Shorter work hours was a vital issue during the formation of the labor movement in the 19th century and continued to be important until the end of the Great Depression. Some of the most dramatic and significant events in the history of labor (such as the strikes of 1886, the Haymarket disaster, the steel strike of 1919) and some of labor’s most notable achievements (such as the ten hour day and the eight hour day) were parts of labor’s century-long struggle for shorter hours. Recent writers have also noted that workers valued shorter hours because it was necessary for the expression of the nonpecuniary values, motives, and activities which the “new labor historians” have shown to be of such significance.

But the history of shorter hours transcends the labor movement. Shorter hours was a political issue almost as long as it was a labor cause. It was part of reform politics from before the Civil War through Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s second term. It was an issue for the idealistic, antebellum reformers. It had a prominent place in the Populists’ Omaha platform and the Bull Moose platform, and appeared in both the Democratic and Re-

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publican platforms as late as 1932. Shorter hours also raised important judicial issues in the early 20th century, leading to the writing of some of the most progressive legal opinions of that day. Federal and state legislation and executive action began before the Civil War and continued until the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. State hours legislation for the period fills a good sized book. Federal action, beginning with Van Buren's ten hour executive order, proceeded step-by-step to reduce working hours for government employees until World War II. A large number of influential writers and social critics welcomed and promoted shorter hours, believing it was as natural and as good a result of technological advances as higher wages. While higher wages would lead to material welfare and security, shorter hours would make progress possible in other areas of life—reducing the burden of work at first, and eventually allowing the common man to exercise his higher faculties in a democratic culture.2

The average hours worked per week reflected these attitudes. Hours of labor reduced slowly but steadily from before the Civil War to the turn of the century. Between 1900 and 1920 a rapid reduction took place—especially between the years 1913 and 1919 when weekly hours fell about eight percent. During the 1920s they stabilized at about 49 hours a week and during the Depression fell below forty.3 But for some reason, the shorter hour movement stopped after the Depression. During World War II weekly hours of


work increased, but afterwards stabilized at forty. Unlike other broadly based reform measures which have prospered in this century, the shorter hour movement reached some sort of historical plateau nearly 40 years ago. Some economists have recently made the stronger claim that there has been no increase in leisure since World War II. During this period, labor has turned its attention to higher wages, collective bargaining rights, and fringe benefits. These have virtually eclipsed all new calls for shorter hours. For 40 years, labor has done nothing comparable to its 19th and early 20th century initiatives and successes. Similarly, since the Depression no major party has made shorter hours a political issue. In addition, state and federal legislators have simply modified and corrected the 1938 law, elaborating upon but not altering the Fair Labor Standard Act’s forty hour week provision. During this time neither Washington nor the states have passed new laws substantially lowering working-hours. Indeed, shorter hours have ceased to be an important part of public discourse. The dreams of the utopian writers of the four hour day and the hopes of those who believed that progress involved leisure as much as it involved economic growth have...

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5 In 1979, Representative John Conyers of Michigan introduced a bill (HR1784) to amend the Fair Labor Standards Acts by reducing the standard work week from 40 to 35 hours over a four year period. Very little interest in this bill was generated, even though Conyers used labor’s traditional arguments. Nevertheless, this was the nearest legislators have come to passing such legislation. John Conyers, unpublished letter, dated Feb. 15, 1979, photocopy. Another curious fact about shorter hours is that the work week and day declined during a period of relative stability in the total work force (as a percentage of the total population) and stabilized during the period when the work force has increased rapidly because of growing population and the entrance of more women into the labor force. More people are at work today as a percentage of the total population than ever before, the percentage increase occurring largely during the period of hours stability. See U.S. Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Washington, DC, 1975), 127.
evaporated, and labor's old demand for "the progressive shortening of the hours of labor" has been forgotten.

Historians have not yet come to grips with these facts and begun to formulate appropriate questions, much less construct hypotheses. By contrast, economists have recently asked "why have working hours stabilized in America since World War II?" They have also offered valuable explanations, most of which of course are economic ones. But since the shorter hour movement was more than an economic event and since its ending involved political, social and cultural dimensions, it is necessary for historians to pose their own types of questions—a few of which are suggested below as possibilities.

Why did organized labor abandon its century-long struggle for shorter hours? Why have shorter hours ceased to be important as a political issue? Why did such a broad scale social movement and the ideas and public debate generated by that movement stop so suddenly? Why did this one part of the 19th and early 20th century liberal/progressive tradition end; and ending, disrupt reform's continuum? Why did the work week do all of its shrinking during the century when the United States was relatively poor and then stop during the time when this country became the richest one in history? Why did the American concept of progress change from dreams both of the growth of wages which would improve material welfare and of the steady increase of leisure which would free individuals from material concerns for other, finer things?

With these sorts of questions for guides, it is possible to begin a search for answers to the larger puzzle—the end of the shorter hour movement. Since this is a large task, and since it is not clear just what the right questions to tackle are, the best course of action is simply to chronicle the last 20 years of the shorter hour movement—to describe labor's last initiatives (the 40 hour week that succeeded and the 30 hour week that failed), to dis-

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6 Ethel B. Jones, An Investigation of the Stability of Hours of Work Per Week in Manufacturing 1947-1970, Univ. of Georgia, College of Business Administration, Research Monograph Number 7 (Athens, 1970), passim; see also footnote no. 4. Among these economists' explanations are: the reduction of fatigue, availability of consumer credit, commuting time, stability of employment, easier work, pent-up consumer demand, increased cost of education and raising larger families, and stable cost of recreation.
cuss the public debate and the political events that bore on the shorter hour process.

After World War I, labor leaders attempted to consolidate the gains in the eight hour day that they had made and opened up a new initiative—the five day week. Whereas the eight hour day had received considerable public support and advanced rapidly during Wilson's administration—one observer noted that "it seemed quite literally to sweep the country"—still, pockets of "long hour resistance" remained in major unorganized industries such as steel. Labor set the goal of standardizing the eight hour day as one of its first priorities. By the end of the decade, this goal had largely been realized. Fairly confident that the eight hour day was becoming universal, labor leaders began to turn their attention to the five day week in the 1920s. In this initiative they achieved only limited success.

Before the end of the war, fewer than 20 manufacturing establishments had adopted the five day week. Most of these were Jewish establishments, managed and staffed by Jews who considered it a religious obligation to observe the Sabbath day. But during the 1920s, over 240 manufacturers adopted the plan. By 1929, approximately 400,000 to 500,000 employees were working a five day week.

In addition to these few advances, the AFL, at its October 1926 Convention in New Orleans, recommitted itself to the shorter hour movement in general, using some interesting language:

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7 Opinion that the eight-hour day, 48 hour week was becoming standard was expressed in articles such as: "Doom of the Twelve-Hour Day," Outlook, 131 (1922), 245-6; "Triumph for the Eight-Hour Day," Outlook, 134 (1923), 572-4; "Death Struggles of the Twelve-Hour Day," Literary Digest, 70 (June 9, 1923). The idea that the five-day week was a new direction taken by labor and was a trend that, like the eight-hour day, was becoming a national force may be found in: "Labor Now Out for a Five-Day Week," Literary Digest, 91 (Oct. 16, 1926), 9-11; New York Times, October 17, 1926; "Prevalence of the 5-Day Week in American Industry," Monthly Labor Review, 23 (1926), 1153-69; "How the Five-Day Work Week Works," Literary Digest, 86 (Aug. 15, 1925), 10-11; "Coming: A Five-Day Working Week," Literary Digest, 36 (March 31, 1928), 12-13; "New Era, Five Days a Week," Business Week, (Sept. 27, 1929), 5-6; "Five Days Shall Thou Labor," Literary Digest, 101 (May 3, 1929), 8.

Whereas in the present methods of modern machine industry the workers are continually subjected to the strain of mechanized processes which sap their vitality; and

Whereas if compelled to work for long hours under modern processes of production, the vitality, the health, and the very life of workers is [sic] put in serious jeopardy;

Resolved, that this convention place itself on record as favoring a progressive shortening of the hours of labor and days per week, and that the Executive Council be requested to inaugurate a campaign of education and organization to that end. . . . 

Labor's initiatives were met by exceptionally strong business opposition. But they were also supported by an unusually large and varied group of people; ranging from James Truslow Adams to Stuart Chase, from Orthodox Jewish groups to "progressive" educators. This was true because more than at any time before, labor's shorter hour cause involved basic questions about the purpose of work and economic growth, the future of capitalism, and the very course of progress. This widespread public interest took the form of a debate, with one side supporting labor and the other rejecting the open ended increase in leisure time.

This debate, its scope and intensity, was occasioned by what was then seen to be the larger social and economic problem of "overproduction." Many Americans, businessmen and labor leaders alike, believed that chronic unemployment and massive disruptive surpluses constituted national threats and were the bitter fruits of improved productivity and economic abundance. A "mature economy" was seen to be a real and present danger.


10 The Readers Guide to Periodical Literature, 35 vols. (New York, 1900-1983), III, IV, V, VI, VII, under the heading "leisure." This standard reference provides some indication of the increase in public interest in leisure during the 1920s. In Vol. V, an index of 1919-1921, only four entries are listed for articles dealing with leisure. In Vol. VII, covering the years 1925-1928 and giving an index of the same 180 reports and periodicals as did Vol. V, over 45 entries are listed. See also L.A. Thompson, "Worker's Leisure: A Selected List of References," Monthly Labor Review, 24 (1928), 508. The best available bibliographies demonstrate this increased interest. See for example Marjorie Casebier, An Overview of Leisure (San Anselmo, 1963); Eric Larrabee and Rolf Meyerson, Mass Leisure (Glencoe, IL, 1958), 389 ff; Larrabee and Meyerson found 51 articles and books having to do with leisure from 1910-1919 and over 410 for 1920-1929.
Businessmen and economists tried to deal with these threats by embracing the "new economic gospel of consumption" which proclaimed that new consumption could keep the economy eternally dynamic. Spokesmen for this new gospel opposed labor's efforts and offered alternatives to increased leisure such as an improved standard of living, consumerism, and steady work. Those who supported the shorter hour cure for unemployment had a different view. They supported labor's call for "progressive shortening of the hours of labor," believing with labor that this would help to control unemployment and shape the direction of industry; limiting surpluses, encouraging the production of basic needs, and discouraging "luxuries."

At the beginning of the 1920s, businessmen tended to have as gloomy a view of the economy as any other group. In 1922 Garett Garrett pointed out that "American business [was] despairing at overproduction," believing that "we are equipped to produce more of the goods that satisfy human wants than we can use." A number of other observers commented on "the prevalent business view" that America was experiencing "universal consumptive indigestion" resulting from "the outright satiation of human wants.""11

Examples of bullish investors and pessimistic businessmen who expressed these sorts of fears may be found throughout the decade. The *New York Times* in its annual assessment of "the financial outlook" reported periodically that "business experts" believed that "great prosperity" invited "industrial reactions," and that the "saturation point" in traditional markets such as textiles had been reached and was near in the newer industries such as automobiles.12 But the majority of such rhetoric

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occurred during and just after the 1921-22 depression. During this time, the press was full of expressions such as "buyers' strike," "psychological reactions," the "dominance of the buyers' market," "overproduction," and "limited markets." In spite of professional economists who tried to assure those who would listen that motives to buy were not limited to some set of specific human needs and would expand quite readily when wages increased, businessmen as well as labor feared that Americans were working themselves out of their jobs by producing more than they would consume. Chronic unemployment and depression seemed to be a likely result of this "need saturation." 13

But like labor, some pessimistic businessmen saw another possibility—shorter work hours. Unlike labor though, those businessmen who recognized the possibility, despised it. They did not see the open-ended increase of leisure as a positive development but as a clear threat to future economic growth. If basic needs were being met by industry and workers chose to devote less and less of their time to their work and do other things, then extended periods of general unemployment would not be necessary to halt progress. Free time in the form of leisure could create the same conditions as free time in the form of unemployment; reduced production and consumption, idle productive capacity, limited investment opportunities and even a mature stable economy. 14

Businessmen's fears about the threat of increased leisure to economic growth were expressed throughout the decade. The most elaborate and thorough-going expression may be found in

13 Quany Yung, "Some Aspects of the Business Depression of 1921," (unpublished Master's Essay, Univ. of Iowa, 1926), 79, 80. See also for example, New York Times, Dec. 5, 1920, 20; Dec. 28, 1920, 18; Sept. 21, 1921, 16; Jan. 8, 1921, 18; Jan. 10, 1921, 18; Feb. 16, 1921, 4; Sept. 29, 1921, 1.

the National Association of Manufacturer’s Pocket Bulletin of October 1926. The NAM questioned 32 prominent business leaders about the five day work week that unions were demanding and Henry Ford had already instituted in some of his automobile plants. All but two of these businessmen were opposed. Some equated increased leisure—"the extra holidays on Saturday"—with crime, vice, the waste of man's natural capacity, corruption, radicalism, debt, decay, degeneration, and decline. John E. Edgerton, president of the NAM, for example, declared that

it is time for America to awake from its dream that an eternal holiday is a natural fruit of material prosperity, and to reaffirm its devotion to those principles and laws of life to the conformity with which we owe all of our national greatness. I am for everything that will make work happier but against everything that will further subordinate its importance in the program of life.

George L. Markland warned that "the men of our country are becoming a race of softies and mollycoddles . . .". He saw the five day week as an indication of "a gradual sinking into decay," a trend toward the dissipation and frivolity that had caused Rome's downfall.15

These businessmen saw free time as the result of market saturation. Nevertheless they vehemently opposed reduction of work hours and searched about for alternatives such as "new foreign markets," "enforced attention to business" and work, appeals to patriotism, and an increased standard of living which might deal with overproduction and stem the tide of free time. But they all agreed that shorter hours meant less production and limited growth. They also characterized labor's position on this issue as "unAmerican" since they felt that labor's bid for the 40 hour week was basically an attempt to limit production.16

Other pessimistic observers of the economy linked increasing productivity to saturated demand, and saturated demand to unemployment or the process of shorter work hours. For them free time was the chief threat to industrial advance. In any

15 See Pocket Bulletin, 27 (Oct. 3, 1926), for the entire issue devoted to criticism of the 40 hour week.
form, free time would mean slower growth or outright cessation of growth. Work was critically scarce and becoming more so as productivity improved.

But by mid-decade, these sorts of fears were evaporating. They were gradually replaced by a new and vigorous optimism, founded upon what Edward Cowdrick called the "new economic gospel of consumption." Responding to the threats of chronic overproduction and the decline of the need to work, businessmen began to concentrate on consumption and conclude that demand could be stimulated. If traditional markets were being "saturated," then the reasonable response would be to find new markets and increase consumption, not to reduce working hours. Businessmen became increasingly convinced that Americans could be persuaded to need things produced by industry which they had never needed before and consume goods and services, not in response to some out-of-date set of economic motives, but according to a standard of living that constantly improved. With this concern with consumption, the business community broke its long concentration on production, introduced the age of mass consumption, founded a new view of progress in an abundant society, and gave life to the advertising industry.

Some businessmen and economists, such as Henry Ford, went so far as to suggest that workers be paid enough to buy

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what they produced. But most businessmen relied heavily on capital spending and on the gradual increase of the consumer markets to insure steady demand. And this demand could be assured only if the enlightened business community provided stable or expanding capital markets and then gradually convinced the American consumer to desire goods and services enough to underpin economic growth in the consumer sector. Growth in the "New Era" of abundance was a problem of human nature, not simple economics. Higher wages did not automatically assure more consumption. If raises were given to workers too rapidly then it was quite possible that production would cease to grow as the workers lost their desire for hard work and tastes for new goods and services, and used high wages as an excuse for taking time off from their jobs. Consumption was not guaranteed, but it could be promoted. It would be the hard work of investors, marketing experts, advertisers, and business leaders, as well as the spending examples set by the rich which would promote consumption and prevent workers from taking time off from their jobs.

Businessmen’s new interest in consumption has been well documented as has their optimism that demand could be stimulated. Herbert Hoover’s Committee on Recent Changes published one of the first and finest examples of this documentation in 1929. The Committee criticized pessimistic predictions about “saturation points,” calling these predictions “abstract” and the likelihood of market saturation “remote.” They pointed

both to economic theory and actual accomplishments to attack the notion that the economy had matured. On the one hand, "economists have long declared that consumption, the satisfaction of wants, would expand with little evidence of satiation if we could so adjust our economic processes as to make dormant demands effective." On the other hand, Americans had proven that this theory actually worked in the 1920s. The "almost insatiable appetite for goods and services, this abounding production of all things which almost any man can want, which is so striking a characteristic of the period covered by the survey..." was the hard reality shattering false fears about overproduction. The Committee found

from study of the fact finding survey on which this report is based, that as a people we have become steadily less concerned about the primary needs—food, clothing and shelter... the slogan of 'full dinner pail,' is obsolete... and we now demand a broad list of goods and services which come under the category of 'optional purchases'... 'Optional consumption'—optional in the sense that this portion of the income may be saved or spent, and if spent the manner of this spending may be determined by the tastes of the consumer or the nature of the appeals made to him by the industries competing for his patronage—presents one of the marked characteristics of the recent economic situation. ... the survey has proved conclusively what has long been held theoretically to be true, that wants are almost insatiable; that one want satisfied makes way for another. The conclusions is that economically we have a boundless field before us; that there are new wants which will make way endlessly for newer wants, as fast as they are satisfied... By advertising and other promotional devices, by scientific fact finding, by carefully predeveloped consumption, a measurable pull on production has been created which releases capital otherwise tied up in immobile goods and furthers the organic balance of economic forces... As long as the appetites for goods and services are practically insatiable, as it appears to be... it would seem that we can go on with increasing activity... our situation is fortunate, our momentum is remarkable.22

Business optimism about the possibility of increasing "optional consumption" spilled over into and answered the concerns expressed by organizations such as the NAM about the declining need to work and the threat of leisure. Optimistic businessmen such as Henry Ford and Henry Dennison saw the

22 Report of the Committee on Recent Economic Changes, Recent Economic Changes (New York, 1929), XV, XVIII, 52, 59, 80, 81, 574-578.
40 hour week as an ally to growing consumption rather than as a threat to production. Like the new "consumption economists," such as Teresa McMahon and Hazel Kyrk, they believed that increased leisure would increase consumption. Spokesmen at the National Distribution Conference agreed and pointed out that increased leisure stimulated the growth of some of the most vital industries, such as amusement, radio, phonographs, motion pictures, publishing, and hotels. Henry Ford argued that "leisure [was] a cold business fact." He maintained that "where people work[ed] less they buy more," since "business is the exchange of goods. Goods are bought only as they meet needs. Needs are filled only as they are felt. They make themselves felt largely in the leisure hours." E.S. Cowdrick agreed that the 40 hour week was good because "it promises more leisure to use up golf balls and holiday clothes." Examples of this reasoning were numerous in the decade, but the President's Committee on Recent Economic Trends again presented one of the best summaries:

It was during the period covered by the survey (the 1920s) that the conception of leisure as "consumable" began to be realized upon in business in a practical way and on a broad scale. It began to be recognized, not only that leisure is "consumable" but that people cannot "consume" leisure without consuming goods and services, and that leisure that results from increasing man-hour productivity helps to create new needs and new broader markets. . . . the acceleration of technological shifts in production and consumption would have resulted in much more serious unemployment if workers had not been absorbed in the newly expanded service industries which both create and serve leisure.\(^{24}\)

While recognizing leisure as an ally to consumption, businessmen such as Ford and Cowdrick nevertheless reaffirmed their faith that work was, and should remain, a primary American value. Ford, for example, while praising the economic significance of leisure, cautioned "of course, there is a humanitarian side of the shorter day and the shorter week, but dwelling on that subject is likely to get one in trouble, for then leisure


\(^{24}\) *Recent Economic Changes*, XVI.
may be put before work rather than after work—where it belongs.” Leisure was deemed to be valuable by businessmen, not as an alternative to work, but as a new reason to work—vital because the traditional reasons for work to meet basic needs were not sufficient to support the economy. Leisure, subordinate to work, supported economic growth and thereby helped to save work.25

But because leisure entailed increased consumption it was limited. The century-long shorter hour process would taper off since workers would need higher incomes in order to finance the leisure they had already. Together with the traditional pessimists such as Judge Gary and John Edgerton—who were calling “the thought of reducing the week’s working time” a “blasphemy,” optimistic businessmen supposed that increased leisure had to have a limit. Even though the 40 hour week was reasonable because it stimulated consumption, shorter hours as a continuous, open-ended process was opposed by most businessmen.26

But according to optimistic businessmen, the shorter hour process would either stop naturally or be controlled by the efforts of advertisers and marketing experts. Since “more spare time would mean desire to spend more money” and “it is impossible to reduce income and the supply of goods and services (through reduced hours) and then have more money to spend” progressively shorter hours would eventually come into direct competition with new spending. But what the economist Constance Southworth called “the infinite capacity of the common man to want things,” would check workers’ desire for increased leisure. The good coin of increased material wealth would eventually drive out of circulation the bad coin of increased leisure. As Henry Dennison put it, prosperity offered society the chance “to take more leisure or to get more wealth, as it chooses.”

Even though “luxuries or leisure” was a theoretical “free consumer choice,” optimistic businessmen were confident that they

could successfully compete with leisure by linking it to consumption and promoting their new products.27

During the time businessmen were reaffirming their belief in work and industrial growth and looking to "optional consumption" to undergird that growth, others such as labor spokesmen, religious leaders, reformers, intellectuals, educators, and social critics were disturbed by this new economic gospel of consumption. Some of these people became convinced that it was beginning to exploit workers. By producing new goods and new demands for these goods, industry was keeping the common man at work longer than necessary. He was working more to serve the interests of the capitalist profit system and less to take care of his real material necessities or meet his own individually felt needs. They questioned perpetual industrial growth, believing that it would continue to exploit workers by convincing them to produce unnecessary "luxuries." The worker had lost control of production. Now he was losing control of consumption and the ability to shape his future and culture. He was facing a new definition of progress—economic growth for the sake of economic growth. Growth toward obtainable goals, such as the meeting of basic needs, still made human sense. But long hours of work in his new "squirrel cage" which capitalism had set up did not. These people continued to feel that higher wages and shorter hours together constituted "genuine progress." The disciples of the new economic gospel of consumption had broken tradition and set up a false idol to resemble real progress.

However, these groups shared the pessimism of those who predicted saturated demand and limited markets. Like businessmen, they too feared and wished to avert the unemployment, chronic or acute, that was threatened by industrial productivity. But in contrast to businessmen and economists, they promoted

labor's alternative solution to general overproduction and unemployment: limited production through shorter work hours.

Between 1920 and 1934, the shorter hour cure for overproduction and unemployment was almost as important as the other solution, the gospel of consumption. The critical debate about unemployment that developed in the 1920s was not, as it has been since the Depression, over how to stimulate demand. Rather the debate revolved around the question of whether work time would continue to decrease, limiting unnecessary production and distributing necessary employment, or new markets would be established. Both points of view shared the idea that the economy had reached a critical juncture.

The arguments of the supporters of increased leisure and the shorter hour cure for unemployment may be abstracted as follows: Modern work was an increasing burden. Economic abundance threatened overproduction and unemployment. Shorter hours could decrease work, raise wages, spread employment, reduce unnecessary production and surpluses, and insure a minimum standard of life for everyone. Therefore, leisure was as practical in "New Economic Era" as new markets and was preferable. It was preferable in the first place because leisure could be used to revive the benefits and values that work had lost to the machine. Things such as craftsmanship, creativity, worker control, and initiative could take place during sports, hobbies, volunteers projects and other constructive recreation. Leisure was preferable also because it would help keep other institutions and traditions alive which were threatened by mass society, standardization, and mass consumption. Individualism, the community of workers, the family and the church would be strengthened and would grow as people had more time to devote to these things. In addition, increased leisure would keep open the possibility of what Edwin Sapir called "genuine prog-

28 For example see "Shorter-Hours Cure for Overproduction," Literary Digest, 90 (Sept. 18, 1926); "Would the Five-Day Week Decrease Unemployment?" Magazine of Business, 54 (Nov. 1928), 508-9. One way of understanding the position of the advocates of limited production is by reviewing their opponents' attacks. For the businessmen's and economists' views of the limited production idea see L. Ardzrooni, "Philosophy of the Restriction of Output," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 91 (Sept. 1920), 70-5; E.J. Kulas, "Whip of Prosperity: Curtailment of Production—a Mistake," Saturday Evening Post, 201 (June 29, 1929), 5.
ress." The dreams of utopian writers, socialists, and reformers which had been around for over a century—dreams of a democratic culture, worker education, the universal pursuit of happiness, and "humane and moral freedom"—were reasonable possibilities given increased leisure. Lastly, shorter hours would counter the new "economic gospel of consumption" which had begun to define progress solely in terms of economic growth and abandon the other, more humane kinds of progress.29

AFL President William Green, for example, explained that less work and more free time were natural results of technological advance and the more efficient satisfaction of human needs. This free time could either be forced upon some workers as unemployment or it could be rationally divided among all workers as leisure.30 A. O. Wharton, president of the International Association of Machinists, argued that "increased production accentuates the problems of overproduction and underconsumption. Increased wages and reduced hours go hand in hand with increased production...". Economic balance could be maintained only if "wages advance and leisure hours increase. If some sort of balance is not maintained, we are headed straight for disaster." AFL vice president Matthew Woll observed that since "production is overlapping our ability to consume," shorter hours would serve as a "restraining influence" and limit production to "rational levels."31

In addition to limiting production to "rational levels," shorter hours would improve wages according to labor spokesmen. By reducing the supply of labor, shorter hours would create a sellers' market for labor, strengthening the unions' bargaining position. Thus workers would be able to command a large proportion— their "fair share"—of the nation's wealth. Instead of the rich buying more luxuries, workers could buy necessities. The direction of the economy would be changed from the production of useless and expensive goods for the more wealthy, to the tasks of assuring that everyone had their basic needs met. Before 1927, organized labor considered shorter hours as an efficient and fair way to help redistribute wealth and assure that necessities were produced before luxuries—without direct governmental action.

An example of those reformers who actively supported labor was George Alger. Active in New York reform efforts such as child labor laws and penal reforms, he came to believe that reform and "racial minds" in the 1920s were concerned "as much with the growing social surplus of time" as the "distribution of the social surplus of things." He argued that the new business view of economic advance led to "artificial demands for useless products." It led to "a consumer wonderland" and to a "new slavery." Individual self-expression and creativity had been sacrificed because "the people who can set before us a long list of new things to want and a way to make us want them irresistibly are the main contributors to our current squirrel cage concept of progress." He criticized work as specialized, mechanical, passive, lacking in self-expression, dull, monotonous, and the cause of increased drug addiction, insanity and crime. He was also suspicious of industrial psychologists and advertisers who, between them, led the masses to a "pendulum-like existence"—a "life of producing and purchasing" useless things for artificial reasons. He reasoned that "the stimulus of what we want to buy rather than what we want to be is, in current theory, that which keeps us at work."

Matthew Woll, "Labor and the New Leisure," Recreation, 27 (1933), 418; William Green, "What is a Five Day Week?" American Federationist, 39 (Sept. 1932), 985.
Concluding that in the face of the "new economy of consumption, . . . any theory of the use of leisure which should make it something else than principally an expression of buying-power, may be considered an alarming heresy because of its possible effect on sales," Alger nevertheless suggested such a theory. "The quality of work and the lack of self expression through work" eroded virtues and "paralyzed our powers." But "enlarged leisure" could revive "artisan and craftsman" values such as creativity, self-expression, and individual control. Leisure could also renew cultural and spiritual values. Through leisure Americans could "enlarge their field of self expression, become active and in control of their lives and freedom and come to grips with the greatest practical problem before us to which depends the future of Western civilization . . . the reaplication of love to life."33

Like Alger, Stephen Leacock thought that industry's needs to grow, to promote more consumption, and to create new markets for luxuries were socially destructive. He also believed that the concept of progress was changing. Progress has been re-defined by businessmen and economists as the chasing after the "phantom of insatiable desires." This progress had little to do with old progressive ideals about material or human welfare. According to Leacock, the satisfaction of human needs through industrial production had reached the point of diminishing returns. The creation of "luxuries and superfluities" was a perversion of progress. Businessmen were producing values as well as new goods and services. "Real human needs" were being ignored in this situation. Leacock maintained that "the shortening of the hours of work with the corresponding changes in the direction of production [was] really the central problem of social reform."34

These sorts of arguments were widespread in the 1920s. Jewish groups and individuals used them in their Sabbath campaign.35 They were repeated by people with widely differing po-

political persuasion—from Elihu Root to Samuel Strauss. Walter L. Weyl, Stuart Chase and Edward Ross followed their teacher Simon Patten, the "discoverer of abundance," in condemning the way America was adjusting to economic prosperity. The displaced aristocrat James Truslow Adams and the humanist scholar Irvine Babbit joined the fray to support shorter hours. Labor leaders, radicals, sociologists, educators, psychologists, prominent religious leaders and intellectuals continued as many Americans had for a century, to believe that leisure, like higher wages, was still a basic element of social reform.

With the onset of the Great Depression, shorter hours be-


came more than a topic for public debate. It took center stage as a political issue for nearly five years. The different opinions expressed in the 1920s about the economic and social potential of increased leisure on the one hand and the benefits of the new economic gospel of consumption on the other became political positions and surrounded concrete proposals such as the Black/Perkins Bill and key components of Roosevelt's New Deal.

In the first years of the Depression, some businessmen temporarily abandoned their opposition to shorter hours and accepted the concept as a solution to unemployment. In 1930 and 1931, several major industrial firms cut weekly working hours to 40 and later to 30. Kellogg of Battle Creek, Sears Roebuck, General Motors at Tarrytown, several cotton manufacturers, Standard Oil of New Jersey and the Hudson Motor Company each thought it was better to institute a shorter work week than to lay off workers. Even though this usually meant a decrease in wages, managers of these firms thought that this measure would increase job security.\(^40\) Herbert Hoover gradually began to look with favor upon such voluntary and spontaneous efforts to "share-the-work." Beginning in 1931 with his public support of the chemical industry's program to spread its work, Hoover began to incorporate shorter hours as a basic part of his administration's Depression policies—a position consistently pressed on him from the time of the stock market collapse by Secretary of Labor Doak and later by his Emergency Committee on Employment and his Organization on Unemployment Relief.\(^41\)

In June 1932, pressed by the AFL to call a national congress on shorter hour legislation, Hoover chose instead to meet with a group of New England politicians and businessmen organized by Governor Winant of New Hampshire to discuss worksharing. This choice reflected Hoover's faith in business voluntarism, his


recognition that shorter hours was an important political issue in the presidential campaign, and his disapproval of labor's movement toward shorter hour legislation. In August Hoover gave his blessings to the National Conference of Business and Industrial Committees' appointment of the Teagle Commission on employment spreading. Teagle opened the "share-the-work drive" in September. This grew into a national force with strong industrial and business support principally because the Chamber of Commerce and the NAM saw this voluntary effort as a hedge against labor's push for national legislation. Teagle repeated labor's arguments that work-sharing would increase employment, provide relief, promote job security, and lead to economic recovery. Unlike labor though, Teagle and his business supporters thought that shorter hours were a temporary expedient which depended on wage reductions and which would no longer be needed when the Depression ended.

During 1930 and 1931 the AFL intensified its efforts to gain the 40 hour week. But as the Depression deepened it began to press for federal legislation for a 30 hour week. This was a clear break from its historic policy of voluntarism. The Federation had always relied upon collective bargaining and had opposed legislation except for women and children. But union spokesmen now argued that a new tack was necessary because the Depression was an abnormal situation. In normal times, hours got shorter and wages increased together. Collective bargaining was designed basically to insure this. But labor had not been very successful since the war. Average hours had stabilized around 49 per week—this following a period of very rapid reduction. Fewer than 20% of American workers had benefitted from the 40 hour initiative and worked less than 48 hours a week. Furthermore, all other industrial nations in the world had made significantly more progress than the United States in this area. Since hours had not been reduced in a reasonable manner, free

time had come all of a sudden—in the economic jolt of massive unemployment.\textsuperscript{44}

Abandoning their briefly held optimism about the benefits of increased productivity,\textsuperscript{45} labor leaders again saw general overproduction and acute technological unemployment linked together. The Depression seemed to have demonstrated that William Green had been right—that free time was a natural result of technological advance and workers had a choice only as to the form that that free time would take: leisure or unemployment.\textsuperscript{46} The Depression had shown that the new economic gospel of consumption was bankrupt. It was felt that labor was under an extreme disadvantage because of the excess, not so much of workers, but of total time worked. A buyers’ market for labor ruled. The possibility of negotiating any contract for higher wages and shorter hours was remote. In the Depression condition shorter hours meant a reduction in pay. This was borne out by the efforts of businessmen, Hoover’s administration, and the Teagle Commission to deal with unemployment by “sharing the work” voluntarily.\textsuperscript{47}

Hence, after some half-hearted overtures to the Teagle Commission in August 1932, the AFL leadership directed the Federation’s Executive Council to draft 30 hours legislation. Hugo Black introduced the Federation’s Bill to the 72d Congress in December. The Bill specified that anything produced by establishments where the work week was more than five days and the work day more than six hours was prohibited in interstate or foreign commerce.\textsuperscript{48}


\textsuperscript{48} The evolution of Labor’s shorter hour legislative cure for unemployment may be followed in the \textit{American Federationist}. See in sequence, \textit{American Federationist}, 38 (1931), 22, (1931), 145, (1931), 401, (1931), 677, (1931), 1056, (1931), 1455; 39 (1932), 382, (1932),
Several affiliate unions had argued that provisions for a minimum wage should be included in this Bill. The AFL, however, concluded that such a piece of legislation would have less political support and would almost certainly be ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Moreover, some labor spokesmen opposed the minimum wage provision because they felt that a minimum wage might easily become a maximum wage. The best course was to enforce a nationwide reduction in the supply of labor. This would provide immediate "work relief"—make the "work sharing" idea really work. Then, as more people were put back to work at thirty hours, buyer confidence would return, purchasing power could expand, and the economy would rebound. As the economy improved, labor could then bargain effectively for higher wages in a condition of continued labor scarcity. Shorter hours legislation was a necessary first step to higher wages.

Labor closed ranks behind the Black Bill (and the Connery version in the House of Representatives) from 1932 to 1938. In fact, unions exhibited an exceptional degree of agreement and militancy. Green and the AFL, for example, threatened several times to call a "national strike" in support of the Black and Connery Bills and firmly believed that they had worker backing nationally for such drastic measures.

Green was moved to some of his most extreme rhetoric by this bill. During the hearings conducted by the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1933, the following exchange took place between Green and Hugo Black:

Senator Black. That being true, you say organized labor is going to fight for it [thirty hour week] and it can be accomplished in one of three ways, the first by voluntary action. Has experience demonstrated that you will get it by voluntary action?

Mr. Green. I am satisfied we will never get it universally by voluntary action.


Senator Black. One of your suggestions is the application of economic force.

Mr. Green. Yes; for we can organize the workers, and whenever we organize them and can arrange to demand—

Senator Black. By universal strike?

Mr. Green. By universal strike.

Senator Black. Which would be class war, practically.

Mr. Green. Whatever it would be, it would be that.

Senator Black. That is the second alternative.

Mr. Green. Yes.

Senator Black. And the third is legislation in line with this bill?

Mr. Green. Yes. This is force.

Senator Black. Legislative force.

Mr. Green. Legislative force, and that is the only language that a lot of employers ever understand—the language of force.

Senator Black. So that your conclusion is you will not reach this objective except by the application of economic force?

Mr. Green. Yes.

Senator Black. Or by legislative force?

Mr. Green. Yes; one of those ways.\(^{51}\)

In the same year, the AFL at its annual convention declared the five day week-six hour day its "primary objective" and accompanied the resolution with some more threats. Green called for the use of "force" to establish the thirty hour week and commented on the "militant spirit" that characterized the convention and labor, nationally. He saw a willingness to use "every weapon; economic, political, and industrial at our disposal."\(^{52}\)

By 1937, union agreements for the 35 or 36 hour week were the rule in five major American industries; glass, coal mining, fur manufacture, men and women's clothing. Approximately 66% of organized workers in newspaper publishing had negotiated agreements for less than forty hours—about half of them worked 37½ hours. The 36 hour week was a part of agreements covering two-thirds of motion picture operators and half the workers in the manufacturing of hats. Two of the largest companies in the rubber industry and two large radio companies had the 35 or 36 hour week. About 5% of organized building construction workers had 30 hour agreements—another 5% worked 35 hours.

\(^{51}\) U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee Hearings on S. 5267, 72d Congress, 2d Session, 1933, 21-22.

Longshoremen on the Pacific Coast also had won the 30 hour week by 1937. These few examples indicate that individual unions were struggling on their own toward the 30 hour objective. Even though the AFL considered national legislation a prerequisite for shorter hours during the Depression, workers such as the San Francisco Longshoremen were willing to strike for the 30 hour week and other workers such as those in the rubber industry were willing to give up other benefits for shorter hours in their bargaining sessions.  

During 1932 and 1933 the shorter hour cure for unemployment built up momentum. Both the Republican and Democratic platforms pledged their parties to shorter hours (but did not endorse the 30 hour bill). Hoover and Roosevelt went out of their ways to approve the shorter hour concept. In fact, this was just one of the few concrete unemployment proposals made by the candidates during the election. Some of this interest was translated into support for the Black and Connery Bills. Supporters were found along the range of the political spectrum, including such people as Monsignor John Ryan, C.H. Palmer, Governor Pinchot, Representative LaGuardia, Secretary of Labor Doak, Frances Perkins, Henry Ford, Senators Wagner and Walsh, E.A. Filene and Viscount Astor. 

During the hearings held in Congress on the Black and Connery Bills and in the public debate, educators, sociologists, politicians, intellectuals, old fashioned reformers, farm groups, religious leaders, and others accepted labor's argument that shorter hours would reduce unemployment, improve wages, provide relief and lead to economic recovery. In addition, the Senate and House hearings provided a forum for reciting the humanitarian benefits of shorter hours which had been explored thoroughly during the 1920s. Like labor leaders, supporters of the 30 hour bill felt obliged to defend the leisure time that would have re-

sulted from the legislation, and in so doing expressed an idealism as old as the liberal reform movement itself.  

The Senate passage of the Black Bill on April 6, 1933, prompted Roosevelt and his advisers, who had been engrossed in the banking crisis, to take their first legislative steps toward economic recovery. Secretary of Labor Perkins was instructed to come up with an administrative alternative, which when drafted and presented to the House Labor Committee, included


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the Black Bill's 30 hour provision with the additions of a minimum wage and federal control of production.

The business community was outraged. Because of the 30 hour legislation's political momentum, business interest in voluntarily "sharing-the-work" had decreased and by 1933 the Chamber of Commerce had shelved the Teagle program. By the time the Black Bill had passed the Senate and Roosevelt had responded with administration support, business had closed ranks against shorter hours as a desirable Depression measure. In fact, the strongest opposition came from businessmen, economists, and industrial managers. Hugh S. Johnson characterized this opposition by declaring, "they would turn back-hand somersaults against the thirty hour week."

Through Raymond Moley the Chamber of Commerce offered Roosevelt their own alternative plan which they had been working on since 1931. Moley, Hugh S. Johnson, and Rexford Tugwell met with the Chamber of Commerce on May 3, 1933 and worked out a compromise which the Chamber accepted. With this compromise secured, Roosevelt sent this National Industrial Recovery Act to Congress on May 15. The NIRA was designed specifically to accomplish the same goals that labor was seeking with the Black Connery Bills—providing work relief, limiting production to "basic needs" to stabilize prices, and establishing minimum wages and maximum hours.

But as the NIRA folded and the Depression continued and the so-called second New Deal began, Roosevelt abandoned the project of controlling production and lost patience with business voluntarism. He was convinced by new advisors such as Harry Hopkins to act directly to stimulate economic activity. Leaving his suspicions about market maturity and limited growth behind, Roosevelt began to use such things as public works, liberal mone-
tary policy, larger government payrolls, and deficit budgets to promote production and consumption. As Robert Heilbroner described these events:

> to the economists in the Roosevelt administration . . . the government not only could but should use its spending powers as an economic instrument for securing full employment . . . They envisioned a new form of guided capitalism—a market society in which the all-important levels of employment and output would . . . be promoted, protected against decline and stimulated toward growth by public action.

Such programs as the WPA demonstrated that Roosevelt had begun to think of the Federal government as having an obligation to provide work for its citizens if the private sector could not. But government would be the employer of last resort. The first line of attack would be to stimulate business activity. Whatever slack was left in the economy would be taken up not by shortening the hours of work but by constructive government spending policies. Hence, Roosevelt, at the prodding of his advisors, consistently opposed the 30 hours legislation throughout the Depression, offering his own programs as a series of alternatives.58

The New Deal and the new gospel of consumption shared economic goals but differed about the means to obtain them. Those who supported the gospel of consumption relied on advertising, salesmanship, capital growth, the consumption example of the more wealthy, and the slow growth of wages to compete efficiently with workers' desire for leisure and thus to provide effective demand. Roosevelt, however, looked to government spending to stimulate that demand, since these other methods had not worked. Drew Pearson saw this similarity of goals when he wrote: “Uncle Sam is a drummer with a commercial line to sell. He sold Liberty Bonds before but never refrigerators.”59

Certainly Roosevelt supported private attempts to increase business activity. He encouraged and supported the National Retail Dry Goods Association and department store owners' efforts to expand retail credit and even defended certain question-


able marketing techniques. In return, retail business people tended to be among the strongest and most loyal of his supporters. As Harry W. Schacter, president of the Kaufman Straus Company in Louisville, pointed out, manufacturers opposed Roosevelt because "they are so far removed from the public." Retailers, on the other hand, knew through direct contact with the consumer about the importance of his efforts to expand "purchasing power." One of the best examples of Roosevelt's efforts to help retailers was his 1939 proclamation, moving up the national celebration of Thanksgiving by one week in order to expand the Christmas shopping season. While Roosevelt tried to assist private efforts to boost retail sales, he was more concerned with increasing purchasing power through Federal spending. This was illustrated by such things as his opposition to the earmarking of work relief money to some of the PWA's heavy construction projects, which he thought would tie up too much money in material and capital costs. He favored instead those projects that paid more wages and thus more directly increased retail spending.60

The Roosevelt administration began to characterize the shorter hour movement as regressive, the 30 hour bills as a clever ruse to disguise the tragedy of unemployment. Such legislation would not cure unemployment; it would simply "redistribute the misery." According to Roosevelt and his advisors, unemployment was unemployment. It had to be cured by full recovery and reliable economic growth. "Normalcy" was to be found in an economy that grew, that provided 40 hours of work a week, and that allowed the standard of living to increase steadily—not one that "forced" people to work fewer hours a week. With the failure

of the Black Bill and the advent of governmentally managed capitalism, the shorter hour movement lost its short-lived political momentum. But more importantly, Roosevelt’s administration committed the Federal government to assuring American workers a 40 hour week and in so doing institutionalized a bias against free time in any form—leisure or unemployment. Since the Depression, few Americans have thought of free time as a natural, continuous, and positive result of economic growth and increased productivity. Rather, leisure has been seen as a drain on the economy, a liability on wages, and the abandonment of economic progress.

Certainly, the end of the shorter hour movement has many dimensions and causes which must be explored. But the short narrative of events presented in this essay suggest two important dimensions and causes—one social, the other political. Among the reasons for the ending of the shorter hour movement was the fact that American attitudes toward free time changed. For over a century, American workers and their supporters valued shorter hours. They did so for a variety of reasons—some economic and some non-pecuniary. Only higher wages competed with this issue for workers’ attention. During the 1920s and early 1930s labor and other groups and individuals saw in “the progressive shortening of the hours of labor” a practical foundation for liberal idealism as well as a necessary remedy for economic ills. But during the Depression, free time took the form of massive unemployment. Instead of accepting labor’s 30 hour week remedy, Roosevelt and the majority of Americans saw this free time as a tragedy that had to be eliminated by increasing economic activity—an activity stimulated by government spending if necessary. The concept of free time as leisure—a natural part of economic advance and a foil to materialistic values—was abandoned. The reform continuum in this one area was broken by Roosevelt’s New Deal and by the modern adherence to economic growth as the great liberal goal.

The change in attitudes found concrete forms in Federal law and policy established during the Depression, which continue today. Hence the end of the shorter hour movement is to be explained partially in political terms. Since the Depression, public
policy has been designed to maintain "adequate demand" and "full employment." Government deficit spending, liberal treasury policy, increased government payrolls, and expanded public works projects have usually been employed whenever the private sector has shown indication of stagnation.

Beginning with Roosevelt's inauguration and continuing through such efforts as the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the Employment Act of 1946, the Commission on Money and Credit in 1961, and the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill of the 1970s, liberal programs to deal with unemployment have been constant. They have been premised on, in the words of the Unemployment Act of 1946, "the continuing policy of the federal government . . . to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power . . .". In practical terms, liberal programs have been and continue to be designed to remedy unemployment by the federal government acting as a "permanent stabilizing force in the economy," spending whatever is necessary to stimulate the economy to "full employment" and "full production."

The shorter hour cure for unemployment has been forgotten for over 40 years partly because of the public policy described above. Share the work and increased leisure have simply not had a political constituency since the Depression. Leisure has neither been an important social nor a political issue. The decisions made during the Depression about the unimportance of increased free time and the importance of economic growth and "full employment" have become articles of modern liberal faith and political dogma. This faith and dogma are demonstrated by modern public policy and economic assumptions. And they are manifest in the fact that the shorter hour movement has been dormant for nearly half a century.