dialogue*, trans. Daniel J. Donno (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 65 (originally 1623); Granville Hicks & Richard M. Bennett, *The First to Awaken* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), 72; B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1982), 59 (originally 1948).

176 Godwin, *Political Justice*, 432-33.

177 Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, 155. Cabet obviously contemplates a mainly agrarian society where work is seasonal.

178 Joaquin Miller, *The Building of the City Beautiful* (Cambridge, MA & Chicago, IL: Stone & Kimball, 1893); Henry Olerich, *A Cityless and Countryless World* (Holstein, IA: Gilmore & Olerich, 1893), both discussed in Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* (2d ed., enl.; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964).

of “obligatories”: for the good utopian citizen, further “voluntary labors, to which he gave much time or little, brought him no increase of those necessities, but only credit and affection.”¹⁷⁹ The anarcho-communist Alexander Berkman promised 3 hours.¹⁸⁰ For Aldous Huxley: 2 hours a day for professors and government officials: but they also do some “muscular work” in their spare time because the sedentary life is unhealthy.¹⁸¹ This too is a standard utopian theme. For B.F. Skinner’s *Walden Two* (1948): 4 hours a day.¹⁸² For Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975): 20 hours a week.¹⁸³ Others don’t provide a statistic, but they promise shorter hours—almost everybody does that, from the Hermetic philosopher Valentine Andreae in 1619¹⁸⁴ to the demagogue Huey Long in 1935.¹⁸⁵

179 Howells, “A Traveller from Altruria,” 1968), 172 .

180 Alexander Berkman, *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 203 (originally 1929).

181 Aldous Huxley, *Island* (New York: HarperCollins, Perennial Classics, 2002) (originally 1962), 173-74.

182 Skinner, *Walden Two*, 52, 59; see also B.F. Skinner, “Some Issues Concerning the Control of Human Behavior,” *Cumulative Record: A Selection of Papers* (3d ed.; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972), 32-33.

183 Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*.

184 Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (London: Freedom Press, 1982), 34, 112. Andreae was a Lutheran pastor—and Hermetic philosopher—who spun the tale of the Rosicrucians, supposedly a humanistic, esoteric, enlightened secret society. Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London & Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 60-69.

185 Huey Pierce Long, *My First Days in the White House* (Harrisburg,

In Ursula K. Le Guin's 1974 anarchist utopia *The Dispossessed*—"an ambiguous utopia," according to its subtitle—people work from 5-7 hours a day, with 2-4 days off every 10 days.¹⁸⁶ Le Guin doesn't promise the moon—although, her society is *on* a moon—rather, she describes an anarchist society subject to harsh environmental conditions. But they are no harsher than in the Kalahari desert where the San—in fact, not in fiction—worked fours a day. Le Guin might have known this, because Richard B. Lee's preliminary findings on the Bushmen were published in 1968, in the *Man the Hunter* anthology. Marshall Sahlins' "The Original Affluent Society" appeared in *Stone Age Economics* in 1972. Ironically (I suppose), Le Guin's father was the famous anthropologist A.L. Kroeber. California Indians, his field of greatest expertise, were leisured hunter-gatherers. We hope for a touch of the exotic in anthropologically informed fiction. But this book is, as Michael Moorcock says, "dull and journalistic."¹⁸⁷ According to Lester del Ray, the ending "slips

PA: The Telegraph Press, 1935), 139.

186 Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1991), 187 (originally 1974). Some doctors, however, work 8 hours a day! Ibid., 121. This might well be many doctors' utopian dream.

187 Michael Moorcock, "Starship Stormtroopers," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* Nos. 72/73 (n.d.), 90.

badly.”¹⁸⁸ I would say instead that the book has no ending. It just stops.

There is little indication that Le Guin is very familiar with anarchist or utopian literature. Contrary to legend, Le Guin is no anarchist. If she is, then where has she been, politically—she is now 86—for the last forty years? Writing stories and making money. She has now written an adulatory forward to a new collection of some of Murray Bookchin’s old essays.¹⁸⁹ (The publisher, Verso, is however marketing them as “new essays,” as if Bookchin has not been as dead as Marley these last 9 years.) Le Guin does identify with the left, betraying the archaism of her ideology. She hails Bookchin as “a true son of the Enlightenment”—yes, as were Robespierre, Napoleon,¹⁹⁰ and the Marquis de Sade.¹⁹¹ She is hailed (by Verso) for her “impassioned endorsement of the writer and political theorist Murray Bookchin.” She is aware

188 Lester del Ray, “Reading Room,” *If*, August 1974 144-45.

189 Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Practice of Direct Democracy* (New York & London: Verso, 2015).

190 “The philosophy which put the fear of death into infamy in the eighteenth century, despite all the book-burnings and piles of corpses, chose to serve that very infamy under Napoleon.” Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, “Introduction,” *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1993), xii (originally 1944).

191 *Ibid.*, “Excursus II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality,” 81-119.

that Bookchin “move[d] away from anarchism.” If she knows that, she knows that Bookchin’s supposed anarchism came under severe attack, and not only from me, years before he publicly repudiated it.¹⁹² His “social ecology” (a phrase he plagiarized¹⁹³) had even sooner drawn some severe criticism.¹⁹⁴

“Impatient, idealistic readers,” she condescends to say, “may find him uncomfortably tough-minded.” Not everybody has the balls to read Murray Bookchin! who modestly boasted of the “muscularity of thought” which he tried, to no avail, to transmit to the wimpy, effete, polite, mushminded, uncomprehending Greens.¹⁹⁵ Impatient, idealistic readers who are accustomed to reading Le Guin’s fiction, all of which is fantasy or very soft science fiction, might find

192 Janet Biehl, “Bookchin’s Break with Anarchism” (2007), available online at www.theanarchylibrary.org & www.communalism.net.

193 For references to “social ecology” as far back as 1930, see Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, 18-19 n. 49.

194 *Social Ecology after Bookchin*, ed. Andrew Light (New York: Guilford Publications, 1999); David Watson, *Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a Future Social Ecology* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia & Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 1996). These titles reflected an impatience widely felt: that it was time for Bookchin to shut up and get out of the way.

195 Murray Bookchin, “Thinking Ecologically: A Dialectical Approach,” *Our Generation* 18(2) (March 1987), 3, quoted in Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, 18, and Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, 15. I can’t quote this too often!

even Bookchin challenging. Harry Potter fans might have trouble too. Bookchin wasn't tough-minded—just single-minded and simple-minded. He was just a blustering bully. If he were a tough guy, he would have rebutted *Anarchy after Leftism*, but, as he wasn't tough-minded—and because he had no balls¹⁹⁶—he didn't.

Le Guin now claims that Bookchin's "Post-Scarcity Anarchism" inspired *The Dispossessed*. That's ridiculous, since her "ambiguous utopia" Anarres is scarcity anarchism, not post-scarcity anarchism, and even its anarchism is compromised. If Bookchin inspired Le Guin, her inspiration was based on a misunderstanding. Taking her at her own word, she concealed her debt to Bookchin (and undoubtedly concealed it from Bookchin himself) until long after she collected her Hugo and Nebula awards, much as Noam Chomsky concealed his anarchism for many years, until anarchism became somewhat fashionable—or at least, too important to ignore—for his leftist fan base.¹⁹⁷

Technology

I have of course been discussing technology all along. That's because you can't discuss work without discussing technology. The first

196 See Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, 17 n. 46.

197 Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 62-64 & *passim*.

discussion of work and technology was by Aristotle: if “the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves.”¹⁹⁸ Actually, the shuttle does weave nowadays, and if guitars don’t exactly play themselves, player pianos play themselves, as do drum machines. Aristotle intended to ridicule the idea that cultured society could do without wage-labor and slavery. We still “want” (i.e., need), servants and slaves. Official opinion has agreed with him ever since.

I agree with Aristotle that technology will never replace wage-labor and slavery. I disagree with him, and with official opinion, that work can never be abolished. It’s not just a technological problem. It isn’t even mainly a technological problem. In 1985 [I] I wrote that I was “agnostic”—but skeptical—about the possible role of technology in the abolition of work. If I was an agnostic then, I am an atheist now. I haven’t learned anything about technology in the last 30 years to suggest that it might have anything to contribute toward the abolition of work. Some utopias are based on the complete rejection of machine technology.¹⁹⁹

198 “Politics,” *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2: 1989 [1 1253b-1254b].

199 E.g., Austin Tappan Wright, *Islandia* (New York & Toronto, Canada: Farrer & Rineholt, 1942).

I admit that it seems to be just plain common sense that there *could* be a genuine labor-saving technology. There has been speculation along those lines at least since Thomas More, indulged in by writers as disparate as Tommaso Campanella, William Godwin, Karl Marx, Paul Lafargue, William Morris, H.G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, Huey Long, B.F. Skinner, and Ernest Callanbach. Thus Marx referred to “the economical paradox, that the most powerful instrument for shortening labour-time, becomes the most unfailing means for placing every moment of the labourer’s time and that of his family, at the disposal of the capitalist for the purpose of expanding the value of his capital.”²⁰⁰ Although technology has advanced beyond the wildest dreams of the utopians, “the essential quality of life has hardly improved to the point that it could be called utopian.”²⁰¹ What’s wrong with this picture? [V].

Technology does not invent itself, or come out of nowhere, or emerge from the basements and garages of gifted, eccentric tinkerers like Rube Goldberg, Steve Jobs or Gyro Gearloose.²⁰²

200 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore & Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels, rev. Ernest Untermann (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), 1: 445.

201 Northrop Frye, “Varieties of Utopia,” in More, *Utopia*, 210 (originally 1965).

202 “The image of the designer as joyous improviser or flying mad man is an historical untruth.” Pierre Lemonnier, *Elements*

Even Francis Bacon, technology's first enthusiast, understood that much. He called for large-scale, state-controlled research laboratories.²⁰³ We have some now. The only way to understand where technology does come from, is through history. The Greeks made discoveries in mathematics, and sometimes in science, but their technology remained almost Neolithic. When you have servants and slaves to do the work, as also in ancient China, there is no reason to invent labor-saving technology. In fact, it would be a bad idea for servile workers to enjoy a lot of leisure. Idle hands, they say, do the devil's work. Technology was instead used for inventing toys, such as firecrackers in China, or the automata which amused the leisured classes in 18th century France.

The place to start is the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. Europe was by then familiar with technological progress. The mould-board plough and the horse collar were invented in the early Middle Ages, and the stirrup was borrowed from the Middle East. That was

for an Anthropology of Technology (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology, 1992), 117 n. 1.

203 Francis Bacon, "New Atlantis," *Essays and New Atlantis* (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), 288-299. "Bacon devotes little attention to a discussion of social or political institutions by which the citizens of Bensalem are governed." Dorothy F. Donnelly, *Patterns of Order and Utopia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 85. Nor did Plato.

more technological progress than the Greeks and Romans accomplished in the previous one thousand years, for all their vaunted high culture.²⁰⁴ Later, a monk invented eyeglasses, the Dutch invented windmills, Galileo invented the telescope, the clock was invented (an ominous development²⁰⁵), and so forth. The Europeans developed ships and navigation, and guns, by which they could roam the world, and pillage it.²⁰⁶ There were also important improvements in agriculture, such as the three-field system based on crop rotation. But the Industrial Revolution, building on these achievements, changed everything—including work.

According to the official story, technical advances in textile manufacturing in Britain inaugurated the Industrial Revolution. The official story is misleading about why this happened. These technologies greatly increased productivity, and profits. Those are the only things technological progress always does. Britain already had a flourishing export industry

204 Lynn T. White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

205 George Woodcock, "The Tyranny of the Clock," *Anarchism and Anarchists*, 104-109, reprinted in *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1983), 53-57 (originally 1944).

206 Carlo M. Cipolla, *Guns and Sails in the Early Phase of European Expansion, 1400-1700* (London: Collins, 1965).

in woolen and cotton goods, but they were not produced in factories. Under the “putting-out” system, merchants provided the raw materials to rural laborers who worked at home. It was profitable for them.

However, workers who were not wage-laborers, were not, as a work force, entirely satisfactory. They accepted work when they needed the money and they declined it when they did not. They worked without supervision. They worked when, and for as long as, they felt like it. But the new mechanized spinning (and later, weaving) technology made it possible and, for manufacturers, preferable, and profitable, to force the workers into factories where, subject to discipline and under supervision, they worked much longer hours than they ever had before. However, the workers resisted, as has been well documented by E.P. Thompson and other historians. They resisted individually and collectively. They noticed that these malign innovations would not be happening to them were it not for the new machines, which they sometimes destroyed (at one juncture some of these recalcitrant workers were called Luddites). Many of them became class-conscious.²⁰⁷ Socialist, communist and anarchist movements

207 Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*.

would emerge out of this history in Britain and elsewhere.

Technology, especially if it is imposed from above, does not liberate workers from work. E.P. Thompson, writing about England, showed that. Herbert Gutman, writing about America, showed that too. Certainly technological advance doesn't for most workers make work more satisfying, nor does it reduce the hours of work. Aldous Huxley complained that inventors and technicians have paid more attention to equipping large concerns with the expensive machinery of mass production than with "providing individuals or co-operating groups with cheap and simple, but effective, means of production for their own subsistence and for the needs of a local market."²⁰⁸ Inventors and technicians pay attention to what they are paid for. I haven't heard of any corporation or government agency or tax-free foundation which is paying inventors and technicians very much to invent empowering, decentralizing, small-is-beautiful, intermediate, appropriate, or convivial technology. Bill Gates and George Soros have not directed any of their liberal philanthropy that way.

That a major purpose of advancing technology is to increase productivity and, therefore, profits, is something I have never

208 Aldous Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace* (New York & London: Parker & Brothers, 1946), 16.

denied. But there is more than one way to increase profits, and increasing profits is not always the only purpose of business. Industrialization developed out of craft production and soon came into conflict with the values and practices of craftsmen, who were accustomed to controlling their own work and doing it on their own schedule. At one time, craftsmen controlled production.²⁰⁹ Even during early industrialization, some industrial processes encapsulated pockets of craft practices or depended on finished goods produced in craft shops.

For example, in the 1860s and 1870s, the Standard Oil Company required a lot of barrels, which originally had to be purchased on the open market from many independent cooperages. Barrelmaking was a skilled trade; barrels were made by hand; and some coopers belonged to the Coopers' International Union (founded in 1870). John D. Rockefeller—when he was not, as a Sunday school teacher, inculcating the work ethic—by a combination of methods ranging from buying up cooperages, to introducing barrel-making machinery, to calling the police to break strikes, destroyed cooperage as a skilled craft, and destroyed the union. He had some cause for dissatisfaction with handmade

209 Aronowitz & DiFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 26.

barrels, because the enormous new demand for barrels (much of it generated by Standard Oil) led to the hasty, stepped-up production of barrels which were sometimes defective. But there was more to it. Hand coopers, men of “obstinate and carefree manner,” in effect enjoyed a four day week, because on payday (Saturday) they did little work. Brewery wagons came around to sell “Goose Eggs” of beer. The men drank beer until it was gone and until they were paid, and then went out for a night on the town.²¹⁰ They didn’t work on Mondays.

As Proudhon put it: “The machine, or the workshop, after having degraded the worker by giving him a master, completes his degeneracy by reducing him from the rank of artisan to that of unskilled labourer.” He added: “It takes an economist not to expect these things.”²¹¹ The progress of mechanization, “very far from freeing humanity, securing its leisure, and making the production of everything gratuitous, these things would have no other effect than to multiply labour, induce an increase of population, make the chains of serfdom heavier, render life more

210 Gutman, “The Labor Policies of the Large Corporation in the Gilded Age: The Case of the Standard Oil Company,” *Power & Culture*, 213-254.

211 “System of Economic Contradictions,” *Property Is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (Oakland, CA & Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press, 2011), 192, 193.

and more expensive, and deepen the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers.”²¹²

Harry Braverman is the best-known proponent of the thesis that industrial technology has been invented and developed for the primary purpose of increasing employer control over the workers.²¹³ The argument was continued, with additional evidence and further into the 20th century, by Richard Edwards.²¹⁴ So far as I can tell, the Braverman thesis has never been seriously challenged in the last 40 years.²¹⁵ I have found an academic who carps that Braverman’s account of this devastating imposition upon workers denies their “agency” and reduces them to automatons.²¹⁶ I don’t find that in Braverman. As a Marxist and former union militant, he probably had some

212 Ibid., 195, quoted in Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London & Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2008), 113. Without acknowledgment, Marx took his critique of the technology of work from Proudhon. Michael Truscello & Uri Gordon, “Whose Streets? Anarchism, Technology and the Petromodern State,” *Anarchist Studies* 21(1) (2013), 12-15, available online at [www.lwbooksco.uk/journals/anarchists studies/](http://www.lwbooksco.uk/journals/anarchists%20studies/)

213 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974; 25th anniv. ed., 1998).

214 Edwards, *Contested Terrain*.

215 Aronowitz & DiFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 27-30.

216 Rosemary Harris, *Power and Powerlessness in Industry: An Analysis of the Social Relations of Production* (London & New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987).

direct experience of class struggle, whereas his critic, a tenure-hungry Marxist college professor, probably did not. Agency is irrelevant to his thesis. What he said happened, happened.

Leftist historians have devoted great effort, with some success, to identifying “agency” in the resistance of slaves to slavery in the antebellum south. Nonetheless, the slaves were freed, not by their own agency, but by the Union Army. No army has freed the army of labor from wage-slavery. Sure the workers fought back. But they lost. As they are losing now. I am weary of revering lost causes as the anarchists and primitivists do. I want us to win this time. Unless it results in accomplishment, agency, or the illusion of it, only raises false hopes.

A case study which confirms the Braverman thesis, one which (like Braverman’s book) I’ve mentioned all along [I], is by Katherine Stone. Her argument is that new technology was introduced in the steel industry (1890-1920) in order to take control of the production process away from the workers. She first

describes the labor system of the steel industry in the nineteenth century, in which skilled workers controlled the production process and made steel by using the employers’ capital. This system

came into conflict with the employers' need to expand production without giving workers a substantial share of the proceeds. They therefore moved to break the workers' power over production and all the institutions that had been a part of it—the skilled workers' union, the contract system, the sliding scale for wages, and the apprenticeship-helper system. They were successful, *and the power they won was the power to introduce labor-saving technology* [emphasis added]. To control the production process, and to become the sole beneficiary of the innovations.²¹⁷

One of the, to me, surprising things in this article is the account of how craft-like even the production of steel can be. Maybe it can be that way again. But the industrialists drastically degraded it. As explained by the infamous Frederick W. Taylor, inventor of the “Taylorism” admired by Lenin: “One of the very first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron as a regular occupation, is that he shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles an ox than any other type.”²¹⁸ The steel

²¹⁷ Katherine Stone, “The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry,” in *Labor Market Segmentation*, ed. Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich & David L. Gordon (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 27.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Bell, “Work and Its Discontents,” 227.

workers, although they experienced something of a recovery during the union era, ultimately became the victims of technological innovation after they lost control of it and abandoned any claim to it. In 1960, there were 600,000 production and maintenance workers in the American steel industry. In 1992, there were less than 200,000.²¹⁹

I would make a further point. Authoritarian social control in the workplace, like authoritarian control in the school, isn't just something you can leave entirely behind you after hours. Especially if you are working longer hours! It has spillover effects on the rest of life.²²⁰ As I've said, if you are habituated to hierarchy [I], that will influence all your social relations, in directions away from personal autonomy and toward subservience to authority. This is related to what Aristotle and Adam Smith—and Frederick W. Taylor!—told us about the degrading effect of work on human capacities, and about how work pre-empts time which could have been available for other pursuits.

Aristotle thought that the manual laborer could not be a good citizen. That doesn't bother me too much, since I am not a good citizen myself. But the democratic state, which works closely with big business, to their mutual advantage, does

219 Aronowitz and DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 33.

220 Alasdair Clayre, *Work and Play* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 174-75.

not want a well-informed, thoughtful citizenry. I would like a citizenry which is so well-informed and so thoughtful that it would disaggregate into fraternal individuals who reject the role of citizen, who reject the state, and who reject work. Work makes the ruling class rich, of course, and I don't underestimate that dimension of class rule and injustice. But work does even more for the power elite than that. No serious resistance to the state or capitalism can be expected from overworked, underpaid, stultified and stupefied workers. I've said it before [I]: They want your *time*. If they have your time, they have *you*. To exaggerate the point, "production is not now, but always has been primarily a means of control. Profit was only an alibi for the ideology of production, and an incentive to train novices in this ideology."²²¹

The historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has discussed two examples of supposed labor-saving technology which were anything but. One is the stove. The other is the washing machine. Both have been assumed, falsely, to have reduced women's work. They didn't.

In nineteenth century America, cooking was originally done on the open hearth (essentially,

221 Lev Klodey & Jason Radegas, *Here at the Center of the World in Revolt* (no publication information), 52. As usual, my ideas are uncredited by those who have obviously gotten them from me. I am the elephant in more than one room.

in the fireplace). During the century, most households switched to the cast-iron stove. It was more efficient and versatile, but for women—whether housewives or servants—“stoves meant more work rather than less.”²²² Unlike the open hearth, the cast-iron stove allowed for different kinds of cooking with the same fire. This led to less one-pot cooking, which meant more work for mother. The stove was harder to clean, and it had to be cleaned often, lest it rust: even more work for mother. The stove did, however, save some labor—for the men, after wood-burning stoves gave way to coal-burning stoves. Men no longer had to chop and carry wood.²²³ The coal was delivered to their door.

Then there is the washing machine. Everyone used to assume that the washing machine just *had* to require less work than did taking dirty clothes down to the stream and rubbing them on rocks, and so forth. As so often, everyone was wrong. As Cowan writes: “If the washing machine made household laundry simpler, it may also have made it more demanding, by raising standards of cleanliness; at the turn of the century very few farmers expected to have a clean suit of

222 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *A Social History of American Technology* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 194-96.

223 Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 61-63.

underwear every day.”²²⁴ Earlier, in middle class households, housewives didn’t do laundry at all: laundresses (servants) did it, just as servants cleaned the floors. Now mother does laundry, and she cleans the floor with a vacuum cleaner. That’s a main reason why—I previously cited the evidence—middle-class housewives, 1900-1940, did as much housework as their mothers had.²²⁵ In working-class households, there were neither servants nor labor-saving devices. Mother worked even harder there.

The enchantment with technology, which is universal now, has always been the iron dream at the heart of the American dream: “This willingness to accept the promise of plenty, this faith in the fruits of the machine, is typical of the American dream. For a hundred years and more”—by now, much more—“we have beguiled ourselves with visions of a utopia which was a sort of mechanical heaven, where the goods coming off the conveyor belts were always bigger

224 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “A Case Study of Technological and Social Change: The Washing Machine and the Working Wife,” in *Clio’s Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary Hartman & Lois Banner (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 247.

225 Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 177-78. “The end result is that, although the work is more productive (more services are performed, and more goods are produced, for every hour of work) and less laborious than it used to be, for most housewives it is just as time-consuming and just as demanding.” *Ibid.*, 201.

and better and more functional.”²²⁶ How far this delusion has been carried, I shall now relate.

I have searched in vain for a zero-work techno-utopia which was not an unwitting self-parody. Instead, look at what I did find. There is Extropia, which is part of a larger “transhumanist” movement. In “Principles of Extropia,”²²⁷ The aptly named Max More, Ph.D., who presents himself as an ultra-rationalist, promises miracles: nanotechnology, genetic engineering, cryonics, “an open-ended lifespan,” and much, much More. He promises—literally—the moon: space colonization, and not just the solar system, but eventually the galaxy. It will take a long time to get to the rest of the galaxy. But people who live forever have, truly, all the time in the world, “world enough, and time.” Like all futurologists [V], Dr. More imagines that trends always continue, if he likes them.²²⁸ One of these trends, he says, is “the ascending standard of living.” There is no ascending standard of living, except for the 1%. His belief in inevitable progress is the only thing

226 Parrington, *American Dreams*, 203.

227 Max More, “Principles of Extropia” (Version 3.11, 2003), at <http://extropia.org/principles.htm>.

228 “But the way the prophets of the twentieth century went to work was this. They took something or other that was certainly going on in their time, and then said that it would go on more and more until something extraordinary happened.” G.K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (London: The Bodley Head, 1949), 15 (originally 1904).

he shares with Marx and Kropotkin. But they were better informed.

This is only warmed-over Saint-Simon, who wrote: "Indeed, we want only to facilitate and illuminate the inevitable progress of events; in future, we wish men to do consciously, with more immediate effort and more fruitfully, what they have hitherto done without knowing it, slowly, indecisively and with little result."²²⁹ That's what Marx later said, and St.-Simon is where he got it from. And the whole grandiose Extropian ambition is warmed-over Francis Bacon: "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."²³⁰ Among the "things possible" which had already been invented in Bacon's imagined

229 *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon*, ed. Ghița Ionescu, trans. Valence Ionescu (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 105. You get this from Marx and Kropotkin too, and even from Gustav Landauer, who should have known better: "One day it will be realized that socialism is not the invention of anything but the discovery of something actually present, of something that has grown." Quoted in Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1958), 47-48.

230 Bacon, "New Atlantis," 288. For Bacon, knowledge and power were synonymous. "Novum Organum," *Advancement of Learning*. *Novum Organum*. *New Atlantis* (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952). Bacon "was the first philosopher to envisage the renovation of society through science." Berneri, *Journey through Utopia*, 127.

Temple of Solomon was napalm.²³¹ Some things are possible which it might be better not to effect.

Words like “work” and “labor” are not in the Principles. Dr. Max-Out More-Is-Better does drop hints—by calling for “bargaining not battling,” for “trading”—that all these wonders will be effectuated by capitalism, about which he clearly knows nothing. I think it’s fair to say that none of the facts in this book—facts which have been publicly available for many years—is known to him, and that none of its ideas has ever occurred to him. He must be entirely ignorant of longer working hours, lower wages, the higher cost of living, the deskilling of much work, structural unemployment, contingent work, and the vast increase in the inequality of income and wealth. He is not, however, entirely unaware of the economy, for he states: “Continued improvement will involve economic growth.” Somehow, Dr. More knows everything about the future, while knowing nothing about the present. There is more useful social thought in Thomas More than in Max More.

What is behind, or below, mad Max’s effusions is his positivist, Ayn Randish devotion to $A = A$ “objective reality,” which Friedrich

²³¹ “New Atlantis,” 298. But soon the manuscript breaks off: “[the rest was not perfected].” Ibid., 303. It never will be. Bacon only got as far as sitting on the edge of the bed, saying how great it will be.

Nietzsche, quantum physics, reflective scientists, and all philosophers of science²³² reject. Even historians know better than that.²³³ And so do I: “Science is a social practice with distinctive methods, not an accumulation of officially certified ‘facts.’ There are no naked, extracontextual facts. Facts are always relative to a context. Scientific facts are relative to a theory or a paradigm (i.e., to a formalized context).”²³⁴ Any real scientist understands this—Steven Hawking, for instance.²³⁵ Dr. More’s epistemology has been out of date for over a century. It is difficult to credit confident prophesies of the future, purportedly based on science and technology, from someone who is not a scientist, who doesn’t understand the philosophy of science, and who apparently has no training or hands-on experience with technology

232 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2d ed., rev.; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: Verso, 1975).

233 David Noble, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity” Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

234 Black, “Technophilia, an Infantile Disorder,” *Defacing the Currency*, 294.

235 Steven Hawking, “Black Holes,” *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 43-44. I am, however, a harsh critic of Hawking’s naïve ideas about science and social policy. Black, “Steven Hawking His Wares,” *Defacing the Currency*, 309-325. He may be less naïve now. After Gaza, he refuses to attend conferences in Israel.

either. This is science fiction (at least 60 years out of date) minus the science and minus the fiction.

Well, but if Extropia is to be dismissed for its capitalism, why not *communist* full automation? Why not “Fully Automated Luxury Communism”? Such is the slogan of Aaron Bastani of Novara Media, which apparently produces TV and radio shows in Britain on newsworthy topics.²³⁶ “There is a tendency in capitalism to automate labor, to turn things previously done by humans into automatic functions,” he explains. “In recognition of that, then the only utopian demand can be more the full automation of everything and common ownership of that which is automated.” He continues: “The demand would be a 10- or 12-hour working week, a guaranteed social wage, universally guaranteed housing, education, healthcare and so on. There may be some work that will still need to be done by humans, like quality control, but it would be minimal.”²³⁷ In Proudhon’s mocking words: “What a system is that which leads a business man to think with delight that society will soon be able to dispense with men! Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour!”²³⁸

236 www.novaramedia.com.

237 Quoted in Brian Merchant, “Fully Automated Luxury Communism,” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2015, at www.theguardian.com.

238 “System of Economic Contradictions,” 189.

248 afterthoughts on the abolition of work

This is the old vision of the Land of Cockaigne: a society of consumers without producers. It is still the case that “in every half-century from the time of the industrial revolution on, we have men of wisdom predicting more free time to come. One of the things which bids us be cautious about accepting glowing prophecies for the future of free time is that up to now they have all been wrong about it.”²³⁹ We know what the trends really are: the rates of technological progress and labor productivity will probably continue to increase. But these trends, which have been increasing for a long time, have not reduced working hours. A simultaneous trend is for working hours to increase. The abolition of some jobs is not the same as the abolition of work. When some jobs are abolished, many workers are thrown into temporary or permanent unemployment, while most of the remaining jobs are made worse. “This is why,” Karl Marx explains, “the most developed machinery forces the worker to work longer hours than the savage does, or than the labourer himself when he only had the simplest and most primitive tools to work with.”²⁴⁰

Bastani speaks of a “demand.” Demanded

239 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 299.

240 Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, ed. & trans. David McLellan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 145. Even Karl Marx knew about the original affluent society!

of whom? The corporations? The state? By whom? The unions? These trends have largely eliminated unions, and if they continue, the elimination of unions will continue. Demanded by well-meaning visionaries like Bastani? Who cares what he demands? I am reminded of poor old Fourier, who set aside an hour every day for visits from industrialists interested in financing phalansteries. They never showed up.

I am also reminded of the explanation, by Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward*, how the monopoly capitalism of 1887 evolved, without violence or revolution, into the benign state communism of the year 2000. By mergers and consolidations, the big corporations reduced themselves, finally, to one big corporation—which, having nothing to compete with, was in fact, and soon in name, the government. Marx had a similar idea, but he thought that a working-class revolution would be needed to persuade the capitalists that they had themselves already created a socialist state. Very likely this would not have otherwise occurred to them. Bastani mentions Bellamy as a precursor. Naturally it would be imprudent for him to mention Marx as a precursor, if Bastani has heard of Marx. Jeremy Rifkin, who made a more modest end-of-work argument, exercised similar prudence [V].

According to Lenin (1917): “The whole of society will have become one office and one factory, with equal work and equal pay.”²⁴¹ If this is utopia, it is utopia lite. According to a utopian department store owner writing a few years earlier (1900), utopia is the world as a department store.²⁴² (Vernon L. Parrington remarks: “It is not a good novel; it is a very bad novel, even for a department store owner.”²⁴³) A libertarian has advocated “proprietary communities” as the good life. His example was shopping centers.²⁴⁴ We would update that today: the good life is malls plus gated communities, both ably defended by private police like George Zimmerman. As of 2001, there were 30,000 gated communities, with almost four million residents.²⁴⁵ There are many more now. But this is no cause for regret because,

241 V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 84 (originally 1917).

242 Bradford Peck, *The World a Department Store* (Lewiston, ME & Boston, MA: B. Peck, 1900).

243 Parrington, *American Dreams*, 153.

244 Spencer H. MacCallum, *The Art of Community* (Menlo Park, CA: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970).

245 Mona Lynch, “From the Punitive City to the Gated Community: Security and Segregation Across the Penal Landscape,” *University of Miami Law Rev.* 56(1) (Oct. 2001), 49-50; Robert H. Nelson, “Privatizing the Neighborhood: A Proposal to Replace Zoning with Private Collective Property Rights to Existing Neighborhoods,” in *The Voluntary City: Choice, Community, and Civil Society*, ed. David T. Beito, Peter Gordon, & Alexander Tabarrok (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 342.

according to Murray Bookchin, “even these enclaves are opening up a degree of nucleation that could ultimately be used in a progressive sense.”²⁴⁶

The follies of Bellamy and Marx are as nothing compared to the folly of the Ecotopians and luxury communists. We know what will happen to workers while history is on the way to their technological paradise, because it has already been happening for many years: poverty, overwork, degraded work, longer hours, less autonomy, and no job security. A worker takes no comfort from the fact that somebody else has been automated out of his job. The money saved by labor-saving devices is never shared with what remains of the work force. The worker knows that she may be next; and, according to Bastani—who approves—she will be. Is she to endure her misery at work, while she still has work, and even greater misery, after she doesn’t, awaiting the arrival of luxury communism—in modern factory parlance, just-in-time? Why should the cavalry show up just in time? She might as well await the Second Coming of Christ.

If Extropia/transhumanism is the lunatic fringe of technophilic delirium, “uploading” is

246 “Interview with Murray Bookchin,” in Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Black Rose Books, 1998). 152

the lunatic fringe of the lunatic fringe.²⁴⁷ Extropian thinking reaches its ultimate absurdity—so far—in the idea of “uploading”: abandoning our bodies and Rapturing our minds into some mainframe computer which will provide us, forever, without fuss or muss, with whatever tactile or intellectual stimuli, or simulacra, we may desire. In the real world, uploading just means moving a file from one computer to another. Uploaders aspire to immortality: as files. They are programs trapped in the bodies of programmers.

Aside from the fact that there is no technological basis for this perverse nerd fantasy—it may be the only way some of these white boys will ever get laid—there is the matter of how impoverished and babyish this future is. The uploaders want to go to Heaven without first having to be good or believe in God. But uploading is less like going to Heaven than returning to the womb, which reminds me of a Philip Jose Farmer science fiction story.²⁴⁸ Uploading (which is undoubtedly impossible) would abolish work, certainly, along with abolishing everything that makes life worth

247 Extropia Da Silva, “Mind Uploading and Cylon Philosophy,” at hplusmagazine.com/2013/3/12/17/mind-uploading-and-cylon-philosophy, which explains that this is a central issue in *Battlestar Galactica*, which may be the worst science fiction movie I have never seen.

248 Philip Jose Farmer, “Mother,” *Strange Relations* (New York: Avon Books, 1974), 7-35 (first published 1953).

living, including life. If the computer which provides them with a virtual universe crashed, their data—their selves—would be lost. That would be no great loss. Or somebody like me might pull the plug on them. If a malevolent virus got into the God-computer, it might delete their files, or corrupt them. Instead of an eternity in Heaven they might spend an eternity in Hell. There's a science fiction story on this theme too, by Harlan Ellison.²⁴⁹ Uploaders should be vaguely aware of these risks, since science fiction is probably the only fiction they ever read. In saying this I am disparaging, not science fiction, but uploaders. A science fiction author wrote the introduction to this book—which just might trick a few uploaders into buying it. But he would probably not disagree with me, or with Michael Moorcock, that most science fiction has been reactionary, militarist, racist, sexist, formulaic, and above all, puerile.²⁵⁰

The most important fact about really existing technology is that destroys jobs, degrades work, disempowers workers, and destroys the environment. Contrary to the official wisdom, but obvious to everyone [V], high technology destroys more jobs than it creates: “while each

249 Harlan Ellison, “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream,” *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream: Stories* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1967).

250 Moorcock, “Starship Stormtroopers.”

generation of technological change makes some work more complex and interesting and raises the level of training or qualification required by a (diminishing) fraction of intellectual and manual labor, for the overwhelming majority of workers, this process simplifies tasks or eliminates them, and thus eliminates the worker.”²⁵¹ I’ve been saying this for 30 years.

Health, Safety, and Well-Being

That work is hazardous to your health is not a new idea. Concerning factory labor, Marx wrote:

We shall here merely allude to the material conditions under which factory labour is carried on. Every organ of sense is injured in an equal degree by artificial elevation of the temperature, by the dust-laden atmosphere, by the deafening, not to mention danger to life and limb among the thickly crowded machinery, which, with the regularity of the seasons, issues its list of the killed and wounded in the industrial battle.²⁵²

Long before Marx, Adam Smith observed that work “corrupts even the activity of [the worker’s] body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance, in any other employment than

²⁵¹ Aronowitz & DiFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 20.

²⁵² Marx, *Capital*, 1: 465.

that to which he was bred.”²⁵³ According to the admirable anarcho-socialist Gustav Landauer:

The limits of technology, as it has been incorporated into capitalism, have already gone beyond the bounds of humanity. There is not much concern for the workers’ life or health (here one must not think only of the machines; one should also recall, the dangerous metal wastes in the polluted air of work-shops and factories, the poisoning of the air over entire cities), and certainly there is no concern for the workers’ joy of life or comfort during work.²⁵⁴

Workplace safety is a topic where the statistics are always out of date before they are published. It’s also a topic where, as I’ve discussed [VI], the official statistics are more than usually defective and deceptive. Nonetheless, safety at work should never be forgotten and it always deserves a fresh look. That some work is dangerous, everybody knows, even David Ramsey-Steele [III]. That some work is more dangerous than it has to be, is known to many, and it is probably dimly sensed by some of the rest. But the magnitude of the danger is not

253 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1902), 613 (originally 1776).

254 Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, trans. David J. Parent (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1978), 96.

generally appreciated.

In 1910, according to that rabble-rouser Emma Goldman, there were 50,000 dead and 100,000 “wounded”²⁵⁵ at work. I don’t know where she could have found those statistics, but the military metaphor is still appropriate. Karl Marx and Edward Bellamy wrote approvingly of industrial armies, and Marx, as quoted, referred to their casualties. In the early 1970s Ivar Berg wrote: “In 1968, a total of 14,300 people died in industrial accidents—about the equivalent of US fatalities in Vietnam that year.”²⁵⁶ Factory work and war have at least two things in common: danger and discipline. In 1917, 1,363,000 workers were injured in the manufacturing industries.²⁵⁷

In a book I have quoted [I], published in 1973, we read: “Among the 80 million workers in the United States, more than 14,000 deaths on the job are recorded annually, and about 2.2 million disabling injuries. Those are probably minimal figures, for every worker knows the devices by which industry hides or disguises accidents on

255 “Anarchism: What It Really Stands for,” *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings & Speeches*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 53.

256 Ivar Berg, “‘They Won’t Work’: The End of the Protestant Ethic and All That,” in *Work and the Quality of Life: Resource Papers for Work in America*, ed. James O’Toole (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 1974), 37.

257 Francesca Maltese, “Notes for a Study of the Automobile Industry,” in *Labor Market Segmentation*, 89.

the job and pads its safety records. A recent report has estimated that the actual numbers may run as high as 25,000 deaths and 20 to 25 million disabling injuries.”²⁵⁸ These statistics were concerned with the obvious—the accidents and injuries—but “not with occupational disease that develops from long-term exposure to noisy, dirty, hot, or cold working conditions and to various toxic chemicals and physical hazards.” Millions more workers die of illnesses not necessarily caused only by workplace conditions (such as many forms of heart disease, lung disease and cancer) in the sense that they also have other causes, but to which, in fact, workplace conditions substantially contribute.²⁵⁹

The book I quote from, *Work Is Dangerous to Your Health*, is not academic (although the authors are academics). Its subtitle is “A Handbook of Health Hazards in the Workplace and What You Can Do About Them.” It was written for workers. It was written in the wake of the enactment of the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1970, nominally enforced by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration

258 Jeanne M. Stillman & Susan M. Daum, *Work Is Dangerous to Your Health* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xii.

259 Ibid., 4. For another set of alarming statistics from the same period of time, see Patricia Cayo Sexton & Brendan Sexton, *Blue Collars and Hard Hats: The Working Class and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Random House, 1971), 103-104.

(OSHA). OSHA has been underfunded and understaffed ever since it was set up. Judging by the rate of inspections during the first eight months under the Act, “it would take them 230 years to visit all the workplaces in our country.”²⁶⁰ The book was written, therefore, as a guidebook to workers how to protect themselves on the job, from specific health hazards. I didn’t pay much attention to that part when I first read the book. I have now.

The book contains a list of “Some Exposures to Health Hazards Listed by Occupation.” Only some, mind you, and only some occupations. It is 51 pages long. Here are some examples. Auto workers and auto repairmen: 19 hazards. You may say, well sure, automobile factories are more dangerous than most workplaces. Similarly for dock workers (13 hazards). But consider some more examples. Bakers: 9 hazards. Veterinarians: 10 hazards. Barbers and hairdressers: 22 hazards. Farmers and agricultural workers: 29 hazards. Hospital workers (including doctors and nurses): 23 hazards. The list for metal workers, who fall into several categories, as does the list for plastics makers, is three and a half pages long. Office workers: 10 hazards.²⁶¹ We now know that there are many more hazards in the office than that. No

260 Stillman & Daum, *Work Is Dangerous to Your Health*, 8.

261 Ibid., 368-419.

one knew then about carpal tunnel syndrome.

The omission of public sector employees is only one way these statistics are cooked. The stereotypical government worker is a paper-shuffler, but that is not so safe either (see below). Government occupations which are relatively dangerous include garbage collectors, social workers, firemen and police. Although the work of police is dangerous almost as much from their own reckless driving as from violent criminals. And why are military casualties not considered workplace casualties? For soldiers, the battlefield is the workplace.

Most of these jobs are in more or less manual trades, whether skilled or unskilled. Other jobs are also dangerous. Older studies of “individuals in high-stress categories of professional practice” find that these professionals report higher rates of heart disease—and that their work is a more important factor than diet, obesity, family medical history, level of physical exercise, or even smoking. Their responsibilities “influence the development of peptic ulcer.” “Work satisfaction” was the best predictor of their longevity—better even than health ratings by their physicians, or tobacco use—and remained a strong predictor even when other factors were statistically controlled.²⁶² Work kills in many ways.

262 James H. House, “The Effects of Occupational Stress on Physical Health,” *Work and the Quality of Life*, 151-160.

There's a tendency, to which I'm not fully immune, when thinking of work, to think of factory work as somehow paradigmatic. It might have been paradigmatic in the late 19th century, although, not long before, the typical wage-laborer had been the household servant. The only factory worker I have ever met was my grandfather. Stillman and Daum knew far more about the health risks to factory workers than the risks to most other kinds of workers. Now, office workers and service-sector workers greatly outnumber factory workers in the United States. But those kinds of work can be dangerous too. First, though, let's check out the US Government's most recent statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor.²⁶³ I am trying to be fair. Uh, okay, I'm not trying very hard.

All the news is, as always, good. There were only 4,405 workplace fatalities in 2013, "down nearly 25 percent over the past decade." True, the "Nonfatal Injuries and Illnesses, Private Industry" total was over 3 million. Some of these mishaps were not that serious. But, 917,100 of them involved "days away from work": an average of 8 days of work missed. I call that serious. "Severe occupational injuries and illnesses"—the ones involving days away from work—decreased

263 US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Injuries, Illnesses, and Fatalities," available online at <http://www.bls.gov>.

slightly for all workers taken together, but the statistic (109.4 cases per 10,000) is nothing to be smug about. Notice that there is no definition of “severe occupational injuries and illnesses” *other than* that they resulted in lost days of work. What about injured workers who survive but are never able to return to work? A young, permanently disabled worker’s lost days of work might reach 15,000 or more. It isn’t difficult to think of a few of these injuries and illnesses which might not be considered severe, by some independent medical criteria. Workers would have every right to malingering, if there were such things as rights. It’s even easier to think of more injuries which might be considered severe, even if the workers returned to work anyway, because they needed the job. Most injured workers are easily replaced. All injured workers know this.

“Private industry employers reported 3.0 million nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in 2013 lowering the incidence rate to 3.3 cases per 100 equivalent full-time workers compared to 3.4 cases in 2012.” In other words, it was about 3 million in 2012 and about 3 million in 2013. Notice that the Government is still relying upon *employer reports*. These statistics are without a doubt incomplete and inaccurate, systematically underestimating everything [VI]. That serves the

interests of business and government alike. They don't want anybody to think that workplace safety is a serious problem, otherwise, there might be demands that they do something about it.

If work places are becoming slightly safer, which has not been proven, there would be at least one reason for that. The reason is that American workplaces contain a lot fewer workers. You can't have an accident on the job if you don't have one. These last few years in the United States have been the time of the Great Recession. The Recession is now claimed to be Receding, but in an odd way: it's a "jobless recovery." The Dow Jones is up; corporate profits are up; dividends are up; CEO salaries and bonuses are way up; rents are up; the cost of living is up—but wages aren't up, and employment isn't up very much. Even the apparent reduction in unemployment is phony. The unemployed are defined as people out of work who are actively looking for work. But many of the unemployed have left the labor market, thus defined, because they know they have no hope of finding employment. Some people never enter it, for the same reason. They're not looking for work because they know they would be wasting their time. If they are included, the real unemployment rate is at least 50% higher.²⁶⁴ There are a lot of

264 Aronowitz & DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, xv.

people like that. There will be a lot more.

The truth of the matter is: “Accident rates in industrial plants have jumped as traditional workplace safety and health protections and other restrictive work rules are modified or scrapped as too expensive to maintain the position of ‘their’ employer in the world market.”²⁶⁵ That’s exactly what I would expect. These workers, who no longer have any job security, are unlikely to file complaints with OSHA, as OSHA is unlikely to get around to inspecting their workplace before they are fired. Their unions won’t file a complaint because they usually have no unions.

The main reason that there are fewer industrial accidents and fatalities—*here*—is that there are now so many fewer industrial workers *here*. Most industry has been sent abroad where workers are paid even less, and protected even less, than they are here. We may be sure that the accident rates in factories in Malaysia or Mexico are higher than those in the same kinds of factories here, for the same kind of work, for lower pay.²⁶⁶ But the jobs we still have are still dangerous.

Office workers face their own health hazards,

265 Ibid., 35.

266 Martin J. Levine, *Worker Rights and Labor Standards: A Comparative Perspective* (New York & London: Plenum Press, 1977), 107-109 (China), 145, 206 (Indonesia), 276-280 (Thailand), 353-55 (Malaysia).

made more serious by the ever longer hours they spend at work.²⁶⁷ One of the hazards, is that long periods of sitting down lead to “wild swings in metabolism. Other research has shown that those who sit for at least 11 hours a day were 40 percent more likely to die within three years—no matter how much exercise they get. Even if you’re only seated for eight hours a day, your risk of death is still 15 percent greater than someone who sits for half that time.” Another finding is that the 15 million Americans who work the afternoon or midnight shifts, because these schedules disrupt our natural sleep cycles, are at greater risk for Type 2 diabetes, cancer and heart disease, and other afflictions.

Another neglected health hazard of office work is that it promotes unhealthy behaviors, such as more smoking and drinking, less exercise, and fewer medical check-ups. In 1998, France reduced working hours from 39 to 35 hours: “workers were 4.3% less likely to smoke cigarettes. They were also less likely to abuse alcohol. And for every hour cut from the workweek, the study’s participants were 2.2 percent more likely to engage in exercise.” These data tend to discredit the alarmism I’ve discussed earlier, which prevailed among academics from the 1920s into

267 The following is from Brian Fung, “Is Your Job Killing You?” *The Atlantic*, April 11, 2012, available online at <http://www.the-atlantic.com/archive/2012>.

the 1950s, to the effect that if workers had more leisure, they would just drink more, and generally sink into dissipation and sloth.

I consider to be unassailable the contention that work, especially employment, is dangerous to your health. But *unemployment* is unhealthy too. In 2012, there were almost 15 million unemployed. Of these, 5.3 million were the long-term unemployed (without work for 27 weeks or longer). In general, although they had less pocket money with which to pay for bad habits, “people who became unemployed saw their risk for mortality jump by 63 percent. The longer a person is unemployed, the greater their [sic] risk for depression. European research has also linked unemployment to obesity and heart disease.” Shorter-hours, with pay, is a limited improvement. It provides more leisure. But *no* hours with *no* pay provide nothing but anxiety, depression and despair, not to mention hunger. Unemployment is not leisure, unless you have a trust fund, an annuity, or a lot of money in the bank. The long-term unemployed are even worse off than the employed, especially the precariously employed. Let’s abolish unemployment by abolishing employment.

Although violence on the job is more sensational than significant, it should not be

ignored. The assassination of bosses by workers is still relatively uncommon. What anarchist, except Leo Tolstoy, hasn't thrilled to the story of Alexander Berkman's bungled attempt to assassinate the industrialist Henry Clay Frick?²⁶⁸ (Who was not, however, Berkman's own employer.) The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports only 397 workplace homicides in 2013. Yet another source estimates almost 800 workplace homicides for that year. It's the fastest-growing category of death in the workplace, and the *leading cause* of death for women on the job.²⁶⁹ A lot of attention is nonetheless paid to what the government thus brushes off as a minor issue: "The bookshelves are filled with dozens of books on workplace violence [this is true]—all drily written academic handbooks, manuals, and guides written expressly for chief executive officers (CEOs), executive vice-presidents, and middle management."²⁷⁰ Some of these killings can't be blamed on the workplace, they just happen there. Jilted lovers murder their ex's where they work because that's where the

268 Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (rev. ed.; New York: The Viking Press, 1934), 105-107; Paul Avrich, "Introduction to the Dover Edition," Berkman, *What Is Communist Anarchism?* viii.

269 Ronald D. Brown, *Dying on the Job: Murder and Mayhem in the American Workplace* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), xiii, xiv.

270 *Ibid.*, xvii.

jilted lovers know they can be found. But “going postal” also happens.

However, “work is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations.”²⁷¹ Any site of long hours of concentrated coercion is potentially a violent place. “Workplace deviance”—most of it not truly violent—is the fastest growing “crime type” in the United States and Canada.²⁷² Who’s to blame for that, the boss (“organizational variables”) or the workers (“personal variables”)?

According to “behavioral science”: both. Sort of like nature and nurture: it’s always both. In general, the academic literature accords somewhat more weight to the organizational variables, *i.e.*, to work itself. Work is more to blame than workers. The behavioral scientists have made a few discoveries which are, if not very surprising, nonetheless of some interest. In

271 Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Random House, Pantheon Books, 1974), xi.

272 Julie Ménard, Luc Brunet & André Savoie, “Interpersonal Workplace Deviance: Why Do Offenders Act Out? A Comparative Look on [sic] Personality and Organisational Variables,” *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 43(4) (2011): 309-317, at 309. There is no such crime as “workplace deviance.”

the workplace, men are more violent than women and managers are more violent than employees.²⁷³ The general conclusion from the authors' own study is: "The more an employee perceived processes and procedures used to make decisions and to determine outcomes as unfair, the more this employee was likely to display physical violence."²⁷⁴ When he thinks he's getting screwed, sometimes he strikes back.

The study I am citing identifies three major organizational predictors of workplace violence: "organizational justice, organizational commitment, and workplace frustration."²⁷⁵ Organizational justice, "an individual's perception of the treatment he or she receives in his or her work setting," consists of "procedural justice—the perception that fair processes and procedures are used to make decisions and to determine one's outcomes"—"and distributive justice—the perceived fairness of outcomes sharing..."²⁷⁶ "Outcomes sharing"—what a euphemism!—means who gets paid how much for what. Presumably a worker might think that he—or, more likely, she—is not receiving equal pay for equal work. If she did, she is probably

273 Ibid., 312, 314.

274 Ibid., 314.

275 Ibid., 310.

276 Ibid.

right. Or she might just think that the bosses are “sharing” too little of the “outcomes” with the workers and hogging too much for themselves.

The next variable is “organizational commitment.” This means, how strongly the worker is committed to his job, for whatever reason: (1) *affective commitment*: you like the job and the people, (2) *normative commitment*: referring to suckers who are loyal to the boss because they think they should be, and (3) *continuance commitment*: another wonderful euphemism, which means, the worker feels trapped in the organization but he’s afraid of what might happen to him if he leaves or loses his job. I suspect that (3) is more important than (1) or (2), and it is surely becoming relatively more important all the time.²⁷⁷ Finally, “frustration, [which] is an affective reaction which precedes various forms of aggression, such as workplace deviance...”²⁷⁸ The trusty old frustration/aggression theory: as social psychologists know, you can’t go wrong with this one. It explains everything and nothing. Frustration does not predict aggression. Everybody is frustrated. Not everybody is aggressive. *Why* is the worker frustrated at work? (1) explains why he is frustrated. (2) explains why, even so, he is not

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 310-311.

aggressive. (3) explains nothing that (1) doesn't explain better, which some other explanations not mentioned (class-consciousness? values of liberty, dignity, and honor?) might also explain.

There's something different about this particular study, although its conclusions are consistent with, and as banal as the conclusions of all the rest. All the others are based on survey research on the victims. This one is based on survey research on the perpetrators. The managers are the source of the finding that managers are more violent than employees. The men are the source of the finding that men are more violent than women. In law, we call this an "admission against interest."²⁷⁹ People are more believable when they say bad things about themselves than when they say good things about themselves. The victim-survey responses agree, so, I am inclined to accept all these findings. They make sense.

In 1985 [I], after enumerating some of the evils of work, I identified the *job* as an aggravated form of work: "One person does one productive task all the time on an or-else basis. Even if the task has a quantum of intrinsic interest (as increasing many jobs don't) the monotony of its obligatory exclusivity drains its ludic potential"—and so forth. At the time, I assumed that the

²⁷⁹ *Black's Law Dictionary* (abr. 5th ed.; St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1983), 24.

paradigmatic job was: just one job, which was full time, and expected to be permanent. A job like that is a career, with the expectation of regular promotion to positions of greater responsibility—with higher pay. Now I was already aware that many jobs were “contingent,” a category which includes temporary workers, part-time workers, independent contractors, and leased employees.²⁸⁰ I was then a contingent worker myself. I’ve never really been any other kind of worker. I never sold out. They never made me an offer.

Since then, contingent workers have been multiplied (and divided) on an ever increasing scale. One consequence: “The career, as an institution, is in unavoidable decline.” Middle class life as we know it is on the way out.²⁸¹ Job security is a thing of the past. “Good jobs” (not my choice of words) have been replaced by low-paid, part-time or temporary jobs.²⁸² When I objected to the *jobness* of jobs, I was criticizing the monotony of working full time all your life in a single occupation which—even if it has its satisfactions to some extent—frustrates what I

280 Fernando Flores & John Gray, *Entrepreneurship and the Wired Life: Work in the Wake of Careers* (London: Demos, 2000), 47 n. 18; Jackie Krasas Rogers, *Temp: The Many Faces of the Changing Workplace* (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 3.

281 Flores & Gray, *Entrepreneurship*, 9 (quoted), 10; Aronowitz & DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, xi.

282 Aronowitz & DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 366.

consider to be, along with Fourier and Morris and many others, a natural desire for variety in activity. I don't make many strong assumptions about human nature, but I make this one. Studies show that variety of operations is a source of satisfaction to both factory workers and office workers, "and among the latter the friendliness of the work group is often mentioned (particularly by women)."²⁸³

"Moonlighting," as it used to be called—working two jobs—isn't all that new. In the 1950s, when full time workers worked 40-47 hours a day, moonlighters—who had a full time job and a part time job—worked 47-60 hours a day.²⁸⁴ We still have many moonlighters, but we also have many people working two *part* time jobs. Since jobs in general have been deskilled,²⁸⁵ and this trend continues, having two jobs doesn't usually gratify what Fourier called the "butterfly" instinct, the instinct for variety. Now it is often two part time jobs. They might be the same kind of shit job. Or they may be two different kinds of

283 Aronowitz & Cutler, "Quitting Time," 22.

284 De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 69-71. A later estimate (1977) is that 60% of moonlighters worked 48 hours or more a week. And that is probably an underestimate, because employers discourage moonlighting, so the moonlighters keep quiet about their other job. Levitan & Belous, *Shorter Hours, Shorter Weeks*, 12.

285 Aronowitz & DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 15.

low paid, deskilled shit jobs. And part time work does not pay as well as full time work, even for exactly the same work. Part time work typically carries a compensation “penalty” of 8-15%.²⁸⁶ It carries the additional penalty that part time jobs usually provide fewer benefits—if any—than some full time jobs still do.

Contingent work in general isn’t new—there have long been seasonal workers (such as hobos and migrant farm laborers) and part time workers. What’s new is that this is the only form of employment which has grown in the last 30 years, and which is still growing: “Since the turn of the twenty-first century, we have entered the era when contract labor overwhelmed significant parts of the salaried middle class.”²⁸⁷ And this allows the government yet another way to pad its employment statistics [VI]. It counts part time, temporary and contingent work as if it were full time work.²⁸⁸ The government has always done this, but the more important contingent work becomes, the longer grows Pinocchio’s nose.

Temp workers can’t resist collectively. They’re not around long enough, and they are

286 Becky Pettit & Jennifer L. Hook, *Gendered Tradeoffs: Family, Social Policy, and Economic Inequality in Twenty-One Countries* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 36.

287 Aroniwitz & DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, xi

288 Stanley Aronowitz, Dawn Esposito, William DeFazio, & Margaret Yard, “The Post-Work Manifesto,” in *Post-Work*, 36.

expendable. They are isolated from each other, which “fosters individualized resistance,”²⁸⁹ or rather, usually, it precludes any resistance. They are also isolated from the “core” workers, who have “permanent” jobs, although few such jobs really exist, with any reasonable hope of permanence, at least not for clerical workers. Often the more monotonous work is assigned to the temp workers, to the core workers’ benefit. Sometimes management physically separates core workers and temp workers. But regardless, the core workers know that the temp workers want their jobs. They also know that the temp workers could replace them, and then *they* would be the temp workers.²⁹⁰ They may or may not know—as the temp workers may or may not know—that the overwhelming majority of temp workers will never be offered permanent jobs.²⁹¹ And yet the temp workers foolishly hope, and the core workers irrationally fear. The American office: what a great place to work!

I believe I once remarked [I] that there is no progress in the world of work. I daresay that in this capstone essay, I have furnished abundant proofs. I don’t think I ever predicted the abolition of work, or identified any trends tending that way.

289 Rogers, *Temp*, 86.

290 *Ibid.*, 10, 41, 86 & *passim*.

291 *Ibid.*, 39.

But I didn't anticipate "[30] years of decline in real wages, the privatization of the public sector, the breaking of the unions, and the transformation of good jobs into increasingly low paid, part time or temporary jobs made possible by new technologies and the deindustrialization in the United States, Canada and Western Europe."²⁹² We have even seen the return of the sweatshop, people working off the books, people working 10-12 hours a day, and for less than the minimum wage.²⁹³

History has a way of making pessimists like me look like optimists. The revolt against work undoubtedly continues, but under ever more adverse conditions. A class-struggle workerist might accuse me of being behind the times, or even of being a frivolous, irresponsible lifestyle anarchist [III, VIII]. History seems to have returned the world of work in some ways to the conditions of the 1880s, which might be used as an argument for the forms of resistance of the 1880s, such as union organizing and socialist politics. At least one leftist implies as much.²⁹⁴

292 Aronowitz & DeFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 366. They referred, correctly, to 40 years, but I've only been on it for 35-30 years.

293 Aronowitz, Esposito, DiFazio, & Yard, "Post-Work Manifesto," 32

294 Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1995), 1. I have found fault with this book. Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*.

To this I reply that these tactics were never more than partially successful, and in the long run they were totally unsuccessful, as even leftists must know. There are important differences between the present time and the Gilded Age: globalization, for instance. The prospect of organizing the workers in their industries on a worldwide basis is even more farfetched than the prospect of organizing contingent workers on any basis. Organizing is not the answer.

To the extent that the unions were ever more than locally and sporadically effective, they relied on the state—not only to refrain from repressing them, but to recognize them and promote them through legislation.²⁹⁵ The state doesn't do that now. It will never do it again. Who can be serious about organizing workers whose jobs, those that remain, have been atomized by contingent work? And all unions are pro-work and anti-revolutionary. They always have been—even in Barcelona in 1936. They don't even demand the right to work, much less the right to be lazy. As for so-called revolutionary unionism, it doesn't exist.

As for electoral politics, a labor party or a mass left-wing political party, such as has been advocated by fools like Ralph Nader, Murray

295 Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Bookchin and Noam Chomsky—who have not been so foolish, however, as to do anything to set one up—that would be almost as utopian as the abolition of work, but not nearly as attractive. Such a party will never bring the workers out on a general strike, much less summon them to the barricades. No such political party ever existed in this country, not even when conditions were far more favorable for one. No such party now exists anywhere in the world.

Are there *any* grounds for hope? The ongoing erosion of the work ethic is a favorable trend. But the work ethic was probably never a major motivation to work. I see as a more favorable portent “the decline of paid labor as a defining activity for self-definition.”²⁹⁶ There is no doubt that in modern times, many workers did come to accept work, not only as an important part of what they did, but as an important part of who they were. For adults, it was their main field for activity, and their main claim to be constructive members of society. It was their main claim to *be* members of society. It is increasingly impossible for workers to define themselves in these ways and maintain their self-respect, not the way work is now. It’s one of my purposes to accelerate this disenchantment with work.

296 Aronowitz & DeFazio, *Jobless Future*, 55.

The authors I quote have it wrong in one respect. The incorporation of work into one's definition of self is not *self*-definition. It is rather the invasion and colonization of the self from outside. As Max Stirner put it: "Man, you are haunted; you have wheels in your head!"²⁹⁷ Where the work-warped self-consciousness is deeply entrenched, its expulsion is not easy, and it leaves some emptiness which might not be easy to fill. I would like to ready people for the day when they lose, maybe not their jobs—not yet—but their belief in jobs. And to suggest that work has not always meant this for people and it doesn't have to mean this now. I try to dispel illusions about work, but they are mostly illusions which work itself is dispelling. Someday there will be a crisis. If it is not decisive, later there will be another crisis. The disillusioned will be ready to act.

I don't know what is to be done. I can think of several things which are not to be done (such as voting and union organizing). I have no strategic advice to offer. I am as dismayed as anybody about how, in so many ways, and certainly with respect to work, we have gone from bad to worse in my lifetime. I can personally do nothing except, as did Diogenes the Cynic, deface the currency.²⁹⁸

297 Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43.

298 Diogenes Laertius, "Defacing the Currency: Diogenes the

That is the purpose of this book, as it is the purpose of all my books. I remain convinced of one thing, though:

No one should ever work.

Cynic," in Bob Black, *Defacing the Currency*, xi-xii.

Suggested Readings

Beecher, Jonathan, & Richard Bienvenu, eds. *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. [Also: *Harmonian Man: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*, ed. Mark Poster. New York: Anchor Books, 1971.]

The theory of “attractive labor” explained and illustrated. Utopian, fantastic, bizarre in details, but powerfully argued.

Black, Bob. *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*. Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, n.d. [1986]

Black, Bob. *Friendly Fire*. Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1992.

Includes “Primitive Affluence: A Postscript to Sahlins,” on the ethnography and history of work, and “Smokestack Lightning,” a reply to a market libertarian critic.

Braverman, Harry. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

Not really about “monopoly capital,” thank goodness, but about how management has fragmented and deskilled work the better to control the workers.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

How “labor-saving” household technology has increased the amount, reduced the satisfaction, and isolated the performance of housework by women.

Goodman, Paul, & Percival Goodman. *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*. 2d ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1960.

Three urban paradigms based on different assumptions about how to live. Most interesting is the one based on abolishing the distinction between production and consumption.

Hunnicut, Benjamin Kline. *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

History of the American shorter-hours movement, once a central labor demand, betrayed by the unions in the 1930s, resulting in longer hours and no right to work either!

Illich, Ivan. *Shadow Work*. Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981. [Also see his *Gender* and *Toward a History of Needs*.]

“Shadow work” is the vast amount of unpaid toil not counted in the Gross Domestic Product—from housework to commuting—underpinning the

wage-labor economy. Just because they don't pay you doesn't mean it isn't work.

Lafargue, Paul A. *The Right to Be Lazy*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1975. [And other editions.]

Karl Marx's son in law mocks the work ethic, although he falls short of questioning work itself.

Lee, Richard Borshay. *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

The most detailed ethnography of a foraging society showing that hunter-gatherers do less work, and more varied, skilled, and interesting work, than most people in more complex societies. Women work even less than men! Annihilates the Hobbesian myth.

Mann, Ernest. *I Was Robot (Utopia Now Possible)*. Little Falls, Minnesota: Little Free Press, 1990.

Unfortunately almost unobtainable, a collection of short essays which explain simply and without jargon how a free communist zero-work utopia is feasible.

Morton, A.L., ed. *Political Writings of William Morris*. New York: International Publishers, 1973.

Morris was a 19th century English artist, craftsman, and fantasy novelist who became a founder of English communism. He explores how work, transformed, can become part of the pleasure of life.

Richards, Vernon, ed. *Why Work?* London: Freedom Press, 1974.

A mostly rather bad anthology, but with a few worthwhile essays such as by Peter Kropotkin, Bertrand Russell, and Tony Gibson's classic "Who Will Do the Dirty Work?"

Sahlins, Marshall. *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

"The Original Affluent Society" and other essays on primitive reciprocity, the domestic mode of production, etc.

Schor, Juliet B. *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Americans work *one month* more than they did in 1951, despite — actually, because of — vast capital investment and new technology. Denounced in the annual report of the US Department of Labor! This is the future of "developing" nations.

Seidman, Michael. *Workers Against Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

A heretical history of the Barcelona working class which, during the Spanish Civil War, resisted the sacrificial workerism of their new bosses, the anarcho-syndicalist militants, as they had resisted the old capitalist bosses.

Vaneigem, Raoul. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Seattle: Left Bank Books & London: Rebel Press, 1983. [Also other editions.]

Situationist; see especially “The Decline and Fall of Work.”

Zerzan, John. *Elements of Refusal*. 2d, rev. ed. Columbia, Missouri: C.A.. Press/Paleo Editions, 1999.

Includes “Organized Labor v. ‘The Revolt Against Work,’” “Who Killed Ned Ludd?” “Anti-Work and the Struggle for Control,” etc.

Liberals say we should end employment discrimination. I say we should end employment. Conservatives support right-to-work laws. Following Karl Marx's wayward son-in-law Paul Lafargue, I support the right to be lazy. Leftists favor full employment. Like the surrealists—except that I'm not kidding—I favor full unemployment. Trotskyists agitate for permanent revolution. I agitate for permanent revelry. But if all the ideologues (as they do) advocate work—and not only because they plan to make other people do theirs—they are strangely reluctant to say so. They will carry on endlessly about wages, hours, working conditions, exploitation, productivity, profitability. They'll gladly talk about anything but work itself.

from "The Abolition of Work"

\$11

The logo for ABC Books. It features the letters "ABC" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The letter "A" is stylized with a graphic element resembling a book or a fan. Below "ABC" is the word "books" in a smaller, lowercase, sans-serif font.