HOURS OF WORK*

1. General Analyses


A careful analysis of the problems which inhere in the concept of an “optimum work week.” The author indicates three criteria by which optimality might be judged—(1) maximization of total physical output, (2) maximization of employers’ profits, and (3) maximization of workers’ satisfactions. The factors affecting the length of the optimal work week under each criterion are examined. It appears that the first criterion would require the longest standard work week, the third the shortest, and the second a work week of intermediate length. The question of which criterion is socially desirable is also explored.


A highly original, sophisticated, and penetrating study of the nature of work and leisure in modern society. Professor de Grazia’s most striking conclusion is that because of the growth of “moonlighting,” commuting, “do-it-yourself,” and related activities, the secular decline in hours of work is largely illusory. Thus, the typical American has no more free time today than he had a century ago and of leisure itself—“a state of being in which activity is performed for its own sake or as its own end”—he has virtually none.


Chapter 5 of this pioneering study presents a careful statistical analysis of the contribution of changes in employment and hours of work to our past economic growth, and Chapter 6 tries to assess the impact...

* Compiled by T. Aldrich Finegan, Research Associate. Additional items will be found in Selected References No. 75, "The Shorter Work Week," published in May, 1957.

** Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.
on growth of future reductions in the work week. Denison estimates that the reduction in hours between 1900 and 1920 was completely offset, and the 1929-1957 reduction about three-fifths offset, by increases in productivity directly attributable to shorter hours. He warns, however, that future reductions in the work week are likely to be much more costly.


This statistical study tests a number of hypotheses about the determinants of the work week of adult males against cross-sectional data for occupations and industries in the United States. The major finding is that men with higher hourly earnings work fewer hours per week in the labor market, other things equal. Other factors affecting the hours which men choose to work are years of schooling, marital status, and color.


This theoretical study seeks to explain, by indifference curve analysis, why unions more commonly press for higher wage rates than for shorter hours or some combination of the two. The crux of Moses' answer is that "such a policy represents an optimum solution to a problem in welfare economics"; it improves the welfare of virtually all union members, whereas a cut in the standard work week would benefit some members while injuring others.


A statistical analysis of trends in hours of work, paid vacations, and paid holidays in the United States during the 1940-1960 period. The Bureau estimates that the typical full-time worker worked one and one-half fewer hours per week and enjoyed six more days of paid vacation and four more paid holidays in 1960 than in 1940. Over half of the total gain in paid leisure took the form of increased vacation and holiday time—"a definite shift from the pattern of earlier years."


Professor Vatter challenges the empirical relevance of the short-run, backward-sloping supply curve of labor in the present-day American
economy. His reasons: (1) the importance of the "demonstration effect" in inducing workers to emulate the consumption patterns of higher income groups; (2) the need for an ever widening array of costly recreational goods to make leisure time rewarding; and (3) the desire for additional savings as income rises. Thus, a rise in hourly wages should increase (in the short-run) the hours which men are willing to work.


An impressive study of the secular trend in hours of work and of the occupational distribution of work and leisure. The central theme is that "while the affluent society may foster an underlying preference for leisure, the emerging structure of opportunity means that a growing minority works very long hours while increasing millions are reluctant victims of too much leisure." Included in the "growing minority" are professional workers, executives, and entrepreneurs. The "reluctant victims" comprise the involuntarily retired, the intermittently unemployed, and the chronically unemployed. Wilensky also offers a Parkinson's Law for women: "Work expands so as to fill the time available for leisure."

2. Union and Management Attitudes


A brief discussion of the economic considerations favoring shorter hours, the public's attitude on this issue, the costs of a shorter work week, the ability of industry to bear these costs, and the impact of shorter hours on worker productivity. The AFL-CIO believes that the basic issue at present is not income versus leisure, "but whether general shortening of the . . . standard work week would be a useful tool in preventing and overcoming the no-hour work weeks of the many unemployed." An affirmative answer is defended. (This article is one of a series.)


This comprehensive report deals with numerous social and economic facts of the shorter work week, including the choices involved, the sources of economic growth, the costs and social implications of shorter hours, and the effects of shorter hours on employment, productive efficiency, worker fatigue, and consumption. In addition to presenting
the Chamber's views on these topics, the report offers (1) a summary of factual material, (2) quotations of selected statements by spokesmen for management and organized labor as well as excerpts from such sources as newspapers, books, and journal articles, and (3) an extensive bibliography coded to various subtopics.


This booklet hoists several danger flags regarding current pressures for a sharp reduction in the work week. While approving the historical decline in hours of work in the United States over the past seventy years, the N.A.M. contends that future reductions (1) are not appropriate for dealing with the problem of unemployment, (2) must be effected very slowly if inflation and a fall in our standard of living are to be avoided, (3) are warranted only in so far as workers desire additional leisure more than additional income, and (4) should not be forced on the economy through legislation.


In this article, the president of the United Automobile Workers recommends that the Fair Labor Standards Act be amended to provide for "a flexible adjustment of the standard forty-hour week based on the level of unemployment, so that it can stand at forty hours when we have full employment, ... and can be reduced whenever we find we are wasting man-hours through unemployment." To maintain workers' purchasing power when the work week is cut, Reuther advocates establishing a National Workweek Adjustment Fund, which would be financed by a payroll tax on all employers and which would pay benefits to workers on short-time schedules.