

# **Review: Finding Time – One Step Beyond the Tyranny of Work**

**Norman Jope. 16pp. 1 pound. Memes Press. Available from 38 Molesworth  
Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 4NT.**

Anarchist Communist Federation

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This pamphlet comes at a time when the struggle against the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) is beginning to hot up. Indeed, this piece of legislation, the compulsive nature of which is written into its very name, symbolises the question around which Finding time revolves: how our time is spent (or rather, squandered) in the service of the market.

## **Workhouse**

Joep begins by noting how 70s talk of the Leisure Society has been abandoned. On one hand, there are many now who work excessively long hours and/or do unpaid overtime: in 1992, 15% of British workers toiled for 48 hours or more per week. On the other, for the millions unemployed, their rights to any kind of income or to go into a job of their choosing have been increasingly eroded and restricted. The JSA exemplifies this. In 1979, leaving a job “without just cause” meant that benefit would be suspended for 6 weeks. The JSA provides for such suspension lasting up to 6 months.

The contrast with the 60s and 70s, or even those still relatively liberal countries like Denmark, is blamed squarely on deliberate policy rather than untameable market forces. Unsurprisingly, the aim of this policy has been to boost profits. It has had three facets: the creation of mass unemployment, for example through privatisation of State-owned industries, the weakening of union rights and power, aided by the first factor; and an increasingly stringent benefits regime.

These changes have had profound effects on the psychological climate as well. Indeed, changing attitudes, such as that of expecting to have “a job for life”, has been an avowed aim of free market ideologists like the Tories. What this has actually meant is the creation of an atmosphere of insecurity and stress running through the lives of the working class, whether in “permanent” or temporary employment, or struggling on the dole. thus the basis for resistance is undercut by the fear of falling through each successive level.

## **Beyond Leisure**

Joep goes on to ask fundamental but often neglected questions as to what kinds of work (and how much of it) we actually need done, and what could be eliminated. As he points out, most people want to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activity. Even the “leisure Society” would be a misnomer for one in which the work/leisure divide had thus been abolished as a result of the overthrow of the capitalist economy. But whether “work” or “leisure”, the common denominator is time: our present lack of control over it and our need to gain such control in order to have a free, humane society.

As things stand, those who demonstrate a certain freedom in their lives, like New Age Travellers for example, tend to be reviled. It’s suggested that this is partly through envy of the contrast they present to lives of “working and shopping”. However, the travellers’ importance in this context is only a symbol of escape from the global market and the State-much more is needed for the transformation of a society which, as Joep shows, demoralises and exhausts the majority.

It is in his examination of the means by which changes might be brought about that anarchists will find most to question. Though the pamphlet has strong libertarian and egalitarian elements (e.g. advocating the active unity of the employed and unemployed) there is a tendency towards reformism in this last part of the discussion. For example, making the Jobseekers Allowance

payable at its full rate in any period of unemployment, and creating a legal offence of “industrial coercion” with the aim of “constraining exploitative employers”. But as well as recognising the improbability of the current Opposition pursuing these aims, Joep stresses that they are not advocated as end in themselves. Rather, they would be to excite the desire for more freedom and shift the consensus of today’s unquestionably diminished hopes, which regard the market and the State as eternal. What anarchists deny is the idea that this system can be infinitely reformed, to the point where true freedom and justice exist. but reforms are useful insofar as they show that change is possible, and employ methods that build general confidence and this, I think, is the intended message.

In the end, the chief value of Finding Time is the attempt to tackle some basic questions of human purpose, rather than its tentative solutions. This is done very successfully, in a clear, informative and thoughtful style. Find the time to read it.

To document further developments with the JSA, and to assist the resistance to it, a newsletter called the Clock Stops Here is also available. Send an SAE to the same address as for Finding Time.

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