The Need to Work

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The theme of this paper is work. At a time when mass unemployment is a major social and political problem throughout the industrial world, it is a theme which needs little introduction. Nevertheless, I shall begin with a bit. For I must confess that work is a subject that did not much occupy my thoughts until recently. I have a steady and relatively congenial job teaching philosophy in a University. There is little danger of my losing it, and scant prospect of changing it. From my own immediate experience, therefore, I have little occasion to think about the issue of work.

This complacency was gradually disturbed, however, by the great British miners’ strike of 1984-5. The strike was against pit closures - in defence of jobs and communities. The cause seemed doomed from the outset, for the miners were pitting themselves against economic forces beyond even the power of governments to control. Nevertheless, the months passed, and the miners stayed out on strike and even increased the intensity of their struggles on their own, without significant support from the rest of the labour movement, and in the face of a concerted attempt to break the strike by the whole organised force of the State and the propaganda power of the media. As the extraordinary level of the miner’s unity, determination and commitment to their cause gradually became evident, one began to wonder: why are they fighting so hard? what are they struggling for?

At one level the answer was clear enough. They were fighting for their jobs and their communities, they were fighting for the traditional socialist principle of the right to work. For socialism is based upon the view that social productive labour is, in Marx’s words, ‘man’s essential activity’ (and woman’s too) and, potentially at least, the main avenue to human self-development and fulfilment. Beyond that, working people have also struggled for a decent portion of leisure as equally a human need. These are the ideas that I will be seeking to explain and defend in what follows.

They are not, of course, peculiar to socialism. In particular, the idea that people need work, and that unemployment is a human evil and one of the greatest of current social problems, is common ground amongst almost all shades of political opinion. Yet, at a more philosophical level, it is not always clear why this should be so. For work is very often conceived as unwanted and painful toil which people would avoid if they could.

This is how it is portrayed by an influential and pervasive social philosophy - the hedonist account of human nature, which underlies utilitarianism and classical economics. According to this theory, the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the sole motive forces of human life. Work involves painful exertion and the deferral of gratification - we undertake it only because we are forced to, as a means to satisfy our needs. If we are fortunate enough to be able to meet our needs without working - to consume without the toil of producing - we will readily do so. So the hedonist theory has it.

Thus Russell, for example, writes ‘In Praise of Idleness’ [1]. Ideally, he suggests, we would live a life of luxurious indolence. Hume, who shares this view, envisages this idyllic life as follows.

Let us suppose that nature has bestowed on the human race such a profuse abundance of all external conveniences, that, without any uncertainty in the event, without any care or industry on our part, every individual finds himself fully provided with whatever his most voracious appetites can want, or luxurious imagination wish or desire.... No laborious occupation required; no tillage, no navigation. Music, poetry, and contemplation form his sole business conversation, mirth and friendship his sole amusement [2].

Appealing and plausible as this vision may at first appear, there are good reasons to question it. Empirical studies reveal that people’s attitudes to work are more complex and contradictory than it suggests. They show that the great majority want work and feel a need for work, even when they find it unsatisfying in all sorts of ways: dull, repetitive, meaningless. Moreover, there is much evidence to demonstrate the harmful and destructive effects of unemployment.

At the simplest level, a remarkably high percentage of people in work respond in positive terms if asked whether they find their work satisfying. In a British survey of this kind carried out in 1978, 73% replied that they liked their work ‘a lot’. Figures were higher among managers (81%) than among skilled workers (73%); but even 66% of the unskilled workers said that they liked work ‘a lot’ [3].

Of course, caution is needed in interpreting such crude findings. It is clear that answers are given in the light of available alternatives, which are usually unattractive, as Kahn explains.

For most workers it is a choice between no work connection usually with severe attendant economic penalties and a conspicuous lack of meaningful alternative activities) and a work connection which is burdened with negative qualities (routine, compulsory scheduling, dependency, etc.). In these circumstances, the individual has no difficulty with the choice; he chooses work, and pronounces himself moderately satisfied [4].

Other studies, however, indicate that very few people would happily give up their work, even if the alternative meant no loss of income. They call into question the idea that what people want is a life of mere consumption and that they work only as means to earn a livelihood. When a cross-section of Americans were asked if they would continue working even if they inherited enough to live comfortably without working, 80% said they would keep working [5]. Moreover, the percentage of people who say that they would work in such circumstances rises as
people approach retirement age. This is a striking fact, as Marie Jahoda observes, *for at the age of 65 the alternative to a job - no work - must be a highly realistic comparison, while for younger people the question invites fantasy* [6].

Studies of the unemployed and of the retired, furthermore, suggest that the effects of the absence of work extend far beyond the financial sphere. An investigation among the unemployed workers of Marienthal in Austria in the early 1930s, for example, showed that 'their sense of time disintegrated; having nothing to do meant that they became less able to be punctual for meals or other arrangements. Budgeting, so much more necessary than before, was progressively abandoned... Family relations... deteriorated and family quarrels increased' [7].

Many subsequent studies have confirmed these findings. They have shown a lowering of self-esteem and morale, and increases in the suicide rate and the incidence of psychiatric treatment [8]. In short, there is strong evidence that 'work plays a crucial and perhaps unparalleled psychological role in the formation of self-esteem, identity, and a sense of order' [9].

### Alienation

Yet people are sceptical of philosophies which tell them that they need to work or that they should find fulfillment in work; and not without some reason. For such philosophies seem grotesquely at odds with the reality of work as the majority experience it. Work is often routine, oppressive and stultifying. So far from offering possibilities of fulfilment and self-realisation, more typically it is alienating and destructive of soul and body. In Marx's well known words, industrial forms of work 'mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into hated toil' [10]. These highly charged words, though written more than 100 years ago about Victorian factory conditions, still apply today - and not only to factory work, but equally to a growing range of office and service sector jobs, which are being subjected to the industrial division of labour [11].

Evidence of the alienating and destructive effects of modern work has been extensively documented by social scientists in recent years. Much of this evidence is based upon personal accounts of the experience of work by workers [12]. This sort of evidence is sometimes regarded as unreliable, as 'subjective' and 'impressionistic'. The overwhelming weight of it, however, means that it cannot be dismissed, even by the most unsympathetic writers. The term 'alienation' is one of the few theoretical concepts of Marxism that has passed into everyday currency; and this is because the features of work that it describes are experienced on a very wide scale. Alienation is a common feature of work as we know it.

Apparently less 'subjective' indications of the extent of alienation can be gathered in the form of statistics for rates of absenteeism, 'unofficial strikes' and other forms of indiscipline at work. Such evidence is more readily quantifiable; but not necessarily better for that reason. For, like all evidence, the significance requires interpretation.

At the end of the sixties and in the early seventies, such rates were increasing. At the time, this was often cited as proof of the increasing alienation of workers and of the demise of the 'protestant work ethic' [13]. We hear less of this theme these days. Such forms of indiscipline are now less prevalent; but it would be unwise to conclude from this that attitudes to work have changed fundamentally in recent years, or that alienation in work has significantly diminished. The threat of unemployment, as we all know, lingers. 'Tranquility is found also in dungeons,' as Rousseau observed, but that does not make them desirable places in which to live [14].

There is no doubt of the alienation and dissatisfaction involved in much modern work. Does this refute the idea that there is a need to work? Not at all. To insist that there is a need to work, and a need for fulfilment in work, is not to say that these needs are adequately met in present society. On the contrary, it is only by recognizing these needs that we can understand the phenomenon of alienation and appreciate the critical force of this concept. For the concept of alienation presupposes that there is a need for work and for fulfilment in work that modern conditions of work deny.

This point is well known and needs little emphasis. It is clear in the description that Marx gives of alienated labour, which consists in the fact that, in his work the worker does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind... His labour is therefore not voluntary but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it [15].

Implicit in the concept of alienation is the view that we are not mere passive consumers - we are active and creative beings. Productive work is 'the first premise of all human existence' [16] - the most fundamental and essential human activity, and the basis upon which both human nature and society develop. And, although Marx never fails to stress that in present conditions most forms of work are alienating and humbly destructive, he entirely rejects the view that work is mere toil and that mankind has a natural and inherent aversion to it. Given the necessary conditions, labour can be 'a liberating activity', it can become 'attractive work, the individual's self-realization' [17].

These ideas are not confined to the socialist tradition. Similar views are at the basis of the work of Maslow and other humanistic psychologists. They also underlie the 'job enrichment' school of industrial psychology. In opposition to the hedonistic account, as Skillen explains, 'Frederick Herzberg and others have argued that... human beings are fundamentally active, creative, intellectual, decisive, problem-solving. Work, then, can and should be attractive, challenging, self-regulated and involving' [18].

This approach helps to explain and illuminate the need to work. In the first place, and at the most abstract and general level, work requires activity. It is clear that people, in the modern world at least, have a need to be active. They are not, in fact, satisfied by a life of mere passive idleness with 'no laborious occupation required'.
One of the great psychological problems of unemployment is coping with the inactivity it brings. Moreover, work not only demands activity, but the form of a job, at least, it imposes a time-structure on the waking day. The absence of such a time-structure is also usually experienced as a problem by those who are unemployed [19].

Secondly, work is productive activity. The exercise of our powers is a cooperative one. As Marx says, 'the object of work is ... the objectification of man's species life' in which he can 'contemplate himself in a world that he has created' [20]. Summarising numerous recent psychological studies, the authors of Work in America report that 'through the ... awareness of one's efficacy and competence in dealing with the objects of work, a person acquires a sense of mastery over both himself and his environment' [21].

Moreover, work is essentially the exercise of these powers towards useful ends. The product is a use-value: something that satisfies human needs. 'Whatever his or her occupation the worker feels needed,' write Hayes and Nutman, 'work roles are not the only roles which offer the individual the opportunity of being useful and contributing to the community but, without doubt, for the majority they are the most central roles and consequently people deprived of the opportunity to work often feel useless and report that they lack a sense of purpose [22].

In the third place, work (in most of its modern forms, at least) is a social activity, both in its organisation and in its product. In most cases a job is a directly social activity. It takes people out of their homes and puts them into contact with others. In modern history, indeed, the very process of work has become a cooperative one. As Marx says, 'the product ceases to be the direct product of the individual, and becomes a social product, produced in common by a collective labourer, i.e., by a combination of workmen' [23]. Moreover, the product, when it is destined for the market, is intended to meet needs beyond those of the individual or the immediate household.

For many people, work is the main basis of their social life, and also of their sense of identity and status. Indeed, in the case of large enterprises like mines or factories, it may be the basis for a whole community. In a wide review of attitude studies, Herzberg and his associates found that the social aspect is the most frequently mentioned source of satisfaction from work [24]. Conversely, as Jahoda says, 'case studies of the unemployed ... repeatedly draw attention to the demoralising effect of social isolation' [25]. This is also, of course, a recurrent theme in the literature about women whose work is confined to the home.

Women and Work

So far, I have implicitly been equating work with a job, with employment, and contrasting it with unemployment. It has been possible to do so because employment has become the predominant form of work in contemporary society. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are many kinds of work which do not take this form. It is particularly important to recognise this fact when talking about the issue of women and work.

Traditionally, women's work has been confined to the domestic sphere, and this has been reflected in the view that women's 'place' is in the home. However, as has often been observed, work patterns are changing. Since the last world war, at least until the present recession, women have increasingly been drawn into employment outside the home. As a consequence, attitudes are also changing. 'In a society in which money determines value,' write Margaret Benson, 'women are a group who work outside the money economy. Their work [at home] is not worth money, is therefore valueless, is therefore not real work' [26].

The modern women's movement is a product of, and a response to, these changes; and it has reflected the ambivalent attitudes to work that I have been describing in a particularly clear and conscious way. Two distinct and opposed reactions are apparent within it. On the one hand, some women have resisted and rejected the pressures towards public employment. The world of work is a 'man's world' - an alienated world - where women can expect nothing but further oppression and exploitation. They have consequently sought to reverse the attitudes that Benson describes and 'revalue' the domestic, the female sphere.

The main tendency of the women's movement, however, has been to accept - indeed, to affirm - the need for women to work outside the home, and to demand the conditions necessary to make practical and tolerable the fulfilment of this need. These conditions being, in the workplace, equal pay and opportunities, and the provision of creches, nurseries, maternity leave, etc.; and, in the home, an equal division of domestic labour. It is not here a question of opposing the domestic role to work outside the home, as though they were exclusive opposites. The strand of the women's movement that I am describing has characteristically affirmed the need for both, with the implication that it must be the same for men. As Margaret Stacey puts it, 'many women no longer want to be presented with an either-or 'choice' between work on the one hand and a family on the other' [27].

No doubt the forces that have driven women out to work are mainly economic ones. Nevertheless, the women's movement is an expression and an indication of the fact that, quite apart from the economic motives, women feel a need - an inner need - for work: a need for a job as an end in itself, and not merely as a means to earn a livelihood.

Some of the psychological evidence for this conclusion is strikingly similar to the evidence about the psychological effects of unemployment in general which I have just described. Housewives increasingly feel constrained by the purely domestic role, and unable to use their talents and capacities to the full. Empirical studies show that the incidence of depression and psychiatric symptoms is higher among housewives than among women with jobs [28].

What this suggests is that the purely domestic role - no matter how fulfilling and productive aspects of it may be - is not a sufficient one for women in modern industrial society. This is the message of the main strand of the women's movement. Long ago, in this context, Betty Friedan talked of 'the problem that has no name' [29]. But this problem does have a name, and that name is 'unemployment'. In the modern world, that is to say, women just like men have a need for jobs, for employment, for work.
II

Work and Liberation

The criticisms that I have made of hedonism have been widely voiced in recent years; but the turn my argument has just been taking is likely to be less familiar and to provoke a more sceptical response. For many who would agree that we are essentially active and productive beings who in some sense need to work, would also maintain that work, in the form of a job, can never be fulfilling. A is something we do only because we have to, in order to earn a living; satisfying productive activity can exist only outside the sphere of employment and jobs, in free time. Thus, it will be argued, a sharp distinction must be made between work in the world of employment and autonomous creative activity outside it. What people want and need is not employment, not jobs, but the very opposite. In Gorz's phrase they want the 'liberation from work' - a reduction of the working day to the inescapable minimum and an extension of leisure time [30].

The socialist principle of the 'right to work' is a demand for jobs. According to libertarian writers like Gorz, this demand is both reactionary and outdated. Reactionary in that the work ethic it embodies is, and always has been, a ruling class ideology which we accepted in working people in the attempt to get them to accept their work and do it without complaint. Until now, the lifelong labour of the vast majority has been a social necessity. However, the introduction of automation and the new technology is rapidly creating the conditions that could free people from this need. We are on the brink of the 'post-industrial' age, in which the 'liberation' from work will be a real possibility, and in which the old ethic of work will be neither appropriate nor applicable.

Ideas and arguments like these are enormously influential at the moment, particularly on the left. Nevertheless, it is impossible to comprehend either our present attitudes to work or their history on the basis of them. They are not satisfied in almost every respect. That is what I will now argue.

In the first place, the widespread view that the work ethic is necessarily reactionary must be challenged. The history of ideas about work clearly reveals that a belief in the human value of labour has by no means always been the outlook of the ruling class. On the contrary, those who have been exempted from the need to work by their social position have often tended to look down upon work - and particularly upon manual work - and denigrate it as the lowest and least worthy of activities [31]. Historically, the idea of the dignity of labour is associated particularly with Protestantism. Nowadays, especially on the left, it is customary - almost obligatory - to sneer at the 'Protestant work ethic' and reject it as a product of reaction and oppressive ideas. I shall come back to the question of its present significance in due course. First, however, it is important to see that in its own time, in the hands of the early Protestants at least, it had a progressive and radical aspect.

It is well known that Protestant ideas about work helped to form the attitudes and to create the habits and discipline which were needed for the development of modern capitalism and modern industry [32]. However, the initial development of capitalist industry was not the work of the ruling class of the time, and their ideas did not express its interests. On the contrary, they expressed the outlook and needs of what Christopher Hill, using a seventeenth-century phrase, calls 'the industrious sort of people': 'yeomen, artisans and small and middling merchants'; in other words, 'economically independent men, households, to the exclusion both of the propertyless and of the privileged classes' [33].

So far from being a ruling class ideology, the views of the early Protestants were often aimed quite specifically against the ruling class of the day - the aristocracy and landed gentry - as an idle and parasitic class; and they formed the basis of the revolutionary ideas of the Civil War period. As Christopher Hill says, a theory that dignifies labour is as double-edged as the labour theory of value which is its secularised counterpart, already to be found in the writings of Hobbes and Locke... 'They are unworthy of bread that in their deeds have no care for the commonweal.' This was the lower-class heresy throughout the centuries. The propertied class had always been able to suppress it until the sixteenth century; but then it won its way to respectability, thanks in part to the growing social importance of the industrious sort of people [34].

Subsequently, as capitalist relations of production were established, it was no longer so much a matter of persuading people of the virtue of the modern habit of work, as of keeping them at it. As the nascent bourgeoisie won increasing economic power and political influence, the political implications of the Protestant work ethic were gradually transformed. In Hill's words, 'as the nonconformists sloughed off their political ideals, so their emphasis on the duty of labour outweighed their emphasis on the rights of those who work' [35].

And yet, at the same time, the 'lower-class heresy' to which Hill refers lived on, and ideas of the dignity of labour continued to be 'double-edged'. Indeed, as I have argued, they remain at the basis of much radical and socialist political thought and form the basis of its critique of modern conditions of work.

In this connection, it is important to see that such ideas also underlie the libertarian outlook of writers like Gorz. Although he calls for a 'liberation from work', his position should not be confused with the hedonist theory I criticised earlier. Gorz is not writing in praise of a life of mere consumption and idleness. Quite the contrary, he advocates that our free time should be filled with creative and productive activities. For he, too, believes that people are essentially active beings, who can find fulfilment only through the exercise of their creative powers. However, he also argues that such fulfilment is possible only outside the sphere of employment, which is unavoidably alienating.

The question of whether alienation can be overcome in some future society is outside my present scope; but it is beyond question that much present work has alienating and unsatisfying features, as I have already stressed. Moreover, it is surely the case that there are some jobs that are so menial and degrading that most people would rather remain without work than do them. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to regard all forms of employment in a purely negative light. For the evidence, I have been arguing, shows that for most people work is a more complex and ambivalent experience. It shows that people gain genuine and important satisfactions from their work.

No doubt, these satisfactions - the satisfactions of the active and social exercise of our creative powers - can be obtained in ways other than through a job. Some people indeed do find them outside the structure of employment, as the report on Work in America recognises: although work is central to the lives of most people, there is a small minority for whom a job is purely a means to a livelihood. To them a job is an activity
that they would gladly forego if a more acceptable option for putting bread on their table were available. What little evidence there is on this point indicates that for most such individuals the kind of jobs that they see open to them do little to provide the sense of self-esteem, identity or mastery that are the requisites for satisfying work. These individuals turn to other activities (music, hobbies, sport, crime) and other institutions (family, church, community) to find the psychological rewards that they do not find in their jobs [36].

For most people, however, the experience of being without a job is a profoundly demoralising and unfulfilling one. This is particularly so if joblessness takes the form of unemployment in its usual sense, but to a lesser extent it is also true of the experience of retired people and of women engaged solely in housework, as I have argued. Here it is worth noting Jahoda's striking finding that when they were made unemployed, the men she studies in Marienthal actually decreased their leisure activities, 'the attendance of clubs and voluntary organisations, their use of the free library, their reading' [37].

No doubt it is possible to live a fulfilling life without a job. However, the number of people who succeed in doing so constitute only a small minority; for the inner resources required are very great. Jahoda puts the point well. 'It is true,' she writes, 'that nobody prevents the unemployed from creating their own time structure and social contacts, from sharing goals and purposes with others or from exercising their skills as best they can. But the psychological input required to do so on a regular basis under one's own steam entirely, is colossal' [38].

A False Need?

This is what the bulk of the evidence indicates, and there is virtually none to the contrary. However, the writers I am criticising are unlikely to be greatly upset by this. They do not seriously dispute the view that a majority, as a matter of fact, feel the need for a job. Rather, the crucial question for them is how this fact is to be interpreted. For they would argue that the supposed 'need to work' is ultimately a product of the training and moral conditioning to which we are subjected. It is a 'false' and 'artificial' need, not a natural one: it is a social and historical product.

My main purpose so far has been to argue that people gain real and important fulfilment from work - the need to work is genuine and real. But by this I do not mean to imply that this need is an inherent and universal feature of human nature. Protestantism, no doubt, involves such a view. It portrays work as the God-given duty and 'calling' of mankind. In more contemporary terms, moreover, it is often argued that human beings are endowed with a unique creativity, and that this is an essential feature of human nature which distinguishes us from the rest of animal creation. Man is *homo faber*, the productive species [39].

The socialist view of work has some similarity to these ideas, it is true. In its Marxist form, however, it differs fundamentally from them in rejecting the idea of a universal and eternal human nature. Human nature, for Marx, develops and changes historically. Human powers and human needs are a human and social product. In particular, they are a product of the essential human activity, labour. 'By acting on the external world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes his own nature' [40].

Through the activity of labour, man develops his powers and capacities, and creates new needs - including the need to work. I have been arguing that this is a real and fundamental need in present society. However, there are reasons to believe that it has not always been so, and that attitudes to work have changed greatly in the course of history.

A frequently heard complaint of Western employers in the third world is that the 'natives' make poor workers: they are 'unreliable', they are 'lazy'. These complaints are not new. Marx quotes an amusing example.

In The Times of November 1857 there appeared a delightful yell of rage from a West Indian planter. With great moral indignation this advocate, in support of his pleas for the re-establishment of Negro slavery, describes how the Quashees (the free Negroes of Jamaica) were content to produce what was strictly necessary for their own consumption, and looked upon laziness itself ('indulgence' and 'idleness') as the real luxury article alongside this 'use value'. They said that sugar, and all the fixed capital laid out in the plantations could go to hell; they smirked with ironical, malicious glee at the ruined planters.... They had ceased to be slaves, but were not yet wage-earning labourers but only self-sustaining peasants working for their own necessary consumption [41].

The same complaints are heard still. Writing in 1961, the anthropologist Gusinde declares, more in resignation than in anger, the Yamana are not capable of continuous daily hard labour, much to the chagrin of European farmers and employers for whom they often work. Their work is more a matter of fits and starts.... Repeated irregularities of this kind make the European employer despair, but the Indian cannot help it. It is his natural disposition [42].

It is absurd to talk of 'natural dispositions' in this way, and to regard these matters in purely moral terms. Nevertheless, this should not blind us to the real differences in attitudes to work that such judgements indicate.

These differences are strikingly confirmed by numerous anthropological studies. On the basis of a great deal of empirical evidence Sahlins, for example, convincingly refutes the common idea that primitive - hunter and gatherer - people have to work without cease in the constant battle to survive, and lack the leisure time needed to 'build culture'. There is nothing ... to the convention that hunters and gatherers can enjoy little leisure from tasks of sheer survival.... The traditional formulas might be truer if reversed: the amount of work (per capita) increases with the evolution of culture, and the
amount of leisure decreases [43]. For example, the Arnhem Land aborigines, according to Sahlin, do not work hard. The average length of time per person per day put into the appropriation and preparation of food was somewhere between 2 and 4 hours. Moreover, they do not work continuously. The subsistence quest was highly intermittent. It would stop for the time being when the people had procured enough for the time being, which left them plenty of time to spare [46]. Similar patterns are found among other hunter-gatherer groups. ‘Reports ... suggest a mean of three to five hours per adult worker per day in food production’ [49].

What do these peoples do with their free time? According to Sahlin, ‘much of the time spared by the Arnhem Land hunters was literally spare time, consumed in rest and sleep’ [46]. If such primitive societies fail to ‘build culture’, he concludes, it ‘is not strictly from want of time. It is from idle hands’ [47]. The choice to avoid embarking on the path of civilized development, he suggests, may even be a conscious one: ‘why should we plant when there are so many mongomongo nuts in the world?’ ask the Bushmen [48].

Industry and Human Nature

Such attitudes are not confined to ‘other cultures’. People of pre-industrial Europe shared them. At the outset of the industrial revolution, working people strongly resisted the new work discipline required in the factories; and the early factory owners complained of the unreliability of their workers in precisely the same terms as do today’s employers in the Third World. In the textile mills, for example, ‘on the first introduction of the business the people were found very ill-disposed to submit to the long confinement and regular industry required of them’ [49]. Indeed, the first manufacturers faced not only technical and mechanical problems; they also had to find ways of ‘training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton’ [50].

Moreover, initially at least, the inducements of higher wages and piece-rates were ineffective. In the eighteenth century, the received wisdom had been that ‘the hands work better the less they are paid’. Payment by results was an innovation of industrialism, introduced only gradually as attitudes to work and its rewards changed [51]. The pre-industrial worker, it seemed, lived with no care for the morrow: when he had earned sufficient he ‘went to the tavern ... or spent it on a drunken spree’ [52]. As with the Quashees described by Marx, ‘ambitions to rise above his own idea of a “subsistence” income by dint of hard work were foreign to him. He had to be made ambitious and “respectable”... For unless the worker wished to become “respectable” ... none of the other incentives would bite’ [53].

The inculcation of Protestant morality, with its emphasis on the virtues of work, regularity, orderliness, sobriety and thrift, no doubt played an important part in changing attitudes to work and its rewards. Likewise, schooling was a significant factor in training the young in the habits of the new industrial order. ‘Once within the school gates,’ as E. P. Thompson says, ‘the child entered the new universe of disciplined time’ [34]. However, the role of preaching and schooling should not be over-emphasised. While work remained on a domestic and small workshop scale, such influences had only limited effect. It was the introduction of large-scale machinery that made the new discipline imperative and enforced it upon the workers. The new mills were clear enough to the manufacturers as their ‘philosopher’, Ure, observes. In a workshop, he says, ‘when a mantua maker chooses to rise from her seat and take the fresh air, her seam goes back a little, that is all; there are no other hands waiting on her.’ In a cotton mill, by contrast, ‘all the machinery is going on, which they must attend to’. And so, Ure stresses, it was ‘machinery [which] ultimately forced the worker to accept the discipline of the factory’ [55].

The first factory workers bitterly resisted the new system but, in the long run, eventually prevailed. The habits and attitudes it required were gradually accepted and internalised; human nature was transformed. ‘How superior in vigour and intelligence are the factory mechanics in Lancashire ... to the handicraft artisans of London,’ exclaims Ure in a typically ecstatic passage [56]; but the same changes were noted by other and more sceptical observers, including Marx and Engels.

By the standards of industrial society, people from pre-capitalist societies are ‘unreliable’ and ‘lazy’, they lack ‘discipline’ and ‘energy’. These are facts noted by writers of the most widely differing moral perspectives. It is not illuminating to see these matters in moral terms, however; for what these observations make clear is that attitudes and habits of work are ultimately a product and a reflection of the mode of production in which they occur. In particular, the modern need to work that I have been describing is a product of the historically developed conditions of modern industry. The ‘habit of industriousness’, as Hegel calls it, is a product of work itself. ‘Practical knowledge, acquired through working, consists first in the automatically recurrent need for something to do and the habit of simply being busy’ [57]. Likewise Marx describes how capitalism in particular ‘drives labour out beyond the limits of its natural needs’ [58].

The historical vocation of capital is fulfilled as soon as, on the one hand, demand has developed to the point where there is a general need for surplus labour beyond what is necessary, and surplus labour itself arises from individual needs; and on the other, general industriousness has developed (under the strict discipline of capital) and has been passed on to succeeding generations, until it has become the property of the new generation [59].

Rousseau was one of the first modern writers to make these points. He recognizes and describes with great insight and originality the way in which our needs - and, in particular, the modern needs to be sociable, active and productive - have developed historically. Man in the state of nature - primitive man - he argues, is a creature of few needs and no concerns beyond them. ‘He desires only to live and be free from labour.... Civilised man, on the other hand, is always moving, sweating, toiling, and racking his brains to find still more laborious occupations’ [60].

Primitive man, says Rousseau, is ‘indolent’. However, he repudiates the moral condemnation usually implied by that term. He does so by simply reversing the customary moral judgement. For he regards the ‘laziness’ of earlier people as the ‘natural’ condition of mankind; and the modern needs to be busy and productive as ‘artificial’ and ‘false’ needs - harmful and corrupting developments of human nature.

Sahlins, in common with many other recent writers, is inclined to take the same view. Thus he warns against judging the work habits and attitudes of the hunters and gatherers he describes ‘from the anxious vantage of European compulsions’ [61]; and he suggests that ‘the more appropriate deduction from the cultural differences might have been that Europeans are overworked’ [62]. Such ideas provide the basis for much of the currently fashionable scepticism about the human value of work. Ginz’s outlook is similar, as we have seen; for he, too, argues that the need to work is a false and artificial creation of modern industrial society. In non-industrial societies we see different - truer and more natural - attitudes to work; and it is these that provide the touchstone for his criticisms of the attitudes that I have been describing.
However, there is another view we can take of these matters. The developments that I have been describing provide no basis for the romantic idea of a 'natural' attitude to work. Rather, they indicate that, in this area at least, human nature is social and historical through and through. Attitudes to work, all attitudes to work - those of pre-industrial societies just as much as contemporary ones - are social and historical products. They are created by and reflect the mode of production in which they occur. Thus the modern need to work, although it is undoubtedly a historically developed need, should not be judged 'false' or 'artificial' simply for that reason. On the contrary, it is a real and ineliminable feature of contemporary psychology. For in the course of the historical developments that I have been outlining, new habits, new attitudes, new needs have been created, and old ones relinquished. Human nature itself has been transformed.

The Need for Leisure

As well as needing work, it is clear that we also need time off work - leisure - both for rest and relaxation, and also for the pursuit of activities and needs not fulfilled in work. Gorz puts strong emphasis on this point. He even quotes some evidence for it: namely a large European survey of 1977 which found that a majority (55%) of people in work, if granted the choice, would prefer a reduction in their working hours to an increase in wages [63].

Moreover, the reduction of working hours is something for which working people have long struggled, although it is important to stress that this has usually been in the context of the demand for full employment. As Jahoda says, the labour movement has traditionally taken the view that 'leisure hours are a complement to work hours, not a substitute for them' [64].

Gorz, by contrast, sees leisure precisely as a desirable substitute for work. As we have seen, his view is that work is a coercive necessity and freedom consists in the 'liberation from work'. In a well known passage, Marx contrasts the 'realm of necessity' (the realm of 'labour ... determined by necessity and mundane considerations') with the 'realm of freedom' which involves 'that development of human energy which is an end in itself'. Gorz makes much of this passage. He talks of the autonomous, creative activities - arts and crafts, hobbies, sports and recreation - which the liberation from work will allow. However, his account of this 'realm of freedom' is just as questionable as his account of the psychology of work. Although he sees well enough that work is a socially conditioned need, he writes as if autonomous and creative leisure activities will flourish quite naturally when we are freed from the coercive need to work. He fails to see that the desires and needs for these activities are equally social and historical products.

No doubt, I will be thought to be misrepresenting Gorz at this point. After all, he says quite explicitly that a reduction of work time is not in itself 'intrinsically liberatory', and that it will bring freedom only if there exists a network of 'collective facilities' - community centres and workshops - and of 'local, non-market, collective services', etc. [63a]. What this suggests, however, is precisely that the need for 'autonomous' activity is present naturally - all that is required for it to flourish are the means - free time and the appropriate facilities. It is this view that I am questioning.

Mere free time, even with a network of coops and so on, is something quite different from the realm of freedom as Marx describes it. The need for the positive and active use of non-work time [6] in fact, a modern phenomenon: it hardly exists in pre-industrial societies. Rousseau describes how this 'natural man', once he has satisfied his few basic needs, simply falls asleep under the nearest tree. The abundant free time of hunter-gatherers, as we have seen, involves little that can properly be put under the heading of the 'development of human energy as an end in itself'. The ceremonies and rituals which are often a well-developed feature of the life of such societies tend to be as coercively members as mundane labour, and bear little relationship to Gorz's 'autonomous creative activity'. Moreover, as E. P. Thompson writes, popular culture before the industrial revolution in England was 'in many ways otiose, intellectually vacant' [67]. This conflicts, I know, with the picture of people in pre-industrial communities spending long hours in conversation, in singing and dancing, and in other convivial pursuits; but we must beware of romanticising these societies. The truth rather appears to be that their autonomous non-work activities are desultory and limited, and not for lack of free time.

The extensive active, free and creative use of non-work time by working people is a development of modern industrial society [6]. The growth of the public leisure activities begins in the eighteenth century and has continued steadily until it has become, today, the basis of huge and still expanding areas of industry. Of course, a great deal of modern leisure activity involves people only as consumers, in a passive fashion. The developments I am describing are still in process: their general direction, however, is unmistakable.

What these observations indicate is that the 'realm of freedom' is not attained simply by having free time; although free time is necessary for its realisation, it is not sufficient. Rather, the active and creative use of free time is a historical development. It is itself a need, the development of which is gradually transforming non-work hours from being a time of mere toil and idleness into a sphere in which there will be a time of free human development of the sort envisaged by Marx. In short, the 'realm of freedom' is best seen as a development of the 'realm of necessity' - its complement and not its mere opposite.

The Politics of Work

I have been defending the view that work and leisure are real and fundamental, though historically developed, needs in the modern world. These ideas, as I have stressed, are central to the socialist outlook. However, they are widely dismissed as conservative attitudes which have ceased to have any application to contemporary politics. In conclusion, I will argue that there is no basis for these charges.

We are frequently told, for example, that the 'work ethic' is in decline, although it is seldom clear just what this means. However, it seems quite likely that work attitudes are changing. Young people in particular, it appears, are becoming more demanding in relation to work:
they are less willing to submit quietly to arbitrary authority, and they want fulfilment from their work. The idea that work of whatever kind is a duty and a virtue is passing - if, indeed, it was ever widespread. However, if the arguments that I have been giving have at all correct, it would be wrong to imagine that this is because people are coming to deny the importance of work in their lives. On the contrary, the evidence, as I have shown, points in quite the opposite direction: it demonstrates that people are coming to regard work no longer as a duty but rather a need which has become an essential part of human nature.

Libertarians like Gorz, by contrast, put a very different interpretation on these developments. They celebrate the 'demise of the Protestant work ethic' as proof that people are at last coming to appreciate that the need for work is a false and unnatural compulsion produced by modern society. This is often presented as though it was the most far-reaching and radical critique of industrial capitalist society [68]. It is nothing of the kind. Such scepticism tells people that their desire for work and for fulfilling work is a delusion, the artificial product of social conditioning, which they should discard. In effect, in present circumstances, this is to tell the unemployed to reconcile themselves to unemployment; it is to tell alienated and disaffected workers to renounce their desire for fulfilling work as illusory and put up with their lot; it is to tell women to keep to their domestic 'place'.

A similar message is expressed in entirely different terms and from an entirely different quarter: not by would-be radicals but by politicians like to think that they are facing the current situation in the most hard-headed and realistic terms. The prospect now, in much of the Western world, is of long-term mass unemployment. Present government policies, in Britain at least, seem almost deliberately designed to this end. If the experience of the thirties is any guide, the recommended alternative of a programme of Public Works (unless on a massive scale), while it might do some good, is unlikely to alter the situation fundamentally. It is a sobering thought that it was only the policies of fascism in Germany and the approach of world war in other countries that lifted the capitalist world out of the great depression [69].

In this context, we have heard talk (even from some Trade Union leaders) of 'training for leisure', where 'leisure' is a euphemism for unemployment. The idea is that unemployment is inevitable - people must be trained to accept the fact and adapt to it [70].

It may seem that the view that I have been presenting gives some encouragement to the idea that people can be trained to accept unemployment. If the need for work is socially created, then surely it can be uncreated by social means - by education, by training? This does not follow. Indeed, what I am saying is directly opposed to such views. When I talk of the need to work in modern society as a real need, and when I stress that it is an outcome and a product of modern industry, I mean precisely to deny that it is a product simply of education, or that it is a purely ideological phenomenon. On the contrary, it is a need which arises out of the most basic material conditions of modern society, and which cannot therefore be altered by the methods of indoctrination alone.

Socialism and Work

The need for work, and the need for leisure too, am arguing, is ultimately an aspect and an expression of the development of modern industry - it is a product of the productive forces. These have developed within the framework of capitalist relations of production. Increasingly, however, the development of industry is coming into collision and conflict with these relations of production. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their letters' [71].

These conflicts and contradictions have never been more clearly apparent. The gigantic forces of production developed by modern society lie underused and even idle: not only factories and machinery but, even more importantly, people - millions of men and women with their socially developed habits and skills. And not because there are no needs that they could be employed to meet, but because the capitalist system is incapable of mobilising and employing them. Even when they are employed, as Marx says, everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new fangled sources of wealth, by some weird spell, are turned into sources of want.... All our inventions and progress seem to result in ending material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery and dissolution on the other; this antagonism between the productive forces and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted [72].

The productive potentiality of modern industry is immense, and so is its potentiality for human liberation. In a satisfied and humanly organised society, it could be used not only to meet the real needs of the most basic kinds - the real poverty and want which still exist, even in the most economically advanced societies; but also to create more humane conditions of work, including a reduction of the working day. But such statements are likely to arouse scepticism in many quarters. For people are fearful and apprehensive of the productive power of modern industry, and inclined to reject such views as naively 'productivist' ones [73].

To this charge socialism must plead guilty, for it is quite avowedly a 'productivist' philosophy - not in the sense that it recommends production simply for the sake of production, but in the sense that it regards production as 'man's essential activity' and as a primary human and social value. Its fundamental criticism of capitalism follows from this. Capitalism is no longer able effectively to employ the productive forces - the means of production and the labour power - which it itself has brought into being. It is not able to meet the needs - including the needs for fulfilling work and leisure - which it itself has created. What socialism demands, therefore, is not the liberation of people from work - capitalism is already doing that all too successfully by throwing millions on to the dole - but rather the liberation of work, of the productive forces (including people), from the stultifying confines of the capitalist system.

As for what a possible future society may hold in store, we have learned to be cautious and sceptical of utopian visions. The problems of 'actually existing' socialist societies are a sufficient warning. Marx, too, was notably restrained when it came to 'dreaming up recipes for the cookshops of the future'. In one of his few attempts to envisage the character of a future communist society, he talks of labour becoming 'life's prime want' [74]. This has often been dismissed as one of his more utopian and fantastic ideas. But is it really so? The arguments that I
have been presenting this question - and not only on the basis of what can be envisaged for an ideal future, but on the basis of what we can see in the present.

According to Lenin, the feudal organisation of social labour rested on the discipline of the bludgeon, while the working people, robbed and tyrannised by a handful of landowners, were utterly ignorant and downtrodden. The capitalist organisation of society never rested on the discipline of hunger.... The communist organisation of social labour rests on the free and conscious discipline of the working people themselves who have thrown off the yoke both of the landowners and the capitalists. This new discipline does not drop from the skies, nor is it born from pious wishes; it grows out of the material conditions of large-scale capitalist production, and out of them alone [75]. Lenin was writing in 1920, when Russia was still predominantly a peasant-based agricultural society. His words have must seemed as utopian and as distant from reality as Marx's [76].

If today, in our society, they still seem so it is for different reasons. We live in a capitalist society, based upon large-scale industry. For most people in our society, work is in many respects an alienating and oppressive experience. The spur that drives them to it may no longer be the threat of hunger as such, but certainly the threat of serious material deprivation plays its part [77]. There is no question but that there are material incentives to work. And yet, the evidence has been arguing, shows that work (at least of any but the most repulsive and degrading sort) is also now felt subjectively as a need. It may not yet be 'life's prime want', but it is a vital want, a need, nevertheless. So far from being a utopian dream, Marx's vision is increasingly becoming a fact of modern psychology. That is to say, the subjective conditions for a more satisfactory and rational organisation of the work of society are developing here and now. What is lacking is the objective framework of economic and social relations, and the objective organisation of work, which would allow this need to be satisfied.

Notes
5. Work in America, p. 9. Results from Britain are similar; see M. Jahoda, 'The Impact of Unemployment', pp. 311-12.
7. Ibid., p. 309.
13. 'The old workhouse morality seems to have eroded. Wildcat strikes, riots, occupations, absenteeism and indiscipline broke out in a world plague in the late 1960s', according to A. Skillen, Ruling Illusions, Brighton, 1972, p. 60. The same view is expressed more cautiously in Work in America, 'in some industries there apparently is a rise in absenteeism, sabotage and turnover rates' (p. 11).
22. J. Hayes and P. Nutman, Understanding the Unemployed, p. 83.
24. J. Hayes and P. Nutman, Understanding the Unemployed, p. 42.
31. This view is familiar in the philosophers of Plato and Aristotle, who both write from the point of view of slave owners in a society based upon slavery. However, these attitudes are echoed in more recent writings: see, e.g., J. S. Mill, Utilitarianism, and S. Sayers, 'Higher and Lower Pleasures', in B. Lang et al. (eds.), The Philosopher in the Community, London, Met. pp. 117-29; and also H. Arendt, The Human Condition, Chicago, 1958. An important strand of medieval social thought was given way to depict it as an unwanted necessity: the curse to which mankind was subjected at the time of the Fall. However, there are also other and more positive aspects to this tradition. It is perhaps too simple to suggest, like P. D. Anthony (The Ideology of Work, London, 1975), that 'the ideology of work is a distinctively modern phenomenon which emerges only with Protestantism but this, in view of the fact that work is given a distinctive moral emphasis in the modern era, is not so.
33. C. Hill, The English Working Class, Oxford, 1984, chs. 8-9, for a brief and clear presentation of these ideas in a philosophical context.
34. K. Marx, Capital, vol. i, p. 177.
36. Quoted by M. Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, London, 1974, p. 28. The Yanamans are a group of South American Hunters. Similar complaints were made about newly recruited Mexican miners at the beginning of this century. 'His lack of initiative, inability to save, absence of desire for alcohol - all were pointed out as proof of a natural inferiority' (quoted in E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism', Past and Present, no. 38, 1967, p. 91.
37. M. Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, p. 35.
38. Ibid., p. 17.
39. Ibid., p. 35.
40. Ibid., p. 19.
41. Ibid., p. 20.
42. Ibid., p. 27.
43. Ibid., p. 191.
44. Ibid., p. 191.
45. See also E. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, London, 1866, chs. 8-9, for a brief and clear presentation of these ideas in a philosophical context.
48. Quoted by M. Sahlins, p. 35.
49. Ibid., p. 191.
50. Ibid., p. 20.
51. Ibid., p. 27.
62. Ibid., p. 100.
63. K. Marx, Grundrisse, p. 104.
64. M. Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, p. 63.
65. Ibid., p. 31.
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