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Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time

Christoph Hermann

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A fascinating both theoretical and historical overview, which at the same time is so close to current working-time policy challenges. Definitely a comprehensive introduction and a pleasure to read!

Steffen Lehndorff, *Institute for Work, Skills and Training, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany*

While much has been written about the defeat of labor movements since the end of the 1970s, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the intensification of workloads and greater corporate control over workers' time – even though these so profoundly impact working class lives and carry such great potential for mobilizing resistance. *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time* is the crucial starting point for correcting this unfortunate neglect.

Sam Gindin, *former research director of the Canadian Auto Workers and Packer Chair in Social Justice, York University, Toronto, Canada*

Work time has perhaps been the subject of more confusion and controversy than any other concept in Marxist theory. With formidable intellectual clarity, Christoph Hermann unravels the theoretical tangles whilst never forgetting the real-life contestation between workers and employers. In the process, he demonstrates the continuing relevance of Marxist theory for understanding labor in the twenty-first century. This book establishes Christoph Hermann as a leading thinker in contemporary political economy.

Professor Ursula Huws, *University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK*

Work time is an extremely timely issue – not only for workers who suffer from increasingly long work hours, but also for an alternative and sustainable mode of development and living. The book stands out for combining both perspectives, as well as for illuminating theoretical debates and practical struggles. A very valuable contribution to political economy and ecology!

Professor Ulrich Brand, *Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, Austria*

Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time

John Maynard Keynes expected that around the year 2030 people would only work 15 hours a week. In the mid-1960s, Jean Fourastié still anticipated the introduction of the 30-hour week in the year 2000, when productivity would continue to grow at an established pace. Productivity growth slowed down somewhat in the 1970s and 1980s, but rebounded in the 1990s with the spread of new information and communication technologies. The knowledge economy, however, did not bring about a jobless future or a world without work, as some scholars had predicted. With few exceptions, work hours of full-time employees have hardly fallen in the advanced capitalist countries in the last three decades, while in a number of countries they have actually increased since the 1980s.

This book takes the persistence of long work hours as a starting point to investigate the relationship between capitalism and work time. It does so by discussing major theoretical schools and their explanations for the length and distribution of work hours, as well as tracing major changes in production and reproduction systems, and analyzing their consequences for work hours.

Furthermore, this volume explores the struggle for shorter work hours, starting from the introduction of the ten-hour work day in the nineteenth century to the introduction of the 35-hour week in France and Germany at the end of the twentieth century. However, the book also shows how neoliberalism has eroded collective work time regulations and resulted in an increase and polarization of work hours since the 1980s. Finally, the book argues that shorter work hours not only means more free time for workers, but also reduces inequality and improves human and ecological sustainability.

Christoph Hermann is a senior researcher at the Working Life Research Centre in Vienna and a lecturer at the University of Vienna, Austria.

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Routledge frontiers of political economy

Are capitalist economies nearing the end of a long-term trend toward shortening the work week? Even with the enduring financial crisis, working time is getting longer and employment or job sharing is becoming passé. This book examines the root causes of the trends and issues with work time using a pluralist approach – assessing theory, history, and public policy from a comparative perspective. Fresh new arguments for shortening working time to promote self-determination, equality, and an ecologically sustainable society, are offered.

Deborah M. Figart, *Professor of Education and Economics, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, USA*

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