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Judith Buber Agassi

## Introduction

Sociologists of work, perhaps even more so than sociologists specializing in other sectors of social life, may wish to perform the task of studying concrete problems related to their area of specialization, that of working life, in order to be able to counsel concerned parties. To that end they have to pinpoint burning problems and to find out, on the basis of known experience, or of available though not yet pooled and unexamined experience, what changes can contribute to their solution and to what extent -- perhaps also to devise both experiments and pilot projects for testing new and possibly useful ideas.

It seems hardly questionable that changes in the norms and patterns of working hours, their extent and position, are currently among the foremost factors which may contribute to the solution of some of the most urgent problems related to work and employment in industrialized countries: protracted mass unemployment (1), stress and burnout (2), the inferior income and status of women (3), and the low level of discretion and autonomy of workers (4). Of course, no one suggests that any of these social problems can be solved by the mere reduction and flexibilization of worktime, yet it is also agreed that these means are significant in the effort to solve them.

The major ideas underlying this assumption that are shared by most, are the following.

- 1) The reduction of protracted mass unemployment requires a) a redistribution of paid work through a radical reduction of normal full-time work hours; b) the facilitation of earlier retirement; c) severe limitation of overtime work (5) d) the facilitation of voluntary part-time work and of job-sharing.
- 2) The reduction of the level of stress and of the frequency of burnout requires a) the reduction of hours spent on intrinsically stressful activities or under stressful conditions; b) the reduction of over-heavy demands from occupational work and housework/childcare combined: reduced work hours should be available to all persons in this position; c) the facilitation of partial and gradual retirement; d) the reduction of conflicting time demands by work and family (or by work and study): work schedules, whether full-time or reduced, of persons in this position should be as flexible as possible; and e) the careful adaptation and limitation of evening, night and weekend work schedules, so as to minimize negative health and stress outcomes (6).
- 3) The struggle against the lower income and lower status of women requires a radical reform of traditional working time norms that were designed for men with dependent wives performing all family work without pay. This reform would aim at a) the rapid reduction of the normal work day, taking the 6-hour day and the 30-hour week as the goal; b) the immediate eradication of all the present special disabilities of part-time work; c) the institution of paid parental leave for infant care and for the care of sick children (7).

4) The increase of workers' discretion and autonomy requires that they should have a) the right to participate in the design of work schedules; b) a choice between alternative schedules; c) wherever possible, also the discretion over starting and quitting hours and longer term crediting/debiting of hours; and d) a choice between retirement at the 'normal' age, earlier or later, or gradually.

Notwithstanding the wide agreement to the above-mentioned ideas, there is also one central idea of this volume that is controversial. It assumes that not only the two camps of workers and employers, but also different groups of workers, whether blue-collar or white-collar, currently employed or unemployed; of employers and managers, whether private or public; of politicians and administrators; indeed of women and men, whether young, middle-aged or approaching retirement, parents or non-parents, currently have some divergent interests, and in some cases even conflicting short-term interests concerning the norms of working time desired by them. It assumes that many of those divergent interests could be accommodated side by side, and that many of the conflicting interests could be overcome, as most members of these societies recognize their common long-term interest in seeking solutions to the four problems mentioned above: protracted mass unemployment, stress and burnout, the inferior income and status of women, and the low level of discretion and autonomy of workers.

The present volume is organized around these four problems. The basic assumption around which it revolves is that a conscious redesign of working time furthering the solution of these problems is feasible. This assumption is not shared by all contributors to this volume. (See the last paragraph of this Introduction for details.) Recent changes in working time norms have been evaluated very differently. Some see them as far-reaching, others as negligible; some evaluate them as entirely positive and promising, others as mainly negative and threatening the well being of most workers. Still others consider certain changes as positive, others as damaging; some see them as economically and technologically predetermined, others as a matter of organizational choice.

The norms of working time in industrial societies have been in considerable flux since the late seventies, yet only in the second half of the eighties has the topic become one of urgent public debate -- especially in Western Europe. By this time, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, all attempts at, and suggestions for, changing the extent and positioning of "normal" hours of work had been concentrated under the two catchphrases of "working time reduction" and "working time flexibilization".

The debate has become extremely adversarial: Union leadership made their central bargaining issue the reduction of weekly hours of work from 40 (or 38 1/2) to 35 without reduction in pay. Union leadership has stuck to the established, continuous and stable norm, namely that of full-time work, daytime, Monday to Friday. Employer federations resolutely opposed reduction as harmful and as reducing the competitiveness of the national economy; they attempted to minimize and postpone it, offering or demanding instead the implementation of flexibilization, by which they meant an array of working hour arrangements and schedules that deviate from the established norm. Union leaders

categorically denounced most of these arrangements as ruses in order to further intensify work pace, and to circumvent existing regulations protecting the conditions of work (8).

In North America the redesign of working hours has been on the agenda somewhat longer. A variety of arrangements alternative to the norms of working the eight hour day with fixed starting and quitting times for all, and a five day week, year round, until age 65 have been implemented in many firms, and some have also been documented and studied (9). Such as flexitime, flexitour, flexiplace, compressed work weeks, modified compressed work weeks, voluntary part-time work, work-sharing, job-sharing, early retirement, gradual retirement, and sabbaticals for workers in industry. Most writers emphasize the common interest of employers and employees in variety and flexibilization. Unfortunately often-exaggerated claims were made, neither the goals nor the limits of the change were clarified in advance, and disappointment then prevented follow-up, improvement and wider application.

Both in Europe and America the impression has been propagated to the public, that Western society is in a process of progression from past conditions of unending drudgery to the ever shorter work-day, work-week, work-year and work-life, and thus to the availability of ever more leisure time. This supposed march towards the 'leisure society' was hailed by some, bemoaned by others (10), and recently explained widely as due to a new generation of employees' supposed preference for more leisure over more income. Is there such an overall trend towards more leisure? Or is there any other trend with a clear direction? Let us take the question of the extent of the workday first.

The bright goal of the eight hour day had been formulated as early as 1817 by Robert Owen; it took more than a hundred years -- until after the first World War -- to reduce the normal non-agricultural working day from over twelve hours to eight for most workers and employees in Europe and North America. Sixty years later this is still the legal norm for 'full-time' working, with the seven hour day being the rare exception, and 'overtime' extending the work days of many full-time workers as frequently as ever. If we consider not only time worked, but time preempted by employment, then most employees, whether full-time or part-time, have to add at least another daily hour for travelling to work and back, as well as between one half to one and a half hours of unpaid time for obligatory breaks.

Now to changes in the length of the work week: here the age old tradition in the West of the work-free 'Sabbath' was upheld by the Church and therefore the six day work week was the norm for most employed workers (though certainly not for live-in domestic workers, who were a numerous occupational group until World War II). Until the fifties, the six-day 48-hour workweek remained the norm; wherever Saturday hours were shorter than eight hours, this was usually compensated by longer hours during some weekdays. The great break-through came in the sixties with the introduction of the five-day workweek and the two-day, 'long weekend' in most highly industrialized countries. In a relatively short time the new weekly full-time norm stabilized at 40 hours. (The five-day workweek is still in the process of implementation in some of the less industrialized countries of Europe and Asia, and is the exception in the industrializing countries of the

Third World.)

Further reductions of each work-week to four -- or each two weeks to nine -- work days, have been introduced in the U.S.A. and in Canada as alternative, more 'flexible', working time patterns, using the name 'compressed work-weeks'. This pattern does not reduce weekly or monthly hours worked, and it usually extends most work days considerably (11). Recently some European union negotiators have suggested using expected future reductions of weekly work hours -- to 38, 37, 36 and eventually to 35 hours -- not by reducing the eight-hour work day, but by reducing the work week at its end.

Now to the work-year. Besides the introduction of the five day work week, the most spectacular reduction of working time, and the greatest extension of paid non-work time that occurred since the end of World War II, was the legal introduction of paid annual vacations for the mass of workers and employees. Before 1945 only French industrial workers had achieved more than one week paid annual vacation. Nowadays workers in all highly industrialized countries -- with the exception of the U.S.A. (where universal paid vacations are still only two weeks and longer vacations are usually tied to seniority) and Japan -- have the legal right to paid annual vacations ranging from four to six weeks. In addition, the number of officially recognized and paid holidays has grown from about five to ten per year on the average. (It should however be remembered that extensions of vacations and added public holidays or other free days, add up to a smaller reduction of annual working hours than would be effected through the reduction of the normal work day from eight to seven hours.)

Now to the extent of the length of the normal work life. Here too reductions in the average length of work lives have occurred. The major cause was the general rise of school leaving age by one or two years, and the dramatic growth of college education that occurred in all highly industrialized countries since 1945. As a consequence full-time working life starts at least one year later for the mass of workers and employees, and for many about four years later than it would have before. Two points have to be remembered here: first, these educational reforms had initially not been intended to reduce the extent of working time or limit the number of new job-seekers; and second, potential work time was not intended to be exchanged for leisure time but (hopefully) for more learning time.

In the case of the widespread reduction at the other end of working lives through early retirement, this was different: here the wish of many workers--especially manual workers--for leisure while they could still enjoy it, was clearly the driving force; also, since the recession and the rise of mass unemployment in the seventies, earlier retirement has been encouraged by employers in order to reduce their manpower, and by governments in order to make room for unemployed younger workers (12). It should, however, be remembered that the lowering of the statutory retirement age has been the great exception, and that there is, especially in North America, a parallel movement for the right to voluntary delayed retirement.

We may conclude that nearly all employed persons in highly industrialized countries

have nowadays more days free from occupational work than was the case 25 years ago; yet hardly anything has changed in the length of the work day of the full-time worker. Interestingly most forms of so-called 'flexitime' (permitting employees to vary their starting and quitting hours) do not grant employees the right of working less than the daily 'full-time' hours (13). To conclude, the supposed general trend towards the leisure society appears to be severely limited in this respect. This limitation has had the effect of preserving the norm of an occupational working day that is simply too long for anybody who has the full, or even the major, responsibility for a household including a young child - even when day care is readily available. Anybody who cannot cope with the eight-hour day is therefore deemed abnormal in the labor market and relegated to 'part-time' work, so-called.

The entire notion of the 'leisure society' was, of course, based on a special kind of blindness to a certain kind of facts: that the majority of women in industrialized societies have an unpaid work role consisting of housework, childcare and the care of older relatives; that much of this unpaid work has to be performed each and every day, including Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and summer vacations; that since the seventies not only those women who have no such role, or only a relatively light one, but also the majority of married women and even of mothers of pre-school children, participate in the labor market. Therefore the majority of employed women carry two work roles; and the overall working time of employed women is on the average considerably longer than that of men, notwithstanding their -- on the average -- shorter paid working hours; and that many employed women (as well as non-employed mothers of larger families) have indeed hardly any leisure at all. Due to this sort of blindness, the changes in the norms of working time that occurred since the sixties did not increase the average leisure time of women, though they did increase the average leisure time of men (14).

All these facts have to be taken into account in the discussion concerning the actual and the potential contribution of the redesign of working time to the solution of the four problems of involuntary unemployment, stress, gender inequity, and lack of autonomy. Under what conditions, and in what form, could working time reduction and flexibilization contribute to their solution? What kinds of reduction, and so-called 'flexible' or 'alternative' patterns of working time are useful, useless or indeed harmful? Or are they perhaps useful for the solution of one of the four problems, but harmful for another? Can a choice between a number of alternative working-time schedules be offered to workers or employees in the same workplace without undermining their solidarity? Can specific working time schedules suitable for older workers, or for parents of younger children, be designed without condemning them to discrimination and an inferior status?

In order to answer these questions we should be aware that there have been in existence for a long time some working time patterns that are very different from the 'normal'. Some of these are 'full-time', like shift-work; some of them 'full-time' and daytime, yet not normal, like most migratory, seasonal and temporary work; another very old work pattern without fixed time limits is home work; perhaps the most important form of work that is both 'abnormal' and 'reduced', and has recently greatly increased, is part-time

work. New versions of shift-work, temporary work, homework, and part-time work have recently been introduced, and will be discussed by several contributors to this volume. In what ways are these new versions different from the old ones? Under what conditions could they contribute to the solution of our problems?

This volume originates from a workshop on The Redesign of Working Time to which all members of Research Committee 30 ( Sociology of Work) of the International Sociological Association, who had done work in this area and wished to participate actively, were invited; the workshop met in late March 1988 in Arnoldshain near Frankfurt on Main. It was attended by sociologists from Belgium, Britain, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Greece, India, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the U.S.A. To the best of my knowledge this was the first attempt at an international discussion among sociologists on issues of changing working time norms. Their contributions vary greatly in their evaluation of these changes, and even of the very feasibility of worker participation in the process of redesign. I should mention as an example of the denial of the assumption that workers and social scientists can usefully participate in the process of the redesign, which assumption I consider a basic justification for my having organized the workshop that has led to this volume, the opening address of Albert Mok, of the University of Antwerp and the Agricultural University of Wageningen, president of RC 30 under whose auspices the workshop took place. This address is here reproduced following this Introduction. On the other hand, the present volume also documents experiences supporting the position I advocate here. The volume, thus, should stimulate much additional discussion among interested social scientists and practitioners in the field.

#### Notes and References

1) The argument that the reduction of working time helps in fighting unemployment was used repeatedly already in 1869 by the British leaders of the Trade Union Congress in their campaign for shorter hours, especially by Tom Mann, founder of the Eight Hours League (1886); in the United States Samuel Gompers launched (1887) the slogan, "as long as we have one person seeking work who cannot find it, the hours of work are too long". Employers and economists repeatedly declared that this argument is empirically unsound in a literature that at the time impressed the public. Under the pressure of this literature trade union leaders usually reverted to the health and welfare argument. For the history of this issue see Blyton (1985), pp.18-21; Levitan and Belous (1977), pp.34-5; for current assessments of the chances of using the redesign of working time for the maintenance of jobs and the creation of new employment, see Owen (1979) and White (1987).

2) In the past the problem of stress and burnout was known as the problem of worker health and welfare. Indeed, the first legislation limiting working hours was meant to protect the health of women and children. The health issue has declined since the normal workday was reduced to eight hours. Related arguments were for reducing workhours to permit more time for educational, social and family activities. Since World War II,

studies of certain stress and burnout producing characteristics of work activities, occupations and professions have been conducted, and demands have been launched for the reduction, interruption, or limitation of the time devoted to them. These may take the form of study, retraining or sabbaticals leaves, as well as early or gradual retirement. Some of the causes of work stress, however, lie neither in the intrinsic characteristics of the work activity, nor in the extent of working time as such, but in the overload of occupational and out-of-work -- usually family -- obligations combined, or in the contradictory demands between the occupational role and a second work role. Consequently both the reduction of occupational work hours, as well as their flexibilization, may be helpful. Stress due to unemployment or the threat of unemployment, especially for older workers, is avoidable through arrangements for part-time work and gradual retirement. See Agassi (1985) pp.79-86; Meier (1982) and Kahne (1985), Chapters 4 to 6; Bradley (1980).

3) The problem of lower income and status of women was only recently discovered as especially relevant to prevailing working time norms. Previously, employed women were supposed to have special health problems and family obligations (on the understanding that housework and childcare are their exclusive responsibility), which demanded barring married women from night work in industry, granting them -- mainly unpaid -- maternity leave, and offering them -- mainly inferior and segregated -- part-time and temporary work. Since the resurgence of the women's movement, the connection has become apparent between male-oriented working time norms and women's inferior status in the labor market. Proposed remedies intended to equalize the status of women in work range from measures for upgrading part-time work, through specific forms of leave and work schedules for parents, to the radical reduction of the working day. See Blyton (1985) Ch.6, pp.101-24; Farley (1983); Kahne (1985); Pearce (1987); Sundström (1987).

4) Linking working time norms to the problem of the absence of discretion and autonomy of the worker is also fairly new. The conventional uniformity and rigidity of the working hours of most workers and employees, are being increasingly resented by them. More choice and flexibility are considered an essential ingredient of the Quality of Working Life. The participation of workers themselves in the design of new and alternative working time patterns and schedules is considered an important part of Industrial Democracy. See Blyton (1985) pp.165-70; Rosow (1981) pp.3-22; Yankelovich (1983).

5) See Blyton (1985), pp. 49-61; Ehrenberg and Schumann (1982); Levitan and Belous (1977), pp. 32-51;

6) The traditional union policy in industry has been to demand the equal allocation of all absolutely necessary evening, night and weekend work to all (male) workers on a rotating shift basis, as well as additional pay for work at inconvenient hours. Recent research into the negative health effects due to the disturbance of the circadian cycle in periodic night work, raise the question, whether long-term night work might not be preferable; yet night work may also cause stress between spouses, and aggravate the situation of the caretakers

of young children. Nightwork would therefore be more suitable for single persons without child-care obligations; for those who attempt to combine paid work with daytime studies, nightwork schedules--and even more so weekend schedules--may indeed be favorable and stress-reducing.

7) The model for generous parental leave for the care of infants and of sick children is Sweden; 90% of the salary of the leave-taking parent is paid by the national insurance system; for the gradually rising participation of fathers see Statistics Sweden (1985), p.20. Sweden has also legally instituted the option of a six-hour workday for all parents of children under eight years of age.

8) For the typical stand of employers see, e.g., Bundesarbeitgeberverband Chemie e. V. (1983) and for that of the unions and their supporters, see ,e.g., Engfer (1982).

9) See, for example, Fleuter (1975); Nollen et al. (1978); Rosow (1981); Swart (1978).

10) See Dumazedier (1967); Larrabee (1958); Riesman (1958); Smigel (1963).

11) By 1980 between 2.7 percent of U.S. workers and employees worked under a compressed workweek system, see Nollen (1982) p.13. Apparently some firms combine compressed work weeks with a sizable reduction of weekly hours to 36 or even 32, and can therefore offer workdays of eight hours or only slightly longer; unfortunately no statistics are available, see Blyton (1985) pp.136-45.

12) See Blyton (1985) pp.150-7.

13) For the early prevalence of the conservative kind of flexitime (or flexitime) that restricts flexibility to the day, see Fleuter (1975) pp.74-5; studies of this restricted form show no gains for reducing stress resulting from conflicting claims of work and family, see Nollen (1982) p.170; where flexitime permits debiting/crediting of hours over a week, a fortnight or a longer period, stress-reducing effects were found. Yet men enjoying this more advanced form of flexibility did not increase their contribution to domestic work, see Blyton (1985) p.133.

14) For abundant evidence from time budget studies in twelve countries on the gender leisure-gap between employed women and men, see Szalai (1972) pp.128 and 583-93; see also Young and Willmott (1973, 1975), pp.348-9.

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