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5 She heated some peasoup and made toast and bacon and eggs and he ate up everything she gave him. While they were eating, they had a nice cozy talk about the movement. She told him about her experiences in the great steelstrike. She could see he was beginning to take an interest in her. They'd hardly finished eating before he began to turn white. He went to the bathroom and threw up.

10 "Ben, you poor kid," she said, when he came back looking haggard and shaky. "It's awful."  
 "Funny," he said in a weak voice. "When I was in the Bergen County jail over there in Jersey I came out feeling fine . . . but this time it's hit me."  
 "Did they treat you badly?"

15 His teeth clenched and the muscles of his jaw stiffened, but he shook his head. Suddenly he grabbed her hand and his eyes filled with tears. "Mary French, you're being too good to me," he said. Mary couldn't help throwing her arms around him and hugging him. "You don't know what it means to find a . . . to find a sweet girl comrade," he said, pushing her gently away. "Now let me see what the papers did to what I said."

20 After Ben had been hiding out in the apartment for about a week, the two of them decided one Saturday night that they loved each other. Mary was happier than she'd ever been in her life. They romped around like kids all Sunday and went out walking in the park to hear the band play in the evening. They threw sponges at each other in the bathroom and teased each other while they were getting undressed; they slept tightly clasped in each other's arms.

25 In spite of never going out except at night, in the next few days Ben's cheeks began to have a little color in them and his step began to get some spring into it.  
 "You've made me feel like a man again, Mary," he'd tell her a dozen times a day. "Now I'm beginning to feel like I could do something again. After all, the revolutionary labor movement's just beginning in this country. The tide's going to turn, you watch. It's begun with Lenin and Trotsky's victories in Russia." There was something moving to Mary in the way he pronounced those three words: Lenin, Trotsky, Russia.

30 After a couple of weeks he began to go to conferences with radical leaders. She never knew if she'd find him in or not when she got home from work. Sometimes it was three or four in the morning before he came in tired and haggard. Always his pockets bulged with literature and leaflets. Ada's fancy livingroom gradually filled up with badlyprinted newspapers and pamphlets and mimeographed sheets. On the mantelpiece among Ada's Dresdenchina figures playing musical instruments were stacked the three volumes of *Capital* with places marked in them with pencils. In the evening he'd

35 read Mary pieces of a pamphlet he was working on, modeled on Lenin's *What's to Be Done?* and ask her with knitted brows if he was clear, if simple workers would understand what he meant.

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55 One Sunday in August he made her go with him to Coney  
Island where he'd made an appointment to meet his folks;  
he'd figured it would be easier to see them in a crowded  
place. He didn't want the dicks to trail him home and then be  
60 bothering the old people or his sister who had a good job as  
secretary to a prominent businessman. When they met, it was  
some time before the Comptons noticed Mary at all. They sat  
at a big round table at Stauch's and drank nearbeer. Mary  
found it hard to sit still in her chair when the Comptons all  
turned their eyes on her at once. The old people were very  
polite with gentle manners, but she could see that they wished  
65 she hadn't come. Ben's sister Gladys gave her one hard mean  
stare and then paid no attention to her. Ben's brother Sam, a  
stout prosperouslooking Jew who Ben had said had a small  
business, a sweatshop probably, was polite and oily. Only  
70 Izzy, the youngest brother, looked anything like a working-  
man and he was more likely a gangster. He treated her with  
kidding familiarity; she could see he thought of her as Ben's  
moll. They all admired Ben, she could see; he was the bright  
boy, the scholar, but they felt sorry about his radicalism as if  
75 it was an unfortunate sickness he had contracted. Still his  
name in the paper, the applause in Madison Square Garden,  
the speeches calling him a workingclass hero, had impressed  
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## Of Toil

Don't mourn for me, friends, don't  
weep for me never,  
For I'm going to do nothing forever  
and ever.

Traditional epitaph  
of an English charwoman.

5 THE INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM has long held out one rather striking  
promise to its participants. That is the eventual opportunity  
for a great deal more leisure. The work week and the work  
10 year will be radically reduced. There will be much more free  
time. Over the last quarter century, a reputation for cerebra-  
tion beyond the reach of run-of-the-mill minds has been most  
easily achieved by speculation on how, when this day comes,  
men will employ what is invariably called their newfound lei-  
15 sure. It is agreed that the question deserves the most careful  
study. There are dangers of abuse. Over the last thirty years,  
the average work week in industry has remained almost con-  
stant. The standard work week has declined but this has been  
offset by increased demand for overtime work and the compan-  
20 ion willingness to supply it.<sup>1</sup> During this period average weekly  
earnings, adjusted for price increases (but not allowing for  
taxes), have nearly doubled. On the evidence, one must con-  
clude that, as their incomes rise, men will work longer hours  
and seek less leisure.

20 The notion of a new era of greatly expanded leisure is, in  
fact, a conventional conversation piece. Nor will it serve much  
longer to convey an impression of social vision. The tendency  
of the industrial system is not in this direction.

25 Specifically, in the early stages of the industrial system, toil  
was dreary, repetitive and physically painful. It was also very  
long. Severe prison sentences featured the inclusion of hard  
labor. Heaven was a place, above all, of eternal rest. Until  
curbed by the enlightened intervention of (among others)  
Warren Gamaliel Harding, the steel industry in the United  
States worked a twelve-hour day and an eighty-four-hour week.  
30 There were no holidays; in the steel towns all days were alike.

<sup>1</sup>In 1941 the average work week in manufacturing was 40.6 hours; in 1969 it was 40.6 hours. In between it was a shade higher. *Economic Report of the President, 1970.*

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When the shift changed, a man worked twice around the clock; as a reward, in return, he had twenty-four hours off a fortnight later. The management of wants was still in its infancy and the steelworker — without radio or television and often illiterate — was well beyond its reach. As important therefore as making more money, and perhaps more important, was to make it with fewer hours of this hideous toil. Men worked to meet a minimum — to make a living. Few nonworkers have been able since to suppose that progressive reduction in hours can be other than a prime goal of the working stiff.

Outside of the industrial system, as in the cotton and vegetable fields, work can still be hard and tedious. But within the industrial system, though always with exceptions, work is unlikely to be painful and it may be pleasant. And the worker has now been brought within the fully deployed power of modern demand management. He too is subject to the revised sequence. So, where his precursor in the steel towns worked to make a living, he works to satisfy his constantly expanding wants. The result is obvious. With more pleasant work and expanded wants, a man is somewhat more likely to choose more work than more leisure.

As one moves into and up through the technostructure, men increasingly exercise the option of more work and more income. And some pride themselves on an unlimited and competitive commitment to toil — one that, regularly, outruns even the most imaginative possibilities for the acquisition and use of goods and services.

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It follows that to argue for less work and more leisure, as a natural goal of industrial man, is to misread the character of the industrial system. There is no intrinsic reason why work must be more unpleasant than nonwork. Presiding over the console that regulates the movements of billets through a steel mill may be as pleasant as sojourning with a connubial fishwife. To urge more leisure is a feckless exercise so long as the industrial system has the capacity to persuade its people that goods are more important. Men will value leisure over work only as they find the uses of leisure more interesting or rewarding than those of work, or as they win emancipation from the management of their wants, or both. Leisure is not wanted *per se* but only as these prerequisites are provided. [---]



***Mechanic* (1920)**

Photographer : **Lewis H. Hine** (USA, 1874-1940)

In *Le musée de la photo*, Phaidon, Paris, 2002