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# **FINDING TIME**

**one step beyond the tyranny of work  
by Norman Jope**

# 1. STAFF ARE LIKE FUSES

## FOREWORD

You'd have to be a hermit, or a Tory voter, to have missed the changes  
The tide has long since turned.

Twenty years ago, the talk was of work reduction, of the advent of a 'leisure society'. Nowadays, over two-thirds of full-time employees in the UK work for more than forty hours a week - and the figure is rising. Many work more than fifty hours - and the very imposition of such hours can exhaust a worker, rendering him or her too tired to resist. So many lives continue in a nightmare state, in which the sleepers are awake enough to suffer, but not quite awake enough to open their eyes. They are spent, in a repetitive dirge of work-sleep-work, with the occasional grudging break thrown in.

And what if one wants life to be a different kind of experience - an experience of ample time? Then problems arise. Almost any reasonably paid job, or 'career', incurs the risk of extra hours - and badly paid casual jobs usually require such hours to be worked, in the absence of a minimum wage. Nor is there escape, these days, through signing on. The Jobseeker's Allowance is only the latest, and worst, of a series of measures meant to close that option.

It can seem as if there's no escape. Life gives way to travail, often in jobs of baffling pointlessness, and to recovery from, and preparation for, travail - as if the only thing that made us worthwhile human beings were the expenditure of time in the service of the market. This pamphlet writes against that nightmare, in the belief that this is not inevitable - and that the minimization of avoidable labour is the hallmark of a civilized society. It writes against the assault of capital on time, in the belief that it has only gained momentum through the fear of isolated individuals - that, despite its current intensity, it will balk at resistance. Take heart - we can't all be replaced! Struggling in unison, we can regain our right to time - to make our lives as long as possible and to pass them, mainly, in the ways we choose.

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The increasing concentration of labour has led, in the UK, to a greater percentage of the population working excessive hours - hours that intrude upon all other activities - than in other EU countries. In 1982, official figures revealed that 15% of British workers were putting in a 48-hour week or more - and that figure is increasing. Sixty hour weeks in term-time are common for teachers and lecturers, and are worked, throughout the year, by an eighth of middle managers - that means taking work home, sometimes giving up a part of the weekend, never getting away from

# 1. STAFF ARE LIKE FUSES

You'd have to be a hermit, or a Tory voter, to have missed the changes that have taken place in the 'world' of work - including unemployment - since 1979. And even hermits, who didn't wish to exist on toadstools and berries, and who also wished to survive through less than temperate winters, would have certainly come face to face with the Government's 'Employment Service' - possibly combining their vocation with the occasional Jobplan course, or programme of Community Action, or a 'voluntary' spell with JobClub.

Things have certainly changed. And this has been the result of conscious agency. Back in the Seventies, it was thought that we were moving towards an Age of Leisure - the three-day week of early 1974 seemed as much a harbinger of things to come, as a short-term response to the Miners' Strike. Even in the early Eighties, at the time of the first big increase in unemployment, there was much discussion of 'positive unemployment' - of a world in which work would not be as dominant as in the earlier phases of industrial society. But we know, too well, that things have turned out very differently - and it's important to note that this need not have been the case. Decisions have been taken, that have blighted the lives of millions - and only an increase in resistance will make things better, or even prevent the situation getting worse.

There is probably about as much work being done, in terms of human hours, as when the Tories gained office. The effect of cutbacks has been balanced by a revolution in the means of creating, storing, and transmitting information - new data densities are being produced and processed, as the memory capacities of computers increase, as PCs enter the workplace, and as photocopying becomes quicker, cheaper and smarter. Additional layers of information have been dredged for use - layers we could have lived perfectly well without - to negate the labour-saving implications of the new technology. That is bad enough. But not only has the overall volume of work done remained constant, when it could have decreased - its distribution has skewed. This phenomenon, which is more common in the UK than in any other EU country, has been called a 'flexible labour market' - however, for millions of workers, it has made life less than flexible.

This increasing concentration of labour has led, in the UK, to a greater percentage of the population working excessive hours - hours that infringe upon all other activities - than in other EU countries. In 1992, official figures revealed that 15% of British workers were putting in a 48-hour week or more - and that figure is increasing. Sixty hour weeks in termtime are common for teachers and lecturers, and are worked, throughout the year, by an eighth of middle managers - that means taking work home, sometimes giving up a part of the weekend, never getting away from

work for more than the odd snatched couple of hours (and never from the omnipresent **thought** of work, that unacknowledged form of unpaid overtime). According to the most recent Household Survey (1995) the average weekly working hours of white-collar workers has increased, in the last ten years, from 41 to 43. And other surveys have suggested that over a third of office workers now put in **fifty** or more hours a week. Of course, the increase in working hours is not just at a white-collar level - go into many Jobcentres, and you'll see adverts for manual workers that require them to work similar, or longer hours. Moreover, the rewards for their doing so are generally scant.

In some sectors, it's reached the point where the worth of an employee is measured, not by the quality of their work in standard hours, but by the extent of unpaid overtime they work - it can be a risky thing to leave on time. And, increasingly, the terms and conditions of many jobs have become open-ended with regard to working hours - one is expected to work 'for as long as it takes to do the job' (implying that the job is really one-and-a-half, or two jobs, and should be offered as such). For example, the blurb for an administrative post I investigated recently, salary in the region of £20K (currently the male non-manual average), stated that 'there are no set hours of work... the postholder will normally be expected to be present during office hours, but will also be expected to work such additional hours as are necessary to fulfil the duties of the post'.

To apply for such a job would be akin to signing away a blank cheque to a stranger... and it is a measure of our predicament that millions have done so. Even lunch hours have been squeezed, to a current average of thirty minutes. It's worth pointing out that **twice** as many people in the UK work excessive hours as in the next most afflicted EU country (Portugal) - for example, in Spain, the standard 40-hour week accounts for a solid 80-90% of workers. On Slaveship Britain, they'll take as much of your time as greed allows. No wonder that so many employees do not look forward to going to work - almost half, according to recent surveys, and it's surprising that the figure isn't even higher. For most employees these days are offered a one-sided contract, which demands their loyalty but surrenders little in exchange.

And what if this oppression proves too much? The attitude of one manager, quoted in a national newspaper recently, is typical - "Staff are like fuses. When one burns out, I get another". And there is now a pool of available labour to exploit. Whilst millions work these cruel, excessive hours, there are millions in waiting - unable to find work, yet constantly harassed by the Employment Service into chasing jobs. And it can be hard to refuse a job on grounds of excessive working hours. There is an emerging philosophy, in fact, which states that the nature of work itself has changed, requiring employees to work in 'dejobbed' environments, without restrictions on job specifications, or working hours - the American writer William Bridges calls this changing pattern 'jobshift'. Jobshift

requires people to put in (roughly) the same number of working hours across a lifetime as earlier, but in concentrated bursts of frenetic activity - these give way to burnout or retirement. Instead of putting in, say, 40 hours a week for 45 years, people may put in 60 hours a week for 30 years. Then, if lucky, they will survive to an exhausted old age. And this exhaustion would have nothing to do with the levels of energy expended - after all, the expenditure of energy, in an activity of one's choosing, is as good a method of rejuvenation as we know - but with the amount of time that had been lost, and the sense of servitude that this engenders.

Some might regard this as a global phenomenon - in other words, we Brits are experiencing a trend that is unstoppable. But there's another way of looking at it. The governments of the US, post 1980, have pursued a similar path to the Tories, in terms of the erosion of trade union rights, the increasing tightening of benefit rules, and the deregulation of labour markets. As a result, it is possible to perceive the same results, in terms of an increasing concentration of workloads, in both countries. That does not necessarily mean that these phenomena are global. Granted, these changes bring the UK and USA a little closer, in labour market terms, to economies such as those of South East Asia with which competition is sought, for the sake of a 'global market' whose value is regarded as self-evident in capitalist quarters. However, there are other European nations that have taken a different direction, from a position of comparable affluence in the Seventies. Countries like Holland and Denmark still preserve some trade union rights, comparatively liberal benefit regimes and ceilings on working hours - and, despite the scare stories issued by the UK government, these countries are still viable. It's interesting that some of our European partners have retained this social ambience, implying that it's been a deliberate series of decisions, by the UK and US governments, that has taken us in other directions.

The result is an increasingly nightmarish society, in which a sizable minority - perhaps ten million - are overworked, and in which another ten million are either unemployed and in penury, or in low-paid part-time jobs. Of course, there are the worst affected of all - those forced to work long hours for low pay, from fear of the consequences of leaving their jobs, when no other kind of job is available. And some are further abused by 'temporary status' - an absolute zero, in terms of rights, and with the threat of being laid off, for good, at the merest hint of resistance. A relative was caught in a succession of such jobs - gutting fish, or coating car exhausts, twelve hours on night shifts, six days a week, until exhaustion intervened. But walk out of such a job, and destitution can be on the cards - no matter how harsh the conditions, or how long the hours, we lack that basic right.

To compound the problem, moreover, some have been conditioned into thinking that this is all there is - that the sole factor that determines our value as human beings is employment. Anyone without a job is deemed

subhuman - have you ever noticed how the media, when reporting a crime, will tag a suspect as 'unemployed', in a way that would never be done in terms of a profession? It's regarded as an illness - no matter whether or not the patient is enjoying it. And, in work, there is this increasing obsession with 'career'. Not only does the approval of the boss replace the approval of the parent, or society as a whole, as psychic validation, but the game makes every other factor secondary. This has been sold to us as a kind of empowerment, although the end result has simply been to heap more work upon us - not only longer hours, but greater pressure. The only generally acknowledged exception to this is family, whose purpose, in any case, is work-related - family life is only tolerated where it fuels and buttresses the worker, or produces the workers of the future.

The society this leads to has a kind of purpose, but no reason to exist - it's a machine that perpetrates and justifies itself, without external reference, for the sake of spending time. But people get snarled up in it, when they cannot frame a strong alternative - for many, God is dead, community is shattered, and creativity is something for the others. All that remains is career - the ultimate narcotic. The possibility of a qualified person not taking career seriously has become unspeakable. And many people who believe this gospel are amongst the ones who make the information - politicians, journalists, and educationalists - the very ones who try to speak on our behalf. Until we learn, again, to think in terms of 'doing jobs' - not 'having careers' - then we are lost.

Three years ago, I was interviewed for a post in Cheltenham. I entered into conversation with one of my fellow interviewees, and asked her, naively, whether the post's salary was more or less than for her current post. I received a withering stare, and the response, "I never move down". This was one for a tombstone - evidently, such niceties as living environment, or quality of work or life itself, never entered the equation. Life, for her, was purely a matter of 'moving up' - of salvation through career. I left the interview, wondering whether that woman derived her self-esteem in any other way than from the jobs she did. I didn't get that job... although, you may be pleased to read, she didn't either.

## 2. CONFORM OR STARVE

During the Sixties and Seventies, the strength of organized labour helped produce an increasing equalization of wealth, and an accumulation of rights. Moreover, the lack of large-scale unemployment, and the liberal benefit conditions that applied, meant that workers could not be intimidated into giving up their rights - it was possible to leave a job, obtain a decent rate of benefit, and seek another. It was even possible to do so in another city, to take a chance without reserves of cash. In order to create a situation of maximum control and profit, it was considered necessary to put this to a stop. The prevalence of such conditions also explains the Right's sustained invective against those times - it isn't the permissiveness they hate, despite the frequent protestations, but the extent of workers' rights.

The ideal scenario, from a capitalist point of view, is not the full employment which is ostensibly sought. Where there is a significant labour reserve - i.e., a large amount of unemployment - those in work are dissuaded from agitating for better pay or conditions, or from resisting losses in these areas. As the saying goes, 'There's plenty more would take your job'. And this is how the management of Timex responded, a while ago, to the refusal of its workers to sign amended, even less rewarding contracts - it sacked the workforce and bussed in replacements, in the form of unemployed people who were 'happy' to take (or coerced, by the Employment Service, into taking) the vacated jobs on comparable terms and conditions to those the previous workforce had rejected. And this, of course, is the second purpose of the labour pool - to act as a source of cut-price labour, under conditions that would be rejected by an empowered and confident workforce.

The erosion of union rights has led to a further lack of protection - but this could not have been accomplished without a dramatic increase in unemployment, which was caused, to a large extent, by the Tory industrial policies of the late 70s and early 80s. That first 'recession' could have been handled in ways that would have led to a much smaller increase, for example by the continued subsidy of key industries (cheaper than paying benefit) - but the drastic nature of the shake-up indicates that the aim, quite simply, was to create a surplus pool of labour at a stroke. Once there were three, or four, or five million unemployed (depending on how one calculates the figures), the unions, in their existing form, were always going to find it hard to hold the line. And other factors, such as the Falklands War, and a period of division within the Labour Party, led to a situation where the Government could push forward its labour 'reforms' with speed.

As a result - the break-up of larger companies into small ones has also been a crucial factor - union membership has tumbled, and a recent court

judgement (in the case of some Southampton dock workers, who had their pay pegged back for refusing to give up their union membership), indicates that union members may be intimidated by all means short of dismissal. And, indeed, they can be threatened by dismissal itself if they organize - it is possible for an employee to be sacked simply for attempting to associate with other union members, or to recruit new members, in the workplace. In such cases, moreover, they may be denied benefits on the grounds that they 'contributed to their own dismissal'. No wonder that the unions have such limited power these days - no wonder many workers see no point in joining them. It may have reached the point, even, where unions will need to be reinvented, rather than revived.

The third part of the equation, along with high unemployment and weak trade unions, is the erosion of benefit entitlement. This may have culminated, for now, with the Jobseeker's Allowance, but it has been going on for several years. Already, the way in which benefits have been pegged back or reduced, especially for those under 25, has made it all but impossible to survive unsupported on the dole for any length of time. After a while, even an extra tenner, for forty hours' work or more a week, can make a crucial difference. But it's not just a case of pegging back benefits. Measures such as the 'actively seeking work test', compulsory Restarts and Jobplan weeks have made the climate more intimidating, to 'encourage' people into low-paid work.

The most significant aspect of this process - one overlooked by many on the Left, it seems - concerns the role of benefit sanctions. The change in these, since 1979, has been disturbing. Then, for example, anyone leaving their jobs 'without just cause', would have had their Unemployment Benefit suspended for six weeks. In the early Eighties, this figure was extended to three months - in 1988, to six months. However, throughout that time, it was possible to obtain a means-tested 'hardship benefit', equivalent to at least 60% of Income Support. This was low enough in 1979 - as time went on, it became even less capable of meeting survival needs, but it could make a difference. Hardship benefit was also available for those who fell foul of the Employment Service - people who refused to go on mandatory training courses, or apply for specified jobs.

As a weapon to persuade the labour pool to toe the line, however, the threat of destitution has been raised once more. The first move was to tighten the benefit conditions - from 1987, it was not enough to simply be 'available for work', but to 'actively seek work' according to the diktats of one's Claimant Adviser. Next, the housing benefit regulations were changed - this was now paid by hard-up local authorities, instead of the DSS. The arrangements were ended by which those in need of homes could borrow deposits for rented accommodation - this measure, above all others, has probably caused the levels of street homelessness in Britain today. Then, allegedly in response to the abuse of Income Support by

New Age Travellers in the summer of 1992, the hardship benefit entitlement for single people and childless couples was removed, except in the case of those who left their jobs. For the first time in living memory, it was possible to obtain no income from any source - the safety net had not been pierced, as much as torn apart with a billhook.

The Jobseeker's Allowance, due in 1996, will take this one step further, by removing the automatic right of hardship benefit for single people and childless couples who leave their jobs 'without just cause', or are dismissed for 'misconduct' (trying to set up a union, for example?). Such people may not be entitled to any benefit for up to six months after quitting their jobs. Set against the 1979 sanction - a 40% reduction for six weeks - this represents an elevenfold increase in punishment. And, of course, the people who will be most affected will be the worst-off - trapped in stressful, low-paid work, yet unable to quit because they cannot afford to buy themselves out. This sanction applies, despite the 'fact' that there are 'plenty more would take their jobs'. It applies, even if the job vacated is immediately filled by another unemployed person, or leads to any other unemployed person obtaining work.

All who are so deterred from leaving their jobs to look for another, where they live or in another area, or to recover from bad experiences in the workplace, are no better off than chattels - no amount of superficial choice, at the level of consumption, can disguise this fact. It's not even economically sensible - rather than yield to other hands and minds, more fresh and motivated, these people will often end up becoming ill. Whether their illnesses are physical or mental, they will cost the State a greater amount in incapacity benefit - and it's remarkable how the tightening of benefit sanctions has been paralleled by an increase in the numbers claiming this benefit, almost as a means of escape. But these measures have been imposed, without consideration of the cost, let alone the ethics, because the intentions are so crudely terroristic. If people start to leave their jobs, then others feel more free - will therefore start to question their oppression. Workers may regain their pride, their rights, their bargaining capacity. The benefits system has been 'amended' to prevent this.

The Jobseeker's Allowance slid quietly through Parliament - largely unreported by the media, opposed in the usual low-key fashion by the opposition parties. It should take effect in 1996, although the logistic aspects, of merging two forms of benefit, are proving a problem. If it does commence, then the effects will be disastrous. Not only are all automatic hardship mechanisms abolished, for single people and childless couples at any rate - another aspect, equally insidious, threatens benefit disqualification on the grounds of one's very appearance. This allows Client Advisers to issue 'directions', which can require an unemployed person to take steps 'to present themselves acceptably to employers' (at the risk of benefit sanctions). Benefits can be stopped where 'the

unemployed person's behaviour is such that it actively militates against finding work' (Jobseeker's Allowance White Paper, October 1994).

The implications of this are clear. Benefit can be stopped, where a punk refuses to tidy her hair - where a Rasta doesn't wish to trim his locks. The unemployed are stripped of dignity, like conscripts. Benefit can also be stopped, if a claimant (sorry, 'client'), carelessly shows up for signing on in a 'Legalize Cannabis' sweatshirt, or signs of being, help, a New Age Traveller. These directions and sanctions will be at the discretion of the Client Adviser - and, alienated by what they were expected to do, many of the decent people have long since left these posts. These sanctions are for fixed periods, but can be repeated until the direction is obeyed.

This has little to do with reducing unemployment, as few employers would ever be placed in the situation of having to appoint someone 'unacceptable' in terms of appearance or let the vacancy remain unfilled. It has everything to do, however, with letting claimants know who's Boss. To paraphrase ex-Tory Alan Howarth, it's a clear case of 'moral garbage... dressed up in moral garb' (statement, October 1995). Resist, and destitution may result. There is no longer either the likelihood of work, as in the Fifties and Sixties, or an adequate level of benefit, as in the Seventies or Eighties. People, as a result, are falling through the so-called safety net, in larger numbers than for over fifty years - those who do not show sufficient nerve to beg, or steal, or join the Convoy, can go under. And, from a humanist perspective, this society fails because of this - the average is irrelevant, when the basics are not guaranteed to all.

This situation would be despicable enough if an accident, or a product of our history or geography. But it has been engineered, because the fear of destitution is designed to reinforce us in our role as labour slaves. The destitute are here to serve as warnings, like the heads and body parts of traitors on the city gates of earlier times. The blazon states Conform or Starve - and, in understandable fear, we get the message. We yield the very thing that makes all pleasures possible - the very thing from which our lives are made - our TIME.

### 3. PURE TIME PASSING

One of the advantages of not working is the hours that one is able to keep. The ability to live in accordance with one's personal rhythms is easily lost - I lost it around a year or so after I started regular work. But between the time I left school, and commenced my first job, it was very different - and, during the summer, hardly a week would pass without my seeing in the dawn. During the quiet hours of the night, I would accomplish much - for example, many pieces of writing and painting emerged. I read, ate, drank and thought at leisure - and there were also moonlit walks to savour. Most of the time, I was alone - but after one or two o'clock, it ceased to matter. I was alone with my books, my paper, and pen - and free, as I have not been since, to draw upon my own resources.

My most recent spell of 'unemployment' was not a time of all-night sittings - but, now and then, my sense of time still went. Occasionally, I would hide the clocks before going to bed - then, the following day, I'd get up not knowing what time it was, except by solar cues. Such days were bereft of appointments, and often solitary, but they were tremendously fulfilling and productive. Lost in a book, a manuscript, a piece of art or a walk through the city where I lived, I could feel myself exquisitely mortal - conscious of a time that seemed to pass more purely then. At a creative level, I was able to enjoy the process itself, and obtain more unexpected results compared to now, when it's so often a case of stealing time for such activities.

Most would agree that creative activity requires extended spells of so-called 'idleness'. It's hard to be creative in two-hour splices, after eight hours' work (let alone more) and two hours' making and eating tea, before a bath and early bed in preparation for another day. It can be done, but much depends upon the nature of the art created - the longer or larger the artwork, the harder it is to execute. Sustained activity collapses, after the exertions of the workplace.

One positive feature of a liberal benefits regime, especially at times of high unemployment, is that it allows those who would rather do something else (such as engage in creative activity) to stand aside in favour of those who'd rather knuckle down to jobs. Even if there were unfilled vacancies, hampering a consensus definition of national prosperity, there would be a moral dilemma involved in forcing people into inappropriate livelihoods - but, where the labour pool exceeds the number of vacancies by two to three million, there is **no need whatever** to force anyone into taking work. In fact, there is an argument for subsidizing such people, in order to ensure that vacancies are there for those who really want them - and, as recent surveys have shown, this would be the vast

majority (even under current conditions!). There is no indication that many people would choose not to work - moreover, the amount so doing would be minimal, if the alternative were subsistence rather than plenty, and if working people were treated with appropriate fairness and respect.

Clearly, a society in which everyone wanted to be a creative artist, and no-one was prepared to clean out the bins or grow the food, would be untenable. But no-one is arguing for that - there is nothing wrong in a society offering incentives, to get jobs done. The argument is to do with creating a society in which the amount of work is kept to a necessary minimum, to fulfil survival needs and basic standards of comfort - it seems likely that this could be achieved with far less than forty hours a week, per adult citizen, because so much of the work currently done is pointless. As Bob Black eloquently pointed out in **The Abolition Of Work** (1982) - '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 and everyone who works for them... thus the economy implodes'.

We could quibble with the list, but do we really need **salespeople**, for example, to tell us what is available to consume? Can't we go out and find it for ourselves? Black goes on to state that 'Forty per cent 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.' And what of the people slaving away, producing superfluous packaging for consumer goods? The editors, printers and deliverers of free newspapers, full of adverts we could do without? Or the City gamblers, inventing money on the trading of 'derivatives' that are unconnected to all product?

Yes, I know that the farmer, the miner, the dentist and the doctor are doing worthwhile jobs (although much of a doctor's time, these days, is wasted dealing with stress-related illnesses brought on by work). But who really believes that the other wage-slaves mentioned are more useful to society than the non-commercial creative artist, let alone the carer or the voluntary worker? Only the minority - the zealots of the market, who can only measure life in terms of moving numbers.

The current Government, of course (and some members of the Shadow Cabinet, it seems), can only understand activities in so far as they generate profit. And even in this, they're extremely short-sighted. No-one would argue that music can't be commercial, and the same goes for film and theatre - but young musicians, filmmakers and actors can take time to establish a niche. In the latter profession, spells of unemployment are even common at relatively accomplished levels. So what does the Government do? It sets up procedures by which young actors and

actresses, for example, are forced to abandon their profession, in order to work in burger bars or double-glazing. Acting then becomes a pastime for the offspring of the rich - and this is happening across the arts. The rest of us are permitted to indulge our 'hobbies' - provided, of course, they don't get in the way of our economic activities. And many of us who would be active, creatively, are deterred from even developing in this direction.

Some get sidetracked into arguments, proposing 'sharing the work around', without an analysis of what work is necessary at all. If the work done is reduced, it can be shared out successfully to all who **want** it - this could ensure a subsistence income for those who wished to spend their time in other ways, plus incentives to get things done. But we seem to be further away, these days, from any discussion of these matters. The concept of abolishing work has become heretical, because it opposes the prevailing belief that work is necessary per se - that 'any job is better than none', and that all who disagree are undeserving, even of the basics for survival.

So it is that the revolution in information processing has been allowed to lengthen working hours, without any collective discussion as to whether the information generated is essential - so it is that increasing inequalities in wealth have led to crime and homelessness, which have spawned a whole range of seemingly 'essential', yet ultimately curtailable, activities. The system employs one person to hit you on the head, and another person to attach a bandage. You get hurt - and time is wasted.

The end result is a society, not only obsessed with work, but in which a series of wrong moves, or sheer bad luck can reduce us to a state of desperation. And, where everyone's thoughts are consumed by work, then it can become harder to envisage an alternative mode of existence. This is why so many are still clinging to the very thing that hurts them, to the point where they resent alternatives. It is why the reaction to ravers and travellers, bohemians and artists from many working people is resentful and envious. The freedom of these alternative approaches to life is seen as a threat, in its exposure of the hollowness of conventional notions of freedom - all of which concern consumption, rather than the capacity to change one's life at will.

It is understandable (if sad) that some people cling to the things that make their lives seem meaningful, because they would rather be miserable than meaningless - a ceaseless round of working and shopping is the way in which many ward off total despair. In some cases, this leads to a careerism that is practically religious in character - the gospel of the Great Move Up. The freedom to live where one pleases, or to achieve a balance between work and leisure, is sacrificed - communities collapse beneath the weight of rootless wage-slaves, living not in places but careers. Those who are obviously not developing careers can settle for consumerism.

Some are offered neither alternative, and are bullied by the threat of destitution instead.

A backlash is immanent, because even the majority who want to work are becoming bored and exhausted, and even less satisfied. And there are millions who are already hungry for additional time - they resent the way in which their lives, so brief, are being taken from them for no plausible purpose. For example, one third of American workers, in a recent survey, allegedly expressed a desire for a reduction in working hours, even with an attendant reduction in pay. An increasing percentage of the population have been found to possess 'post-materialist' values - these include an appreciation of the value of time. And others are fighting to hold on to the time they have, against an Employment Service which, more than ever, is working on behalf of exploitative employers.

In short, control of time will be at the heart of radical politics, and anti-politics, for the foreseeable future. And the process is culminative - the more that time is liberated from the market, the more the resentment of those who are still imprisoned will give way to a desire to join the party. The market sucks our time - much more than it needs, to guarantee survival and abundance. Millions, annually, are waking to this fact. And resistance lies in finding time, in fighting to reserve it for ourselves - even if the market, as we know it, falls. This may sound utopian, but free time has addictive properties - we've seen resistance in the past, for shorter working hours and longer holidays, but this could be as nothing to the wave to come.

Of course, we may be told that there is no alternative - that we may have to submit to lifelong toil, for the sake of the emerging global market. And if we don't? The misery, allegedly, will increase. That's like subsuming every other value to the dictates of a vast protection racket - to be complied with out of fear, for the greater good of an elite. It's certainly not a recipe for joy or hope. And, once fully in place, a global market may prove quite impossible to resist. What better reason for resistance now, whilst the possibility remains.

## 4. SUCKING BLOOD FROM THE HEART OF THE BEAST

Much as we would like it otherwise, it's likely that the struggle to recover time will commence with a minority... as time goes on, however, this minority should swell. Initially, it is likely to be embraced, with greatest enthusiasm, by those who are seeking to preserve their time, rather than those who are deprived - for this reason, the struggle needs to be conducted in such a way as to attract these others. Otherwise, it'll be a case of 'round up the usual suspects' - small fractions of fractions, that will argue and split up into even smaller fractions, until momentum ceases. This struggle is for anyone who wants to earn a life - no matter how young or old, how hip or straight, how courageous or how timid.

At a time when revolt has largely become a theatre of gestures, a resistance through style, it would comfort many were it possible to pursue this struggle primarily through such methods... but going to all-night raves, or dressing up in punk or goth or scally garb, will not reclaim our time as if by magic. The wearing of insignia can bind together those opposed to the dominant paradigm - and, with regard to the Jobseeker's Allowance, it's probable that personal appearance will come into the equation. But the major theatres of resistance and rebellion will most likely be the duller ones... workplace, benefit office, city centre, media, Parliament. Partying all night may unify the tribe and raise the spirits - but the most likely effect on society will be a minor nuisance, in the form of increased policing bills or sleepless villagers. And the system can welcome such nuisances, as excuses for a clampdown. The Government may have always wanted to restrict entitlement to hardship benefit, but they waited until the New Age Travellers provided them with an alibi. That is not to criticise the Travellers, but to make a point about the way in which repressive people think. And the use of provocation as a means of creating a backlash, to be followed by a wave of public sympathy, is a risky strategy at best - at worst, disastrous. This cause is strong and human, and it does not need it.

If this subject is still relatively hidden, at the moment, it is because the waged and unwaged fail to recognize their common ground. Those struggling against excessive hours in work would do well to talk with those who are out of work, yet threatened with jobs they do not want, and which would take away their time - on all sides, there is a similar pressure. At the very least, there needs to be an exchange of information... so that those in work do not assume a cosy life for those on the dole, and vice-versa. Effective forms of association will encourage this. They may also encourage economic mutualism - although it may prove impossible to run an advanced society entirely on a LETS-type framework (and a return to primitivism is unwished-for by the writer of

this pamphlet), such schemes can enhance our sense of freedom, through a partial withdrawal from the market.

It would be prescriptive to lay down strategies, although those which break the law are not encouraged by this pamphlet (and are probably unnecessary). Those which draw upon familiar models, such as the demonstration or public meeting, should be considered carefully for their effect - so often, they can become the funeral processions and orations for the causes which they seek to advance, or a means by which the usual suspects, with their right-on togs and unusual hairdoes, are displayed to an indifferent populace. A variety of other possibilities remain... such as using the media, lobbying influential figures, accompanying fellow claimants to Restarts, setting up staff associations to contest high workloads, supporting legal action against unscrupulous employers, using artistic media and public events to discuss the problems of time, work and leisure, and so on. We must re-invent, and start afresh, where necessary.

Our aims will differ. Some may plump for workless utopia, in support of Bob Black's ideal of a society in which useful work is transformed 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' (**The Abolition Of Work**, again). Others may set out to achieve more short-term, reformist aims, or to use these as a means of stirring the dispirited. The following possibilities are in the latter category, and may even be achievable without a backlash - opinions differ, but my reading of the current situation is that we'll have to shift the political consensus to the 'liberal left' before we can get anywhere. In right wing political climates, the thrust of revolution is more likely to come from the right - as the US is confirming, with its 'Pro-life' terrorists and militant militias. Reformist measures can succeed in shifting the consensus, and in raising expectations, more effectively than repression - there's nothing like the taste of freedom to leave us hungry for more.

Assuming this is the case, there is a need for a series of emergency measures - would it be too much to ask for a succeeding, non-Conservative government to enact these as priorities? Almost certainly so, but I will list them anyway. Firstly, the Jobseeker's Allowance must be modified, so that it is automatically paid during any period of unemployment - at 100% of the adult rate for all those aged 18 or over, and for 16 and 17 year olds living independently (whether through necessity or choice). This would include anyone who had resigned from their jobs. The Employment Service should be stripped of all its powers to compel claimants into specific courses of action, and the resources saved should be used to boost its range of optional services - by focussing on those who actually wanted its help, its results would probably improve! To combat poverty in work, a minimum wage should be set. The UK should also implement the Social Chapter, with its directive on working

hours, and an offence of 'industrial coercion' should be established, as a means of constraining exploitative employers. The right to strike should be secured at workplace level, and all union members should be allowed to recruit, and associate, within the workplace. Finally, the deposit lending scheme should be restored, to allow the penniless to take up rented accommodation, irrespective of their housing legislation status.

The cost of these measures might be met by an increase in the top rate of income tax, as well as capital gains and inheritance tax, and a surcharge on the transfer of capital outside the EU might also be considered - although a minimum wage is likely to pay for itself, as in other countries that have found it works. The majority of such people would not be adversely affected by these proposals, although try telling that to the Labour and Liberal Democrats! For reasons best known to themselves, they continually over-emphasize the interests of those paying higher rates of tax, at the expense of those who are nowhere near doing so, or who pay these on a small percentage of their income.

In the longer term, the Jobseeker's Allowance, invalidity benefit, old age pensions and student grants should be merged into a single Basic Income (with supplements for those too old or ill to work). This would be paid irrespective of one's availability for work, but incentives for participation would be maintained, by way of a progressive taxation system which allowed the bulk of modest incomes to be kept. The Department of Employment should establish a Bureau for Employment Reduction and Equalisation - its purpose would be to reduce the amount of work done within society, and to equalize its voluntary distribution. One spin-off of this would be the encouragement of job-sharing, time-banking, and sabbaticals - rather than cut working hours by a day a week, it may be more popular to offer employees a subsidised sabbatical (Basic Income plus a bonus) every five or seven years. Again, this need not be too prescriptive - it is the thrust of what is proposed that matters. Work can be our servant, not our tyrant. And it is the direction of change that counts, rather than the distance of certain changes from an envisaged goal. These are changes in the left direction, away from the power of class and capital.

Most of these objectives - certainly the first group - could be accomplished without a massive amount of expense, or negative reaction. In fact, the reduction in fear, and destitution, would be approved by almost all - unless I am wrong, people do not wish to be confronted with decisions, every time they visit city centres, about whether or not to give to a homeless hungry person. And the current hassle will increase, unless something is done, as those deprived of benefits are forced to waste their time in futile economic activities. There is nothing more pointless than a struggle for survival that need not have been - whether pursued through begging, or washing cars at traffic lights, or selling knick-knacks out of boxes. And all but the youngest and the shortest-memoried can recall a

time where this just didn't need to happen - we also know that it can be that way again.

It speaks volumes for our current situation that these objectives can appear 'utopian'. They are only utopian in a context where mainstream political activity is so completely geared to market values. Whoever wins the next General Election, it is likely that the worship of the market will continue at the expense of most of us - we will be bribed or bullied, but seldom respected. Questions of the quality of life will be erased from the debate, as ever, or parodied at a superficial level. The threat of falling living standards will be invoked against our every hope.

Granted, these changes might bring about a slightly less affluent society - but, for those of us who value our time, this would be compensated for, in ample measure, by the possibilities that they would lead to. In a society consumed by work, our leisure activities tend to be frenetic as well as cost-intensive - after a ten hour day, 'leisure' will usually consist of activities such as holidays in the sun (recovery from work, as much as travel), shopping trips, pubbing and clubbing, and passive entertainment. In all these cases, the contraction in leisure time is accompanied by a higher level of expenditure per leisure hour. In a society where time is valued, leisure pursuits may be less resource- and capital-intensive, but are likely to be more humanly (and intellectually) rewarding. Above all, they will focus on the association of human beings with each other, and with the wider world.

Contact may be immediate (as in the case of social interaction) or indirect (as is the case in many of the arts) but the effect, in terms of community, and in terms of **participation**, is likely to be immense. With adequate time at our disposal, to make friends and lovers, to develop our imaginations, to encounter the world, to simply **think** and contemplate the many mysteries of life, will we miss the regimented oblivion of the weekend drinking session, the dash around the shopping precinct? That's a question each must answer for themselves - and it's likely that many will wish to hang on to these things, producing a society that is a compromise between the one that currently exists, and the one I want to live in.

That may be no problem. What I **don't** want is to go on feeling like a pampered slave - pleasantly treated on the whole, but unable to change the conditions of my life without the risk of destitution. I also want the time it takes to develop myself, and my creative work - and I want that time **secured**, against the market's grasp. This pamphlet seeks to bring about this happy situation - written from selfish reasons, for the selfishness of self and others. Our time is as precious as our blood - and we must suck it back, into ourselves, to live as we would wish to live.

(Swindon, March-November 1995)

## FINDING TIME

is the sixth in a series of Mini-Memes, published by

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Anyone wishing to check out a more radical approach to this matter should try to read Bob Black's **The Abolition of Work** in its entirety (as cited on pps 10 and 14). A new and revised edition has been published recently by Feh! Press, 147 Second Avenue #603, New York 10003, USA - copies may also be available still from the Institute of Social Disengineering, Box B, 111 Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 (send SAE/IRC for details in both cases). This Mini-Meme is put forward in the belief that a variety of approaches and solutions, rather than a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way, is a spur to action rather than a barrier - moreover, approaches that appear contradictory can so often complement each other in practice.

That may be no problem. What I don't want is to go on feeling like a pampered slave - pleasantly treated on the whole, but unable to change the conditions of my life without the risk of destitution. I also want the time to develop myself, and my creative work - and I want that time secured, against the market's grasp. This pamphlet seeks to bring about this happy situation - written from selfish reasons, for the selfishness of self and others. Our time is as precious as our food - and the first step is to take it back, into ourselves, to live as we would wish to live.

(Swindon, March-November 1995)

# CLAIM! CLAIM! CLAIM!

This message is intended as a supplement to FINDING TIME, and will be incorporated into future editions. FINDING TIME should not be copied or passed on without it. It will state the obvious to some readers, but it may not do so to others.

As stated in the main text, it has been possible, since the end of 1992, to be denied all benefit. From October 1996, this sanction can also be applied, for up to 26 weeks, to those who are deemed to have left their jobs 'without just cause' or lost their jobs through 'misconduct'. It might also apply, from that point, to those who have left (or lost) their jobs from the start of April onwards, and are still in receipt of hardship benefit at the end of September. All in all, the Jobseekers' Allowance will make it easier for claimants - irrespective of their needs - to be denied a living income.

In all cases, however, it is always worth claiming, nagging and cajoling. Firstly, there are exceptional categories - these include people with children, people with caring responsibilities and those who are pregnant, sick or disabled or who have a pregnant, sick or disabled partner. Secondly, the payment of hardship benefit appears to be discretionary in some cases, for example when people have left or lost their previous jobs. Finally, the severity of the benefits regime varies between areas, offices, officials - a course of action can lead to a rap on the knuckles in one town, but a complete loss of benefit in another.

For these reasons, and to allow for changing circumstances, the advice of FINDING TIME is clear. IF YOU DO NOT CLAIM, YOU WILL NOT GAIN. If you claim and are refused, then claim again. If you have your normal benefit stopped, then apply for hardship benefit. If you are cold or hungry, visit their offices again and again until they help you, or show themselves to be barbarians. Make the staff feel guilty if you have to. A basic income is your entitlement as a human being, still more so in a society of plenty. Stay as calm, as polite, as dignified as you can, but never give up. Above all, never be deterred from claiming, because you fear that you will not receive. It is their business to say No, not yours. It is on their conscience if they choose to bully you, or let you go without. If they choose to betray you for the sake of their jobs, then it is up to them. You are not paid to do their work, so CLAIM - and try to stay alive, for better days ahead.

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