

INTRODUCTION

Intensified competition in the machine tool industry has become one of the continuing serial stories in the financial press. Japanese investors move out across a wide field, to Illinois, Kentucky, Alabama, North Carolina, Ohio and California. They also open up production in softer areas: in Worcester or Milton Keynes in Britain. In Europe they join in the takeover scramble in France and Germany

Mergers and rumours of mergers are only one of the defensive responses to this invasion. States take alarm, and promote joint projects like Eureka and Esprit to safeguard their space in the fields of the new technologies. Such technologies do not advance quietly: they roar ahead. While the East Germans announce a new plant to make one megabit chips, Hitachi are about to launch into their programme to produce four megabit chips.

New tools, new styles of production. What delays the widespread application of flexible automation? Partly, there is evidence that managements themselves are insecure, and fear their own displacement in the new processes. Partly the long downturn in the economy discourages fundamental change for the time being. There is already more industrial capacity than can find outlets for its products, and unless capital is restructured in a major slump, these facts will hinder the full use of new techniques already available. And behind these techniques wait others, ready to surprise us into the twentyfirst century.

All this adds up to a revolution in patterns of work. A production explosion, maybe. But a meltdown of jobs . . . ? Are we to endure a polarisation in which the few remain enslaved in many hours of toil and overtime, while the many live out their lives on shrinking doles? Or are we going to establish work access for all, and begin to subordinate machines to people?

Ken Coates

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Shorter Working Time: The Cutting Edge of Social Advance

Ken Coates

“The Ten Hours Bill . . . told indeed upon the great contest between the blind role of the supply and demand laws which formed the political economy of the middle class, and social production controlled by social foresight which forms the political economy of the working class. Hence the bill was not only a great political success: it was the victory of a principle: it was the first time in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class.”

Karl Marx

The campaign for industrial democracy is only very partly about elaborating legislative proposals. True, Robert Owen wrote to the Tsar in order to arouse his interest: and none of the reformers who established socialism as a political choice ignored the need for legislative support. But the future of trade unionism depends, in the first place, on its capacity to mobilize opinion, and to encourage people to have confidence in themselves and their own abilities to change the world.

Thus, while one arm of the policy of the trade union movement in Britain must necessarily involve preparing possible legislation for a new Labour Government, the other arm must prepare tomorrow's victories, and win over tomorrow's seasoned campaigners.

Since we live in an international economy which has not yet evolved its proper representative governmental forms, a key part of tomorrow's campaigning involves the creation of grassroots internationalism. Tomorrow's industrial democrats will speak several languages, and work together to administer multinational enterprises. Today's trade unionists, however, need to establish the very beginnings of practical co-operation, on very primary issues.

What could be a more primary issue than that of working time? Already the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has made this a central issue for collective bargaining in recent years, and has established precise questionnaires and co-ordination in the campaign for a 35-hour week. Some trade union centres have gone beyond this, to call for a maximum week of 32 hours. In Britain, the TUC calls for six weeks annual holiday. Legislation in Austria, Spain, Finland, France, Luxembourg, and Sweden guarantees all workers a minimum of five

weeks annual holiday. The scope for systematic campaigning is already large, and has already aroused considerable movements. In considering how these might develop, British trade unions could have received enormous help from one very respected British trade union leader. But, because he died in the middle of 1986, he cannot present these arguments for himself. During the last few months of his life, it was my great good fortune to have several long conversations with Frank Cousins. Even though he was suffering from ill health, his mind was as sharp and keen as ever.

We spent some time talking about the campaign for shorter working hours. I was comparing the courageous but defensive struggle of the miners in Britain with what I saw as, in social terms, the more audacious battle for the shorter working week during the German Metalworkers' dispute. IG Metall, the union which led the strike, had not only advanced conventional industrial relations arguments for shorter working time. It had opened up a broad political campaign aimed at winning general support from women and environmentalist groups as well as trade union members. What was the purpose of shorter hours? Well, how could family relationships be transformed if men were not able to be at home to play their part in child rearing and other domestic work? An increase in 'free' time is quite essential to the improvement of domestic circumstances. It would also have a powerful effect on all kinds of voluntary activities. The German trade unions, in short, took on all the range of arguments about social issues, in order to mobilize general support for their campaign. Of course, shorter working time is very much an issue in the campaign to restore full employment, so the German struggles, closely followed by a dramatic upheaval in Denmark, provided an important example.

Frank Cousins was excited by these developments. "But", he said, "I have been thinking that they need to be given a shape which will lead people forward". "What we need", he said, "is a campaign for the 1000-hour year." I found this idea an electric one. The more I thought about it, the more it had to commend it.

First of all, with unemployment running at 18 million in Western Europe, and bombing along around three million in Britain, we need substantial cuts in working time, as well as economic expansion, if we are not going to be brought to accept the development of an unemployed class of people who are permanently frozen out of the processes of production and community involvement. Of course, Douglas Jay is right when he argues that the extent of human needs on a planetary scale is easily sufficient to generate work for all who want it. But we can't avoid facing another disturbing fact: the very slump which has laid off so many workers has also restricted the application of technologies which would displace even more people, if they were fully applied, flat out. It is

therefore no longer a simple humanitarian argument which urges that hours of compulsory labour should be sharply reduced. There is no middle-term solution to the problem of economic regeneration, without an extension of demands by extending employment and free time, taken together.

But in a number of countries, the imposition of agreements about shorter working time runs against barriers in the present day organization of work. Nowhere is this more true than in Britain, where we have established a regime of institutional overtime, as a result of a tacit conspiracy of both management and labour to offset early experiments in incomes policy after the war. Within such a regime of payments, reductions in agreed working hours are very slow to take effect. If one wishes to reduce working time, it would probably be far more effective in such circumstances to increase holiday entitlements, or offer sabbatical leave for various purposes. Of course, longer holidays do not contradict proposals for a shorter working day, or shorter working week. The inestimable merit of the goal of a 1000 hour year is that it leaves wide scope for the development of different approaches, appropriate to the social conditions as well as the organisational needs of different groupings.

The 1000 hours also invite a wide variety of approaches. For any trade union, the 'do-it-yourself' ingredient of policy is crucially important. The political strength of the labour movements depends upon establishing areas in which small-scale reforms are possible, even on a purely experimental basis. Within the wider goal of a 1000 hour year, a 100 different approaches become possible. Groups of workers may bargain for reductions in working time by the day, week or year. Local authorities may agree to extend facilities for their employees, in improving holiday entitlements or the scope for educational leave. National governments may legislate on all these matters, and many others. Legislation can be mandatory, establishing a minimal entitlement or right, or it may be enabling, offering support for the recognition of socially desirable practices. Because there are many roads to the shortening of working time, the overarching goal of the 1000 hours may serve to give people the sense that they are participating in a line of march. It may also serve to knit together workers in widely different trades and industries at widely different levels of skill and technique.

But the 1000 hours can also serve to unite us across frontiers. The stock argument of industrialists against the shorter working week has always been that it would serve to profit the competitive opposition. Convergent action by trade unions in many countries can undermine this resistance. Of course, unions already co-ordinate their schemes, and try to match each other's holiday entitlements, for instance. The 35 hour week, and now the 32 hour week, become standard issues. But the 1000 hour year

could become the occasion for a general congress of European labour, involving not only trade union, but also political and community forces. It could deliberately seek to link up with unemployed people, whose aspirations it can help to meet. Trade unions have already established fora in which they can discuss their bargaining strategies: but the 1000 hours implies a co-ordination of political commitment, legislation, and combined social action.

It would be a very fitting memorial to Frank Cousins if we could move towards the first European study conference for a 1000 hour project.

A Thousand Hours by the Year 2000?

Peter Glotz and Andre Gorz

Peter Glotz. I would like to ask Andre Gorz, as a student of technological change and workers' struggles, what he thinks are the practical prospects for a reduction in working time. How long would it take us in the big industrialised countries of Europe to go over to a 32 hour week, taking new technology into account?

Andre Gorz. This is essentially a political question. The average annual increase in productivity in France since 1977 has been 3.7% as against economic growth that falls short of 1.5%. So there is available productivity of about 2.5% a year. This means we could theoretically reduce working time by 2.5% every year without reducing unemployment. The French Institute of Statistics (Insee) calculate that going over generally to a working week of 30 hours by 1994 would leave the rate of unemployment still at 8.4%. Looking at the matter in a purely technical way, we could attain the goal of a 20 hour week or, better still, a 1000 hour year between the year 2000 and 2005.

Conditions for attaining this goal are essentially political: one would need a cultural and training policy, a policy for the allocation of time, an economic policy. The first has to give individuals a cultural autonomy strong enough for them to find in themselves strength and means to develop, to set themselves aims, to choose for themselves activities, to take on board goals in cooperation with others. Their socialisation and their identity should no longer depend on work being assigned to them and for which they are paid. On the other hand educational and training policy has to be such as to equip many more people, than is today the case, for far more advanced tasks and managerial functions. In my view it is absolutely essential, politically, for everyone — and this includes managers, research workers and professionals — to do better work but less of it and for the reduction in working time to go with making their activities more interesting and accessible to many more people. There is no shortage of vocation and capability; what is lacking is appointment to jobs where these potentials can be developed.

If we reduce working time only in unskilled occupations, we shall never be able to overcome the tendency for society to split into two distinct sectors: the power of those who have interesting work for themselves and positions of responsibility will continue to grow and that of all the rest to diminish. That is why I don't agree when you propose a differentiation of

working time in your *A Manifesto for a European Left*. This would lead to segmentation of the labour market; what we ought to do instead is to continually transfer people from sectors where productivity is growing rapidly to sectors where it is growing little or not at all.

All the big enterprises have medium term plans for productivity, but they are jealously guarded secrets. The transforming of all these private arrangements into a national plan, sector by sector, is what planning is all about. So one would have a basis for negotiating understandings in outline and collective agreements and policies related to them.

To ensure that a general and substantial reduction in working time did not bring with it a reduction in purchasing power it is necessary for the cost of an hour's work not to increase which would make many services and even foods terribly dear. Instead it would be necessary to compensate for the fall in direct salary and wage payments by expenditure in the form of a social income, financed by taxes which would be differentiated according to the type of products.

As for work which cannot be done away with and is horribly unpleasant and nasty, the best thing would be to divide it out amongst everyone. Delivery and stamping of post, cleaning factories and offices are examples of work which could be taken on by the whole of the staff. Ten minutes a day would be enough and night work by the overexploited pariahs, who are now given such work, would no longer be needed. The same would go for garbage and cleansing: divided out between everyone it would require at most two or three days a year. This kind of service would not be all that different from the "refresher courses" for which Swiss men give up at least a week once a year in the armed forces. In short, the twenty hour week or the thousand hour year are realizable possibilities, in my view, if only the political will for them is there.

Glutz. I agree that reduction in working time is a political decision. But I find it difficult to share your futuristic and anti-elitist idea about managers taking part in garbage collection and street cleaning. This is because this might upset my applectart. I support differentiation in working times because it is extremely difficult to get one single strategy adopted by engineering unions, chemical unions and unions in public services. Think how divided the trade union movement recently was between those who were demanding a reduction in the working week and those who were for an earlier age of retirement. The leadership of the German Confederation DGB had to stop the in-fighting between the different unions and work out a strategy that took account of the diversity of interests. But this ought not to be a hindrance to thinking about more longterm objectives.

I agree with you that we are dealing with a political decision by trade unions and the Left that ought to be linked to an educational and cultural

policy; it is only in this way that men and women will be able to get cultural autonomy. And after all socialism has been in its beginnings a sort of cultural movement. In Germany for example it all began with associations for workers' culture, then the workers' movement travelled a long way from its initial practices and today it is often a bit like a huge machine that organises wage claims and pushes quite specific material interests. Cultural questions are often neglected at the top of trade unions and parties. And workers themselves are part of the problem. Before all else it would be necessary to win them for this strategy, because when there are discussions about this in the factories and people wonder what ought they to be asking for, more money or less work, many comrades opt for the increase in wages.

Gorz. Normally this is the verdict of about half those who are asked. And this will not change as long as we don't know how to explain that we are talking about work not exceeding a thousand hours in the year bringing in a real income at least equal to what it now is and making available collective services, locally with which one can make, alone or in collaboration, many things which now we have to buy from others. The use value of the time will then be much higher than its exchange value, that is, the purchasing power of what one could earn working more hours, not to mention the pleasure people have working for themselves, cooperating, helping themselves mutually. It will be possible to overcome economic categories that govern one's way of thinking, the monetarisation of all values, only if we are able to illustrate positively another way of living and working. This is why to me it is most distasteful when sociologists studying work, like Kern and Schumann, insist on the value of working for a wage or salary as the sole source of personal identity and social integration. What is forgotten is that work done for wages can no longer be seen by individuals as a realisation of themselves.

The fact that work demands above all intelligence and initiative and the fact that division of labour within the enterprise may be partially abolished does not change its abstract and alienated character, because the division of labour is still there at the level of society and the wage-worker, however interesting his task may be, often is oblivious of its purpose and meaning.

Work can be humanised, alienation as to the means of production can in large measure be suppressed, but the alienation of the product and the meaning of work remains. If instead of linking socialisation of the individual, his or her personal identity, to the ever more important sphere of non-economic activities and things that are not to do with buying and selling — which ought to be the big cultural objective of a new Left — we continue to stress the identity that one should be deriving from one's own wage work, then it is not at all surprising that trade unionists defend their

ultra-pollutant factories against the ecologists, that New York building workers demonstrate against neopacifists and that arms workers go on strike (this has been seen in France also) against reduction of military programmes.

Unless we offer people a view of the future that puts wage labour in its proper perspective and likewise occupations determined by the social division of labour, unless we show the relativity of these concepts to the social framework, we need not be surprised if many people finish up by one day accepting the war economy and a national-socialist state.

The question that must be raised is: what will the worker who makes trams do when the currently necessary work on its construction comes to an end? What then will be the source from which his identity springs? One must remember that 90 per cent of the hours of work required to build the tram are employed on the construction of components that have then to be assembled. These components — screws, aluminium, electric motors, breaks, wheels — come from at least some dozen different industries.

For the person engaged in manufacture, the sense of one's own labour is somewhat less obscure. This is because our culture succeeds in joining together wisdom belonging to various different people — and herein lies the source of our wealth. A simple bicycle contains more than the wisdom of just some individual or other or even of thousands of individuals put together. Hence the necessary division of labour that, for the greater part of the people actively involved, stands in the way of their understanding the meaning and purpose of what they are making. This opaqueness can be reduced but we cannot eliminate it. What I call "heteronomy" and Habermas calls "system" and "functional conduct" cannot ever altogether disappear. To reduce the sphere of heteronomous activities, functional activities, so that they don't dominate our life, it is necessary for us to stand apart from these activities at a distance from which we can assess them critically.

Glutz. The questions you raise seem to me legitimate as orientations, but I have need, some way or other, for a practical perspective around which I can organise a struggle that locates the thirty hour week in the ten, fifteen or twenty years that now lie ahead of us. Alienation at work will not vanish; even if the worker spends only thirty hours a week in front of a numerically controlled machine, he can't find full self-realisation in his work. The thirty hour week is nonetheless a realistic trade union objective, and we ought to pursue this objective in such a way that the worker can, outside of his work, live in society in a way that conforms with the idea of existential autonomy.

As the complete abolition of work does not represent a real possibility in our time, summary condemnation of work has the effect of wiping out any appeal to the objectives of trade union struggle.

Kern and Schuman have fixed their sights on more short term objectives, they say: we are fighting in the big enterprises to see that the introduction of electronic machine tools goes side by side with acceptable labour relations. This, I think, is a reasonable intermediate objective, provided one adds the observation that the work one gets does not yet permit the full human capabilities to be realised. Or am I mistaken?

Gorz. No, that's right. I agree with your way of presenting things. We ought to advance on two fronts at the same time: on one side humanise work, and that means organising it in a way that is not brutalising and allows for exchange of information and self-determination, and on the other side, allows people to stand back from work sufficiently to give them free time and to make this freeing of time something that is desirable.

The objective can be nothing short of "all-round realisation of individuality" — and this is Marx's wording, even if today it has a resonance that is typically Christian. This presupposes that everybody has possibilities for activity on more planes at the same time. This implies that the duration of working time is reduced to the advantage of activities which, in Marx's formula, "are in themselves their own ends". And these activities cannot be their own ends until they are not necessitated for subsistence nor utilitarian nor to do with trade, that is with gain as their end. So what we are talking about is cultural and artistic activities, activities that have to do with all forms of care, with the quality of the environment one lives in, with the countryside, with children, all those things that have nothing to do with economic rationality and can give pleasure, provided they do not impose constraints on others and involve only the allocation of one's own time. Putting non-economic activities in the lead over work that is economically necessary has been in every age — for Plato as for Marx and not only in Western civilisation — humanity's goal. But only today does technology make this goal potentially realisable.

Investing in People

Ron Todd

In comparison with business investors, the captains of industry and our present government, we can hold our heads high because we have been investing in our own country's future. Not selling it down the river as they have done so persistently, so arrogantly, so unpatriotically and so damagingly.

It is vital for us to realise that there is an acute national economic crisis just around the corner. It is there because the North Sea oil bubble has burst more quickly than most people expected. What we now have to take on board is an even sharper, more urgent enquiry into how we can secure economic life after North Sea oil for the British people.

This explains . . . (the need for) a detailed practical plan for reconstructing our economy, based on the principles set out and evolved from our alternative economic strategy philosophy.

We should be clear that we have already done half of the work for that plan. We have, with the Labour Party, clearly defined and costed proposals for seeing that public money is used to boost our economy, and create one million jobs within the first two years of a Labour government. Scares about this being too expensive, or too adventurous, or inflationary have cut no ice. Even the CBI now recognises, as do groups like the Builders' Federation and the Road Haulage associations, that our infrastructure needs to be remade.

The difficult part lies in coping with a Britain, which all the forecasters know full well, is going to get back into a serious balance of payments crisis because the oil is no longer plugging the import gap. A Britain where the manufacturing base is now too small for either sufficient export growth to be feasible without direct government help, or for jobs to be created fast enough to see that the other million and a half to two million jobs we need will be created. The latest reports say we need to create 3,000 jobs per day for five years to reach one million out of work in five years. Tory Britain is creating only 750 per day and on a declining trend. A Britain where a revolution will be required in investment habits to see that domestic manufacturing investment becomes the main user of our funds, in place of the amazing situation where we are letting businessmen invest twice as much abroad as in their own country.

And we will also have to give concrete detail to another revolution, a democratic and participatory revolution in the way our economy is managed. For surely we cannot have any faith in the prospect of simply handing over public money to the bulk of businesses who have so avidly excluded anyone else from the decision making processes in the past

seven years and done so poorly by our nation.

I am deeply convinced, as most people are who understand how our country is bleeding, how much of our family silver has been flogged off, and how deep our decline has become in comparison with other advanced nations, that we must also raise our sights and promote a galvanising, a motivating and a forward-looking feeling of national purpose in the programme we develop.

We have to do it in relation to poverty, and there will be struggles about this both in terms of taxes and in terms of pay and profits, if we are genuinely to stop Britain being a poor country run by very rich people and turn it into a prosperous, fair and free society.

We have to do it in relation to unemployment, and job creation. We already have the 35 hour week goal and we should re-launch the four day week aim too, but we should also look very closely at a new concept bequeathed to us by the late Frank Cousins — the concept of the 1,000 hour year.

We have to do it to the power of capitalism in industry and finance, and grapple with the problem of creating power sharing and social ownership on the basis of consent. In fact we will be putting this question in the form of how we will make planning agreements work, and we might take a leaf out of the Tory book and see if we couldn't inject some compulsory balloting of shareholders and employees into industrial decision making on issues like mergers, planning agreements and government subsidies.

And we have to do it in relationship to the great and new issues of environmentalism in their broadest sense. Whether it will be the jobs problems of going non-nuclear in defence, or getting out of, or into dangerous high technology industries and protecting our environment and physical assets — all of them at short-term cost and all of them needing special planning skills and alternative job provision. The language of priorities cannot push these issues aside, and I do not think either our members or the broader electorate would really want us to evade them.

So there is much work to be done. The guiding ideas are, I genuinely believe, well-founded. We have half of the work done at a practical and professional level. The worsening economic context is going to make life both harder for our people and also easier, in the sense that politically it is now clear that the electorate has rumbled monetarism. It has rumbled the asset strippers who posed as doctors committed to the nation's health. And not only the electorate but many industrialists, even some multi-nationals are now looking for a different future for this country.

In this sense the tide has turned. Now we have to harness its energy and put our nation back to work.

A European Labour Forum?

We have been seeking support for the idea of a European Labour Forum, which could create a framework for discussion on improving economic and political issues, of interest to Labour movements throughout the continent. Such a forum would not seek to displace existing institutions of the Labour movement, and would not take decisions or vote on policy resolutions. It would work by exchanging information and ideas, and improving communications between participating organizations. Such practical effect as it might have would result from successful networking, rather than co-ordinated policy formation.

There is a strong case for a preliminary meeting of such a forum in the run up to the European Elections in June 1989.

It is suggested that three problem issues be selected for a preliminary agenda. These would be:

- .. **1992: Let's Level Up.**
- .. **The Menace of Unemployment: How to get Europe Back to Work**
- .. **Shorter Working Time: Meeting the Challenge of New Technology: the Thousand Hour Year by the Year 2000?**

Naturally there are a wide variety of issues which arise out of these questions. We have already been approached by various groups of people employed in particular industries who are anxious to discuss, not only with fellow trade unionists, but also with relevant community organisations in different countries. The spate of merger fever in the telecommunications and electronics industries has provoked other workers to ask for our help in contacting interested parties in Germany and Italy. Concern for employment makes the issue of shorter working time very important to trade unions, but it is also an urgent question for the women's movements which are seeking support for changes in the patterns of family responsibilities. Job creation is a matter for local and regional administrations, as well as national governments. The levelling up of social provision would profoundly affect local authority responsibilities and be of great interest to a wide variety of voluntary organisations.

These and other interests need to find a space for communication across frontiers. The meeting we propose will discuss the possibilities of continued co-operation, while at the same time facilitating workshops on all these issues of social concern.

We propose an exploratory meeting at Nottingham University on the weekend of 22nd-23rd April, 1989.

We would value your advice about those who might be invited to present papers at such a forum, and about how to mobilise appropriate participation. We think that a conference of perhaps 200 people, broken into relevant workshops would make an appropriate beginning to what might well become a continuous and widening exchange.

For further information write to IWC, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4ET, England Tel. 0602 784504

Joint Action for Jobs A New Internationalism

Edited by Ken Coates

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Socialism 21

The obvious difficulties which confront the British Labour Party afflict, in lesser measure, many of the other European Socialist Parties. At a time when mass unemployment remains a major problem in the most important European economies, when there is a worldwide debt crisis, and when there are profound threats to the global environment, it may seem strange that Socialist Parties are in crisis. Certainly crisis affects the world economy, which cries out for radical remedies. These are nowhere under consideration by the powers that be.

In *Socialism 21*, Ken Coates argues that underpinning all these difficulties is a crisis of national democracy, which arises because transnational corporations have established a framework of power which annuls the economic controls formerly available to nation states. He concludes with an appeal for a European Labour Forum, a general conference of Labour and Social movements all across the continent, to agree priorities, and to network for mutual assistance.

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