

Using a variety of sources and detailed information at both an individual and a collective level, Zancarini succeeds in writing a history of the agency of the “subaltern classes” in the broadest sense “from below”. Her approach is predetermined, however, by the example set by Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, and by a political interpretation of Gramsci’s concept of “subaltern classes”, summarized in the binary opposition of “dominance” and “resistance”.⁶ Zancarini is well aware that “one does not strike all the time, demonstrate all the time, or revolt all the time”. She asserts that she tried to show the continuity of the daily life of the people, but also admits that she is not certain “if she succeeded in doing so in every chapter”.⁷ Indeed, a “people’s history” that would address daily life in social relations at work, earning a living, family life, social and geographical mobility, and the life course would have resulted in a more complete, but also a completely different book.

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HERMANN, CHRISTOPH. *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time*. [Routledge frontiers of political economy, vol. 190.] Routledge, Abingdon 2014. 236 pp. Ill. £85.00.

Since the 1970s, periodic crises have marked the development of mature capitalist economies. This time frame has been concurrent with increasing working hours for many, and unemployment for others. At the same time, we stand on a precipice, as capitalism seems to be propelling us into an environmental crisis of devastating proportions. Into this mix, Christoph Hermann throws the subject of work time, asking: “Why did work hours decrease up to the 1970s, but thereafter stagnated in most countries and even increased in some cases?” (p. 1). Although working hours might seem to be a sideshow in understanding contemporary socio-politico-economic systems, for progressive economists, historians, and social scientists more generally, this is a prescient question that warrants serious investigation.

Hermann’s welcome contribution to this debate is divided into four parts, exploring: (i) work time theories; (ii) production and reproduction; (iii) struggle and conflict; (iv) conclusions. The first part of the book contains three chapters outlining theoretical approaches to work time. These include neoclassical, Weberian, institutionalist, and feminist theories. The second part of the book considers how the relationship between time use and work has developed historically, considering production processes, service work, and (unpaid) housework. The third part examines how work time has been a focal point in the power struggle between workers and employers, exploring this in different historical phases. In this part, Chapter eight bears a close comparison to Marx’s analysis of conflict over the working day, and this content is further developed in Chapter nine, with focus on work time reduction and flexibilization (in particular considering the thirty-five-hour week in Germany and France,

6. See also Jollet, “Décentrer le regard”, p. 158.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

and increased part-time work). The final part of the book considers the political agenda of neoliberalism, and issues of direct relevance to worker welfare (flexibility, consumption, etc.). Having considered the historical conflict between classes, and within the household, Hermann finishes the book with a series of recommendations regarding work time.

A particular strength of the book is the discussion of Weber, and the tension between his approach and Marxian analyses in relation to productivity increase. For Weber, productivity improvement increases the possibility of work time reduction. In contrast, Marx saw productivity, along with working hours, as nexuses in class conflict. In the narrative of this chapter, and that of the following (examining Marxian and feminist perspectives), Hermann categorizes many contemporary scholars in the work time literature: we found the typology and classification particularly useful. The contemporary relevance of André Gorz – concerning consumerism, sustainability and work time – is emphasized and outlined with great clarity. The conceptual discussion of feminist approaches to work time is also considered, and alternative perspectives on the potential conflict with Marxian treatments explored.

The book captures the historic work time struggle between workers and capitalists. This is familiar stuff for those versed in the first volume of Marx's *Capital*. However, beyond that, it develops the theme of gender equality in feminist context. The book also offers an account of the impact of Fordism, Taylorism, and lean management systems in historical perspective. Hermann extends Marx's analysis to consider how the UK has interacted with European Union (EU) regulations on work time, and this gives a backdrop to current discussion about Brexit. However, little data subsequent to 2008 is presented, which is a shame, because the Global Financial Crisis changed much, particularly in relation to the balance of class forces.

The demise of trade union power (and membership) in the face of neoliberalism has partially arrested the secular fall in work time. Hermann argues that solidarity among workers must increase to shift the balance of class forces, but says little about how this can be achieved. As Hermann notes: "Trade unions, in Gorz's view, have little interest in shorter work hours because they represent workers in the workplace – and not in the home" (p.32). However, even if union objectives could be aligned with a reduced-hours strategy, research and data show that western societies have moved away from collective bargaining to individual petitions, making the return to strong unions unlikely in the short run.

A key theme emerging through the book is the capital-labour conflict. The role of contemporary societies in constraining workers to work long hours, coupled with "gender neutral" policies that reinforce gender roles, is clearly articulated. However, the analysis could have been developed further by including more elaborate investigation of how social norms affect work time (especially concerning "norms" examined in the feminist literature). It would have provided a more nuanced analysis of "care" if the distribution of care work, independent of hours in paid work, was elaborated in greater detail. This is especially important in the context of part-time work.

The book also reviews a broad scope of history, from the advent of the factory system. This results in a nuanced perspective, with long-term and short-term patterns. Hermann emphasizes the role of care in the household, which is crucial for paid production to be possible. Although women's domestic work began to reduce in the 1960s and 1970s, unpaid housework is still mainly carried out by women. On this basis, a better distribution of work is called for, with associated reductions in unemployment and an improved balance between paid and unpaid work. The health of workers would likely improve as a consequence of reduced hours, and the link between reduced consumption and sustainability is highlighted. The social aspects of increased leisure time is also highlighted, enabling workers to participate in cultural activity, with associated increase in social cohesion.

Concerning the environment, Hermann introduces this early on in relation to post-Marxism, André Gorz's theory on work time, and the consumption of commodities. However, the relationship between work time and sustainability is not developed as explicitly as it might be in the rest of the book, and the reader is left to join the dots up. Ecological sustainability is one of the arguments offered for a thirty-hour work week since this will result in a more sustainable environment, presumably because people will consume less and spend more time on community work. However, this presupposes that community work has a lesser environmental impact relative to individual consumption. And, little is said about consumption time. At the risk of being flippant, if people use increased leisure time to race monster trucks, little may be achieved. Key is how people are educated about environmental impact, which is not explored or considered in Hermann's book. There may also be an issue regarding the proposed redistribution of work from the employed to the unemployed (and underemployed). Increasing the availability of work to those who are time-rich and cash-poor may result in a net increase in aggregate consumption, since the wealthier may not consume all that they earn. Whilst, normatively, we would support the redistribution of work, this has to be applied concurrently with steps to reduce aggregate consumption.

Another of Hermann's arguments for a thirty-hour work week is the positive effect reduced hours will have on health. The relationship between health and working hours is introduced at the end of the book, though health and safety at work is cited as the main reason for work time regulation in relation to the EU Working Time Directive introduced in 1993 (93/104/EC), and revised in 2003 (2003/88/EC). Of course, work can also have beneficial effects on health, and redistribution of work is likely to increase societal welfare.

Overall, we enjoyed reading and discussing this book immensely. In terms of shortcomings, observations thus far notwithstanding, they are small, relative to the contribution Hermann makes to scholarship more generally. We did feel some of the empirical literature on absolute surplus-value production was neglected, but, overall, this is a well-crafted book that contributes wonderfully to research on work time and associated conflicts. Its main contribution is to give conceptual structure to a complex, contested, and highly relevant (policy) theme in contemporary labour market studies.

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Nowadays, most governments publish dietary guidelines to help promote health and prevent chronic disease among current and future generations. Users of dietary guidelines are