

“Hours for What We Will”

Work, Family, and the Demand for Shorter Hours

A woman is handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the pattern of man's advance in the professions, or by refusing to compete with man at all. But with the vision to make a new life plan of her own, she can fulfill a commitment to profession and politics, and to marriage and motherhood with equal seriousness.

BETTY FRIEDAN, *THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE*

I'm just like any modern woman, trying to have it all: loving husband, a family. It's just I wish I had more time to seek out the dark forces and join their hellish crusade, that's all.

MORTICIA ADDAMS, IN THE 1993 FILM *ADDAMS FAMILY VALUES*

Many of the shortcomings of early second-wave liberal feminism are by now familiar. Take, for example, Betty Friedan's 1963 prescription for careers for women (which she distinguished from mere “jobs”) as an alternative to culturally mandated domesticity. As her feminist critics have since pointed out, most women's experience with waged work was not then and is not now what Friedan had in mind when she waxed eloquent about the many rewards of a serious, disciplined, lifelong professional commitment. Most women in the United States worry less about being able to break through the glass ceiling than they do about falling through a structurally unstable floor. Focused as she was on a very specific population of white, middle-class American women, Friedan largely ignored the realities of a dual-wage labor market, constituted in

part by the racial and gender divisions of labor, the poles of which have continued to move apart since 1963. Add to women's often rather grim prospects for wage labor the challenges of single parenthood or the stubbornly persistent gender division of labor in the heterosexual family, and the result is an increasingly strict economy of time, with women putting in longer working hours and enjoying less free time than men (see Sirianni and Negrey 2000, 62–63).

One aspect of this legacy that has not been adequately confronted, however, is its valorization of work. Friedan's celebration of waged work as a means to social status and self-development and as a haven from cultural assumptions about feminine domesticity continue to inform feminist analytical frames and political agendas. By and large, feminists who address questions of work today focus on the struggle for more and better work and tend to neglect the possibility of struggling also for less work. As we saw in the previous chapter, the wages for housework tradition—with its signature demands for more money and less work—offers an important alternative to this pro-work tendency. The demand for money in the form of a basic income was the focus of the last chapter; here I want to address more directly the demand for shorter working hours as a locus of antiwork politics and postwork imaginaries. Toward this end, a second aspect of the legacy of wages for housework will be important as well: the recognition of the links between work and family, and insistence that the struggle against the one must include a struggle against the other. Once again, the inclusion of unwaged domestic labor poses a considerable challenge—in this case, to the politics of work time. As we will see, an analysis of the relationship between waged work and family will be crucial in thinking about what counts both as work and as its reduction. That analysis will also help to expose the shortcomings of the most popular defense of shorter hours, one that Friedan herself later came to embrace—namely, as a way to expand family time and thereby counter what she called “the real economic threat to family values” (1997, 13).

Following the model of wages for housework in yet another respect, the demand for shorter hours will be conceived here not only as a call for reform but as a perspective and provocation. On the one hand, it is a demand for a reduction in working hours to improve the quality of life. The demand for a six-hour day with no decrease in pay is the formula that I will take up here. I want to emphasize that my focus is not on

efforts to reorganize work schedules (through, for example, flextime options) but rather on attempts to reduce the number of hours people work—a reduction, moreover, that would not entail a cut in wages (unlike most forms of part-time work). On the other hand, as we have seen, a demand is more than a simple policy proposal: it includes as well the perspectives and provocations that both inform and emerge from the texts and practices by which it is promoted. Besides presenting a useful reform, the demand for shorter hours is also based on and potentially generative of a critical perspective on—and the imagination of alternatives to—the current organization of work and the dominant discourses that surround it. Thus, in addition to identifying a specific concrete goal, the movement for shorter hours can also serve to provoke an interrogation of the basic structure of work and the needs, desires, and expectations that are attached to it.

The struggle over time has been central to the history of capitalist development. Marx recounts part of this history in his chapter on the working day in *Capital*. According to his account, worker militancy over the length of the working day was critical to the process of industrialization; indeed, it was the successes of the proletarian struggle for shorter hours that provoked capital to mechanize production and thus shift the focus from absolute surplus value to relative surplus value (Marx 1976, 340–416; see also Cleaver 2000, 89). The increase in productivity that ensued helped to set the stage for what Marx imagined as a new kind of freedom, a basic prerequisite of which would be the continued reduction of the working day (1981, 959). In the United States, the struggle for the shorter day and the shorter week was the focal point of the labor movement up until the end of the Great Depression. The insistence on shorter hours was seen as an important source of solidarity, a demand that could hold together a coalition of different types of workers. As Samuel Gompers put it during the fight for the eight-hour day, “however much they may differ upon other matters . . . all men of labor . . . can unite upon this” (quoted in Rodgers 1978, 156). Women workers tended to be particularly interested in such demands (Roediger and Foner 1989, 164). Support for shorter hours peaked in the early 1930s, when the idea was hailed by its various proponents as a way to—depending on the proponent—increase productivity, reduce unemployment, drive up wages, strengthen the family, make time for domestic duties, or increase leisure time. In 1933 the Senate even passed Senator Hugo Black’s

Depression-era bill limiting the work week to thirty hours, which was shortly thereafter abandoned in favor of the Roosevelt administration's preference for creating jobs instead of reducing work. As Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt notes, in the same period that government support for the "right to work" a full-time job grew, the movement for shorter hours lost momentum. Job creation, once derided by union activists as "make work," emerged as a centerpiece of US economic ideology (1996, 34). The demand for shorter hours, increasingly associated with a constituency of women workers, was sidelined, leaving postwar labor feminists, as Dorothy Sue Cobble puts it, "with a politics of time designed primarily with men in mind" (2004, 140–41). Although efforts to achieve a shorter work year and work life continued in the postwar period (through, for example, vacation days and retirement benefits), unlike in Europe, there has been no substantial progress in the United States toward a reduction of the work day and work week since 1939 (139–40; Roediger and Foner 1989, 257–59).¹

However, the issue of shorter hours is now making its way back onto the broader US intellectual and political agenda. This resurgence revives and reinvents various elements of the idea's historical legacy. Some of the current approaches, however, hold more potential for feminists than others. One of the problems, as we shall see, is that some of the strategies by which the demand can be promoted as a policy can limit it as a perspective and provocation. As an example, one of the arguably most successful strategies employed in previous movements was to demand limits on the working day for women on the ground that long hours threatened their health. Once achieved, the precedent could then be used to secure the reduction of men's hours. One can well imagine how the deployment of the trope of feminine frailty, the narrative of rescue, and the ideal of masculine protection might have enhanced the demand's legibility and appeal. But although this might have improved the prospects of the reform's success, to the extent that this affirmation of gender difference relied on and reproduced traditional gender stereotypes, it proved more limited in its capacity to generate a broader critical perspective on and framework for public dialogue about the quality and quantity of work in women's and men's lives. What may render a demand more appealing does not necessarily enhance it as a perspective on the present, or a provocation toward a different future.

So what might we want when we demand shorter hours, and what

might we want to do in those hours? The way the proposal is framed has consequences for its eventual success as both a persuasive demand and a provocative perspective. As a demand, it should be broadly appealing—that is, it should be relevant to more than a small minority of workers—and potentially effective as a way to better their lives. Moreover, a feminist demand for shorter hours should include a broader accounting of what is recognized as work and feminist analyses of its value. Beyond the assertion of a specific policy proposal, to demand is also, as we have seen, to assert a particular discursive agenda. Considering the demand for shorter hours also in these terms, I want to take into account the ways in which it could provide a vocabulary and conceptual framework for new ways of thinking about the nature, value, and meaning of work relative to other practices. With this in mind, in the pages that follow I will build an argument about what a contemporary feminist movement for shorter hours in the United States could accomplish, and how it might most fruitfully be conceived. The discussion will be organized around three different cases for shorter hours that have recently been advanced: one that demands shorter hours as a means of securing more time for family, and two others that de-emphasize—albeit in different ways—the family as the primary rationale for reducing work. For each of these three approaches, a representative text will serve to illustrate some of their advantages and disadvantages.

LESS WORK AND MORE FAMILY

The most common rationale for shorter hours—and hence the first argument I want to address—is that it would make more time for family. This approach is particularly powerful because the emphasis on family resonates comfortably with mainstream political priorities on both the Left and the Right. After all, commentators across the ideological spectrum frequently assume that the family is the source of popular political motivation and the basis for political judgment. Furthermore, tapping into this familiar discourse frames the demand for shorter hours in terms of the easily articulated issue of work-family balance. Yet despite these advantages, I find this the least compelling rationale for work reduction. There are, as we will see, significant pitfalls to organizing a critical discourse about work and a struggle for shorter hours around the idea of the family.

Arlie Russell Hochschild presents a particularly rich and insightful

version of this family-centered approach in *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (1997). In that book, Hochschild attempts to confront what is for her an important puzzle: why do so few of the employees of a “family friendly” Fortune 500 company (which she calls Amerco) take advantage of its various programs offering shorter hours for working parents, even though they report feeling strained to the limit by the long hours they put in between work and home? Hochschild’s answer, based on a study of company policies and interviews with employees, is that because work is becoming more like home and home more like work, the people she interviewed tend to prefer to spend more time at work and less at home.² She claims that Americans live in a culture that increasingly devalues the unpaid work of parenting while overvaluing paid work, thus reinforcing the relative attractions of work over family. This time bind imposes many obvious stresses and strains on parents but is, she argues, particularly harmful to children. What is needed, Hochschild concludes, is a time movement that centers on shorter and more flexible hours at work to create more time for family.³

Hochschild writes eloquently and sympathetically about people’s struggles to reconcile the pleasures and demands of work and of life outside work and offers an astute and timely case for a movement that urges us to rethink the assumptions and values of this work-obsessed culture. In effect, she deploys the familiar discourse of “work-family balance”—a version of which shaped the family-friendly policies she investigated at Amerco—to mount a far more substantial challenge to the present organization of work than one finds circulating in human-resource departments. The problem with this rationale for shorter hours is that ultimately it cannot avoid invoking and reinforcing the conservative or neoliberal family values that have figured so prominently in recent public debates and legislative initiatives. There are a number of points at which these normative discourses of the family gain entry to or are enabled by Hochschild’s analysis. The discussion that follows will focus on five ways in which this text reproduces a restrictive and prescriptive conception of the family. Rather than being specific to this particular argument, the problems are typical and, I would argue, to some degree inevitable limitations of an analysis that privileges the family as the ground for work reduction. Indeed, one of the reasons this particular text is so interesting is that, in contrast to the classic works of

early liberal feminism, this more contemporary contribution is attentive to the diversity of household practices and yet still fails in the last analysis to distance itself from traditional family discourse.

Hochschild is clearly sensitive to the dangers from a feminist perspective of privileging a traditional model of the family, and yet she mines that model for standards against which she can formulate her critique of the organization of waged work. For example, fundamental to her analysis is what emerges in the account as a standard of a “child’s time”—a value that the working parents she interviewed continually ignored. Faced with time pressures, parents, as she describes it, “stole” time from their children (1997, 192). Even when one couple reported that their children were not suffering from a lack of time with their parents, she disagrees, claiming that “in truth, the children were on an elaborate Rube Goldberg assembly line of childcare, continually sent from one ‘workstation’ to the next” (189–90). Different estimates of how much time children need with their parents are characterized as a form of denial: “Responding to overwhelming demands on their time, some Amerco parents decided that everything seemed fine at home, that families simply did not need as much time or attention as had once been imagined” (221). Refusing to recognize “a need as a need” is one line of “defense against having to acknowledge the human costs of lost time at home” (229). Parents were thus, we may presume, in denial about their children’s true needs when they thought that a hot meal at night was not always required or when they thought that daily baths were unnecessary (228). This notion of the amount of time that children need from parents, presented as uncontested and without a history of its own, functions in Hochschild’s argument as a seemingly neutral standpoint from which to critique contemporary work schedules and work values. But of course the model of intensive parenting she poses as a norm is not natural, nor is it uncontested—a conclusion to which many of her interviewees’ rejection or “denial” of the model can perhaps attest. The problem is that the standard of “children’s time”—what they need, when, and from whom—is linked to and made possible by a family model that features a full-time, unwaged woman at home, a model that was always only available to some families and is increasingly available only to a few. As Sharon Hays points out: “One cannot simply *extract* the gendered division of labor from this portrait, since the isolation and protection of that home absolutely depended upon having one person who was fully

dedicated to its maintenance” (1998, 31). While apparently either neutral or broadly inclusive of different household formations in some respects, Hochschild’s argument implicitly privileges certain family forms and practices over others.

In addition to privileging a specific family model, her analysis also tends to naturalize the family in a way that serves to establish its fundamental difference from and superiority to work. This naturalization of the institution of the family appears, for example, as a consequence of the way it is contrasted to a particular understanding of the world of work. At Amerco, managers encouraged employees to feel part of “the Amerco family” and reinforced family-like ties among co-workers. As Hochschild describes it, “layer after layer of thin culture was thus poured on from the top” (1997, 18). In her interviews, she “heard little about festive reunions of extended families, while throughout the year, employees flocked to the many company-sponsored ritual gatherings” (44). These work relationships, she suggests, are less substantial and less authentic because they are not natural or voluntary. Of course, one need only recall the frequency with which the language of family values figures in political discourse or to consult the Defense of Marriage Act to recognize that the institution of the family has its own management discourses that are designed to manufacture consent and adjust individuals to preconceived roles. Yet Hochschild expresses concern about the “surprising” amount of family life that “has become a matter of efficiently assembling people into prefabricated activity slots” (212), as if that is not precisely what the institution of the family already was, as if to suggest that someone’s position, responsibilities, and behavior in the family had once been a matter of a unique and purely organic individual choice. Whereas work relationships are manufactured from above, family relations, she suggests, arise spontaneously from below; to the extent that she characterizes work relations as thin and inauthentic, family relations, we are left to surmise, are—or should be (there is some tension here)—substantial and elemental.

Hochschild further resorts on occasion to a nostalgic vision of the family. This nostalgia is registered in an appeal to the historical ideal of separate spheres in her critical account of the present relationship between work and family. One can see this in her references to the ways in which what had been a haven—in this case, of unalienated labor—is now contaminated by work: the family is taking on an “industrial” tone, a

“Taylorized” feel; parents are subject to “deskilling,” with children forced onto a “childcare conveyor belt”; domestic tasks are increasingly “outsourced,” and “family-generated entertainment” is now replaced by television and other commodities (Hochschild 1997, 45, 49, 209, 190, 232, 209–10). Hochschild’s allusions to the degradation of preindustrial craft labor and her suggestion that the current penetration of work into family is something new help to augment her claim that it is both desirable and possible to reparate the two once we revalue the home and have more time to resume our efforts there. One can appreciate the ways in which this nostalgic image of the family could serve to entice and inspire some to rally to its defense and challenge the dominance of work that threatens it.

The attempt to contest the overvaluation of waged work that traditional ideas of work promote by revaluing unwaged work in the household further predisposes Hochschild to a moralization of the family. What we need, in her view, is a greater “‘emotional investment’ in family life in an era of familial divestiture and deregulation” (249). Indeed, Hochschild’s strategy seems to be to demoralize waged work, to challenge the hold of traditional work values on the individual and social imaginaries, by remoralizing work in the family, calling for renewed vows of commitment there and contending that this is where we ought to spend more time and energy. Not only does this strategy risk a kind of sanctification of domestic work that continues to resonate problematically with conventional assumptions about women’s natural or socially necessary domesticity, but the effort to revalue unwaged household and caring labor replicates the very ideas about the moral virtues of work that it intended to call into question. Rather than challenge the traditional work values that are linked to waged labor, it risks simply expanding their scope. The problem, it seems to me, is that using the moralization of nonwaged work to argue for a reduction of waged work precludes a broader or more insistent interrogation of dominant work values.

Finally, despite Hochschild’s commitment to and talent for demystifying the family, using it as the standard against which to critique work leads her nonetheless to idealize the family. Reporting the harms that long hours now inflict on families is one thing, but it is something else to acknowledge more fundamental problems with the institution of the family that could threaten its appeal as an alternative to working time and a reason to demand its reduction. Here I find it interesting that

Hochschild does not comment more on the gender division of domestic labor in this text, despite both her fine previous work on the issue (1989) and the frequency with which it was raised as a problem in the interviews she recounts. It is not that she is inattentive to the distribution of household and caring labor, but when she does comment on rather than simply describe the division and the conflicts it generates, she presents the issue as more incidental than essential to the family form she defends. Yet the frequency with which the gender division of labor in the home was both practiced and identified as a source of women's pressures in and dissatisfaction with family life in her interviews suggests the need for a more direct critique of the family. Perhaps, to pursue an alternative explanation, the problem is not that work is that good, that attractive, and that satisfying to the people she interviewed, but rather that family life is really that bad, that there are more fundamental problems with the institution. But to the extent that these problems could render the family less an alternative to work than an equally deserving target of reform, paying attention to them risks undercutting the family-centered line of argument.

These elements of the argument—the tendency to privilege one family form over others, and to naturalize, moralize, wax nostalgic about, and idealize the family—serve to lend authority both to Hochschild's critique of current working practices and to her vision of a specific alternative to them. But these aspects of her argument also enable and perpetuate a normative model of the family, an ideal of family life that is deeply problematic from a feminist perspective, one that has been used as a standard from which to condemn a wide variety of relationship practices and household patterns. Her argument also tends to overlook the gender division of labor in the traditional family. Of course none of these depictions of the institution are required for the argument; indeed, one could, and often Hochschild does, make the case for work reduction without evoking a narrow and prescriptive model of the family. My claim is not that this version of the family is necessary to the perspective, but rather that it is a rhetorical temptation built into the line of argument. This is the trap that the argument sets, for both authors and readers, by relying so centrally on the trope of the family in the current context. For example, while it is true that “one need not compare” the childhoods of those whose parents work long hours “to a perfect childhood in a mythical past to conclude that our society needs to face up to an important

problem,” one would also expect that it might be tempting to try (248). For some, this strategy might make the demand for shorter hours more intelligible and appealing. But this seems a high price to pay; essentially the force of the demand is bought at the cost of its capacities as a critical feminist perspective. Rather than appropriate this discourse of the family for feminist ends, there are other, more promising ways to define the demand for and shape the perspective on shorter hours.

LESS WORK FOR “WHAT WE WILL”: DECENTERING THE FAMILY

The solution would seem to be to displace the family from the rationale for reduced hours, and the second approach I want to consider does that, emphasizing instead a broader and more open-ended set of justifications for and benefits of shorter hours. An inspired example of this approach can be found in “The Post-Work Manifesto” by Stanley Aronowitz et al. (1998). Their call for a thirty-hour week of six-hour days without a reduction in pay is part of a broader postwork vision and agenda that the authors propose as a response to current economic conditions and trends in the United States. Citing what they describe as an increase in working hours—whether through more overtime, the colonization of nonwork time by work, or piecing together multiple temporary or part-time jobs—they argue that “it is time for a discourse that imagines alternatives, that accounts for human dignity beyond the conditions of work. It is time to demand and get a thirty-hour workweek” (64). Economic restructuring, technological change, and work reorganization increasingly erodes job security, while at the same time, “the virtues of work are ironically and ever more insistently being glorified” (40). Arguing that we must think critically about the work ethic and imaginatively about possibilities for the future, the authors attempt to outline a post-work political agenda animated by a vision of “shorter working hours, higher wages, and best of all, our ability to control much more of our own time” (33). With the decline of well-paid, secure, and full-time work, what may in the past have been deemed an unaffordable luxury is, they suggest, increasingly an economic necessity (64, 69).

The movement for shorter hours is linked in this formulation to a social vision that is very different from that of the family-centered approach. In contrast to the vision of nonwork time devoted to family, the authors of “The Post-Work Manifesto” present a far more expansive set of possibilities, including time for family, community, and polity (70). I

will discuss the specific advantages of this broader conception of the goals of work reduction below. Here I want to highlight one further possibility that the authors present: more time for “what most pleases us” (76). In their insistence on this, they reinvoke an important goal—some scholars have argued it is the most important goal—of earlier movements for shorter hours: time for leisure (Hunnicuttt 1996, 52). Recalling the slogan for the eight-hour movement—“eight hours labor, eight hours rest, and eight hours for what we will”—this approach acknowledges that an important part of “what we will” is the enjoyment of leisure time. Rather than, for example, appealing primarily to norms of family responsibility, this formulation suggests that a movement for shorter hours should be animated not only by the call of duty but also by the prospect of pleasure. Departing from more familiar models of political asceticism, the approach offers the expansion of this kind of unbounded time as another goal that can enrich the demand for shorter hours and broaden its perspective on the possibilities of nonwork time.

Despite the many advantages of this approach (others of which will be discussed below), it is limited in one respect: the analysis does not attend adequately to the entire working day. As a result, shorter hours of waged work may lead to a reduction in total working hours for men, but not always for women. If in the period of the eight-hour movement, “what we will” for male workers did not often include doing their share of unwaged reproductive labor, studies of the domestic division of labor do not give much reason to be more hopeful today. Given the current privatization of social reproduction and the gender division of unwaged domestic labor, even if an employed woman’s time on the job decreases, her work in the household—housework, consumption work, child care, and elder care—could easily expand to fill the extra time. To the extent that the present organization of domestic labor is not contested and employers can continue to make distinctions between workers on the basis of their assumed responsibility or lack of responsibility for the work of social reproduction, we are more likely to be offered what are alleged to be solutions for the problem of long working hours—more part-time, flextime, and overtime work, and multiple jobs—than we are to win shorter hours for all workers. The point is that any account of working time must include an account of socially necessary unwaged labor, and any movement for reduced working time must include a challenge to its present organization and distribution.⁴ Where earlier

movements for shorter hours took for granted the gender division of privatized reproductive labor at the heart of the modern family ideal, it seems to me that a feminist movement for shorter hours today must confront and actively contest both the dearth of social support for and the gender division of that labor. This inattention to the whole of the working day also hampers the effort to contest not just work schedules but work ethics. As was the case with the family-centered approach, this effort to challenge the moralization of waged work will be at best constrained and at worst undercut if it does not extend the critique of productivist values to nonwaged household work, because the moralization of this work—defining it as that to which we should devote our lives—remains uncontested.

The family is not privileged in this rationale for and vision of shorter hours. The problem is, rather, that it is more or less ignored. The demand for shorter hours will be limited to the extent that it does not adequately account for the mutually constitutive linkages between work and family—or rather, to switch vocabularies here, between the present organization of waged work and unwaged household labor. The wage system, work processes, work ethics, and modes of worker subjectivity are intimately bound up with kinship forms, household practices, family ethics, and modes of gendered subjectivity. Attempts to challenge or reform any one of these—like the schedules of and dominant values attached to waged work—must take into account the complexity of the entanglements here.

Not only wages—I am thinking here of the “female wage” and the “family wage”—but hours too were historically constructed with reference to the family. That is to say, when the eight-hour day and five-day week became the standard for full-time work shortly after the Second World War, the worker, typically imagined to be a man, was presumed to be supported by a woman in the home. (Although this was of course a predominantly white and middle-class arrangement, it need not be accurate in fact to function effectively as a social norm and political tool.) If instead the male worker had been held responsible for unwaged domestic labor, it is difficult to imagine that he could credibly have been expected to work a minimum of eight hours a day. As Juliet Schor has argued, this system of hours could never have evolved without the gender division of labor and the high rates of full-time, household-based reproductive work among women at that point in history (1997, 49–50). This gender

division of labor as a normative ideal was supported in turn, in some cases, by waged domestic labor, which itself was marked not only by gender but also by racial divisions (see, for example, Glenn 1999, 17–18). These gender and racial divisions of labor are also what enabled the postwar labor movement to focus on the issues of overtime and wages rather than on work-time reduction. Even today, assumptions about family form and the gender division of reproductive labor continue to underwrite and be in turn underwritten by new developments in work schedules. Thus, for example, some studies suggest that where the labor force is primarily made up of women, employers are more likely to use part-time workers to maintain flexibility; indeed, certain jobs are constructed to be part time because they are generally filled by women (Beechey and Perkins 1987, 145). Thus part-time work for women—which is often low-paid and has few or no benefits and few opportunities for advancement—continues to be rationalized by reference to women’s assumed position as secondary wage earners and primary unwaged reproductive laborers. Men, in contrast, are more likely to provide flexibility by working overtime (Fagan 1996, 101; Williams 2000, 2). Both full-time and overtime are better able to pass as reasonable options insofar as it can still be assumed that someone else can take primary responsibility for domestic labor. My point is that work time—including full-time, part-time, and overtime—is a gendered construct, established and maintained through recourse to a heteronormative family ideal centered on a traditional gender division of labor. Attempts to challenge the legitimacy of the eight-hour day would do well to make visible and contest these aspects of the organization of social reproduction on which work schedules have been based.

Similarly, any attempt to challenge contemporary formulations of the work ethic should also take aim at those aspects of the discourse of the family that help to sustain them. One can detect, for instance, a mutually reinforcing asceticism that animates both the work ethic and the family ideal. One of the most persistent elements of the work ethic over the course of US history is its valorization of self-control in the face of the temptations and what Daniel Rodgers characterizes as a faith in the “sanitizing effects of constant labor” (1978, 123, 12). This same productivist asceticism, which was designed to encourage work discipline and thrift, has also served to animate the ideal of heterosexual marital mo-

nogamy. In the nineteenth century, for instance, the white, middle-class family was idealized as the form that could redirect sexual appetites and desires toward productive ends (see, for example, D’Emilio and Freedman 1988, 57). One can see this assumption at work in the efforts by early-twentieth-century social reformers to impose both bourgeois work discipline and bourgeois family forms on immigrant households (Lehr 1999, 57; Gordon 1992). Indeed, the alliance between the work ethic and this family ideal is nowhere more visible than in the history of social welfare policy in the United States. According to Mimi Abramovitz’s historical account, social welfare policy has been shaped by two fundamental commitments, one to the work ethic and the other to what she calls the family ethic—a set of norms prescribing proper family forms and roles that “articulates and rationalizes the terms of the gender division of labor” (1988, 1–2, 37). Perhaps one of the clearest distillations of these two systems of norms can be found in the overt efforts of the 1996 welfare reform to promote both the work ethic and heterosexual marriage—for example, by means of work requirements and the enforcement of paternal responsibility. Improbable as it may seem, waged work and marriage are the two socially recognized and politically approved paths from what has been called social dependency to what the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act heralds as “personal responsibility.” The broader media and policy debates about social welfare, relying on narrow models of both what counts as work and what counts as family, frequently focus on the poor single mother, often deployed as a racialized figure, for her imagined failure to conform simultaneously to the dominant family model and hegemonic work values.⁵

The partnership between the work ethic and the family ethic is sustained in and through a variety of cultural forms. One can see this interconnection operating behind the interesting coincidence of labels marking the male and female version of the tramp. The figure of the male tramp, seen as a threat to social order and values, figured prominently in public discourse from the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, when the word also came to designate a negative moral judgment on modes of female sexuality (Rodgers 1978, 226–27; J. Mills 1989, 239). What interests me here is how the tramp functions as a disavowed figure in both work and family discourse, how a similar con-

trolling image marks in comparable terms the boundary between the normative and the abject.⁶ Contrary to the central tenets of both the work ethic and the family ethic, the tramp is in each usage a figure of indulgence and indiscipline. Both male and female tramps are wanderers who refuse to be securely housed within and contained by the dominant institutional sites of work and family (see Broder 2002). Both are promiscuous in their unwillingness to commit to a stable patriarch, as shown in their lack of loyalty to an employer or to an actual or potential husband. The tramp is thus situated against legible models of both productive masculinity and reproductive femininity. Given that the accumulation of property was supposed to be one of the central benefits of a disciplined life of wage labor, and respect for property a cornerstone of the sanctity of marriage, both male and female tramps violate yet another set of fundamental social values. Each is a potentially dangerous figure that could, unless successfully othered, call into question the supposedly indisputable benefits of work or family and challenge the assumed naturalness of their appeal (see Higbie 1997, 572, 562). Just as male tramps, these “villains on a stage of toilers and savers,” threatened to inspire otherwise compliant workers by their “shameless rebellion against all work,” the figure of the female tramp threatened the ideals of sexual propriety and women’s roles at the heart of the bourgeois family model (Rodgers 1978, 227). Though the language of the tramp may have fallen out of use, the basic offenses that the label identified continue to be registered under and regulated by means of more contemporary controlling images. The racialized figure of the welfare queen, in which the supposed violations of both work ethic and normative family form are distilled, is one of its most injurious reiterations.⁷

My point is that the work ethic and the family ethic remain joined together by a host of historical, economic, political, and cultural threads. This renders shortsighted any claim to challenge the schedules of waged work without addressing the organization and distribution of unwaged reproductive work, and makes problematic any effort to demote prevailing work values while either promoting or leaving uncontested prevailing family ethics. What might be the terms of a time movement that cannot be subsumed into the discourse of family values or serve to augment the power of traditional work values and that—by taking into account the whole of our working hours, both waged and unwaged—could be a feminist movement too?

A contemporary time movement must certainly focus on the linkage between waged work time and domestic life, but a challenge to long hours must also include a challenge to the contemporary ideology of the family. To recall the wages for housework perspective explored in the previous chapter, if, as Selma James argues, work and family are each integral to capitalist valorization, then “the struggle against one is interdependent with the struggle against the other” (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 12). A third text, Valerie Lehr’s *Queer Family Values: Debunking the Myth of the Nuclear Family* (1999), recognizes the relevance of the household to the topic of work hours but seeks to avoid advancing a normative discourse of the family.

Lehr ends her critical analysis of and proposed agenda for US gay and lesbian family politics with a very brief discussion of the demand for shorter hours. Although this may seem on the surface to be a rather odd conclusion to a book about the family that is centered at least initially on an examination of the struggle for gay and lesbian marriage, it is actually a logical outcome of the author’s efforts to situate evolving discourses of the family in the context of some of the changing exigencies of capitalist production and accumulation. Lehr argues that rather than continuing to allow capital and the state to define and constitute what counts as an acceptable family, we should pursue strategies that give people more freedom in determining their intimate and social relationships (1999, 171–72). Reducing the workweek is offered as one significant way to provide the material basis for enlarging this freedom. Lehr poses two basic approaches to securing the resources that can enable choice: either expand the state’s welfare provisions and, with it, the state’s potential to shape and control our lives, or, as she prefers, attempt to formulate demands that have the potential to allow greater autonomy from the structures and institutions, including the state, that now presume to dictate so many of our choices (172). As an example of the latter approach, the demand for shorter hours is “intended not to bring the state into people’s lives, but to use state power to enable citizens to have the resources that they need to make real choices” (13).

Both “The Post-Work Manifesto” and *Queer Family Values* suggest how the demand for shorter hours could be made not in the name of the family but in the name of freedom and autonomy. I refer here not to the

solipsistic notion of freedom as individual sovereignty, but to a different conception that can best be described as the capacity to represent and recreate oneself and one's relationships, the freedom to design, within obvious bounds, our own lives.⁸ This account links freedom not to pure voluntarism or to autonomy vis-à-vis others, but to the possibility of gaining a measure of separation or detachment from capitalist control, imposed norms of gender and sexuality, and traditional standards of family form and roles. It is thus not only a matter of securing individual freedom of choice, but—as the autonomist Marxist tradition might have it—of making some space for the collective autonomy that might alter some of the terms of such choices. In this way, shorter work hours can be seen as a means of securing the time and space to forge alternatives to the present ideals and conditions of work and family life. This conception of the value of shorter hours is also an important element in “The Post-Work Manifesto.” Its authors refer to the prospects of a “self-managed life” and time away from “the impositions of external authority,” envisioning what it would be like to “finally have the time to imagine alternatives to the present and the possibility of a better future” (Aronowitz et al. 1998, 76). Like Lehr, they offer a more expansive conception of potential alternatives than is found in the family-centered approach, highlighting, for example, the importance of citizens' time and the possibility of a heightened politicization. Indeed, beyond improving the standard of living, these authors hope that additional nonwork time could enable higher levels and new forms of collective projects and political participation (74; see also Lehr 1999, 174–75).

What Lehr adds to this is a focus on the prospect of nonwork time as relationship time, time to recreate and reinvent relations of sociality, care, and intimacy. From this perspective, the goal is not to liberate the family from the encroachments of work. The institution of the family should be recognized as an integral part of the larger political economy, not a separate haven; the normative discourse of the family is intimately linked to and implicated in the work values that should be challenged. The goal is rather to claim the time to reinvent our lives, to reimagine and redefine the spaces, practices, and relationships of nonwork time. The demand could thus be imagined also in relationship to the possibilities of what Judith Halberstam calls “queer time”: temporalities that are, among other things, “about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (2005, 2). By these

means, the movement against work becomes linked to a transfigurative politics—not just an opportunity to advance preexisting demands, but also a process of creating new subjectivities with new capacities and desires, and, eventually, new demands.

To return once again to that famous slogan from the eight-hour movement—“eight hours labor, eight hours rest, and eight hours for what we will”—we may now more clearly see an interesting ambiguity in the phrasing of the demand. Does time “for what we will” refer to time for what we want, or time for what we will to be? In other words, is it more about getting what we wish for or about getting to exercise our will? Is it a matter of being able to choose among available pleasures and practices, or being able to constitute new ones? Both, I think, are crucial goals that the demand for shorter hours should articulate and advance: more time to partake of existing possibilities for meaning and fulfillment, and time to invent new ones. It is thus not only about more time for leisure as the term is traditionally conceived. It could instead be articulated as time to explore and expand what Rosemary Hennessy describes as “the human capacity for sensation and affect” that has been corralled within and reified by the logics of commodity production, consumer culture, and identity formation in late capitalism (2000, 217). Contrary to those critics of consumer society who fear that shorter working hours would create only more time for mindless consumption, thereby ensuring our further descent into commodity fetishism, there is reason to expect that if given more time, people will find ways to be creative—even if those ways do not necessarily conform to traditional notions of productive activity. Rather than simply a state of passivity, it is important to recognize the potential social productivity of nonwork. By this measure, the problem posed by an expansion of nonwork time is not, as E. P. Thompson notes, “‘how are people going to be able to *consume* all these additional time-units of leisure?’ but ‘what will be the capacity of experience of the people who have this undirected time to live?’” Perhaps if what Thompson calls the Puritan time-valuation were to relax, we could, as he speculated, “re-learn some of the arts of living” (1991, 401). Again, one of the things this conception of the demand for shorter hours should help us to think about is the value of nonwork time as a resource for social, cultural, and political projects of transvaluation.

But perhaps rather than highlight the social productivity of nonwork—remaining thereby within the terms of productivism’s own logic—

should reflect for a moment on why it is that the prospect of nonproductive time is so disturbing, why it is that, as Aronowitz observes, “we may be terrified of free time” (1985, 39). Many objections to the demand for basic income center not on its expense but on its ethics, and the possibility of shorter hours raises comparable concerns—in this case, threatening the model of productive subjectivity and the prohibition on idleness that remains fundamental to its elaboration. Indeed, the possibility of more time for consumption may be less threatening than the prospect of idle time, not only because of what we might do with more nonwork time, but of what we might become. Productivist ethics assume that productivity is what defines and refines us, so that when human capacities for speech, intellect, thought, and fabrication are not directed to productive ends, they are reduced to mere idle talk, idle curiosity, idle thoughts, and idle hands, their noninstrumentality a shameful corruption of these human qualities. Even pleasures are described as less worthy when they are judged to be idle. And what might be cause for ethical distaste in the case of the individual can, when compounded into a generalized indiscipline, become a threat to social order. This fear of free time, whether manifested as idleness or indiscipline, should not be underestimated. If nothing else, it can testify to the ways in which models of both the individual and the collective have been shaped by the mandate to work, and continue to be haunted by what Rodgers describes as the “immense, nervous power” of the contrast between work and laziness (1978, 241).⁹

Beyond creating time for people to fulfill their duties to the family as it is presently conceived, a feminist time movement should also enable them to imagine and explore alternatives to the dominant ideals of family form, function, and division of labor. The demand for shorter hours should not only speak in the name of existing commitments but also spark the imagination and pursuit of new ones. The point is to frame it not in terms of the relentless choice between either work or family, but to conceive it also as a movement to expand the range of possibilities, to secure the time and space to imagine and practice the personal relations and household configurations that we might desire. Shorter hours could thus be about having time for housework, consumption work, and caring work; time for rest and leisure; time to construct and enjoy a multitude of inter- and intragenerational relations of intimacy and sociality; and time for pleasure, politics, and the creation of new ways of living and

new modes of subjectivity. It could be imagined in these terms as a movement for the time to imagine, experiment with, and participate in the kinds of practices and relationships—private and public, intimate and social—that “we will.”

TOWARD A FEMINIST TIME MOVEMENT

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, an argument for shorter hours should be assessed as a demand, but also as a perspective and a provocation, an opportunity to think differently and a call to act collectively. The task, then, is to consider how to articulate the demand—its content and rationale—to ensure that the reform could be effectively advanced and, at the same time, that it could serve as an occasion to raise new questions and spark fresh deliberation about the possibilities and limits of the present organization and ethics of work.

It is important to underscore the potential value in the present moment of the critical perspective that the demand could generate. At its best, the demand for shorter hours could open up a public debate about the present and future status of work and provide an avenue for developing a critical discourse on work values. The continued cultural authority of the work ethic today is both disturbing and puzzling: “Just what is the reason for public and private silencing around discussions of the work ethic? What is the ‘secret’ that has the force of a social ‘fact’—that paid work is a condition of human nature and that ‘one must work till one drops?’” (Aronowitz et al. 1998, 72). Again, the point is not to deny the present necessity of work or to dismiss its many potential utilities and gratifications, but rather to create some space for subjecting its present ideals and realities to more critical scrutiny. A feminist perspective on work-time reduction in the United States could enable a change in some of the ways we think about work by denaturalizing both the eight-hour day—the seemingly obvious, unquestioned standard for full-time work—and the even more insistently naturalized privatization and gendering of reproductive labor. It should provide an opportunity to raise questions about those aspects of life that are too often accepted as unalterable. Of course the terms of such a public discussion about work values and routines would have to be made more complex. While the term “work” succeeds in registering the social dimensions of certain practices and thereby rendering them subject to political debate, what counts as work—particularly with regard to unwaged caring practices

like parenting—would need to be continually reevaluated. Perhaps we need a new vocabulary to better account for the range of people's productive or creative practices and experiences, and to enable us to confront most effectively the structures and discourses that organize them. At the very least, we need to replace the category of nonwork with a range of distinctions.

Let me conclude with a few observations about how best to conceive a feminist movement for shorter hours and what it might accomplish. It is important to emphasize that the goal is the reduction rather than the mere rearrangement of paid work time. While the problem of work-family balance may be widely recognized, the strategy most popular with employers—the flexible work schedule—neither reduces the hours of work nor challenges the assumption that social reproduction should be a private, and largely female, responsibility (Christopherson 1991, 182–83). The demand for a six-hour day is crucial; however, it can only be a beginning or a part of the struggle. A feminist demand for work reduction should attend to the whole of the working day by, for example, insisting that estimates of the socially necessary domestic labor time of individuals be included in both calculations of working time and proposals for its reduction (Luxton 1987, 176). The demand must link this critical analysis of waged work to an interrogation of the organization of both waged and unwaged reproductive work. In terms of waged domestic labor, this requires challenging the gender and racial divisions of waged domestic labor and the low value placed on this work. On the unwaged front, it might mean demanding the reduction of this work time as well as by struggling to make visible and contest the gender division of unwaged household and caring labor, as well as the lack of adequate publicly funded services to support this socially necessary labor. Up to this point, feminists have had relatively little success in degendering and socializing responsibility for social reproduction. But making time for more women and men to remake their lives requires demands for services like high-quality, affordable child care, education, and elder care, and for adequate levels of income for unwaged and underwaged parents.

There are myriad possible benefits of reduced work hours. For instance, an important goal of the shorter-hours movement historically, and one that is certainly relevant today, was to alleviate unemployment by expanding the number of employees necessary to cover the shorter shifts. In addition, a shorter work week could reduce underemployment

by raising some part-time employment to the status of full-time. Besides flextime, the second most prominent existing remedy to the problem of time is the part-time schedule, which most workers cannot afford. Key to this proposal for shorter hours is that it does not entail a reduction of income. This would ensure that it would be relevant not only to more-privileged workers but to workers at all pay levels.¹⁰ A third solution to the problem of time, hiring domestic workers, is similarly unavailable to most people. To return for a moment to the epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter, it should be noted that both Betty Friedan's and Morticia Addams's solution to the time bind involved the long-standing practice by which some women hire other women as domestic service workers (Friedan recommended that women hire housekeepers, and Morticia hired a nanny) as a way to create the time to pursue other projects. As with the other two strategies, flextime and part-time, hiring domestic workers constitutes a partial solution to a general problem, a private strategy for the relatively privileged to deal with what is and will remain a collective predicament.¹¹ Because they avoid challenging the existing organization of production and reproduction, such individual solutions only perpetuate the larger problem. In contrast, the demand for shorter hours—particularly when it is linked to struggles to gain recognition for, and to restructure the social organization of, domestic labor—could appeal to a broader constituency and make it possible for new political alliances to form across race, class, and gender lines.

Indeed, the politics of time in general and the demand for shorter hours in particular seem relevant to the feminist politics surrounding waged domestic work. Feminists recognize that buying more services is not the simple remedy for working more hours that the popular media often assume. The titles of recent articles in feminist journals like "Is it Wrong to Pay for Housework?" (Meagher 2002) and "Do Working Mothers Oppress Other Women?" (Bowman and Cole 2009) suggest some of the problems that this option poses for some feminists, even if these particular authors answer their questions with a qualified "no." Although discussions of such questions elicit a variety of positions, there is broad consensus among feminists involved in such debates that it is important to improve the conditions of domestic employment, that the work deserves more respect and should be better compensated, that the employment regulations governing it need to be both enforced and enhanced, and that the organizing initiatives of workers must be sup-

ported. Interestingly, however, the question of hours is seldom raised; the debate tends to focus more on whether there are feminist reasons to accept or reject domestic work's commodification than on the long working hours that arguably produce a significant measure of the demand for these services. Although these struggles for better work are vitally important, so too, I want to suggest, is the demand for less work.

Reducing work hours has always been an issue around which different groups could find common cause. As David Roediger and Philip Foner observe in their history of US labor and the working day, "reduction of hours became an explosive demand partly because of its unique capacity to unify workers across the lines of craft, race, sex, skill, age, and ethnicity" (1989, vii). Today it has the potential to bring together a broad coalition of feminists, gay and lesbian activists, welfare rights advocates, union organizations, and campaigners for economic justice. Hochschild claims that a focus on expanding family time in order to meet children's needs could serve as a cause around which to organize a broad coalition of time activists; certainly, she suggests, we can agree on the importance of that (1997, 258). But such a demand can easily slide into and reinforce the kinds of traditional norms and assumptions about the nature of family life that still dominate discussions about and representations of intimacy and sociality. My concern is that tapping into this discursive reservoir and these wells of social meaning to fuel the demand for reform risks compromising the demand's promise as a perspective and a provocation. Therefore, rather than fighting for shorter hours in the name of the family, I believe that a more compelling, broadly appealing demand and a richer, more generative perspective and provocation can be fashioned around the goals of freedom and autonomy. Conceived in these terms, time is a resource to use however we might wish. The demand would be for more time not only to inhabit the spaces where we now find a life outside of waged work, but also to create spaces in which to constitute new subjectivities, new work and nonwork ethics, and new practices of care and sociality. By framing the demand for shorter hours in terms of this more open-ended and expansive set of goals, by demanding more time for "what we will"—and resisting the impulse to dictate what that is or should be—we can create a more progressive coalition and sustain a more democratic discourse.