

Have you ever wondered why you're so busy, where your time goes, or how much your time is really worth?

This book will radically alter your understanding of the nature and value of time. Authored by leading experts in social, economic and environmental sciences, it explains how moving towards shorter, more flexible hours of work could help tackle urgent problems that beset our daily lives – from overwork, unemployment and low well-being, to entrenched inequalities, needless high-carbon consumption and the lack of time to live sustainably.

Time on Our Side challenges conventional wisdom about what makes a 'successful' economy. It shows us how, through using and valuing time differently, we can reclaim the time to care for each other, follow our dreams and enjoy each moment.

About this book

“Time is the one resource in human life that is absolutely scarce. Discretionary time has also been shown to be a major determinant of perceived well-being. The unorthodox, empirical-minded and change-oriented authors who have contributed to this volume weave issues of time allocation and time use to those of labor and employment, growth and productivity, gender and care, life style and consumption, money and time, and environmental/climate sustainability. The result is a coherent, comprehensive, and highly suggestive account of ideas and policies whose time has come.”

Claus Offe, Emeritus Professor of Political Science, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin

“To a lot of people, the idea of reducing work hours will seem like a modern heresy. But working long hours doesn’t necessarily equate with more productivity and it certainly doesn’t equate with a fulfilled life or a better environment. In this book, the contributors think the unthinkable – a standard working week of 30 hours or less – and show that it is quite possible to conceive of a world in which more people work less with all kinds of benefits that follow on. This remarkable volume could be the start of a quiet revolution in attitudes to life and work.”

Professor Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Warwick

“This important volume places time at the heart of a range of vital political issues including the environment, socio-economic inequality, gender equality and care. Most fundamentally, it underlines the significance of the politics of time for how we fashion a good life and a good society.”

Baroness Lister, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, Loughborough University

“With the publication of this outstanding set of essays, **nef** brings to the public an extraordinarily rich range of insights into how we could all make much better use of our time. If you want to know how environmental sustainability, social justice, and gender equity can all be enhanced through shorter paid working hours, then take the time to read this stimulating book.”

Peter A. Victor, Author and Economist at York University, Toronto

“Time is money... except it isn’t. This exploration of the politics of time and the asymmetries between clocks, work, wages, the seasons of the day and the cycles of life is vivid and vital.”

Beatrix Campbell, writer and broadcaster, London

Time on Our Side: Why we all need a shorter working week

Edited by Anna Coote and Jane Franklin

Contributors: Barbara Adam, Valerie Bryson, Ian Buck,
Tania Burchardt, Molly Conisbee, Anna Coote, Mark Davis,
Angela Druckman, Anders Hayden, Bronwyn Hayward,
Tim Jackson, Dominique Méda, Martin Pullinger,
Juliet Schor, Andrew Simms, Robert Skidelsky

First edition published in hardback in Great Britain in 2013 by

nef (the new economics foundation)

3 Jonathan Street

London

SE11 5NH

www.neweconomics.org

E-mail: info@neweconomics.org

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7822 6300

The moral right of Anna Coote, Jane Franklin, Barbara Adam, Valerie Bryson, Tania Burchardt, Molly Conisbee, Mark Davis, Angela Druckman, Anders Hayden, Bronwyn Hayward, Tim Jackson, Dominique Méda, Martin Pullinger, Juliet Schor, Andrew Simms and Robert Skidelsky to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Acts of 1988.



Some rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or photocopying, recording, or otherwise for commercial purposes without the prior permission of the publisher. This book is Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

Every effort has been made to trace or contact all copyright holders. The publishers will be pleased to make good any omissions or rectify any mistakes brought to their attention at the earliest opportunity.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-908506-39-9

Registered charity number 1055254



The new economics foundation supports The Forest Stewardship Council [FSC], the leading international forest certification organization. All **nef** book titles are printed on FSC certified paper.



Cover design and art direction danfarleydesign.co.uk

Typeset by Tetragon, London, NW1 7JE

Production management Eddepro, West Sussex RH12 3DQ

Copy edited by Juno Baker

Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Padstow PL28 8RW

Contents

Introduction: A new economics of work and time – Anna Coote	ix
Essay summaries	xxiii
Why we need a shorter working week	
The triple dividend – <i>Juliet Schor</i>	3
Two commentaries	
In search of the ‘good life’ – <i>Robert Skidelsky</i>	21
The trouble with productivity – <i>Tim Jackson</i>	25
Challenging Assumptions	
Clock time: tyrannies and alternatives – <i>Barbara Adam</i>	31
Hurried and alone: time and technology in the consumer society – <i>Mark Davis</i>	41
Redistributing paid and unpaid time	
Time, care and gender inequalities – <i>Valerie Bryson</i>	55
Time, income and freedom – <i>Tania Burchardt</i>	69
Shorter hours, smaller footprint	
The ‘green life course’ approach to designing working time policy – <i>Martin Pullinger</i>	83
Time, gender and carbon: how British adults use their leisure time – <i>Angela Druckman, Ian Buck, Bronwyn Hayward and Tim Jackson</i> ...	101
Learning from other countries	
Patterns and purpose of work-time reduction – a cross-national comparison – <i>Anders Hayden</i>	125
The French experience – <i>Dominique Méda</i>	143
A provocation	
National Gardening Leave – <i>Andrew Simms and Molly Conisbee</i> ...	155
Acknowledgements	169
Notes	171
Bibliography	195
About the authors	213
Index	219

Introduction: A new economics of work and time

Anna Coote

Most of us live by the clock and the calendar. Weekday clock time tells us when to get out of bed, have breakfast, get the kids to school, go to work, leave work, pick up the kids, go home, make dinner, watch television, get the kids to bed, go to bed. We're allowed to do different things on Saturday and Sunday, on bank holidays and usually in two or three weeks of the summer months.

Each hour, measured by the clock, is the same for all of us: made of 60 equal minutes and pacing out the day in 24 equal measures, at all times of the year and in all parts of the world. Each year, measured by the Gregorian calendar, is the same for all of us: made of 365 days, each comprising the same number of hours and minutes, divided into the same number of weeks and months. We take all this for granted as though it were as natural as the sun rising in the East.

Time that is divided into discrete, globally consistent units can be measured and counted uniformly. The units become a tradeable commodity. We are all familiar with the saying: *time is money*. We sell our clock measured hours for wages and – in theory, at least – the more hours we sell the more money we get. But most of us have little or no control over how our time is valued, or how much of it we must trade to earn a living. It has become 'normal' to spend between 35 and 45 clock hours in paid work each week, for somewhere between 45 and 48 weeks of the calendar year.

The rest of our time is assigned no monetary value whatever. It is not officially tradeable and, according to conventional economic wisdom, it is just a lost opportunity.

Some questions arise. How 'natural' is clock time? How accurately does it reflect the way we actually experience time? How 'natural' is the 40-hour paid working week? How accurately does it reflect the time we actually need to exchange for money? How much money is enough? Is our time worthwhile only when it is sold? How do we experience and value the time we do not sell?

And what would happen if we exchanged less of our time for money? Suppose, for example, we did paid work for 30 instead of 40 hours each

week? Life would certainly be different. Perhaps it would be better – for people, for the planet and for our beleaguered post-industrial economy. If that were so, how could we change our habits of thought and practice, our regulations and institutions, to build a new consensus about what makes a ‘normal’ paid working week?

You will find these questions tackled in these pages by a range of authors offering a rich mix of expertise. They were brought together by the new economics foundation (**nef**), following the publication of our report *21 Hours*. In this we proposed a radical redistribution of paid and unpaid time, calling for a slow but steady move towards shorter and more flexible hours of paid work, with the provocative end-goal of a 21-hour week. We set out evidence-based arguments as to why such a shift would bring substantial social, environmental and economic benefits. The report received such a wide and enthusiastic response that we were encouraged to convene a major conference at the London School of Economics in 2012, followed by an expert seminar where we discussed early drafts of the essays in this book.

Why time matters

The economist John Maynard Keynes famously predicted in 1930 that rates of productivity, driven by technological change, would rise so rapidly that by the twenty-first century no one would need to work more than 15 hours a week. He was right about a lot of things, but spectacularly wrong about that. Certainly, productivity rates have risen dramatically since the 1930s. But in the last three decades, workers’ share of the surplus has not grown at the same rate. Meanwhile, markets have developed – globally – by encouraging people to buy and consume more and more. Faster cars, bigger houses, more furniture, ‘convenience’ foods and labour saving devices, gadgets galore, copious clothing and cosmetics, toys for children, toys for adults, flights and foreign holidays. All these things have become ‘normal’ accoutrements of everyday life in the rich world, and aspirational goods for many in the developing world.

To afford rising levels of consumption (from our diminished share of productivity growth), we have had to keep on working long hours. By 2011, on average, all people of working age in the UK were putting in 36.3 hours’ paid work a week, while those working ‘full-time’ were clocking up 42.7 hours.¹ In the United States, people work much longer.² Even so, many have found their wages too low to meet the costs of all the shopping required of them to stoke and service the capitalist economy. So they’ve been encouraged to borrow money, shedloads of it. The need to service their debts locked them even more tightly into long hours of employment, while the banks turned their high-risk credit into dodgy ‘derivatives’ and gambled them away on the global markets.

We all know what happened in 2008. By this time, people on lower wages had accumulated debts they could not repay, however many hours they worked; and the banks ran out of ways to hide their losses. The global economy plunged into an unprecedented crisis, from which it has yet to 'recover'. Millions lost their jobs in the wake of the crash and now have no paid work at all. The wealthier elites emerged unscathed. The widening gap between the rich and the poor, the powerful and powerless, is one of the dirtiest scandals of the twenty-first century.

Running alongside this economic drama, hand-in-hand, has been the rapid rise of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accelerating climate change and the steady depletion of the earth's natural resources – mainly a consequence of the high-rolling consumerism of the rich world. In a nutshell, people have been working long hours to earn money to buy stuff that's made and used in ways that inflict profound and irreversible damage on the ecosystem on which all life depends.

It's clear that time, money, consumer goods and planetary boundaries are interdependent. The lines on the graphs are heading in the wrong direction. That's a very good reason to think again about time and to change the way we value and use it, whether it is traded or not. Time is not just money. It is far more precious than that.

Time beyond growth

In her opening essay, Juliet Schor argues that countries in the rich world cannot continue to grow their economies if they are to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to sustainable levels. We must face up to a future with little or no economic growth. One of the worst effects of a flat-lining economy is usually high unemployment – but this can be offset, to an extent, if people work fewer hours. Schor proposes that workers, especially above-average earners, should start negotiating annual increments due from increased productivity (where this occurs) in terms of more time rather than more money. This, she argues, will help to keep more people in employment and to erode the prevailing ethos that attaches higher pay and status to those who work longer hours. It will also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. People who work shorter hours tend to have a smaller ecological footprint. This is not just because they are earning less *pro rata* and therefore have less money to buy energy intensive stuff. It is also because they have more disposable time, which makes it possible to live at a different pace and to think again about what life is for and how much money is enough to live a good life.

Robert Skidelsky picks up this theme. He argues that we must develop a shared understanding of what constitutes a 'good life' and suggests seven elements: health, security, respect or dignity, personal-ity, friendship, harmony with nature and leisure. There are two political

requirements, he says, for moving towards a good life: first, to create a 'market in hours' so that workers have more control over how much labour to supply, and, secondly, to remove the pressures to consume that currently distort people's decisions about how much time to spend in paid employment. He suggests legislation to support a progressive reduction in paid working hours, combined with further curbs on advertising, and a consumption tax that falls heavily on luxury items. Only by pursuing the goals of a good life, says Skidelsky, can we escape from today's rat race, where accumulating money and stuff has become an end in itself and where much of our consumption is pathological.

Tim Jackson points to another, related pathology: 'squeezing time though the frame of productivity growth to increase output in the economy'. He suggests we relinquish our 'fetish for labour productivity'. There are some jobs and professions where working faster and faster makes no sense at all. Think of teachers, doctors, nurses, carers, actors, musicians. The quality of their work depends not on producing more per hour of human labour, but on irreducible inputs of time. In conventional economics they count for little because they can't sensibly increase their productivity. This, says Jackson, comes 'perilously close to the lunacy at the heart of our growth obsessed, resource intensive, consumer economy': a whole set of activities that could provide meaningful work and contribute valuable services are written off as worthless. Yet an economy built around the exchange of human services rather than the relentless throughput of materials would be far more sustainable. Questioning how we experience and value time would help us think differently about productivity, Jackson observes. Time has malleable qualities: 'More things can happen in a very short space of time doing absolutely nothing, than can happen in a very full working day, working as hard as you possibly can.'

Time beyond 'efficiency'

Beyond our 'common sense' understandings, time has a multitude of meanings, functions and effects. As Barbara Adam argues, long before time became associated with the fixed regimes of clocks and money, it was – and remains – associated with 'life, change and difference'. All times are *not equal*; context matters, including season, place and infinitely varying circumstances. Crucially, social relations are not characterised simply 'by time as abstract exchange value, but also by time as gift in the context dependent interactions between spouses, lovers and friends, carers and the cared for'. When people give time to one another, they do so according to a very different set of principles from those involved when they sell time for money. They have a different take on past and future: think of parents and children, or friendships based on years of

shared experience. There are, says Adam, two equally unquestioned sets of assumptions about time: one is time measured in discrete units by clocks and calendars; the other is time subject to the multiple rhythms of nature, evolution and human relations. The first is a relatively recent construction; the second predates the first, underpinning, interweaving and surrounding it. But in modern economics, politics and employment practices, the first entirely blots out the second – because ‘only as an abstract, standardised unit can time become a medium for exchange and a neutral value in the calculation of efficiency and profit’.

When time is money, speed matters a lot. The more work that is squeezed into a unit of time, the greater the efficiency and profit. This conflicts sharply with other realms of experience, such as caring for children or practising a musical instrument, where using more time rather than less can yield far more valuable results.

The idea of speed as a means to efficiency has come to dominate our lives in ways that were unimaginable only a few decades ago. Mark Davies considers how new mobile technologies, online consumerism and social media are transforming everyday experience. In our ‘curiously hurried lives’, our perception of time has become ‘so acutely accelerated that we live in a series of fleeting episodic moments... characterised by a series of seemingly disconnected intensities’. We are under growing pressure, as individuals, to consume, to be efficient and productive, and to connect and communicate. This is apparently made easier for us by increasingly speedy and sophisticated technologies. But the pace of technological ‘progress’ simply piles on the pressure. We are online for much of our waking hours – to work, to buy or to interact with others at any time, anywhere, often ‘multi-tasking’ to squeeze more into the same passage of time. It gets quicker and easier to buy stuff, so we buy more and more. We can mass-produce social relations on a global scale with minimal investment of time, physical exertion or emotional engagement. So we have more and more ‘friends’, with whom we communicate more and more. We can work not just in the office but in bars and cafes, in bedrooms, kitchens and bathrooms, on trains and planes, day and night. So we work more and more. Almost imperceptibly (no one has made much fuss about this) the digital revolution has crashed open the barriers between work time and home time, and hugely increased the scale of activity that can be accomplished in a single moment.

In other words, while we count out units of time according to the old industrial clock, which still ticks away in our heads, most of us in the rich world and growing numbers in the developing world live by a very different set of time rules: much faster, much less compartmentalised, much more intense. Perhaps we have the impression of more control, flexibility and choice. But that’s illusory and the price is high. Not only

do we all seem much busier, lacking time to do things we want to do, but busy-ness attracts higher status: a desirable condition to which we should all aspire. Not only are we beset by more and more information, but we are also more easily bored; we are losing the capability to ponder slowly and think deeply. As Davies observes, knowledge has become 'a commodity to be consumed just like any other'. Not only do we have flimsier relations with friends we contact via social media, but this can mean we have less in the way of meaningful face-to-face contact, which is 'fundamental to an ethical life lived in the company of others'; more of us feel lonely and isolated, in spite of – or more likely because of – the amount of time we spend surfing the web and 'facebooking' other people.

Our hurried lives aren't making us any happier; rather the reverse. New technologies may be churning up the conventional boundaries between paid and unpaid time, but moving to a shorter standard working week could nonetheless open an escape route, by challenging contemporary values, and helping to change habits and expectations. As Davies says, it might help 'each of us to become citizens, carers and creators within our own communities, through reconnecting with other human beings in their physical (and thus moral) proximity'.

Economies of time and care

Time devoted to intimate personal relationships that develop through love, kinship, care and physical proximity has a different character from time exchanged for money. Valerie Bryson observes that it is fluid and open ended, revolving around being, doing and interacting, rather than simply getting things done. She argues that moving to shorter hours of paid work could help make significant strides towards gender equality. It would validate patterns of time use that are typically female. It would help to distribute caring and workplace responsibilities more equally between women and men. It would 'challenge the dominant temporal mind set of society, encouraging a relationship that is more appropriate to giving and receiving care'.

Without care, as Bryson says, society would collapse. Most of it is done by women, unpaid and invisible (or overlooked) by elites, who base notions of importance, normality and success on male paradigms and give lower status and reward to the 'roles, attributes and patterns of behaviour traditionally associated with women'. The time that women devote to caring and housework locks them into patterns of employment that are low paid, marginal, insecure and predominantly part time. But what if 'part time' became the new 'full time', with – say – 30 hours as the new standard? Think of all the time this would free up for men to share caring and housework. It could transform the distribution of choice and opportunity between women and men. Bryson is under no illusion

that all men will readily accept such a ‘radical inversion of dominant thinking’, especially when it threatens their ‘inherently fragile’ masculine identity. But she argues that attitudes are changing: there is evidence that fathers are now more inclined to favour a more equal division of paid and unpaid labour. A shorter working week could overturn conventional ideas about which abilities are natural and which skills are valuable, as well as what’s important, normal and successful. It might stimulate fresh thinking about how to value and organise work (such as caring) where success depends on quality of relationships and on processes that are inherently slow, rather than on speedy throughput. It could also ease the growing pressures on time poor families, as paid work becomes less secure and more intense.

People can be described as ‘time poor’ when their time is so thoroughly absorbed by earning a living, caring and other responsibilities that little or none is left to their discretion. Tania Burchardt demonstrates that how much ‘discretionary’ time an individual has depends on a combination of resources and responsibilities. Notably, levels of income and obligations to care for others have a strong influence. Discretionary time is an important measure of an individual’s ‘substantive freedom’ – that is, what you are capable of doing with the resources available to you, in order to pursue your personal goals. Burchardt develops a model to investigate the balance of resources and responsibilities available to people in different circumstances. She finds several factors that – singly and combined – may diminish discretionary time. These include having low educational qualifications, having many and/or young children, being single and being disabled. The crucial point here is that moving towards a shorter paid working week will not alleviate time poverty on anything like an equal basis, because people have different degrees of control over their time, depending not just on the number of hours they are expected to work in a particular job, but also on their income and responsibilities. Typically, a lone mother with a low wage job would not necessarily have more ‘freedom’ if her hours of paid work were reduced. How far the potential benefits are realised – and by whom – ‘depends critically on what other policies are put in place’. Affordable child care and a higher hourly minimum wage could help to ensure that the benefits are more evenly distributed.

Economies of time use and climate change

Efforts to reduce paid working hours have, until now, focused mainly on achieving social goals, such as a better ‘work–life’ balance, and economic goals such as avoiding redundancies and retaining skills in the workforce in recessionary times. They have less often focused on environmental goals. But, as Juliet Schor has noted, it is becoming increasingly urgent

to fend off global warming and there is some evidence that a shorter working week could help to reduce GHG emissions – by helping to change energy intensive patterns of behaviour by individuals and businesses. Martin Pullinger asks whether policy can ‘reconcile diverse environmental, social and economic goals whilst being tailored to respond to the needs, preferences and capabilities of different demographic groups and different employment sectors’. Comparing the UK and the Netherlands, he models the effects of work time reduction on GHG emissions, showing the differences between income groups in three scenarios: a 20 per cent reduction in hours equivalent to a four-day week; a number of new career breaks for care, study and other purposes, and a combination of the two. The effect on emissions is greater in the first and third scenarios and, in all three, it is far greater for higher earners.

The estimated cuts are significant, but the contribution of lower income groups is negligible. It may therefore be tempting to focus on reducing hours for those at the upper end of the income scale, as this would cut more carbon and would also help to reduce the pay gradient between lower and higher earners. On the downside, however, it would intensify the time dimension of inequality identified by Burchardt: lower earners would still be poorer and they would also have less discretionary time. Pullinger reviews a range of policy options, combining rights to shorter hours and career breaks with increased support for lower earners in what he calls a ‘green life course approach’. Above all, he points to the need for careful analysis and customisation, tailoring policies specifically for environmental gains as well as for fairness and accessibility.

If spending less time in paid work appears to reduce GHG emissions, can we safely conclude that using time instead for unpaid work and leisure will be more environmentally friendly? Well, up to a point. Angela Druckman and her co-authors analyse emissions related to different activities and find (not surprisingly) that ‘a simple transfer of time from paid work to the household may be employed in more or less carbon intensive ways’. A significant proportion of carbon is ‘locked up’ in basic household provisioning, such as how we cook, shop, care and commute. Some household activities, such as reading, playing games, or simply spending time with friends and family, have relatively low emissions, while some pastimes – particularly those involving travel – are carbon heavy. Strategies to encourage low carbon activities would ‘have to navigate the subtle and sometimes not so subtle differences that characterise people’s use of leisure time’, which are closely bound up with gender and identity. Druckman *et al* agree about the danger of deepening inequalities and the need to make ‘appropriate changes in underlying and supporting physical and social structures’.

Learning from other countries

Working hours have been reduced in different ways in different countries, with various motivations and effects. Over the last two centuries, as Anders Hayden points out, reductions have reflected a wide range of objectives: 'higher quality of life for employees, creating and saving jobs, gender equality, reducing work-family conflicts, ecological sustainability, and workplace modernisation.' There are often tensions between these goals. For example, where business interests predominate, work time reduction may lead to the same amount of work being compressed into fewer hours, or to people having less choice over when they put in their hours. Such arrangements may reduce 'time poverty' but they would be unlikely to improve quality of life or to reduce work-family conflicts.

What is striking from Hayden's review of working time across Europe is the wide variety of arrangements and trade-offs, responding to different pressures and interests. Some enhance workers' own needs for flexibility, choice and security; others give the advantage to employers. Some privilege particular groups of employees at the expense of others. Some are negotiated, others imposed by law. Some are more likely than others to reduce GHG emissions, or to retain skilled employees in the workforce, or to improve gender equality. In short, social justice, environmental sustainability and a flourishing economy are possible consequences of shorter paid working hours, but *not* inevitable. It all depends on how it's done. And there are plenty of real-life examples – of good and bad practice – from which we can learn.

The French experience of a 35-hour week is a case in point. This was introduced by the two 'Aubry' laws (named after the then Minister for Employment, Martine Aubry) in 1998 and 2000. Dominique Méda traces the political manoeuvring behind the legislation, the different goals and effects of the two laws, and public responses to them. The first, says Méda, aimed to reduce unemployment and share out jobs, while the second 'did less to reduce the working hours of individuals, than to make their hours more flexible, largely to the advantage of employers'. Workers responded differently according to their experience: when and how their employers introduced and managed shorter hours; their personal circumstances (parents with young children and in managerial roles reported much more favourable effects); how far their work had been intensified; whether they felt they had been consulted; and how much control they retained over their time. There is no evidence, says Méda, to support the claim that the innovation undermined the 'work ethic' in France or reduced productivity. A substantial proportion of employees reported better working conditions as a result of the 35-hour week, which survived efforts by Nicolas Sarkozy to abolish it during his term

as president. Méda's findings confirm that the devil is in the detail – and the politics – of a shorter working week.

Cutting to the chase

So far we have learned, from these essays and from **nef's** earlier work, that there are no simple equations between shorter paid working hours and social, environmental and economic gains. It is complicated by a vast range of variables – including income, gender, culture – and the complex ways in which different policies and habits, role and responsibilities, and interests and institutions interact.

But some certainties can be pulled from the tangle of ifs, buts and maybes. Here are just four. One: moving to shorter hours of paid work across the labour force would be more likely than not to encourage slower and more sustainable patterns of living. Two: it would be more likely than not to release more time for men and women to fulfil caring responsibilities. Three: some countries have demonstrated that it is possible to have significantly shorter average hours than, say, the UK and US. Four: there is no correlation between shorter average paid working hours and the strength of a country's economy.

Andrew Simms and Molly Conisbee offer a provocation to challenge conventional assumptions about time. They propose a four-day week coupled with rapid expansion of green spaces for cultivation in urban areas. They call it 'National Gardening Leave' and argue that using time differently, for purposes other than earning money, can bring manifold benefits. Of course not everyone has a garden, but it would nevertheless help to 'resolve the paradox of overwork and unemployment'; it would give people more time to be better parents, carers, friends and neighbours (as well as gardeners) and – crucially – it would help to safeguard the environment. They argue that it could help us all to get off the treadmill of energy intensive consumerism that drives us, as Tim Jackson puts it, 'to spend money we don't have on things we don't need to create impressions that won't last on people we don't care about'. More urban greenery, more local food production and more community-based gardening would all contribute, say Simms and Conisbee, to the well-being of people and the planet. They point to the state of Utah, USA, where all public service employees worked a four-day week in a brief but popular experiment, and to a city analyst who found that cutting down to four days greatly improved his quality of life: 'You may get 20 per cent less pay but you get 50 per cent more free time.' Whether the extra free time is for gardening or not, the nub of their argument is that, with all the caveats, the call for a shorter paid working week deserves serious attention and bold imagination.

A zeitgeist issue

It is an argument that will not go away. Judging by the huge volume of response it generates whenever it is aired through the media (as it is increasingly), nearly everyone has an interest in time. Some feel they have too much of it on their hands; others that they are impossibly busy. Many wish they had more hours to call their own, or to spend with their children or elderly parents. Some can see retirement bearing down on them and wonder how to cope with 'doing nothing' (which is how not working for money is routinely understood). As these essays have demonstrated, we are interested in time as not just a matter of seconds, minutes and hours – or even just as something associated with paid work – but as something that we experience, value and utilise in various ways that are largely unnoticed and unexplained. And, as Barbara Adam says: 'all times are not equal'.

If there is now a gathering momentum behind the idea of moving to shorter hours, it is for at least three reasons. One is the fading lure of consumerism. There's good evidence that, beyond the point of meeting life's necessities (albeit a changeable concept), buying more stuff doesn't enhance our well-being and it's increasingly apparent that needless consumption is taking an impossible toll on finite natural resources. Another reason is that more and more people are aware of being caught in a profound and prolonged crisis: we have a global economy that is damned if it grows (because of the likely negative impact on climate change) and damned if it doesn't grow (because of the likely negative impact on jobs and income). Crisis provides a strong incentive to think afresh and seek out alternatives.

A third reason is this. The 'problem that has no name', as Betty Friedan called it, is ready to be named again. The phrase was used by Friedan in 1963, to describe the way women felt obliterated by an unquestioned division of labour and purpose, which they had not chosen and could not control. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* has often been credited with launching the 'second wave' of feminism, which raged through the later 1960s and 1970s. Fifty years on, the problem is only marginally different. It is less about enforced joblessness and housework; more about the pressures of paid work and caring. It is still about the combined impact of under-valued responsibilities and stifled opportunities, locked in place by the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid time.

Nowadays women are expected to go out to work and bring home a wage, but they must do so in ways that interfere as little as possible with, first, caring for children and, later, caring for ailing parents – and often both at once. They are under-valued in the workplace when they do so-called 'part-time' jobs, which attract lower wages and status because

they are not seen as proper (that is, 'full-time') employment. The formal economy could not survive for a moment without the work women do at home. Yet in the terms of the formal economy, this work is un-valued and largely unnoticed: a problem that has no name. It is an absurd situation that is ethically indefensible and politically unsustainable. Moreover, it is avoidable.

Making the transition

Reducing hours of paid work for men as well as women would loosen the bolts that hold up the edifice of gendered inequalities. It would make it possible to manage an economy that isn't growing without widening income inequalities, by sharing out the work and keeping more people in paid jobs. It would challenge accepted notions of 'normality', changing aspirations and patterns of behaviour that are wrecking the planet and failing to improve human well-being. Looked at this way, time offers a powerful lever for change, with huge scope for helping to build a sustainable future.

No one here is suggesting that it will be easy to shift to, say, 30 hours as the new standard working week, or that there are no bear traps along the way. The most important next step, in our view, is to address the problem of low pay. There is no point trying to cut hours of paid work if the poor suffer first and most. This is an issue that **nef** is beginning to address, but it needs to be tackled from several angles: what is 'fair' pay and what's a reasonable ratio between high and low pay in any organisation? What is a reasonable minimum wage or 'living wage' for workers who put in 30 rather than 40 or 50 hours a week? What must governments, employers, trade unions and political campaigners do to achieve levels of pay that are compatible with social justice and sustainability?

Another important goal is to explore ways of improving incentives for employers. Many of them currently assume that shorter hours would threaten their capacity to manage staff effectively, to increase productivity and to remain competitive. This is partly a matter of learning from successful economies where employers routinely manage workers on shorter hours. It also requires parallel strategies for training (so that work can be shared among people with the requisite skills), while managers learn to deal effectively with job-sharing, shift patterns and other arrangements for combining larger numbers of workers that are each doing fewer hours per week.

As I was writing this introduction I received an unsolicited email from Qaiss Dashti, who works with the UN Development Programme in Kuwait. He had read about **nef**'s case for a shorter working week and wanted to tell us this: 'In the month of Ramadan in the Middle East all companies reduce the working hours from eight hours to five hours for

30 days, and surprisingly we all finish our work like it's an eight hour work day. We even discuss this between ourselves as employees: how a shorter day is much better and makes us more positive and willing to use the rest of the time for sports or family, and I guess it reflects back on our performance at work.' His account suggests that shorter hours can be uncontentious, productive and popular, once a pattern of working time is established as 'normal' and culturally acceptable.

A third challenge is to find ways of achieving incremental change while building popular support. We have always maintained that a reduction in paid working time is something to be pursued gradually over a decade or so. We have seen that there's a wide variety of policies adopted by different countries for reducing working hours. Several of the authors here make suggestions about how to get started in the right direction. Overall, there would seem to be three entirely plausible and promising strategies, which could be mutually reinforcing. The first is to trade productivity gains for a bit more time each year rather than just for money, as Juliet Schor suggests. This will work better for some kinds of employment than for others where (as several authors note) increasing productivity is neither possible nor desirable.

A second strategy is to follow Belgium and the Netherlands by enshrining in law the right to request shorter working hours and the right to fair treatment regardless of hours worked. Accordingly, employees would be able to apply for shorter hours, within agreed parameters, while employers would be obliged not to withhold permission unreasonably. It would be unlawful to discriminate unfairly against individuals because they do shorter hours. This would help to improve flexibility for workers and to establish shorter hours working as an entitlement rather than a deviation from the norm.

A third strategy is to initiate hours reduction at both ends of the age scale. At one end, following the Netherlands, young people entering the labour market for the first time could be offered a four-day week (or its equivalent). That way, each successive cohort adds to the numbers working a shorter week, but no one has to cut their hours. Before long, there would be a critical mass of workers on shorter hours and others may want to do the same. At the other end of the age scale (following an idea suggested by **nef's** earlier work) incremental reductions of working time could be introduced for older workers. For example, those aged 55 and over could reduce their working week by one hour each year. Someone on 40 hours a week at 55 would thus be working 30 hours a week by 65 and – if they continue in paid employment – 20 hours by 75. The shift would be gradual and universal, enabling people to carry on working for more years without undue stress and strain, adjusting slowly but steadily to shorter hours and then to retirement. Over time,

the cohorts of youngsters who enter the workforce on a four-day week will reach 55. Thirty hours will be the new standard. Gradual reductions could continue for older workers: deciding how exactly this is done can be left to future generations.

These essays offer a range of evidence, analysis, insights and ideas. Together, they make a powerful contribution to the debate about time, work and moving towards a sustainable economy. They are a beginning, not an end: we welcome responses, critiques and additions from all who read the book. We cannot say at this stage whether – or how fast – this growing body of knowledge will inspire widespread practical action. We think it should be soon. Time will tell.

Essay summaries

Why we need a shorter working week

The triple dividend

Juliet Schor

How people divide their time between paid work and other activities can make a big difference to their ecological footprint, to rates of unemployment, and to the quality of individual and community life. Current policies on work and time, based on the relentless pursuit of economic growth, are failing to avert catastrophic damage to the environment. Juliet Schor examines the structural connections between hours of work and ecological impact, paying attention to the effects of both scale (size of economy) and composition (mix of products produced and consumed). She presents new findings on the impact of working hours on ecological footprints and CO₂ emissions across OECD countries, showing how working hours are a powerful lever for reducing eco-impact. She then suggests how to make the transition to a shorter-hours economy, trading productivity growth for time not just money, as people's preferences adapt to changing circumstances.

Two commentaries

In search of the 'good life'

Robert Skidelsky

Why did Keynes' 1930s prediction that people today would be richer and work far fewer hours fail to materialise? Robert Skidelsky suggests it's because more people find work enjoyable and satisfying than in the past, because many are afraid of unstructured leisure time, and because wages are low and too few think they can afford to work shorter hours. The promise of consumption and of good things to come keeps people striving for more. If we get off this treadmill to consume, we might reconsider what we mean by the good life. We could then work out how to structure our institutions to make it easier to live such a life. The basic components of the 'good life' include health, security and dignity. The political means of achieving this goal include job sharing, a reduction in working hours, wealth distribution, changes in taxation and basic income. Overall, there is such a thing as a good life, it can be achieved, but it is not the life that is currently on offer.

The trouble with productivity

Tim Jackson

Tim Jackson challenges the argument that more labour productivity inevitably leads to more growth and more jobs. What happens if we let go of our fetish for labour productivity? How can we make an economy work when it isn't chasing continual growth? We might rely less on technological developments and more on building an economy around care and culture. These are areas where it seldom makes sense to apply conventional productivity goals. . Once we understand that human labour is at the heart of society, we can think again about how we experience and value time. It's a slippery commodity. More things can happen in a few minutes of doing absolutely nothing, than in a very full day of hard-pressed paid employment. . Thinking differently about time helps us to reassess the value of what we do and to challenge assumptions about productivity and growth.

Challenging assumptions

Clock time: tyrannies and alternatives

Barbara Adam

Time is not what most of us think it is. Our assumptions are taken for granted and rarely explored. We think of time measured by clocks and calendars: standardised units applied uniformly across the world. This is how we've come to think of time as money. It's a resource that can be priced and traded. Barbara Adam shows how time has become a commodity in capitalist economies, with speed highly valued as a route to greater productivity and profit. In fact, time is much more complex and flexible, experienced variously, depending on context. All times are not equal. Season, hour, place and condition all make a difference. If we unearth and challenge our assumptions about time, we can shed new light on gender, age, sustainability and social justice – and this will help us to develop alternatives to current working practices.

Hurried and alone: time and technology in the consumer society

Mark Davis

The idea that we are 'saving time' through digital communications is deeply flawed and ultimately self-defeating. In fact we just get busier, cramming more and more into our increasingly hurried lives. And, paradoxically, the more we communicate via digital technologies, the more likely we are to become isolated and lonely. Our rapidly intensifying relationship with new technologies triggers two significant questions. How can we live an ethical life in relation to others if we communicate with them in ways that are more virtual than real? And how can principles of equality, democracy and self-determination survive if we live our

lives primarily as individual consumers, rather than as citizens, carers, or creators? What's required, argues Mark Davies, is fundamental change to the way in which we use and distribute our time. As we go on trying to living faster, in pursuit of more money to fund more consumption, we are living not just on borrowed money, but also on borrowed time.

Redistributing paid and unpaid time

Time, care and gender inequalities

Valerie Bryson

A radical reduction in 'normal' paid working hours could help to redistribute responsibilities between women and men. It would leave more time for giving and receiving care. Care work, whether paid or unpaid, is time-consuming and mainly provided by women. The time involved in caring for others tends to go unnoticed and be under-valued. Carers are economically penalised, entrenching gender inequalities. Bryson contrasts the temporal logic of the workplace with the interpersonal flow of time in caring relationships. She argues that this flow of open-ended and contingent time is very different from the time-is-money logic of the capitalist workplace. A redistribution of paid and unpaid time would benefit men by enabling them to live in a less pressurised, more care-oriented society with a broader understanding of masculine identity. Women would benefit from a new 'standard' paid working week that better supports and rewards their existing patterns of life.

Time, income and freedom

Tania Burchardt

People should have enough free time to pursue their own goals and interests, while securing an adequate standard of living and caring for those who depend on them. The number of hours of paid and unpaid work required to secure a standard of living and to provide for the care of family members, varies significantly between individuals, depending on their resources and circumstances. This essay offers a conceptual model of how resources interact with responsibilities to produce a range of feasible time allocations, which in turn generate combinations of disposable income and discretionary free time. Some groups need much greater support than others – in terms of public policy interventions – to ensure that a shorter working week helps to narrow, rather than widen, inequalities.

Shorter hours, smaller footprint

The 'green life course' approach to designing working time policy *Martin Pullinger*

What level of environmental benefits could arise from reductions in paid working time? Martin Pullinger proposes a 'green life course' approach that supports and encourages working time reduction to benefit people and the environment. He models the impact on greenhouse gas emissions and household incomes of different scenarios in the UK and the Netherlands, involving a 20 per cent reduction in the weekly working hours of full time workers. He assesses the impact on incomes, expenditure and carbon footprints of households, estimating the total change in national greenhouse gas emissions. He then looks at the implications for the design of working time policy, drawing lessons from the Netherlands and Belgium.

Time, gender and carbon: how British adults use their leisure time *Angela Druckman, Ian Buck, Bronwyn Hayward and Tim Jackson*

To meet the UK's challenging targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, we will need to change the way we do things in our daily lives. One way is to focus on the goods people buy and on shifting to alternatives with a lower impact. But it is just as important to change the way people use their time. This essay explores the greenhouse gas emissions per unit of time spent on different types of unpaid activity, such as household chores and leisure pursuits, by an average British adult. How does time use vary within households, and how does this affect carbon emissions? The authors find that leisure activities are more closely associated with lower carbon emissions than non-leisure activities, and that a higher proportion of an average man's carbon footprint is due to leisure than an average woman's. They consider the implications for the varying roles carried out in different types of household, with carbon as a potential marker for social justice, along with the implications for policies to reduce working time.

Learning from other countries

Patterns and purpose of work-time reduction: a cross-national comparison

Anders Hayden

A range of goals have driven recent reductions in paid working time: the pursuit of better quality of life, creating and saving jobs, gender equality and ecological sustainability. There are tensions and synergies between these goals. For example, a shorter working week can help to reduce carbon intensive consumption and to generate more employ-

ment. Anders Hayden provides an overview of work-time reduction in different countries, mainly in Europe. He outlines the main ways to pay for shorter working hours, and examines the pros and cons of different work time options, along with barriers and opportunities for change.

The French experience

Dominique Méda

What happened when the French government introduced a 35-hour week? Dominique Méda considers the impact of the two 'Aubry laws' to reduce working hours in France in 1998 and 2001. The first aimed primarily to create more jobs, but triggered opposition from employers. The second worked more in employers' interests, giving them more flexibility to decide when workers would put in their hours. The laws were generally popular with parents of young children but popular support for them eroded as workers found, after the second law, that they had less control over their time, with tasks compressed and labour intensified. Méda argues that changing individualised assumptions about working time would make it easier to share work and to open up space for public deliberation. A serious reduction in working hours would also challenge gender norms, as men and women rebalance their time investment across public and private spheres, leading to an increase in men's responsibility for household and family tasks and thus to an improvement in the public status and financial independence of women.

A provocation

National Gardening Leave

Andrew Simms and Molly Conisbee

Britain would be better off if we all spent less time at the office. Andrew Simms and Molly Conisbee make the case for a new, voluntary scheme to introduce a shorter working week, called *National Gardening Leave*. The authors propose giving people entering new jobs (and, where possible, those in existing jobs) the option of working a four-day week, while adapting a wide range of available spaces for the rapid expansion of gardening, both productive and aesthetic, in Britain's towns and cities. They argue that these changes would make people happier and healthier, the economy more resilient, and communities stronger and more convivial places to live. It would create the space to cultivate a society where individuals and communities could flourish, grow together and plant the seeds of a better Britain.

