

C. Maitte and D. Terrier, *Les rythmes du travail: Enquête sur le temps de travail en Europe occidentale XIV^e – XIX^e siècle*

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This valuable study accomplishes a rare double feat: it is both comprehensive and path-breaking. Maitte and Terrier's book builds on, and often supersedes, two durable disputes in early modern European labour history, the storms over the fortunes of English industrial workers and the industrious revolution. As the fierce, Cold War debate over the standard of living of England's early factory workers started to lose steam, one conclusion was accepted by all participants. The industrial revolution had transformed non-acquisitive workers, whose hours of labour and leisure were indissoluble and governed by the task rather than the clock, into 'economic men and women'. Thus E. P. Thompson, in his foundational article on 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', explained that time in Georgian England became a 'currency: it is not passed but spent'.¹ This great shift, Thompson continued, was linear. Fresh from the farm or the artisan's shop, the first generation of factory labourers learned the value of time, the second forged the ten-hour movement, and the third walked out in pursuit of overtime rewards. The labouring poor were now 'modern', and there was no turning back to work timed, if at all, by Church bells. But Thompson's claims about the hours of pre-industrial toil, unlike those of Maitte and Terrier, rested on literary sources and prescriptive appeals.

As the Cold War closed, Jan de Vries located the making of the modern workers' sense of time and its worth in their unprecedented access to manufactured and imported, tropical goods. From the mid-seventeenth century, a consumer revolution touched the English and Dutch labouring poor, who *chose* to sacrifice leisure in favour of tea, sugar, and mirrors. As a result, the number of days they put in at the workbench increased. Equally, they sweated through longer, intensified hours of daily toil. Crucially, this rising demand led to the mechanisation of production and the clustering of workers in mills and factories, where regular attendance and steady intensity were the order of the day. But de Vries's account, like Thompson's, did not rest primarily on close readings of output registers or the records of payments made for hours in the shops.

Maitte and Terrier take full advantage of the research prompted by the unsettled debates about the workers' standard of living and the industrious revolution, as well as overdue attention to women's work, unpaid labour, and the broad, complex spectrum of coerced toil. Their examination of these matters, among many others, is strengthened by the *longue durée* of their inquiry. It ranges from the fourteenth

to the nineteenth centuries, with careful consideration of practices and issues across this entire timespan. Maitte and Terrier are therefore able to undermine neat Rostovian stages and linear models of time-thrift and time-discipline. And their mastery of a wide variety of past labour processes permits them to fashion a history from the workshop up, in which the measure of time and calculation of its worth were lodged in subtle ecologies of production and profit. Nevertheless, Maitte and Terrier's discussion is not deterministic. Rather, they reveal the blend of production imperatives, the fresh and ancient conflicts among masters, journeymen, and apprentices, and the shifts in markets, taste, and techniques that framed evolving rhythms of labour in a flock of trades.

As Maitte and Terrier establish, hard work, long hours, six-day workweeks, specific starting times, fixed output quotas, night work, unpaid labour (especially in the preparation of raw materials and burnishing of finished products) and, of course, calls for punctuality and clean hands all emerged before large-scale mechanisation. So did worker challenges about control of the clock: tinkering with the movement of its hands was hardly rare. Out of this caldron of expectation and mistrust arose ceaseless struggle about the workday and its rewards. In sixteenth-century Cracow, for example, the master papermakers conceded that journeymen would be paid for 'overwork'. This pact reflected the trade's understanding of a 'day's work'. It was a measure of output, shared from Kent to Fabriano, that was to be completed by both candle- and sun-light. Moreover, the durability of papermaking's productivity standards over several centuries opens a crack in the foundation of de Vries's version of a distinctive era of industrious revolution.

Maitte and Terrier demonstrate conclusively how early modern European production processes that linked mills, modest workshops, and individual workers in their garrets were matched by mixed systems for the reckoning and rewarding of worktime and output. Accordingly, they put paid to the classic claim that the displacement of payment for time by payment for results (piece rates) was the critical innovation in the schooling of modern industrial hands. In fact, Maitte and Terrier dismiss the arrival of a unique, modern rhythm of labour somehow shared by on-call, gig labourers and self-employed, homebound men and women. Their focus on the stakes, conflicts, and hard-won accords forged within the imperatives and custom of every craft and industry offers a satisfying account of how diversity in past worktime came to be reflected in the persistent diversity of current worktime.

Maitte and Terrier's assessments of the Weber thesis, with its distinction between the profitable use of time in Catholic and Protestant countries, and the effects of the workers' self-proclaimed 'day off' known as St. Monday, rightly remain cautious. Their judicious approach fits nicely with the agenda of their study. After all, it is at once a learned synthesis of decades of scholarship on early modern European worktime and a road map for the next generation of researchers. Even more, the lacing of this volume is a set of questions begging for further exploration. How much work, for example, was accomplished on holidays? How did disruptions in the physical environment of production, such as waterwheels idled by droughts or freezes, influence the annual calendar of work in various regions and trades? How did diverse political economies and their

policies influence patterns of labour and time-thrift? And what did workers – men, women, and children – contribute to the complex, ever-shifting practices, suppositions, and ideals that informed time-discipline in their trades? To paraphrase Herbert Gutman, in the matter of worktime, how did the labouring classes influence what masters and managers wanted from them – and how often were they able to curb their bosses' productivism? That such important questions emerge from Maitte and Terrier's remarkable book is a measure of its value, and the utility of putting in time to savour it.

Note

1 E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967), 61.

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