

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF “OVERTIME”

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The Employee Policy Foundation did a study in 1996 estimating, “conservatively,” that illegally denied overtime pay amounted to at least \$19 billion each year (Geoghegan, 1999, p. A4)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we examine the relatively recent recognition and institutionalization of a key labor issue – “overtime” – and its relevance to changing work rules and styles, in the U.S. and more globally. The number of hours employers may require employees to be on the job is one of three key elements in distinguishing what is deemed fair from exploitive in modern industrial (and post-industrial) societies. The two other indicators of fairness address the physical setting of work and the wages paid. Whether applied to workers assembling sneakers in third world countries, or, more historically, to the conflicts that encouraged the formation of labor unions in the U.S., these issues are always among the first to be negotiated by labor and management.

OVERTIME AS A SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCT

By now, “overtime” is such a widely understood and taken-for-granted construct it is surprising to realize it (like other *New Deal* policy innovations in the U.S.) is a recent, still-contested and hardly universal institution. A key aspect of the “overtime” construct is its very public labeling as “illegitimate” the practice of requiring employees to work more than a set number of hours per day. Some

The Transformation of Work, Volume 10, pages 165–187.
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ISBN: 0-7623-0766-8

recent controversies surrounding the legitimacy of work definitions and assignments include lawyers for the U.S. Justice Department (highly skilled white collar professionals) suing their employer for misreporting their long hours and refusing to consider paying overtime for their "after hours" work (Johnston, 1999). Strikes over "mandatory overtime" have also shut down automobile assembly lines, with worker representatives asserting that because it is cheaper to pay them overtime than to hire new employees, they were required to involuntarily work 60-hour rather than the usual 40-hour weeks (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998).

These conflicts starting off the new millennium point out that some very basic issues concerning the definition of work, work rules and their administration continue to demand consideration and resolution. Interestingly, the issues contested remain unchanged in many ways, even as technology, workforce demographics, skill levels, and formal organization undergo significant alterations.

Although most workers in the United States have an intuitive, and sometimes contractual sense of "overtime," its meaning and operationalization are symbolic and social constructions, undergoing constant revision as social relations and expectations change (Bergman & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1991). What we accept to be "overtime" is dependent on and embedded in the social and political contexts that surround it (Gergen, 1995). The construct can have multiple, shifting meanings that vary depending on their constituencies and particular logics (Sayer, 1997; Van Langenhove & Berloznik, 1996). What a contemporary French civil servant considers "overtime" differs considerably from what an American management consultant conceives as "overtime," for example.

As Merton (1982) has suggested, our expectations of the length of time required for tasks vary with the prevalent social norms. During the 20th century, diverse forces produced fluctuations in the social construction of work hours. Expectations concerning average work hours follow changes in regional, professional and organizational norms. Trends in work hours also vary between nations and between periods in history according to changing social expectations, cultural norms and their attendant logics and rhetorics. In 1970, both European and U.S. work hours averaged 1,900 hours per year (Greenhouse, 1999). However, work hours have continued a steady decline in Europe while they have increased dramatically in the U.S. Currently, the average American works 350 hours or 9 weeks more per year than workers in other industrialized nations (Greenhouse, 1999).

In another context, Japan, extreme overwork has long been respected. In fact, "Karoshi" or "death from overwork" is a highly respected, though unfortunate, fate for 10,000 Japanese workers each year (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998). A poll of 4,000 workers by Japan's National Institute of Public Health found that 35%

of Japanese have experienced chronic fatigue for at least 6 months (French, 2000). Only recently has the Japanese government reconsidered the role of overtime and taken steps to reduce its incidence. In contrast, the understanding of overtime in the U.S. has reversed and now Americans work 70 hours more per year on average than Japanese.

HISTORICAL SETTING

The construct and institutional logic of "overtime" could not exist in the United States (and still does not yet exist in many emerging nations) until the U.S. Congress reached agreement over how many hours constitute an "official" workweek. Agreements needed to be struck on "normal" work hours before the idea of "overtime" hours could enter the lexicon. This did not formally occur until 1938; the year that the number of hours for a typical week of work was legally set at 40 hours by the federal government. Before this formal definition was instituted and set into practice, the very idea of "overtime" was untenable; for not until this agreement over the ceiling after which working additional hours was understood to qualify as "overtime" – could the surrounding cultures of employers, employees, and law and custom understand and act on the difference between "normal" and "overtime" hours worked.

Since its creation and official recognition from this passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in 1938, overtime has become a tangible and routine, taken-for-granted element of employment contracts, work organization and economic performance. While debates have continued over which legal categories of workers are covered or excluded from coverage by the term, the basic, society-wide understanding that eligibility for overtime pay extends out to a large number of workers is now beyond challenge in the U.S. and other industrialized nations of the world.

But, just as the institution of overtime makes sense and seems natural by the year 2000, it is instructive to inquire into the ideational and political forces which prevented, and deemed it unnatural during both the industrial and agricultural eras which preceded it. From this exploration we can also cast light on why in some nations today there is still no legal recognition of overtime, and also consider other, similar topics and issues which have been transformed from local and private logics and discourses, to more global and publicly visible issues.

Work Hours, Cross-Nationally, Following the Industrial Revolution

Preindustrial workers had always measured their work using "tasks" such as clearing a field or the milking of cows as their metrics (Roediger & Foner,

1989). It was not until the industrial revolution that the construct of time became the accepted standard of employers and thereby for workers to measure work: "Time is now currency; it is not passed but spent" became an accepted maxim (Thompson, 1967, p. 61). Natural cycles were replaced with abstract durations of time. These were more formalized in the early nineteenth century as clocks and pocket watches became more commonplace. Time quickly became a focus of struggles between workers and employers. As work's definition became time-based, the subject of work hours arose as the basis for negotiation, and for deliberations about reduced work hours and, eventually, reduced overtime. The "socially expected durations" of work time (Merton, 1982) thus came into being.

Under Anglo-American law, employment conditions and work rules were seen as private agreements between employer and employee. For landowners and tenant farmers, working hours varied by planting and harvest times, with flexible hours (by season) essentially built into their employment relationship. An early recognition of overtime existed for some medieval manor hands (Schor, 1991). If they worked more than a twelve-hour day, they were compensated for two full day's work.

British guilds as early as 1321 set official work hours standards in the form of "ordinances" (Roediger & Foner, 1989). Work hours usually amounted to 14 hours in the summer and 12 hours in the winter. Some scholars argue that hours were actually closer to 8 or 9 hours per day, while "overtime" hours frequently added as much as 48 hours to each week (Schor, 1991; Webb & Cox, 1891). As soon as time became the metric of interest, guilds, the forebearers of modern labor organizations, began to argue for hours limitations. Organized workers struck to reduce work hours as early as 1718 in Britain and 1791 in America (Roediger & Foner, 1989, Labor Research Association, 1942).

The concept of overtime was nonexistent at this point, but a struggle to set work-hour standards prefigures the concept of "overtime," which began to be understood at this time as any hours in excess of set standards (Webb & Cox, 1891). No premium was added to wages for these early overtime hours. There were numerous agreements concerning work hours standards, but most of these standards were very loosely adhered to and included multiple loopholes and exceptions. For instance, statutes in Virginia in 1621 and in Massachusetts in 1641 set workers hours at 6 and 8 hours respectively while other statutes in Massachusetts set hours at 12 hours in summer and 10 in winter (Roediger & Foner, 1989). Historians accept the fact that regulations as low as 6 hours per day would not have been taken very seriously. The eighteenth century did witness the imposition of Sabbath statutes that were more regularly enforced. However, most statutes diverged so much from all reality at this time that any

conception of "overtime" was unnecessary until more consistent and realistic standards were set in the early nineteenth century.

The advent of technology for industrial manufacturing changed work – from dependent on natural seasons to the possibility of year-round constancy, subject only to the variation in sales and market demand for the factory owners' output. With labor supply far more plentiful, and factories running year-round, the number of work-hours increased dramatically: by 1850 6-day, 70 hour work-weeks, of 11½ hours per day were common in the United States (Schor, 1991). As work hours increased to twelve-hour days, seven days a week, protests were voiced over the fairness and morality of these free-market arrangements. By the early nineteenth century industrialized British and New England factories employed enough workers so that realistic standards could be legitimately initiated, regulated and enforced. The motivating factor was the fact that although hours in these factories ranged upwards of 80 to 110 hours per week, which was similar to some agricultural work, the conditions were more dangerous and unhealthy (Cross, 1989).

By entering employment agreements with factory owners, unorganized workers lost control over their work hours and recovery of this control has remained an issue ever since. In the nineteenth century, labor struggles to regain control over work hours and to reduce or eliminate overtime hours were concentrated in Britain (Webb & Cox, 1891). The Ten Hours Movement called for shorter hours and eventually led to the Factory Acts of 1833 which only restricted work hours for women and children. This "protective legislation" was not considered necessary for adult men since they were considered to have stronger constitutions and they supposedly could resist fatigue and the other pernicious health effects caused by long work hours. Labor struggles in Britain continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as organized labor maintained a stable role as the respected representative of British workers. Workers organizations became the forum in which overtime and other work hours issues were constructed, debated and codified into organized movements.

Compared to British factory workers, more conservative and individualistic French tradesmen were less interested in unionization, which they equated with the elitist bourgeois order (Webb & Cox, 1891). As a result, repression of the labor movement in France continued throughout the nineteenth century due to reactionary bourgeois ideologies in tandem with liberal, laissez-faire economic thought and policies. The British labor movement had aggressively struggled for a universal 10-hour day in the 1830s and 40's and for a 9-hour day in the 1860's and 70's (Cross, 1989). In comparison, the French 12-hour law of 1848 applied only to factories. Different understandings of work time existed even within such close proximity as London and Paris.

Interestingly, liberal economists in France were averse to the regulation of work hours, which they interpreted as unnecessary controls on a free market economy. "Protective legislation" eventually reduced work hours to 10 in France in 1904. However, individualistic French workers struck to protest the wage reductions that accompanied these reduced hours. Exemptions from this legislation allowed French workers to put in 6 million hours of overtime in 1905 (Cross, 1989). At this time, French workers considered overtime as a "right," following from the free market's invitation to earn whatever income they were capable of.

Both liberal and conservative thought in France throughout the nineteenth century continued to obstruct any fight against excessive work hours or even the regulation of overtime hours. Over time however, different understandings the utility of "protective legislation" would change interpretations of overtime legislation in France. Today, the French embrace protectionist legislation that guarantees leisure time and work hours at levels below any other nation.

Australian workers had a much easier time of it due to a labor shortage coupled with higher living standards. Although Australia was geographically remote, its ties to Britain enabled conceptions concerning work hours and control of overtime to spread rapidly and fairly easily. In 1856 workers secured an 8-hour day after only one, brief, 3-week strike in Melbourne (Webb & Cox, 1891). Labor shortages and higher expectations allowed Australians a more progressive conceptualization of work hours and the utility of overtime regulations. However, as the population increased, struggles were renewed to retain universal 8-hours regulations. The Australians became the exemplar which other labor movements used to persuade skeptical workers throughout the world of their own potential to enact overtime legislation. They also joined workers in hundreds of cities throughout Europe and the U.S. for the May 1, 1890 International Day of Protest for an 8-hour day (Cross, 1989).

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WORK HOURS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the U.S. work hours and overtime were the central issues which were used to galvanized otherwise individualistic American workers' to band together into organized labor unions. The struggle for 10-hours legislation provided a unifying demand in the early nineteenth century shipbuilding, textile, steel and other industries. Individual states slowly legislated 10-hours limits for certain industries beginning with Pennsylvania in 1849 (Webb & Cox, 1891). A call for an 8-hour day soon followed. Only a few of these laws completely prohibited

overtime as opposed to simply setting standard "limits" with miscellaneous exceptions. Textile factory workers were prohibited from working more than 56.5 hours per week with exceptions made for factories driven by water recovering from flood or drought. Advances were limited to certain industries with numerous exceptions. Legitimate execution of these laws was also a problem considering penalties were minimal and only a small number of cases ever made their way to court. In 1870, the average industrial worker still toiled for 12 hours per day, 6 days a week (Roediger & Foner, 1989).

Repeated strikes and calls for work hours reform eventually exploded in the Haymarket riots of May 1886. However, after the disastrous riots and killings public opinion was successfully swayed against work hours reform as factory owners used their institutionalized networks of power and control to unfairly influence the police, courts and media. Work hour reformists were unfairly portrayed as violent, anarchistic and immoral (Hunnicut, 1988). The reputation of the 8-hour day movement was successfully tarnished and the concept of working hours and overtime temporarily lost public support. The protestors' legitimacy had been undercut by employers' assertion that interference with their right to assign work hours would lead to increases in crime and vice, idleness and degeneracy (Schor, 1991 citing Whapples, 1990).

Attempts to construct a positive conception of overtime were also hampered in the U.S. by a population explosion fueled by an influx of desperate, non-unionized immigrants willing to work extremely long hours to improve their economic and social status. The immigrants' perception of the American social structure was highly susceptible to manipulation by the press and other institutions. Immigrants from poor, unindustrialized regions accorded great respect to factory owners who had the power to assign them work or let them starve. This influx of unskilled workers, coupled with a new industrial structure of technologically advanced factories simultaneously increased both employers' and employees' expectations about the number of hours to be worked. . This change in public opinion coupled with a recession led to reduced union involvement in the 8-hour day movement, which dwindled in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The concept of overtime restrictions waned for the next few decades.

Framing New Discourses and Economic Perspectives on Overtime

Until Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor, succeeded in shifting the discourse about working hours, union organizers seeking agreements for 8-hour workdays continued to be portrayed as anarchists and immoral radicals. *Gompers replaced the rhetoric of fairness and decency by focusing*

attention on how the inefficiencies of workplace arrangements reduced profits and productivity. Long working hours resulted in greater rates of accidents and illnesses due to fatigue and exhaustion (Sparks, Cooper, Fried & Shirom, 1997). Gompers shifted the terms of debates over working hours from arguments for employee welfare and human rights to a dialogue on the economic costs of unemployment and the inefficiencies caused by worker fatigue (Hunnicut, 1988). *This more utilitarian discourse, emphasizing the goals of safety, health, and working conditions became important economic justifications for the passage of reduced workweek legislation* (Schuster & Rhodes, 1985).

Gompers' victory, in moving the focus of public discussion towards these worker efficiency and welfare concerns, came about partially, and ironically, as a result of the increasing influence of more detailed neoclassical economic analyses. These replaced Mercantilist interpretations of competition that had been developed in a context of shortages, in which skilled tradesmen and guild workers were scarce (Contensou & Vranceanu, 2000). These workers had retained enough control over the bargaining relationship to impose their own preferences for work hours and overtime restrictions. However, as the population increased dramatically in nineteenth century industrialized nations, classical economic thought came to the fore, emphasizing the free market and the contribution of individual behavior to the production of capital. This logic, in turn, supported a rationalized shift of control from workers to factory owners.

The influence of these population shifts was particularly evident in Australia where the loss of the struggle to implement an 8-hour day in 1856 was directly tied to the growing supply of labor. In the face of this increase, overtime disputes became less tractable. The surplus of available workers increased the bargaining advantage of employers, for as competition for jobs rose they could more easily afford to ignore workers' preferences re wages and working hours. Subsistence and inhumane conditions prevailed for unskilled urban workers. This dehumanization of workers as capital gave rise to labor resistance and Marx's attempt to shift control back to the workers (Figart & Golden, 1998).

Concurrently, complex neoclassical models were developed that took seriously more of the variables concerning worker behavior and the natural factors of the market. The influences of fatigue, stress, and collective bargaining between labor and owners were now considered relevant points when determining wages, work hours and the elasticities of these constructs. Anticipating more of the recent discussions over these same issues, the stated goals for work hour and overtime regulations, by the beginning of the 20th century, included health, leisure, worker control, and unemployment reduction by means of work sharing (Cross, 1989; Malamud, 1998).

Overtime's Acceptance by Industry

Much as Clemens (1996) found the legitimacy of small farmer policy positions rose when they shifted their rhetoric to satisfy broader constituencies, Gompers' focus on long working hours as a cause of lost productivity generated a developing consensus to reduce the standard number of hours. Employers' interest in overtime is directly tied to their concern for fixed employment costs. The fixed costs associated with new hires include administrative overhead, benefits packages (including health insurance, sick leave and vacations), screening, training, and separation costs (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998; Dunn, 1990). These diverse labor costs increase dramatically with each new hire. Firms prefer to increase overtime in order to reduce these fixed costs, reduce overall capitalization and increase productivity.

In examining these issues, researchers from Britain's Health of Munitions Workers' Committee found in 1919 that worker productivity increased as the workweek was reduced (Vernon, 1977). In fact, they reported that reducing hours not only increased hourly productivity as would be expected, but productivity increased so much that overall more was produced by workers who worked shorter weeks! Overall output increased by 11% and 9%, when a 74.8 hour week was reduced to 61.5 and 54.8 hours per week, respectively. Taylor's "scientific management" studies found similar increases in productivity by adjusting workers hours (White, 1987).

The rhetorics used by both sides in these negotiations to attain their respective goals converged in accepting the view that labor's effectiveness and productivity were directly tied to working conditions – including humane work hours. After Haymarket and the failure of the Paris commune, labor discourse over hours shifted slightly from direct bargaining with owners, including strikes, to an increased reliance on government legislation to set workday ceilings.

To achieve their growing commitment to developing more standard practice over the length of their employees' workdays, industry accepted Gompers' reframing of the discourse. *Large, industrial firms including U.S. Steel, Kellogg and International Harvester argued for work hour reforms and themselves actively lobbied state legislatures for work hour limits in the name of economic productivity* (Hunnicut, 1996).

Keynesian and neoclassical models predicted opposite effects on unemployment as a result of national hours reduction legislation (Owen, 1989). Keynesian models predicted a decrease in unemployment for the simple reason that additional workers would be hired to replace firms' lost hours. Neoclassical models predicted hours reductions would not lead to a proportionate increase

in employment, particularly if hours reductions produce an increased demand for leisure time. As the concept of regular leisure time became more institutionalized, leisure developed into another argument against long hours and forced overtime (Cross, 1989). All gains in legitimacy for leisure time were direct gains for legitimacy *against* overtime as well.

The Institutionalization of Overtime

Increased public interest in leisure time in the 1920s motivated twelve states to reconsider the length of the workday and the measure of overtime by legislating eight or ten-hour laws. In unionized settings, the average number of work hours per week was cut back from 54 to 48 (Hunnicut, 1988). Concurrently, improved technologies enabled Henry Ford to offer a 40-hour work week, but with the provision that workers keep up with his accelerated assembly line. Overtime was an accepted and sometimes manipulated construct by this point.

No national rules concerning work hours developed, however, until the high unemployment generated by the 1930s depression. The direct relationship between the concept of overtime and unemployment was espoused by many economists by this time. In 1933, Black's radical 30 hours bill was justified on the grounds that work reductions in overtime hours would reduce unemployment – a concept known as “work spreading” or “work sharing” (Malamud, 1998). Roosevelt's Keynesian approach to double digit unemployment redefined the legitimacy of having a larger number of people working shorter hours, in contrast to a smaller number of employees working long hours. Pressure on the federal government was increasing and a full employment or 0% unemployment argument was taken up by Roosevelt during the Depression as it spiked up to 20% (Hunnicut, 1988). The economic dynamics of the Depression decreased demand for workers, increased political pressures and altered public opinion so that the typical workweek had dropped to 36 hours. Roosevelt advocated a reduced workweek as a means to reduce unemployment and boost the economy out of the Depression. This progressive movement toward legislated state and federal intervention ran contrary to the prevailing, institutionalized, laissez faire economics.

Keynes' attack on the laissez-faire justification for not regulating the employment relationship provided additional discourse and ideas needed to build support for national work hours legislation. The economic and social discourse was entirely reframed by Keynes' interpretation of the economic collapse of the Depression. Keynes (1936) argued persuasively that laissez faire economics had failed and government intervention was required to maintain a rational and stable economy. Working hours regulations and overtime pay were positively

framed as solutions for the collapse of the economy; Keynes' conceptualization of an interventionist welfare state was adopted by the Roosevelt administration (Nordlund, 1988).

The effects of reduced overtime hours were constantly reconsidered as the government actively sought the best models to reduce unemployment. As the Roosevelt administration developed the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 the question of punishments entered the debate about overtime hours in the form of "premium hours" (Malamud, 1998). A premium is an added charge on all time worked beyond the agreed-upon limit as set by the specific legislation or contract. The usual premium discussed was a 50% addition over normal wages for all hours worked overtime. "Overtime" was now reinterpreted to be synonymous with "time and a half pay." An overtime premium was officially added to payrolls concerning overtime, and people's understandings of the construct of "overtime" became directly associated with this premium.

The understanding that overtime should be charged had been developed as a disincentive to employers to assign employees to work beyond the point agreed on as "normal." Keynesian economists argued that this premium would also deter workers from working overtime. Some states such as California have legislated a double time premium, as a necessary disincentive for work beyond 12 hours per day (Davis, 2000). This exceeds the Federal government's definition of the necessary overtime disincentive, set nationally at time and a half for overtime work beyond 40 hours per week.

OVERTIME ACHIEVES LEGITIMACY: PASSAGE OF THE FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT

Changing social and economic forces created an environment where the concept of overtime was becoming positively framed and historically embedded (Gergen, 1991). When the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was first proposed, the Roosevelt administration sought to cap the workweek at 30 hours. A strong sign that government's role in the employment relationship had achieved legitimacy was that business' opposition to the bill took the form of negotiating over the hour limit, rather than opposing the principle of federal regulation of hours altogether. Once Roosevelt accepted the workweek's official construction as 40 hours, he then advocated "premium pay" for hours worked above this ceiling.

This construction became known and was institutionalized as "overtime" when Roosevelt signed the FLSA in 1938 as part of his National Recovery Act. The overtime provision provided workers at least one-and-a-half times the

regular wage for any hours worked over 40 per week. The previous discourse had been restricted to issues of work hours reduction, but suddenly, the construction of overtime as a “socially expected duration” became understood and taken for granted as a normal part of the employment relationship (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky & Saute, 1998; Merton, 1982).

Legislators now had a formal and legitimate disincentive for overtime at their disposal. At this time, the principle arguments for overtime pay and reduced working hours include unemployment, institutional control and the welfare of workers (Owen, 1989). First, reducing hours and penalizing employers with overtime pay would hopefully reduce unemployment which was running at 20% in 1938. Second, the Depression clearly demonstrated that a free labor market was imperfect and formal, institutional intervention was needed. Finally, reduced hours would improve working conditions.

Diversity in Recent Interpretations and Claimants

However, once the principle of overtime had been legitimated, attention turned to which occupations and categories of work would be covered by the term. To satisfy interest groups with divergent constituencies, the categories of “exempt” and “non-exempt” were constructed. These concepts were not fully enumerated when the FLSA was signed into law, and needed to be framed more clearly by the Department of Labor. In line with Thornton’s (1992) discussion of “nomenclature as an organizing and legitimating strategy,” managerial employees became “exempt” from coverage by the FLSA, while most hourly employees were included. At the time, the proportion of “white collar” employees was lower, and they were assumed (more than they are now) to be part of “management.”

Today, most people understand the concept of “exempt” workers as connoting anyone whose job is salaried. This is not accurate. The “exempt” provision institutionalized a class distinction between blue-collar laborers and white-collar managers (Krueger, 1995). White-collar status was (and is) so preferable to blue-collar status, that many employees would sacrifice the potential for overtime pay to attain the symbolic capital associated with an “exempt,” white-collar position (Bourdieu, 1980). Consequently, the concept of overtime is frequently associated with class distinctions.

Aside from status, job duties were also a central factor in the Roosevelt administration’s determination of which groups were to be exempted from the FLSA (Malamud, 1998). Andrews had been appointed the Wage and Hours Division Chief of the Department of Labor and would determine the details of executing the FLSA. He carefully weighed both functional job duties as well

as symbolic status considerations when determining which workers would be subject to FLSA overtime regulations. Status arguments were descriptive and symbolic understandings concerning what place certain workers held in society, particularly whether a position was considered to be "white collar" or "blue collar." Certain white-collar workers and more skilled workers bristled at being considered in the same category as hourly wage earners. They defined themselves through their work roles. Defining their own status as exempt from hourly regulations struck to the heart of their sense of self. These status considerations involved the ways in which people symbolically defined themselves through their work roles. Heated arguments were made against overtime provisions for "business class" workers.

Arguments on the basis of job duties, on the other hand, involved the functional, purposive and instrumental aspects of the job itself, not the role played by the worker. The rhetoric of these arguments centered on considerations of whether the job involved "executive," "professional," "administrative," or "unskilled" tasks and responsibilities. Arguments for exemption from overtime provisions considered characteristics such as whether supervising or independent decision-making was required to perform the job. Eventually, both status and job duty considerations were included in the final determination of the FLSA classifications of exempt status.

Although the Federal Labor Standards Act created the formal, legal construct called "overtime," implementation of this taken-for-granted construct is continually changing. Through the resulting set of Byzantine codes, limitations and "exemptions," an "exempt" worker is commonly interpreted to denote a salaried, non-hourly, professional manager. Formally, the construct is much more complex. At the time of passage, lobbying by agribusiness "exempted" 800,000 children from coverage (Nordlund, 1988). By 1988, 20 million employees were exempted, 3.5 million of whom were exempt due to the employing firms' small size. Today, approximately one-third of the workforce is classified as "exempt" (Golden, 1998).

Between 1951 and 1987, decisions by lower courts led to rulings to compensate 8.5 million employees for underpayments due to misunderstandings of the overtime construct (Nordlund, 1988). More recently, a 1997 class action law suit over unpaid overtime hours in Washington state resulted in 2,100 workers being paid \$2.8 million (Liddle, 2000). When all 15,000 employees in the Oregon class action are finally contacted the entire Oregon settlement may amount to \$5 million. In 1997, the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor determined in a compliance action that Iowa Beef Producers underpaid 23,500 workers \$7.1 million in back wages and interest for 14 minutes of unpaid daily clean-up and set-up time (Joinson, 1998). Similar class action law

suits have involved thousands of Wendy's and Walmart employees (Ukens, 1999).

The negotiations over which occupations are covered, and which remain exempt has continued to the present, with changes occurring periodically in the interpretation of these categories. There are over 40 categories for the "exempt" status (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) and the Supreme Court was forced to rule recently on the increasingly elusive boundary separating the seemingly different concepts of "salaried" versus "non-salaried" (Canoni, 1997). Recent reinterpretations included the determination in 1995 by a federal appeals court that reporters at some newspapers are exempt because they are "artistic professionals" while reporters at less prestigious newspapers are non-exempt (Fitzgerald, 1999).

This debate over how the rules are interpreted, and which occupations covered, revolves around a continuing contest over the implementation of an accepted, legitimate and now taken-for-granted concept – overtime pay for "extra" work performed. *Just as the number of hours in the (still 40-hour) work-week has been socially constructed, we are now also witnessing renegotiations and reinterpretations of the age at which members of particular occupations (voluntarily or otherwise) retire, or become eligible for Social Security payments.* In each of these areas, the institutions of overtime, retirement and social security are no longer subject to debate, but how the legitimate rules they embody are to be implemented remains ripe for negotiation.

The suit brought by the U.S. Justice Department's lawyers seeking overtime pay is an excellent example of this continual negotiation (Johnston, 1999). According to the 1945 Federal Employees Pay Act, Justice Department lawyers are entitled to overtime pay or compensatory time. Justice Department documents show that this was known and corroborated in departmental memorandums. However, dummy records were actually kept so that overtime would not be paid. Meanwhile, the actual overtime records were used when charging hours to plaintiffs and also to coerce certain divisions and lawyers to log more overtime hours! Internal documents suggest that resistance to overtime by the Department was partially rationalized on the basis of status. They insisted that Justice Department lawyers, as professionals, are expected to work overtime without compensation. The complexities of the exemptions from the FLSA thus resulted in even the Justice Department violating its own standards while ironically using professionalism as an excuse.

Arguably, many skilled professionals and white collar workers are now more commodified than managerial workers were earlier, and as such are "entitled" to inclusion in the category of "non-exempt" workers. In 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court accepted this commodification argument in the case of computer program-

mers who were seeking to place limits around the number of hours of their assignments and to earn overtime pay for the additional hours they did work (Coie, 1996). The Court ruled that most programmers are only writing codes according to routine however skilled those routines may be, and this type of work qualifies for overtime pay. Some economists posit that the labor supply of certain skilled workers, such as computer programmers, has dropped since the 1970s, shifting the control of labor negotiations back in favor of these employees (Bluestone & Rose, 1998).

RISING DEMAND FOR OVERTIME AS INDICATOR OF REVISED SOCIAL CONTRACT

While the institution of overtime is now taken-for-granted, arguments over its implementation, particularly concerning which groups will be entitled to get paid for working extra hours, continue unabated. *We anticipate the number of occupations seeking the legal definition of "non-exempt" will continue to increase.* As noted earlier, between 1970 and 1990 the number of hours worked by employed Americans increased by 160 hours. The average worker added an entire month of work to her work year in a period of only 20 years. The average couple added 8 weeks to their work year mainly due to an increase in the number of women working full-time and an increase in the number of people working very long hours (Greenhouse, 1999; Rones, Ilg & Gardner, 1997).

Continuously changing technologies and job categories will keep this a live issue for the foreseeable future, particularly in an environment where employers recategorize salespeople as "customer service managers" and secretaries as "administrative assistants." As service professionals, working in teams and on projects, in non-hierarchical work settings were not anticipated when the FLSA was first passed, how will their moves for inclusion as non-exempt be adjudicated? Though overtime was once renounced in favor of symbolic managerial prestige, the power of nomenclature to so regulate and oppress has waned.

The demographics of which groups prefer to work overtime, and which prefer more time off vary substantially across the American workforce. Surveys show a substantial minority seek to avoid overtime assignments in order to have more time with their families (Perlow, 1991). For 60% of Americans in 1997 the most important factor in choosing an employer was quality-of-family-life issues (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998). One manager recounted his experience with an unspoken imperative to put in face time on Sundays (Perlow, 1991). According to him, they would just sit around for hours chatting. He stopped going to work Sundays to have some quality time with his children. He was subsequently passed up for a promotion because of his "attitude problem." For

many, overtime in the form of “face time” still symbolizes commitment which translates into increased symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1980).

While “quality time” with the family may still be a norm for some, Hochschild (1997) believes workers are spending more time in the office because they find more “quality time” there. She suggests that improved work practices such as “Total Quality Management” and teamwork have brought family values and norms into the workplace while “home” often suggests unpleasant family responsibilities. For these workers, overtime is reconstructed to denote leisure time or quality time while “home” is reconstructed to denote work time. The standard economic framing of the tradeoff between *leisure and work is reversed*.

Cross-Generation Preferences and Cross-National Variations

The practice of overtime is historically embedded and its frequency of use varies with historically fluctuating demand. Overtime in the U.S. surged during World War II. Work hours continuously decreased from 1947 to 1979, but overtime hours did not (Greis, 1984), probably due to employers’ attention to fixed employment costs. The concept of a 40-hour week enforced by overtime provisions contributed to changes in Europe as well. Post-war European countries have experienced significant reductions in annual work hours varying from an incredible 28.9% reduction in Sweden and an average decline of 15% for all of Europe (Di Martino, 1995; Marchand, 1993; Owen, 1989). Since World War II, hours worked declined twice as fast for Europeans as they quickly caught up with and surpassed U.S. work hours standards (Greis, 1984). These annualized hours declines are primarily due to increases in vacation time while weekly hours have remained more stable through 1970 (Kniesner, 1976). While European working hours have remained low, U.S. work hours have increased particularly for those with higher levels of education (Bluestone & Rose, 1998; Di Martino, 1995; Glosser & Golden, 1997; Hetrick, 2000; Marchand, 1993). Disaggregating annual working hours uncovers the fact that weekly hours have decreased for some demographic groups, but overall yearly hours have increased since WWII in the U.S (Owens, 1989).

Attempts to understand the decline of work hours in most of the world include an argument that technology has consistently led to reductions in work hours as demonstrated in the reduction in work time from 1870 to 1980 (Fogel, 2000). However, this analysis relies on Maddison’s (1995) calculation of work hours. This calculation does not account for recent increasing trends in work hours in the U.S. despite rapid increases in technology.

Another explanation for increased voluntary overtime in the U.S. is that Americans are feeling a need to purchase more and more. After WWII, increases

in the number of female workers and a decreasing retirement age compensated for a general decline in male working hours (Owen, 1979; Rones, et al., 1997). Despite increases in productivity and income, workers' consumption increased at an even faster pace. Workers' acquisitiveness combined with wages that have stagnated due to inflation have led them to perceive overtime as preferable to leisure time (Hunnicut, 1988; Owen, 1979). Increased marketing pressures particularly in the U.S. may explain the motivation for this type of workaholism. Marketers often suggest consumers compare themselves to reference groups at higher income levels than their own. Consequently, workers must work more to attain an inaccurate status quo. This might explain why increasing preferences to work conflict with increasing preferences for leisure (George, 1997; Schor, 1998). Such marketing efforts produce cognitive dissonance as workers struggle to acquire more goods and enjoy more leisure.

Aside from insecurities over relative socioeconomic status, workers in the U.S. have expressed increased job insecurity. Concerns about job insecurity have risen from 11% of workers in 1979 to 32% concerned in 1999 (Leonhardt, 2000). Although, many non-exempt employees perceive it as fast, extra income granted to the best workers, exempt workers put in unpaid overtime to maintain job security (Stewart, 1997).

As the U.S. shifts from manufacturing to service industries, disruptions and displacements create job insecurity which permits employers' preferences for more work hours to prevail over worker preferences for more leisure hours. Job security concerns may help explain why inflation has not increased in the 1990's as most economic models would predict when unemployment levels remain below 5% as they have recently. During the early sixties, the causal relationship between overtime and unemployment was reasserted (Carr, 1986). In fact, recent record unemployment levels have not led to increased "quit rates" possibly due to instilled job insecurity in the older workforce after years of restructurings and downsizings (Leonhardt, 2000; Rones, et al., 1997; Uchitelle, 1998).

In contrast, the more youthful Generation X members' responses to surveys on work preferences show that 20 to 32 year olds prefer more time off than overtime (Mitchell & Orwig, 1998). Employers have recently been shocked by Gen-Xers walking out of first-round interviews in response to overtime requirements (Shellenbarger, 1997). Gen-Xers also display little concern about overtime (Parmley, Parmley & Wootton, 1987). Two-thirds of all young workers reported that they would prefer more time off even if pay was reduced (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998). This suggests that Gen-X workers may be more leisure focused than older workers who are more income and job security focused. As a group, Gen-Xers may not correlate overtime with job security since

restructurings and downsizings quickly followed the growth in overtime in the 1980s and 1990s. This negative construal of overtime may also be related to the United State's recent, record-breaking, economic expansion. With such a positive environment – including unemployment at record lows and a sellers' market for workers – why should Gen-Xers work overtime? Generational differences in the construction of overtime may be the result of different job tenures as well as contextual differences in economic conditions.

These variations in worker preferences around work hours will be relevant considerations as the “overtime” issue continues to be negotiated between employers and employees.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

One frequent argument for FLSA reform is that service professionals working in teams dominate today's economy. Supposedly, the 1938 FLSA is out of sync with these post-modern, non-hierarchical, organizational structures (Kilberg, 1996). Team compositions and job definitions change before norms can become institutionalized. Related follow-up judgments on back pay have resulted in damages in the tens of millions of dollars (Cooper & Zorpette, 1991). As noted above, millions of employees have been reimbursed for underpayments (Nordlund, 1988). Organizations that restructure are particularly susceptible to miscategorizing employees as job duties change dramatically. Symbolic managerial status is almost meaningless in today's rapidly changing workplace.

The distinction between the regular workweek and overtime is becoming further blurred as overtime is reconstructed in various new forms. “Mandatory overtime” is a construct that relates back to the “systematic overtime” that was commonplace in the nineteenth century. “Systematic overtime” was time routinely worked beyond the hours stipulated in early labor agreements and this overtime was paid at normal wages. “Mandatory overtime” is usually written into union contracts which stipulate that employees must accept overtime at legislated or higher, agreed upon premiums. Mandatory overtime is favored by management because it increases short-term profits by reducing fixed labor costs such as benefits, but in the long-term frequent labor disputes eliminate these cost savings. Recently, Caterpillar, GM, Firestone, and Verizon workers have all struck over mandatory overtime issues (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998; Romero, 2000).

“Comptime” and “annualized hours” reimburse overtime hours with vacation hours (Golden, 1998). “Chinese overtime” refers to the practice of reducing normal wage rates to neutralize overtime expenditures. Although employers may attempt to neutralize the impact of overtime premiums by lowering regular

wages, this does not completely eliminate the financial impact of overtime (Trejo, 1991). This practice diminishes employee loyalty and trust; so, workers rack up excessive overtime to win back the lost pay they legitimately earned. Overtime in this environment is perceived as a way to gain leverage in a constant seesaw between management and workers (Martin & Newman, 1992). Another reconstruction of overtime known as "sleeper-time" calculates overtime pay into a fixed salary. Workers negotiate a fixed salary based on how many hours the worker will be *available* to work on nights and weekends. This fixed salary remains the same no matter how many "sleeper-time" hours they *actually* work.

Another system effectively eliminates overtime by reducing regular workweek hours. "Work sharing" or "job splitting" permits two people to share the responsibilities for one job so that each works only part-time (Harriman, 1982). Since each worker's normal workweek is only 20 hours, it would be nearly impossible for either to work over the 40 hours necessary to earn time and a half pay. When it is voluntary, this practice benefits both employers and workers.

CONCLUSION

The institution of overtime has achieved legitimacy, as the surrounding society provided government an important role in defining the 40-hour workweek as the ceiling above which additional work by "nonexempt employees" qualifies as "overtime." Additional institutions and symbolic values, which have moved recently from private (contractual) issues into a more public arena, include health care, human rights, and citizenship. For the latter two, the question is now on the table as to what extent they will be socially constructed as local rather than global, and within vs. across national boundaries. For all three, the legitimacy of any position is still subject to sharp dispute. Whereas overtime has achieved the legitimacy of an accepted institution, for these other issues, uncertainty still prevails concerning what rules will be adopted, and for how long.

The concept of overtime is embedded in the changing relationships between constituencies. As Gen-Xers assert more power over their working hours, managers must reconstruct their understanding of what they consider reasonable overtime. Managers and employees, labor economists and neo-classical economists, European workers and U.S. workers, all these groups maintain relationships that vary between times of tension and conflict and other times of reconciliation and understanding. These relationships are constantly in flux and contribute to the changing conception of overtime.

When different constituencies' understandings of overtime become too divergent, as happens with "mandatory overtime," conflicts such as strikes arise.

The reconstruction of overtime mirrors the political, cultural and social struggles of the 20th century. So far, the different constituencies have been able to reconstruct the boundaries, domains and prescriptive determinism of overtime without having to completely reconsider the concept entirely. There are some who do believe that a complete overhaul is required (Krueger, 1995), but if recent, rapid changes continue, the construct of overtime will remain simultaneously legitimate and subject to ongoing conflict and renegotiation.

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