

Work, Time, and the Wheel of Fortune

The machine [has] penetrated everywhere, thrusting aside with its gigantic arm the feeble efforts of handicraft. . . . After a century and a half of labor-saving machinery, we work about as hard as ever. For the great majority of the workers, the interest of work as such is gone. It is a task done consciously for a wage, one eye upon the clock.

— Stephen Leacock, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*, 1920

THERE WAS A TIME (and it was not really that long ago) when workers and assorted radicals and socialists would protest the gap between poverty and wealth by railing against “the idle rich.” This class of indolent coupon-clippers, *rentiers*, and aristocratic spongers had little moral traction; if they bothered to respond to critics who denounced them for getting so much for doing very little, the idle rich could only invoke some sort of “natural order of things.”

In this scheme of things workers were in a position to occupy the high ground. They could point out, in the words of the old union hymn, that:

It is we who plowed the prairies, built the cities where they trade . . .
All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone . . .
They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn . . .
But the union makes us strong! Solidarity forever . . .¹

Things have changed. Nowadays we hear about the punishing schedules of the well-to-do. The lawyers and managers and consultants, the professional and technical people (“P&Ts”), Robert Reich’s “symbolic analysts,” such people work sixty, seventy – even 80-hour weeks. They have an arduous workload, but they know how to get things done, too. The rich apparently deserve their good fortune.

In a travel article aimed at upscale couples, journalist Judith Timson offers poignant testimony to this, outlining “energizing” quickie vacations. She and her husband had tried it, and it worked. Her advice to fast-track careerists was to be goal-oriented in their leisure. “Stay focused” on shop-

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¹ “Solidarity Forever,” words reprinted in P.B. Patterson, “Rise Up Singing: The Group-singing Songbook” (Bethlehem, Penn.: A Sing Out Publication, 1988).

ping (one recommended destination is Minnesota’s 360-store Mall of America – the “ultimate shopping binge”), sightseeing, eating, whatever. Jammed between ads for vacations in the Cayman Islands and India, the piece is essentially a come-on for medium to high-priced tourism (with a bill of up to \$1,200 per person for two or three days of relaxation).

We learn that “life in the nineties means more work and no play,” especially for the self-employed and the tense survivors of corporate downsizings. “We’re in hot pursuit of the one commodity eluding us all these days – not money, not even happiness, but time.”²

What this amounts to is the remoralization of the rich. Not that hard-working urban professionals see themselves as “rich” in the old liveried-chauffeur sense of the word. Harried representatives of the upper reaches of the middle class doubtlessly regard themselves as part of a comfortable class of people deserving of everything they have. After all, they work so hard for their money that they have little time to spend it. From this perspective, it is not hard to imagine that the people at the other end of the social scale – those whose *surplus* of time may take, say, the form of underemployment in a part-time job – comprise the undeserving poor.

The issue of access to work is important in any consideration of a shrinking middle of the workforce. In the United States, differences in wage rates have been responsible for much of the erosion of middle-level income. But in Canada access to working time has been “a major determinant of the growth of earnings inequality.”³

For Dave Lachapelle, time has never been a commodity. Back when he worked at a monster press stamping automobile bumpers out of sheet steel, he could never understand the men who grabbed every hour of overtime they could, working Saturdays and Sundays whenever possible. He detested overtime “with a passion.” One of his favourite clauses in the union contract at Windsor Bumper was the one stating that overtime was strictly voluntary.

Lachapelle, a soft-spoken, reflective man, tells about the only time he went all-out for hours at work. He had angered some of his fellow workers with his outspoken attacks on long hours and figured that if he spoke out about an issue he should have first-hand experience. So for six months he worked seven days a week, twelve-hour shifts, double shifts back to back.

² Judith Timson, “The Four-Day Vacation,” *Destinations*, March 1993.

³ Morissette, Myles, and Picot, “What Is Happening to Earnings Inequality in Canada.”

Was I right in what I was saying? I found myself drinking a little more than I would normally do. I found myself snapping at my family, which wasn't my personality. I found myself looking at the calendar to find out what *day* it was. I worked holidays – triple time! What more incentive do you need? But I reached a point – the second time I almost fell asleep at the wheel on the way home – that I pulled over, and to be perfectly honest with you I cried. I was just so physically and emotionally exhausted. It scared the shit out of me that I had almost fallen asleep. I sat there and cried like a baby. I asked myself, “Am I losing my fucking mind?” I went home, gathered my thoughts, spoke to my wife. And everything I had been saying about working long hours was right. There is no question.

Still, Windsor Bumper never had a shortage of volunteers for overtime when it wanted to keep production going. Sometimes the men would sneak cases of beer into the plant. One fabled tradesman supposedly had a mickey of rye hidden in every electrical box in the plant. But the employees didn't stick around for eleven-hour shifts on weekends because they were having a good time or liked the mind-numbing work. Some of them felt they just had to work long hours to maintain a certain lifestyle. For others the job had become all there was.

Lachapelle had worked over half his life at the bumper plant when corporate restructuring and free trade closed it down in 1990. Now he has a part-time job in a nursing home within walking distance of the mobile-home park where he lives with his family. He has mixed feelings about the change.

“I've lived it,” he says, recalling the frantic, lucrative days when the company was going flat out to fill a big order that would allow Ford to fit another line of Fairlanes with heavy, chrome-plated bumpers that shone like silver. “I know why it was that when I used to say that I had spent a nice weekend with my wife they'd look at me and say, ‘What the hell you want to stay home with the old lady for?’” Still, he misses his old job, with its regular paycheque and sense of fellowship. He says that going to work is important: “You create a camaraderie, a society. It's like going to the local bar, it's comfortable.”

Lachapelle was among others who occupied the plant in 1981 when the company threatened to close the plant if the workers didn't make contract concessions. Although he had no love for the work, he was attached to the others at the plant and the security of a regular job. “To have that torn from you is . . . is . . .” Lachapelle hesitates as he tries to describe the sense of loss. “Well, it's hard to explain what you feel.”

The workplace that was such a large part of his life got flipped around so often during the casino capitalism of the 1980s that when he went to work he often didn't know who the new boss actually was. The former autoworker is not too pleased that the company he sustained for a quarter-century is still making bumpers down at the other end of US96, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

At the same time, Lachapelle never did buy into the work-to-spend cycle of the goods society. His father put in thirty-four years at Chrysler, finishing up with a good job in the stock room, away from the assembly-line. His son lives at home, taking some upgrading courses while earning a few bucks at a local pizzeria. “Society says to you: ‘If you've made it, then you have the two cars and you have the boat and not the hundred-thousand-dollar house, because that's average, but the quarter-million-dollar house.’”

Lachapelle, a conscious anti-consumer, laughs at the irony of it. “You're programmed to strive for that. Seven days a week and you have the means to get the whole cake. All of a sudden I'm eating angel food cake with the most wonderful icing. And then someone says, ‘Well you can have the cake but a smaller piece. And forget the icing.’” For Lachapelle and others, the abrupt shift is hard to take. “Once you've had something and it's gone,” he says, “that's worse than never having had it at all.”

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As the great recession of the early 1990s gave way to a painfully slow jobless recovery, financial analysts shrugged about the lack of “consumer confidence” and the apparent reluctance of the citizenry to do their bit by getting out there to spend. The recession had been the most severe since the Depression of the 1930s, whose end Ford celebrated at the 1939 New York World's Fair with a Cycle of Production exhibit that showed automobile manufacturing from mining to assembly. In this great cycle workers were nowhere represented.

By 1964 another New York Fair had rolled around; Dave Lachapelle was getting ready to drop out of high school for that secure future in a car plant. At the fair General Motors' corporate fantasy saw a future in which a jungle road-builder would take care of the rainforest. Historian Michael Smith has probed this form of corporate futurism:

GM's vision of taming the jungle focused on replacing its natural transportation medium, an “aimless wandering river,” with modern superhighways. First, a jungle harvester felled great swaths of trees with laser beams. Then the area would be sprayed with chemical defoliants, and “a road-building vehicle as high as a five-story building and as long as three football fields” leveled the cleared ground, set steel pilings, and extruded a multilane highway “in one continuous operation!” GM press releases predicted that this massive “road-builder,” powered by its own mobile nuclear reactor, would be “capable of producing from within itself one mile of four-lane, elevated superhighway every hour.”⁴

4 Michael L. Smith, “Making Time: Representations of Technology at the 1964 World's Fair,” in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.237.

By the 1990s, when something called the “information superhighway” had replaced the road through the rainforest as the latest pathway to prosperity, the psychic and environmental pain associated with conventional views of progress was becoming apparent. More Canadians had begun taking seriously Dave Lachapelle’s ideas about the relative importance of work. Periods of high unemployment often breed discussions that question our need to pass so much time at work, whether we are stamping out bumpers or (at the other, more rarefied, end of the split-level society) spending frazzled, sixty-hour weeks and then making a fast-paced getaway to the Mall of America or “high tea at low tide” in Bermuda.

When high and intractable levels of joblessness are combined with overwhelming evidence of environmental destruction and a cultural crisis that combines rising crime and the uncertainty about both private family life and public civility, people begin to search for answers. Some rally around the flag of “family values” and around putting more people in jail for longer periods, while letting the growth of the free market sort out the tiresome problems of joblessness, poverty, and pollution.

But will faster growth ease the pressure on stressed-out families, the forests, or the ozone layer? Will it ease the pressure that pushes people to scramble for jobs in jails in a land that already spends over \$7 billion annually on prisons and policing?

In his book *Working Harder Isn't Working* British Columbia employment counsellor Bruce O'Hara outlined a “Too Much Trap” characterized by three tendencies: 1) overproduction, which causes unemployment to rise; 2) unemployment, which allows employers to drive wages down; and 3) workers who must buy less even though those still working produce more and more.⁵ O'Hara's plea for a wholesale rethinking of the world of work was part of an ever-louder chorus that has linked joblessness with environmental and cultural issues. Most borrow (either implicitly or explicitly) from the ideas of thinkers, such as Ivan Illich, who question the values – family and otherwise – of growth-addicted consumer capitalism. O'Hara came up with one of the longest subtitles in Canadian publishing history: *How We Can Save the Environment, the Economy and Our Sanity by Working Less and Enjoying Life More*.

Economists such as Juliet Schor no longer risk being excommunicated from the polite circles of academic society when they point out that the treadmill of life in fin-de-siècle North America traps a majority of people into overwork while a growing minority languishes in the enforced idleness of unemployment. Schor's book on the unexpected decline of

leisure, *The Overworked American*, points out what many, particularly working women with children, already know. Modern life is lived too quickly; too many people suffer from a shortage of time, even though it should be possible to produce 1948's standard of living in less than half the time it took that year.⁶ Schor, however, is not mesmerized by images of happy info-workers puttering away in electronic cottages, plugged into the information highway. The twentieth century has witnessed profound shifts in the role of women's labour, which have lately been accompanied by changes in the labour market as a whole.

Women's time became an artificially undervalued resource. In exactly the same way that we use up too much clean air and water because it has no price, the housewife's time was squandered. . . . Ultimately, inequality of time must be solved by readdressing the underlying inequality of income. Only when the poorest make a living wage can their right to free time be realized. And barring an economic miracle, part of it will have to come from the people at the top. In the 1980s, the rich grabbed a fantastic amount from those below them. Now it's time to give it back.⁷

The issue of work time cannot be separated from the vision and values of consumer culture. Any movement towards less work will require not only work-sharing, but also wealth-sharing. Otherwise the gap between the haves and the have-nots in the alleged new economy, between those who work a lot and those who work too little, will only continue to widen. While the future may not be Brazil's high walls topped with broken glass, Canadians can anticipate L.A.-law, with personal safety privatized as those who can afford it huddle inside gated, guarded suburbs.

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Many of us remember learning that the crucial invention of the industrial revolution was the steam engine. We are now told that the computer is the key to the second industrial revolution. Indeed, being trained to use a computer is held up as a prerequisite to success in today's intensely competitive labour market. In a comparison of the two inventions, British design engineer and trade unionist Mike Cooley pointed out that the steam-driven engine was working for 102 years after James Watt built it. The computer he was using in 1984 was obsolete in three or four years.⁸

According to Cooley, the winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize for his designs of socially useful products, people once had skills, and tools to put those skills to use, that lasted a lifetime. When today's most important tools – the ones that

5 Bruce O'Hara, *Working Harder Isn't Working: How We Can Save the Environment, the Economy and Our Sanity by Working Less and Enjoying Life More* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1993), p.67.

6 Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p.2.

7 Ibid., pp.96–97, 150–51.

8 Mike Cooley, “Work and Time,” in *About Time*, ed. Christopher Rawlence (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), p.33.

drive the second industrial revolution – become obsolete faster and faster, “so too do the skills that people require to use them. They are trained to use a particular piece of equipment, but that knowledge is only valid for about two or three years.”⁹

There is a crucial element at play here: speed and acceleration. Time has long been used as a tool of social analysis, because everyone experiences it; yet it is also an abstraction. Is time real or imagined? Can it be spent or wasted? One thing is clear: discussions of time bring out conflicts between basic values.

One of the chief characteristics of the changing labour market has been the rise in part-time and temporary work. Just-in-time production is said to be the hallmark of efficient, flexible organizations. The ability of currency speculators and insurance-claim processors to move information instantly across the world is a hallmark of a globalized world in which money traders can quickly drive down the value of a nation's currency and the medical claims of Ohio steelworkers are processed in County Cork, Ireland.

One of the most famous essays on the subject was written by Lewis Mumford in 1934. In “The Monastery and the Clock” the U.S. cultural critic and historian of technology pointed out, “The clock, not the steam-engine, is the key-machine of the modern industrial age.”¹⁰ As Mumford noted, centuries before James Watt's engine the first mechanical clocks regulated the daily routines in medieval monasteries. Today, when steam locomotives are consigned to museums and the older among us can only nostalgically recall the haunting call of the steam whistle, the clock is still the predominant machine in our homes. Middle-class North American homes may each have three colour televisions that may or may not bring them into the 500-channel universe. Perhaps they are looking forward to home shopping along the information superhighway. But it is a virtual certainty that clocks – bedside digitals, blinking readouts on the vcr, wall and stove-top clocks in the kitchen, internal nanosecond regulators in the home computer – outnumber any other bit of technology in the home. Despite anxiety about the corrosive cultural effects of television, the enormous social and cultural implications of strict timekeeping are unsurpassed – and too often unscrutinized.

Mumford understood this well. For him, the coming of the mechanical clock – first to the monastery and then to the bourgeois town – meant that lives once played out to the natural rhythms of the season and the harvest were changed forever: “The clouds that could paralyze the sundial, the freezing that could stop the water-clock on a winter night, were no longer obstacles to time-keeping: summer or winter, day or

night, one was aware of the measured clank of the clock. The instrument presently spread outside the monastery; and the regular striking of bells brought a new regularity into the life of the workman and the merchant.”¹¹

Social struggles over the new commodity have persisted ever since. Who would control the hours, minutes, and seconds that were the products of the new technology? Was this new regularity a good thing? By the fourteenth century, mechanical clocks were in regular use in Europe.

At the end of that century the dominant system of labour time was still controlled (as it would remain for many generations in many lands) by agrarian rhythms “free of haste, careless of exactitude,” in the words of historian Jacques Le Goff. Land was divided and named a *journal* according to the amount that could be ploughed in one day, *un jour*. The way people worked mirrored the society of the day, “sober and modest, without enormous appetites.”¹²

This way of doing things was under assault. The cloth trades experienced some of the first upheavals over time and its use; and it is consistent with today's ambivalent attitudes to overtime hours that, like so many of Dave Lachapelle's workmates, some workers wanted the working day to be lengthened so their incomes would rise. (On this point Le Goff cites the fullers' assistants in the famous French tapestry town of Arras.)

But opposition to the discipline of the town's *Werkglocke* (work-clock) persisted. The expanding cloth trades were the “leading edge” of the day, playing a role similar to today's information enterprises. The cloth-making bourgeoisie enthusiastically embraced the *werkglocke* as a means of controlling the work of their subordinates; time became a social category, “the time of the cloth makers.”

“Worker uprisings were subsequently aimed at silencing the *Werkglocke*,” Le Goff observes. The cloth-manufacturing bourgeoisie protected the work bells with zeal; the authorities did not hesitate to invoke the death penalty against anyone who called for revolt, not only against the king, but now also against the officer in charge of the work bell. “It is clear that in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the duration of the working day rather than the salary itself was the stake in the workers' struggles.”¹³

Five hundred years later, that prototypical revolutionist, the anarchist agent provocateur in Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*, was instructed by his paymaster to blow up the Greenwich observatory, the most obvious symbol of timekeeping at the turn of the twentieth century: “It will alarm every selfishness of the class that should be impressed. They believe that in some mysterious way science

9 Ibid.

10 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934). p.14.

11 Ibid.

12 Jacques Le Goff, *Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.44.

13 Ibid., pp.46–47.

is at the source of their material prosperity. . . . Yes, the blowing up of the first meridian is bound to raise a howl of execration."¹⁴

Today's computers and quartz timepieces measure time more accurately than scientists were able to do by observing the heavens through the telescopes at Greenwich. Not that such fractions of a second are much to quibble over, but the period between the medieval *werkglocke* and today's cheap quartz watch was fraught with conflict over time, as those who would *pass* it were ranged against those who would *spend* it like the currency described by Benjamin Franklin ("time is money"). A printer by trade, Franklin was used to customers who wanted their work done without delay. It soon came to pass that the symbolic recognition of decades of disciplined service to an employer took the form of a gold watch.

The principles of adherence to a timetable, originally enunciated in the monastery, were rigidly applied in schools, workshops, armies, and hospitals. Michel Foucault has pointed out that well before scientific managers brought a rigid division of labour to Ford's assembly-line, soldiers and students were subjected to the rhythms of signals, whistles, bells, and orders that "imposed on everyone temporal norms . . . intended both to accelerate the process of learning and to teach speed as a virtue."¹⁵

Teaching (or, perhaps, "training") people to internalize the discipline of the clock constituted a massive cultural change, a characteristic of industrialization that E.P. Thompson described as a "severe restructuring . . . a new human nature." The English historian showed that in the same way that Algerian peasants under French colonialism sometimes saw the clock as "the devil's mill," artisans in eighteenth-century England were reluctant to give up their precious Saint Monday, even under the shrill exhortations of various Methodists and merchants. Their work was irregular, and that was the way they liked it. Monday was "Sundayes brother" according to an old satirical rhyme, a day set aside by Sheffield cutlers and Yorkshire miners for leisure, rest, and personal business. It was not until the onslaught of the Victorian era, when, according to Dickens, "the deadly statistical clock . . . measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid," that the dominance of time discipline and the separation of work from the rest of life began to appear complete. Mill-owners would steal time from employees by setting the clocks forward in the morning and backwards in the evening.

Max Weber's description of the capitalist ethic drew on Ben Franklin's "time is money" dictum to describe its

essence. According to Thompson, Franklin was a man of the New World, "a world which was to reach its apogee with Henry Ford."

Although we are told that we have now reached a post-Fordist world of flexible accumulation and globalization, we would do well to heed Thompson's thoughts on time, work, and life:

If we are to have an enlarged leisure, in an automated future, the problem is not "how are men going to be able to *consume* all these additional time-units of leisure?" but "what will be the capacity for experience of the men who have this undirected time to live?" If we maintain a Puritan time-valuation, then it is a question of how this time is put to *use*, or how it is exploited by the leisure industries. But if the purposive notation of time-use becomes less compulsive, then men might have to re-learn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life.¹⁶

The lunacy of lives driven by the compulsions of work, speed, and consumption is evident everywhere, particularly in "the machine that changed the world." Automobiles are designed for maximum speeds that are not safe, legal, or sane. Other less obvious cultural manifestations lie behind the events that most fascinate us, from sports to disasters.

The decades-old fascination with the fate of the luxury liner Titanic has been the subject of books, films, articles, and underwater adventures aimed at photographing and even raising the wreck of the White Star liner whose owners ordered the captain to steam at full speed into a fog-shrouded ice-field in 1912. The ship's owners hoped that the largest moving structure ever made would be able to shave a few hours off the transatlantic crossing and thus attract more customers. The chilling image of the Titanic's huge steel stern as it rises hundreds of feet into the air before taking more than fifteen hundred people to their cruel, silent grave has haunted imaginations ever since that fateful night. But the words of the Chicago bishop who condemned the arrogance of the "insane desire" for speed have almost been forgotten.¹⁷

16 E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, 38 (1967).

17 Quoted in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p.110. Also more or less forgotten are the less-celebrated fates of the thirty Filipino sailors who perished in 1994 when the bulk carrier Marika 7 steamed out of Sept-Iles into the teeth of a vicious North Atlantic gale. The event rekindled concern over safety of crews on ships whose owners operate on schedules so tight that the on-time delivery of iron ore takes priority over human life. When Rev. David Craig, director of the Halifax Missions to Seamen, complained after the Marika 7 disaster that captains are routinely pressured to sail aging ships into violent storms so that owners can avoid cash penalties for late delivery, he was sacked from his job.

14 Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (London: J.M. Dent, 1961), pp.33, 35.

15 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1979), p.154.

Other odd desires persist. The fastest, most prestigious and most expensive way to fly the Atlantic is aboard the supersonic Concorde. This modern version of the Titanic, designed and guided by sophisticated computer technologies, was produced by firms that clearly saw the potential demand for this sort of thing at a time when the same tools and talents could have been put to use making handier and cheaper – though slow-moving – wheelchairs. What priorities stimulate Concorde? More efficient converters could use the sun's energy to charge batteries for better wheelchairs for those millions of the globe's disabled who can't get around. Four of five Canadian families own a microwave oven.¹⁸ What Canadian home, once accustomed to it, would easily give up the microwave oven and retreat just a few years to those days of cooking more slowly?

When viewed through an environmental or cultural lens, the compulsory consumption of superfluties makes little sense. For instance, a glossy magazine ad for a cellular phone portrays a designer toddler atop a playground dinosaur, his happy, GORE-TEX-clad mom steadying him with one hand while holding her Nokia mobile phone to her ear. It is not clear whether her smile is being stimulated by her child or the phone conversation. Equally (and, one guesses, intentionally) ambivalent is the headline chosen by the advertisers hired by the Finnish company to sell the Korean-made phones to Canadians: *Some things are just too important to miss*. Like "quality time" with the family? That important call? One thing that is undeniable is that there's no need to waste time looking up the number or dialling; the Nokia boasts alphanumeric memory and speed-dialling.

The accumulation of microwaves and cell-phones, like the accumulation of property and capital itself, has no apparent limit. There's a gnawing anxiety about the future of the family at the same time that the market burrows its way like a tapeworm into the guts of our everyday lives. The imperatives of compulsory consumption undeniably lead to families spending less and less time together. Less and less often do we share a meal. Rather, we prefer to "graze" by popping something hurriedly into the microwave before heading off to our meetings, tvs, and organized distractions.

"The family meal was once a primary family sacrament, where children learned the terms of civil discourse," Robert Bellah and his co-authors say in their compelling study of the social ills of modern life, *The Good Society*. "What happens to the family when commodification reaches this extent?"¹⁹

In his appeal for less work and more life, Bruce O'Hara suggests that the central symbol of our time is the refrigerator-door timetable, a chart that guides dual-income fami-

lies through the shoals of life in the late twentieth century. Many parents adhere to rigid schedules for driving the kids to school, getting to work at one or more jobs, shopping for groceries, organizing music lessons, and so on. Marriages have eroded when people have been too distracted to notice. "Parents don't have time to be parents," O'Hara concludes, pointing out that smart parents slot in time together. "They try to make it up to their children with horse-riding lessons, Nintendo games, designer clothes and 'quality time.'"²⁰

The social struggle over time has proceeded a long way since the time of Saint Monday, with many people coming out losers. According to Statistics Canada, one in three Canadians feels "constantly under stress" trying to do more than they can handle. One in four sees himself or herself as a workaholic. When presented with the statement "I often feel under stress when I don't have enough time," 45 per cent (and more women than men) agreed. Nearly as many (44 per cent) said that when they needed more time, they skipped sleep. One in five had resolved to slow down the following year.²¹

A profile of Canadian family life from the Vanier Institute of the Family shows that more than a third of dual-income families would sink below the poverty line if one partner stopped working. According to the research, family incomes are going "nowhere fast" and licensed child care is "not much, not cheap." Divorce is on the rise, and after separation women are much worse off than men. But along with these commonplace realities of the 1990s comes the Institute's description of a typical workday of a Canadian family.

Up early to get the kids dressed . . . breakfast eaten, lunches made, animals fed, kids delivered to daycare or school, and in to work on time . . . the commute home – stressful enough, even without traffic jams or remembering to buy milk – pick up the little ones from daycare, prepare a reasonably nutritious meal while juggling phone calls, the latest mechanical calamity, and the children's problems. . . . If things go well, the kids will watch tv quietly so the parents can get the meal on the table as quickly as possible. [The Institute optimistically assumes that dad is helping with the cooking.] And then a leisurely evening at home? Hardly. Instead, it's baths, homework, a quick load of laundry because someone needs that special shirt the next day. Or maybe it's hockey, ballet or music lessons, or 4-H for the kids or a community college course in data processing or business administration for their parents to upgrade career prospects. And don't forget the parent-teacher meeting, or the community daycare meeting. And that exercise class to try and get the body in shape to keep up with this

18 Statistics Canada, 1992 *Household Facilities and Equipment Survey*, Ottawa, 1992.

19 Robert Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Knopf, 1991), p.93.

20 O'Hara, *Working Harder Isn't Working*, p.16.

21 Statistics Canada, *Initial Data Release from the 1992 General Social Survey on Time Use*, Ottawa, 1993, cited in Vanier Institute for the Family, *Profiling Canada's Families*, Ottawa, 1994.

ridiculous pace! . . . It would seem that all too often today's families must live on the left-overs of human energy and time.²²

The good life or the goods life? In his dissection of the language of cultural transformation, Welsh social critic Raymond Williams probed how the notion of "the consumer" had been moulded by the market. In its original English use, borrowed from the French at the time of the medieval *werk-glocke*, "to consume" had negative implications. It meant to destroy, to exhaust, to use up, to waste – a sense that it retains today. In the middle ages, if a judge ruled you a heretic or a witch, you might well find yourself sentenced to being "consumed by fire." Tuberculosis was long known as "consumption." From the sixteenth century, when the noun "consumer" was used it had similarly wasteful implications.

It was only in the twentieth century that "the consumer" was transformed into an abstract figure in an abstract market. We now speak of "consumer-led" recovery and even have Consumers' Reports and a Consumers' Association. Williams situates the change in the word against the background of a particular stage of capitalist development and the needs of a mass market for artificially created needs. "It is appropriate in terms of the history of the word that criticism of a wasteful and 'throw-away' society was expressed somewhat later, by the description *consumer society*," he concludes. "To say *user* rather than *consumer* is still to express a relevant distinction."²³

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A Catholic friend of mine tells about something that happened on one of his family's traditional Sunday drives in the country, something he has always remembered. As he peered out the car window he noticed a field littered with thousands of round stones. He asked about the meaning of this strange sight. "The farmer was working his field on Sunday, instead of taking a day of rest," was the response from the front seat. "All of the potatoes were turned into stones."

Ever since then, after years spent studying classical philosophy and working on issues of social justice, my friend says he has been puzzled about why something that seems so eminently reasonable – one day of rest out of seven – should need a commandment to back it up, or labour-standards legislation to enforce it.

As it is, we move faster and faster, only to remain in what Juliet Schor calls "capitalism's squirrel cage." Labour-saving devices, however many we consume, have apparently done little to save time. But Schor points out that consumerism is not an inescapable fact of human nature. The waste that has accompanied commodity culture has been with us since at least the 1920s, when productivity growth began to be trans-

lated not into relaxation and leisure for all, but into a culture of unlimited desires. According to Schor, "Business was explicit in its hostility to increases in free time, preferring consumption as the *alternative* to taking economic progress in the form of leisure."²⁴

We are now living with the legacy of that choice. It takes the form of being afraid of the sun because the ozone layer is thinning and searching for new garbage dumps to replace the ones overflowing with ancient rusting gas barbecues and the packaging from the new home computer.

If business has always opposed reductions in work-time in favour of more work for more consumption, labours relationship with working hours has been more ambivalent. Workers historically have wanted to work shorter hours. The response from above has been equally predictable. As early as 1816 Nova Scotia adopted a vicious anti-union statute that made unlawful meetings and association aimed at cutting hours or raising pay punishable by three months in jail. When Kingston workers agitated in the 1830s for shorter hours, the Loyalist press responded by blaming the situation on "calculating Yankees" who wanted to promote their "pernicious" ideas about "Atheism, Republicanism and Revolution." Fully a third of all strikes in the 1860s and 1870s were provoked by the desires of workers to get shorter hours or control over some other aspect of work life.²⁵

The most important of these strikes took place in 1872 as part of an upsurge of labour agitation aimed at the nine-hour day. The movement had started among English construction workers in 1859, spreading across the Atlantic. A U.S. labour reformer of the day, George McNeill, explained, "Men who are compelled to sell their labour, very naturally desire to sell the smallest portion of their time for the largest possible price. They are merchants of their time. It is their only available capital." Throughout central Canada nine-hour leagues sprang up. At a Hamilton demonstration in 1872, workers led by railway machinist James Ryan used a horse-drawn wagon to display a gravestone bearing the epitaph "Died 15th of May, the ten hour system."²⁶

Although the Hamilton workers and their allies were rebuffed in that attempt to work less, in the decades that followed unions pressed the demand relentlessly. In 1870 the standard work-week in Canadian manufacturing was sixty-four hours. But workers made major strides, particularly in the years immediately following World War I.²⁷ In the wake of the wave of postwar militancy, the eight-hour day became widespread.

"It may very well be that an eight-hour day will prove, presently if not immediately, to be more productive than one

24 Schor, *Overworked American*, p.120.

25 Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, pp.65, 52, 93.

26 *Ibid.*, pp.106–8.

27 Ontario Task Force on Hours of Work and Overtime, *Working Times: The Report of the Task Force*, Toronto, 1987, p.13.

22 Vanier Institute, *Profiling Canada's Families*, p.107.

23 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983), pp.78–79.

of ten,” said Stephen Leacock as he gazed with alarm at the labour unrest. “But somewhere the limit is reached and gross production falls. The supply of things in general gets shorter. But note that this itself would not matter much, if somehow and in some way not yet found, the shortening of the production of goods cut out the luxuries and superfluities first.”²⁸

By the 1930s the work-week had declined to forty-nine hours. In a huge victory in 1937 the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union mobilized five thousand women to strike in Quebec. The ILGW succeeded in cutting the women’s weekly hours from an astonishing eighty to forty-four.

A major watershed period was the 1920s, when labour demands intersected with a realization on the part of business that a consumerist consensus was vital to continued profitability. Advertising took off, along with instalment selling and consumer credit. At the same time that they learned about the dangers of “office hips” and “underarm offence,” women suddenly found out that their proper place was in the home. It was there, within the family, according to home economist Christine Frederick (author of a 1929 book, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*), that women qualified for the rank of “quartermaster rather than general.” Frederick’s ideal woman runs the supply room “for the very reason that she can’t lead the forces in the field.”²⁹

Also in 1929 a Committee on Recent Changes appointed by U.S. president Herbert Hoover summed it all up by proving “conclusively” that “wants are almost insatiable; that one want satisfied makes way for another.” The committee concluded that economically the United States had “a boundless field” lying in wait in its future. “There are new wants that will make way endlessly for newer wants, as fast as they are satisfied.” It would only take “advertising and other promotional devices” and “carefully predeveloped consumption” to build a “remarkable” momentum.³⁰

An old-fashioned conservative like Leacock had little use for the apostles of progress and their pursuit of the “phantom of insatiable desires.”³¹ But for the liberals of the day – and ultimately the trade union movement and the evolving mass culture – the way to full employment lay along the aisles of new things called supermarkets and roads crowded with automotive traffic. Hoover’s successor Franklin Roosevelt even moved Thanksgiving forward a week to make more time for Christmas shopping. Before World War II, radio was well established along with mass circulation magazines and newspapers. In the postwar period television was soon to place a

fast-talking salesman in every living room. Buying became linked up with another looming pastime – watching.

Why? Why did consumerism “work,” replacing labours old demand to “work less and live more” with demands for money, not time? It might be tempting to attribute the trade of time for money to the nefarious influence of The Box. But that is unsatisfactory, confusing cause and effect. Freudian Marxist Herbert Marcuse echoed the Tory Leacock. Marcuse, an exile from Hitler’s Germany, stayed on in the postwar United States and looked around at its explosive growth and attendant consumer culture. For Marcuse, capitalism had gained the ability to anaesthetize people, stimulating simple desires that could easily be fulfilled by market relationships. Soon, he argued in *Eros and Civilization*, the ability to produce more things with fewer people might make much work unnecessary, and free time could take over. “The result,” he wrote hopefully, “would be a radical transformation of values. . . . Advanced industrial society is in permanent mobilization against this possibility.”³²

In 1930 breakfast cereal magnate W.K. Kellogg launched an experiment in decreased work-time, creating 25 per cent more jobs at his Michigan corn flakes plant by cutting the workday to six hours and adding a fourth shift. Like Stephen Leacock, he figured that a logical future would not bring infinite growth. Instead, technology would create more “free” time. The workers took no cut in pay. The experiment lasted over fifty years.

In 1932 a U.S. labour department Women’s Bureau research team travelled to the Kellogg operation in Battle Creek and found that 85 per cent of the women workers liked the short shift. It meant they could pass more time with their families, relaxing and participating in self-activity like canning and organized games. Just after World War II management offered more money if the unionized workers would return to the eight-hour day, but the vote was three to one in favour of less work. From that time on a protracted struggle unfolded. On one side was a coalition of senior male workers and company managers who wanted more hours, and on the other a group of women workers committed to less work. Workers were allowed to choose workdays of six or eight hours.

After the 1950s, historian Benjamin Hunnicutt reports, the eight-hour advocates “abandoned the language of freedom and control that both men and women had been using for over 50 years, insisting that money was the only job benefit.”³³ According to this perspective, work – not free time – was the centre of life. Those who wanted to work less were denounced by other workers as “silly” or “crazy” or “weak

28 Stephen Leacock, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (New York: Jonathan Lane, 1920), pp.81–82.

29 Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York, 1929), p.15, quoted in Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, p.171.

30 Quoted in Hunnicutt, “End of Shorter Hours.”

31 Leacock, *Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*, p.28.

32 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1962), pp.vii–viii.

33 Benjamin Hunnicutt, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” *Context: A Quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture*, 37 (Winter 1993–94), pp.34–38.

girls” or “lazy, sissy men.” Those who continued to work the six-hour shift (three-quarters of them were women) called their opponents “work hogs” and defended “our shorter hours.” They liked having more time outside the sphere of necessity, time free from both paid work and domestic chores, time to spend with kids, to go birding, to go to the park, to crochet – in short, time to do what they pleased.

Management eventually abandoned the gentler, human-relations technique of trying to persuade the Kellogg’s women that work was all important. Instead the company picked up the stick. In the 1980s managers began talking about competitive pressures and threatened to relocate the jobs to places where the workers were more compliant. On December 11, 1984, a majority of the six-hour workers voted to end their “experiment.”

The Kellogg experience provides a glimpse of how we have come to see leisure as an effortless time. The passive culture of consumption replaces other forms of activity. For Hunnicutt, the story of the corn flakes makers raises important questions: “Why go see the women play baseball when you can watch the Detroit Tigers on tv? Why do your own canning when you can buy canned goods at the supermarket? Why do anything in leisure time when you can pay someone else to do it? Why should I put in the trouble, why should I bother to expend all this effort when I’ve done my duty, I’ve put my time in at work, now I can just cease being a human being, put my brain on hold.”³⁴

Putting your brain on hold: the metaphor would have been foreign to Leacock or Marcuse – or to anyone who grew up in the early years of the telephone. After the war the idea of a reduction of labour time disappeared from the public agenda. Labour dropped its longstanding demands for shorter hours. And – for a brief historical interlude – the accommodation between labour and business brought low unemployment and wide-reaching prosperity and security – at least temporarily – to more people than had ever had it before.

Arguments for shorter work-weeks or fewer hours, however, do not get to the heart of the matter. While important, they are by definition qualitative. (As Lewis Mumford put it, “In time-keeping, in trading, in fighting, men counted numbers; and finally, as the habit grew, only numbers counted.”)³⁵ To get at the heart of the matter, it is important to consider not just time but also *pastimes*. The various ways in which we pass our time reflect both our values and those of the culture that has spawned them, the same place where we learn those values. Do we pass our time passively? Do we squeeze time from busy work schedules for quickie power-vacations?

For my Catholic friend – the one who wondered about

those stones lying out in a field on Sunday – capitalism’s compulsive work/consume ethic is such a mess that it is impossible to simply “social-engineer our way out of it.” Rather, the answer has to mirror the complexity of the dilemma, combining social and economic change with something he calls “spiritual discipline” – doing *without* to meet the needs of others, avoiding waste out of respect for nature or the poor, considering oneself a steward rather than the owner of things.

The values inherent in this rumination of time and spirituality are precisely those that Marcuse said industrial society was permanently mobilized against. They spring from a notion of love that is bound up with putting oneself at the service of others. *Service*: not in the sense of a service economy in which the word assumes the form of another commodity, where service means a new form of servitude, but in the form of stepping back and *thinking* – and not just in quantitative terms but in qualitative ways – searching, as Charles Taylor puts it, “for ways to recover a language of commitment to a greater whole.”³⁶

* * *

Mary Veley of Kingston has spent all of her adult life as a housewife and a good deal of it as a skein winder and heat setter in a yarn plant. Before that she worked in a knitting mill. Factory work finally led to back problems, and she had to quit work a few months before Kingston Spinners closed down to consolidate production in Quebec and Georgia.

“Hard work has never bothered me,” she says. “I’ve done it all my life. Even with my back injury I didn’t want to give up my job. But I was told if I stayed it would only get worse.” Aside from factory work Mary Veley has had another working life. As the mother of three grown children she has been cook, cleaner, nurse, referee, psychologist, seamstress: Mother, Housewife. If love is all about putting oneself in the service of others, she has been in service as a caregiver all of her adult life.

Veley’s mother arrived in Kingston from Quebec without being able to speak a word of English. Her father worked as a janitor at The Base. The area is lucky that CFB Kingston survived the military budget cuts of 1994. (Although 435 jobs disappeared at The Base, Bombardier’s Kingston plant was revived by a contract to build transit vehicles for Malaysia.) Veley’s son has his Grade 12 and a job driving a truck for a local steel fabricator. He says it is not something he wants to do all his life. Her nephew has a job at a packaging firm but has been applying everywhere else he can, “just in case. . . .” Her husband, a welder, has his own shop. Veley herself can rhyme off all the plants that are closed along Dalton Avenue in the industrial zone north of the CN main line.

34 See Hunnicutt, “Pursuit of Happiness,” and Jamie Swift, “The Brave New World of Work,” *CBC-Ideas*, June 29, 1994, which includes an interview with Hunnicutt.

35 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), p.22.

36 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.509.

Veley has thought a lot about what she could do now that the kids and the job are gone. Floral arranger and receptionist are a couple of jobs she thinks she could handle, jobs that would not be too hard on her back. She has been on Workers' Compensation for two years, with lots of time in physiotherapy, but her back still goes into regular and painful spasms. The Board wants her to get retrained so they can get her off their benefit rolls. So she has done the "Orientation to Employment" at St. Lawrence College. She has done the Job Finding Club at the March of Dimes on Patrick St. around the corner from her house. They did practice interviews and learned about resumés. The same week a newspaper story told about a local developer who had received three hundred applications for a receptionist job and was forced to put another ad in the classifieds telling people to stop sending in resumés.

But Veley has not yet fallen into the category that the labour-market policy types refer to as "discouraged." What's more, she's ready to play the training game. Her shining formica kitchen table has a neat stack of files with all the papers, pamphlets, and exhortations she's received since she began to participate in the great training tournament. The papers include her own notes, written in a neat hand on sheets of lined foolscap.

At the top of page one she has written "Places To Get Training For New Jobs" over a list of private business colleges. Her notes indicate two categories that she has been told are crucial to success in becoming a model employee in the 1990s. The first is "Human Relations." All the bosses these days say they want team players, so Veley has written down "getting along with others," "assertiveness," and "keeping attitudes." "At Kingston Spinners, I trained girls on the machines," Veley says. "You had to get along with others and take responsibility." But the second category is computer skills, and for her the world of dBase III Plus is a different matter. She has noted the need to learn where all the keys are on a computer as well as "what some of the functions of the keys are." She is now on her third training course, this one at the Academy of Learning: computer familiarization, four hours each week for four weeks.

Like many other people who find themselves in this situation – and like many women in specific – Mary Veley has a fistful of skills that she herself doesn't recognize as such. These are things that, like so much else, she takes as given: tacit skills that are not necessarily available out there on the training market, abilities that you can't pick up off a shelf.

A few years back her daughter Laurie survived a hideous car accident and spent two months in a coma. After finally being released from the hospital, Laurie was partly paralysed. Veley took her home and began to work on her recovery. It was a long, slow, and painful process that involved teaching Laurie how to move her legs to walk and her hands to write. All the while Veley was working twelve-hour shifts at the yarn

mill. After a three-month period of convalescence her daughter had recovered enough to get about on her own and look after herself.

(Advocates of a saner approach to working hours and labour standards in general argue that employees should have the right to take paid leave to deal with urgent family matters. The most common management response, at least in North America, is typified by Bruce McGillivray of Allegheny Ludlum, a steel company. "You can't take a day off because something's going on in your family," he told a *Wall Street Journal* reporter.)³⁷

At one of the job-finding clubs, Veley was urged to add "experience as a caregiver" to her new resumé. But she only reluctantly gives details of this work. She feels it is just one of the things that fall under the job description "mother." She doesn't see it as any kind of formal credential. "I wasn't trained as a caregiver," she says frankly. "I looked after my own daughter, but I never looked after other people."

Now, when she reflects on this experience and her current situation, Veley is convinced she would like to find work caring for people. "Once you've been through something like that, you can really understand what people go through," she says. But with her back problem it would be difficult to work at hospital or home-care jobs that are physically demanding. She looks hard at the thick binder with all the papers from the courses she has taken, all the careful notes she's made. Her skills, her "really useful knowledge," have no apparent commercial value.

She is good at *caring*, in both literal and figurative senses of the word. In a world in which care is often sold like Jello or Nintendo, the skills she has can be salable. But when purchased – either through private home-care agencies or public facilities – they tend to be undervalued. Home-care workers hardly command rates of pay competitive with people who dream up advertising concepts for Nokia cell-phones. Indeed, with health-care cutbacks and increased reliance on out-of-hospital "community" care, those who do the looking after are more and more frequently women like Mary Veley. They do it on their own time, as part of their work as mothers, wives, daughters.

Nonetheless, Veley feels that she would like to work visiting seniors in their own homes, providing older women with hairdressing, light cleaning, and company. She once asked the wcb if they would help her out with hairdressing training, but her request was refused. So she is stuck trying to learn the rudiments of computer work. She finds it frustrating, but plays along.

"You need a certificate saying you have the skill," she says. "I did my mother's hair for years. I give my girlfriends perms and colouring. I began cutting my brother's hair after his barber retired, and he said he'd never go anywhere else. If it's

³⁷ *The Globe and Mail*, October 7, 1994.

something you're interested in, they should give you a chance at it."

The issue here is not simply just that Veley has been working all her life, wants to find work now, and finds herself with so many unused units of time. She is a caring person cast adrift in a world in which idle people and unfulfilled needs walk hand in hand. This is the mismatch that social policy should be attempting to address. It requires an alternative social vision, one that recognizes the existence of profound human needs that can't be served by the market. Unfortunately, people who find themselves without paid work will be quick-marched – as a condition of public provision – into whatever the private sector happens to have by way of low-wage work. Maybe they will be retrained, through some sort of learnfare program, for a job that may or may not exist. Or perhaps the jobless will be forced, like those convicted of minor crimes, to do "community service."

A more genuine and humane shift in social policy would involve a complete recasting of priorities, rooted in the recognition that the right to a decent income and the right to work should not necessarily be linked to a paid job in the conventional sense. This does not imply some pared-down version of the welfare state. A genuine and humane shift would speak to the need for a "policy of time."

"Work – or time exchanged for a wage – would no longer be one's principal occupation," French social theorist André Gorz says. "Everyone would – or could – define themselves with reference to their free time activities."

Such a future would defy the logic of competition and the war of each against all. The search for true "family values" would involve escaping capitalism's squirrel cage. It would mean a reduction in the activity of people-as-consumers, a break from the unsustainable notion of infinite growth on a finite planet – a break with the values of the market, values based on a belief that somethings worth can ultimately only be determined by its price. The shift would recognize that the obscene disparities that fracture the planet between rich and poor represent the true meaning of globalization.

A "policy of time" would only be realistic if it were accompanied by a similar redistribution of material wealth (income), because we also live on a planet where too few have too much, and too many too little. According to Gorz:

What would happen to the ethic of speed and punctuality, of 'we're not here for fun' – an ethic inculcated into children at school ever since the invention of manufactures? What would happen to the glorification of effort, speed and performance which is the basis of all industrial societies, capitalist and socialist? And if the ethic of performance collapsed, what would become of the social and industrial hierarchy? On what values and imperatives would those in command base their authority?

Gorz points out that millions of bosses large and small recoil from such ideas. "Instinctively," he concludes, "they prefer

unemployment to more free time. For unemployment is a disciplinary force."³⁸

The glorification of effort and performance is not confined to the bosses. When trade union official Miriam Edelson found herself ground down by her time-gobbling, high-powered job and the need to look after an ailing child, she began to worry about her own health. She asked the Canadian Auto Workers union for time off: "I was told – point blank – that I wasn't committed enough." When the union – an organization explicitly devoted to the values of sharing and social justice – was less than sympathetic to her need for more time, she says she felt "betrayed."³⁹

The real alternative to continuing unemployment is not just to break the fixed link between income and a *job*. It is to reconceive jobs so that they take on the more positive characteristics of work-as-vocation, the way Mary Veley sees caring for her injured daughter. We have seen a job as something that you "get" or "keep" or "lose." It has often been associated with criminals, whose slang describes a job as the next stick-up. A job has a limited sense, an occasional project, as in doing "small jobs" (or lumps) of work.⁴⁰ It is often ordinary, too often negative – as in the sense of a Burger King or assembly-line or computer terminal. Jobs in a technologically advanced society, warned Senator David Croll in the wake of his inquiry into poverty, "make work as a means to any end other than putting food on the table and paying the bills, most uninviting."⁴¹

Work as *vocation* or *occupation* has a positive resonance, implying a combination of the mental and the manual, a reintegration of conception and execution, which the industrial division of labour has done so much to drive apart. Work can be inviting, something one does not for a *living* but to breathe fresh air into life – or to nurture life itself, the reflection of what could be called a *caring society*. We think of cultivating plants in a garden, an activity that differs starkly from the job of a field hand. It is only because a job implies a social relationship (usually hierarchical) that a woman who is nurturing children and managing a household – devoting much of her life to the servicing of those she loves – can be said to be *not working*.⁴²

* * *

At age forty-six, after twenty-four years of stamping out bumpers, Dave Lachapelle found himself out of work, with a Grade 10 education and few apparent prospects. Things were changing ail around him.

38 Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, p.136.

39 Miriam Edelson, "The Boys Just Don't Get It," *Our Times*, October/November, 1994.

40 Williams, *Keywords*, pp.334–37.

41 *The Globe and Mail*, March 13, 1974, quoted in James Rhinehart, *The Tyranny of Work: Alienation and the Labour Process* (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Canada, 1987), p.5.

42 Williams, *Keywords*, p.335.

Lachapelle spent a year wondering what to do and realized that the age of falling expectations meant that he might be forced into work that paid half of what he used to make. He got odd jobs around Viscount Estates, where half the residents are senior citizens. Lachapelle, who describes himself as “sort of a half-assed handyman,” put his Mr. Fixit skills to work doing the little bits of work that old people can’t get commercial contractors to undertake – minor plumbing, panelling, painting, and roof coating.

After a year he decided to hop on the training bandwagon. High-school upgrading at St. Clair College allowed him to extend his UI claim, but he still had no idea about where he was headed. Then he remembered his first-ever job, working as a porter at Riverview Hospital, helping the patients get up in the morning, serving meals, feeding those who needed help and getting them to physiotherapy. He had liked that work, particularly in comparison to the clang, grit, and monotony of the auto-parts plant. He remembered how the patients appreciated the help others gave them.

His wife of twenty-five years was supportive during this period. Going back to high school can be a traumatic experience for people who have been independent and never felt that more education would ever be needed. This is particularly true of those like the Lachappelles, whose kids have already finished school and are now adrift in the tricky currents of the youth job market.

Dave Lachapelle completed another training course. This one gave him a health-care aide certificate and a chance at a job working at the Essex Nursing Home, a ten-minute walk from the Viscount Estates. Three days after he pocketed his certificate he found himself on call as a part-timer for the Reliacare Corporation. The hourly pay was less than he had got in his former full-time job, but at least it was something. Besides, he found that he was now doing really useful work. His transition from widget-maker to caregiver hints at a different sort of world of work, one that earmarks a Caring Society. The whole thing has something to do with human needs – both his own and those of others.

When I worked at Windsor Bumper I hated the idea of just picking a bumper off the rack, putting it in the press, hitting the buttons, picking a bumper off the rack, putting it in the press, hitting the buttons. As far as the actual work goes, I’d have to say the nursing home is better. You’re dealing with actual people and they appreciate what you’re doing. If you’re making bumpers for a company, they’re making lots of money but they don’t appreciate you. And I think a man needs that. You need the acceptance of other human beings. You need appreciation showed for what you’re doing. It’s part of being whole and remaining sane in a society which continually tries to drive you nuts.

I was saying to my wife last night that there’s this one lady, Stella. She never speaks. She sits in a chair and has this look on her face and says “Unhhh . . . unhhh . . .

unhhh” all the time. I’m nice to her, like I try to be nice to everyone. I go up to her and she’ll reach out and grab my hand and just hold it and look right in my eye and she’ll just squeeze. For me things like that make work worthwhile. Makes you feel like something.

This Caring Society is one possibility. The Gambling Society is another – and one that governments across the country seem to be pushing as an underpinning of the new economy, a source of revenue and jobs. But it is uncertain as to whether the work spawned, for instance, by Windsor’s new casino offers the kind of feeling Lachapelle talks about experiencing in his work as caregiver.

At its gala opening, trade-unionist-turned-cabinet-minister Frances Lankin described Canada’s first Las Vegas-style casino as a “terrific jobs effort.” Blackjack dealer, security guard, waiter: it was with no apparent irony that the head of Circus Circus Corporation (a casino partner) followed Lankin with the prediction that the newly created jobs would result in “a tremendous economic upheaval.”⁴³

The upheaval was the result of a remarkable social consensus in Windsor. Everyone from the Chamber of Commerce to the Labour Council jumped on the gambling bandwagon after Windsor had been eviscerated by a combination of recession, free trade, and a high dollar in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Gambling seemed to offer a return to prosperity. The province legalized casino gambling, and Canada’s first big-time Las Vegas style casino opened in 1994 in the municipal art gallery, itself a converted brewery.⁴⁴ Sculptures and paintings were consigned to a suburban mall until a permanent building with more of the requisite glitz could be erected to stare across the river at Detroit. Most of the gamblers come from the United States.

Part of the debate (what there was of it – the development steamrollered a desperate city) over the introduction of the casino centred around the possible influence of organized crime and increased prostitution. Would the service jobs created by slot-machine tourism be able to replace the union jobs in the auto sector that had evaporated or emigrated? Such was the casino’s momentum that this question didn’t really seem to matter. Windsor apparently had no choice. There was simply no other way.

The city was ideally located for the same reason that it remains an important centre of car production, close to the American industrial heartland, not far from Chicago, Cleveland, and, of course, Detroit.

The United States has been called a “gambler’s society.”⁴⁵

43 Swift, “Brave New World of Work,” *CBC-Ideas*, interview with Hunnicutt.

44 Gambling is often referred to by both government officials and its promoters as “gaming.” This is perhaps because, despite its popularity and relentless advertising, the idea of gambling has yet to lose all of its residual moral tarnish.

45 David Popenoe, *Private Pleasure, Public Right* (New Brunswick,

One of the most attractive things about the country has always been the very real hope that everyone, no matter their origins, has a chance of hitting the jackpot, making it to the pinnacle of wealth and power. Even as that nation's relative economic power declines and it becomes stymied by its violence, poverty, and the anguished malaise of its modernity, people from all over the world still want to come and take a chance in the Gambler's Society. Each year Canadian newspapers feature ads for a "Green Card Lottery" that offers private services to help people with the annual U.S. immigration sweepstakes. They are attracted to the powerful American promise of freedom and opportunity, the chance to spin the wheel of fortune and come out a winner.

For Canadians – and particularly English Canadians in search of identity – this attraction to the United States remains ambivalent. We search for those things that separate us from Americans. At least on this side of the border an unlucky illness or accident – on the job or off – doesn't foreshadow a steady slide into poverty. For the Gambler's Society has its dark side. It is far easier to find yourself "out on the street" – both figuratively and literally – in the United States, a country whose employment regulations give much less weight to job stability than do those in most industrial societies. The poor in the United States have relatively little in the way of community support. A liberal politician like Bill Clinton favoured cutting people off welfare after two years. David Popenoe, the U.S. sociologist who coined the term "gambler's society," points out that to be well-off in his country means having both freedom and affluence; to be poor "is to be a second class citizen in a way that is not found to be acceptable" in many other lands.⁴⁶

But Canada, too, is becoming more of a gambler's society. On the most obvious material level, we witness governments at all levels scrambling to maximize their tax takes, not by making the tax system fairer, but by bringing in new lotteries: 649s, Super-Lottos, Pro-line sports systems. Every mall offers its specialized lottery kiosk, the fantasies and realities of abundance. Gambling, whether it is a night at a smoky bingo hall in the Legion, a day at the races, or the big payoff from buying a ticket at the corner store, allows space for individualized fantasies. People with few choices or chances in the rest of their lives get the opportunity to make decisions that could make a real difference. (The Lotto 649 slogan is "Imagine the Freedom. . .") Even if we never even participate, who among us hasn't caught ourselves imagining what we would do if we ever won The Big One?

We have more difficulty – even when robbed by unemployment or subemployment of the possibility of using our skills – of conjuring up the vision of an alternative based on

the radical rethinking of how we spend our time and what we find rewarding.

So gambling, once confined to racetracks and shady back rooms, is now all around us. Churches that also protested Sunday shopping have raised moral objections, but few others seem to care. Gambling seems to respond to the apparently universal urge to take a chance, be a winner.

This is where the other side of the gambler's society shows itself. Canada, particularly English Canada, is becoming more and more like its southern neighbour. As in the United States, the abyss of poverty and despair that awaits the losers in the gamblers society yawns ever wider and deeper. Many more of us are poorer, more still insecure, as the market is left to sort the good job winners from the bad job (or no job) losers. Indeed, everyday jargon describes someone who is either poor and disreputable or just plain unsuccessful as a "loser." At the same time our public and political discourse is saturated with "win-win" solutions. There was a prime example of this in early 1995, when twenty-thousand people lined up at the Metro East Convention Centre in Toronto to apply for work on a General Motors assembly-line. One man waiting to fill out an application form reflected on the odds of getting a job: "Life's a chance, so why not take a chance on getting a job?"⁴⁷

The process of Americanization is partly the result of a long historical trend that some Canadians have resisted but many, from the Liberal King to the Tory Mulroney, have accepted. It is the stuff of classical Canadian angst. In few other places do a people define themselves not by what they are but by what they are not: that is, American. By the 1990s Canadians grasping for the hallmarks of their own distinct society amidst the rising tides of continental integration often held up their social programs, particularly medicare, as an example. We have it. The Americans don't.

Put aside the shakiness of public health care in Canada, the U.S. administration's glacial (and apparently futile) moves in the opposite direction, and the largest province proclaiming a "win-win" situation when it succeeded in diverting a tiny portion of professional basketball profits to its hospitals. Put aside the fact that by the mid-1990s the main political opposition that English Canada had sent to Ottawa was touting an American-style individualism that simply wanted to get government out of the way and put the boots to the poor. The Red streak in Toryism had breathed its last with Brian Mulroney's callous cynicism.

Mutual affiliation and solidarity are foreign to the gambler's society, where it is more likely society-as-crapshoot. This tendency gets played out clearly in the labour market. Education and training are held out as the *sine qua non* for those who are to be winners. At the same time, both elements become more expensive and hence ever more the preserve of

N.J.: Transaction Books, 1985), cited in Bellah et al., *Good Society*, p.89.

46 Ibid.

47 CBC-Radio News, January 9, 1995.

those fortunate enough to be what was once called “well born.” So pervasive is the faith in learning and skill as the key to the future that the nagging question of who gets education and training and who does not is shunted aside. University tuition has doubled in the past ten years, with students paying a larger share of university costs. “These trends will no doubt continue,” was the dry, apparently indisputable conclusion of the 1994 Liberal green paper on social policy.⁴⁸

As a result, affluence has staged a comeback as a symbol of superiority. If you don’t make it, if you do not survive, it is because you lack the skills that separate you from the winners. Those with the means treat schooling as another market, shopping around for the best schools in the best neighbourhoods – when they don’t secede from the public system by joining the accelerating rush to private education. Then it is on to the university lottery as young people compete for admission to the ever more expensive schools at the top of *Maclean’s* fervid annual ratings.

Windsor exemplifies the stresses of a working-class city with a rough egalitarianism based on trade union power in traditional manufacturing. More and more working-class children set their sights not on the University of Chrysler but on the University of Windsor as the key to the future. The fact that the city grasped the dubious promise of a gambling economy signals the stresses of a town that stares relentlessly across the Detroit River at the horrific wreckage of the American dream that is Detroit.

Kingston, for its part, gazes placidly across the charming blue waters of the St. Lawrence River and its Thousand Islands, which the city hopes will continue to attract touring yachts, affluent retirees, and the professional class of emerging information and bio-tech industries. It stakes its future on an elite university that is in the vanguard of what has come to be called “privatizing” the programs it offers, where \$20,000 or more will buy you a business degree. There’s an “executive MBA” on offer. The trend is also known as “full-fee” education. Big money will purchase access to programs that, we are assured, promise *excellence*.

The wheel of fortune, of course, does much to determine one’s life chances. The kids from the right side of the trades – in Kingston, on the right side of Princess Street – will have a good chance at all that learning. In Kingston the social divisions remain, reminding us that we by no means live in a meritocracy. The wheel of fortune continues its relentless spin.

This is an undeniably dystopian vision, not perhaps as bleak as George Orwell’s look at the future in *1984*, but akin to it nevertheless. Remember, in *Coming up for Air*, Orwell’s picture of modern life as a frenzied struggle to sell things: “With most people it takes the form of selling themselves

In the final weeks of Orwell’s life his old prep-school chum and fellow writer, Cyril Connolly, wrote an article for the final issue of *Horizon*, a literary magazine that had published some of Orwell’s finest work. Connolly must have been depressed by the end of the magazine and the imminent death of his friend, whose last great work was no cheery comment on modernity. “It is closing time in the gardens of the West,” he wrote, “and from now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair.”⁴⁹

In the face of what seems to be overwhelming evidence, we must search for a metaphorical counterweight to fortune’s wheel. Time is of the essence, and with a planet both divided and despoiled, this is true in more ways than one. Connolly’s words hint at an alternative to the Gambler’s Society. Good gardens take time, usually years, to develop. This is especially true in a cold climate such as ours. Gardens are universally popular, appreciated by almost all cultures, the inspiration for artists, the magic playground of children, the private haunt of lovers, the symbol of sustenance.

Growing things for the love of growing things is hard to rival as a pastime. While so many other pursuits are governed by a burgeoning expertocracy, gardening is ideally – and most frequently – the preserve of the amateur. It is not just for large landowners. Gardens are democratic, because anyone interested in cultivation can care for a small plot – perhaps an allotment with tomatoes and greens, an apartment balcony teeming with growth, a simple backyard plot. Caring for plants and flowers is physical work, and digging and weeding are good for the body as well as the soul.

Gardening is the kind of work that stands in glaring contrast to so many tasks regulated by the clock and the other machines that so dominate working lives and leisure-time activities. Indeed, mechanization and the market have trouble subverting this pastime, although oddly enough some people seem to prefer the shrill whine of the leaf-blower to the quiet brushing of the rake.

The work of gardening is usually not a job. It is more often a hobby, a diversion from life’s other activities, a form of caring and nurturing. Its built-in soulful character distinguishes its labour from much of the rest of the way we pass our time, in work or in leisure. If someone says they love television it might be a little hard to take them seriously, or at least difficult to empathize with their passion. But most of us nod with understanding when people talk of their great affection for their roses. This is all bound up with caring, as opposed to gambling.

The distinction of the organic from the mechanical is part of a long tradition that goes back to Coleridge and Thoreau. It is possible – and sometimes even dangerous – to overplay organic metaphors by applying them to whole societies,

48 Human Resources Development Canada, *Agenda: Jobs and Growth: Improving Social Security in Canada*, Ottawa, 1994, p.17.

49 *Horizon*, 129–30 (December 1949–January 1950).

rationalizing hierarchy and some supposed natural order of things. But the idea still has resonance, as it did for poet James Oppenheim in 1912 when he noticed a banner carried by a Massachusetts woman. She was one of twenty thousand workers who had walked away spontaneously from their mill jobs to protest an arbitrary cut in pay. Her sign bore the simple message: “We want bread and roses too.”

From the sight of the women “marching in the beauty of the day” sprouted a line of verse: “Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread but give us roses.”

Training is in good measure about ratcheting down the hopes and expectations of *people*, who become “human resources” to be called forth and filled up again and again with the skills now demanded, now declared obsolete, by a fast-changing labour market – and this is where “hearts” come in. Demands for less work-time must be rooted not just in the need for jobs, jobs, jobs. They must also have a cultural dimension, for without that dimension the issue of less work (a “policy of time”) is unlikely to be resonant enough to spark the popular imagination.

It is true that the urge to take a chance, to compete, to be a winner is a powerful one. If we are to move from a gambler’s society to a caring society, we must recognize Leacock’s “phantom of insatiable desires” for what it is: a ghost of a chance based on capitalism’s need to expand – forever. Only a relative few, both within Canada and around a world torn by unshared bread, will emerge as “winners.” The odds are stacked, the game fixed. If we fail to challenge the mania of the gambler’s society, most of us – and the earth we live on – can only be losers culturally or materially, or both.

All of the above thoughts spring out of what I learned from working-class people, from what I found in the archives or read in books, and (need I say it?) from my own prejudices and experiences. I have never really been a gambler. I do not understand the intricacies of scratch ‘n’ win at the corner variety store. Like many other dutiful Canadians, I save carefully and do not take risky chances with my RRSPs. I admit to being somewhat unnerved when I get a mailing from an investment dealer telling me to “forget about” public pensions: “There can be no exceptions to this rule.” Despite the warning, I will continue to play it safe.

Nor am I much of a gardener. Although I will put in a few practical kitchen herbs come May each year, I have never developed the passion for the garden exhibited by many people I know, including my mother Olive and her grandmother before her. (Is the garden more of a female pursuit? Certainly gardens on farms were traditionally tended by women.) Even so, I have enjoyed working with my mother in her handsome rock garden in recent years, when her health has prevented her from doing the heavy work. I would happily dig new beds according to her specifications.

Then, in the middle of the time when I was writing this book, my mother became seriously ill, and was confined to

various hospitals, in need of various levels of care (intensive, acute, long-term . . .). It became apparent to me that she would never again be able to look after her precious garden. A woman who had devoted her own life to volunteering her time in churches and libraries and, in general, caring – for her children, her own parents and her mother-in-law, her husband – was now herself in need of care.

In one hospital after another – four of them – my mother received the best of care from nursing and housekeeping staffs whose ranks have been thinned by public-spending cuts. When she left one place she would keep in touch with her former caregivers, scrawling out notes in her shaky hand. I am sure that one of the reasons she fared so well in these institutional settings was that she was so thankful for receiving any bit of routine care that the gratitude became reciprocal, making work that is becoming more pressured and subject to speed-up just a bit more enjoyable, seemingly more worthwhile.

The situation reminds me of something that Dave Lachapelle told me when he was describing what it was like to be working in a home for the aged instead of in an auto-parts plant. “Older people get neglected, so they appreciate anything you can do for them. I sorta get a good sense out of it. If you go in just saying, ‘This job pays fifteen bucks an hour, it’s great . . .’ you’re fooling yourself. All that’s gonna happen is you’ll turn bad.”

Unlike gambling, an individualistic and often compulsive pursuit, caring – and a caring society – is about choosing to be connected, to be involved. It reflects something mutual, something that Orwell would have described with that favourite word of his, *decency*. In 1946 Orwell wrote that the important issue of the day was not whether “the people who will wipe their boots on us during the next fifty years” would be labelled managers or politicians or bureaucrats. The question was whether capitalism, doomed in Orwell’s eyes, would give way to oligarchy or true democracy.

Capitalism is still with us today, with a vengeance, so Orwell was certainly wrong on that score. But in the same essay, a discussion of James Burnham’s book *The Managerial Revolution* (a major influence on 1984), Orwell anguished over the tendency to what he called “realism” – the tendency to assume that the thing that is happening now will simply continue. He called this inclination not just a bad habit but a “major mental disease.”⁵⁰

Those of us who, fifty years later, would imagine a Caring Society of connectedness, of decency, are accustomed to being told to “get real” or to reconcile ourselves to “the real world.” But we must recognize this talk for what it is. It is not

50 George Orwell, “James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution,” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol.4, *In Front of Your Nose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), pp.160–81.

just sturdy pragmatism that can be juxtaposed to some dreamy cloudland inhabited by idealists. It is, rather, what Orwell would have called a “smelly little orthodoxy.”

Today’s “real world” is the world of the market, a place in which equality and our cherished individual freedoms are overwhelmed. The economic lives of our cities and the people in them are now dominated by a vast global market that apparently cannot be controlled nationally, let alone locally. This is not a world in which the needs of people who are really in need – in Windsor or Kingston, in Bangladesh or Guatemala – have any priority. Orthodox wisdom has it that this state of affairs is cast in stone – that we can do nothing but adapt to this new normalcy. The vision of a Caring Society recognizes that the problem with “normal,” to paraphrase Bruce Cockburn’s refrain, is that it “always gets worse.” We can, surely, do better.