

## Reimagining the Workplace for a Caregiving Society

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“To become a fully functional adult male, one prerequisite is essential: a job”

- US President’s Commission Report, 1964 (LaJeunesse, 2009, p. 8).

“No, not less of a man, but maybe more human”

- A Dutch doctor on being asked if part-time work made him less of a man (Hayden, 1999, p. 153).

The rich countries of the Global North continue to suffer from severe problems of gender inequality rooted in the gendered division of household and outside labour. This division produces a number of problems: an enduring pay differential between men and women, an absence of women in the best jobs, a lack of sharing of caregiving responsibilities, overwork, time poverty, stress, and a general pervasiveness of work-life imbalance.

A number of prominent feminist theorists such as Fraser (1997), Gornick and Meyers (2009), Nedelsky (2012), and Tronto (2013) have argued that the key to social progress in this regard is a shift in our work-family relations away from the gendered division of labour towards a more egalitarian sharing of work and caring responsibilities. This is a vision of the family as dual-earner/dual-caregiver or of “universal caregiving”. For example, Nedelsky argues, persuasively in my view, that many of the aforementioned problems will not be satisfactorily resolved until society adopts a broader norm whereby all adults, regardless of their gender, engage in significant amounts of caregiving.

However, while there has been substantial work on the normative need for universal caregiving, there has been much less focus on its institutional requirements. What kind of concrete workplace arrangements are necessary to foster and enable a caregiving society? Is universal caregiving economically feasible? Do we have compelling real-world examples? The aim of this paper is to begin addressing such questions by analyzing some of the economic institutions that would be required to sustain and underlie a society committed to universal caregiving.

My overarching argument is that part-time, flexible work is an essential element of a caregiving society. In particular, I argue that an economy which provides a large number of good, flexible, part-time jobs, is both attractive and economically feasible. In order to assess this feasibility we investigate the best practices that currently exist (which are mainly from western Europe) and pay close attention to their economic viability. Drawing on these best practices I advocate a “real utopian” model of part-time flexible work for all, which I see as a central component of a universal caregiving society, and therefore, a necessary pre-requisite for real gender equality.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of “real utopia” is associated with the work of Erik Olin Wright (2010). Real Utopias are institutional projects that are normatively hopeful and emancipatory, while simultaneously grounded in careful study of empirical possibilities, tradeoffs, and limitations. Of particular relevance for this paper is the volume of the Real Utopias Project focusing on gender equality (Gornick & Meyers, 2009).

The first section sets out the problems that universal caregiving is meant to address and derives the main principles that it implies for our work arrangements. The heart of the paper is the second section, which examines best work practices in three areas: good part-time work, shorter full-time work, and flexibility (or what I prefer to call “time sovereignty”). The third and final section ties these strands together to illustrate a vision of a real utopian model of part-time flexible work that could provide feasible and effective institutional support for a universal caregiving society.

## 1. Problems and Principles

In their important article on gender equality Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyer (2009) argue that universal caregiving requires three main institutional changes: flexible parental leave, part-time flexible work, and high-quality subsidized childcare and education. While all of these are important areas, I focus here only on the second one. So my focus on work arrangements should be seen as embedded in a broader institutional framework of the kind envisioned by Gornick and Meyers; a call for flexible PTW is meant to complement but in no way substitute for egalitarian leave or affordable child care.

In order to investigate the institutional possibilities for flexible PTW, the first task is to acquire some clarity as to the normative principles that we want to be realized by our workplaces. And a good way to clarify our normative principles is to reflect on the problems and deficits in contemporary workplaces. The following seven problems are not only intrinsically detrimental to gender equality, but they also reinforce each other. Indeed, a central reason why gender inequality has proven so resilient and difficult to overcome is that the problems are not rooted in any one place. Rather, gender inequality is the result of a number of causal processes, both institutional and cultural, that feed off each other and sustain each other, resulting in a relatively stable social system that gets reproduced again and again (Brighouse & Wright, 2009). This is important to appreciate because it implies that changing gender relations requires simultaneous changes in a variety of areas.

The basic fact is that women working in the labour market now constitutes the employment norm.<sup>2</sup> However, the division of household labour continues to be heavily gendered, which has created a number of problems:

(i) *Gendered norms of women as inherently caregivers and men as inherently breadwinners continue to put immense pressure on women to do the bulk of caring and housework, and men to work long hours outside, resulting in unequal sharing of caregiving responsibilities.*<sup>3</sup> A consequence of the cultural pressure on women to be “good mothers” (Macdonald, 2009) is that they stay home, which in turn makes it rational for employers to discriminate against them – since they are more likely to have reduced human capital, less likely to be committed to full-time work, and more likely to take

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<sup>2</sup> Across thirty OECD countries, 71% of mothers with one child, and 62% of mothers with two or more children are now employed (Gornick & Meyers, 2009, p. 7).

<sup>3</sup> In most OCED countries fathers devote fewer than one-quarter of the hours devoted by their female counterparts to routine housework, and less than half to caregiving (Gornick & Meyers, 2009, p. 10)

leave – resulting in a gendered wage gap.<sup>4</sup> Such norms also prevent men from spending substantial amounts of time caregiving, which thereby risks undermines their capacity for intimacy.

(ii) *Long hours of work means insufficient time for caregiving, and results in people living hurried, stressed lives, suffering from time poverty, and work-life crisis.*<sup>5</sup> A consequence is that many people, particularly women, find themselves in a time-bind (Hochschild, 1997), and many others, particularly men, find themselves too busy to help in the caregiving, which then falls on women to do.

(iii) *Inflexible workplaces make it hard for caregivers to move fluidly and easily in and out of the labour market.*<sup>6</sup> This makes it hard for caregivers to balance work with caregiving. And since women tend to earn less in the labour market, it becomes economically rational for the woman in a heterosexual relationship to stay home or work part-time and the man to work full-time (Sirianni & Negrey, 2000), which thereby reinforces gender stereotypes of women as caregivers and men as workers.

(iv) *Part-time jobs are often unattractive because they offer lower wages and worse benefits than full-time work.*<sup>7</sup> Part-time work is particularly unattractive in societies like the US where basic goods (such as healthcare, pensions, childcare leave etc.) are often coupled to full-time employment. A consequence of this is that it reinforces the desire in men to work full-time, which then means they are unavailable for caregiving, which again sustains the pressure on women to do such work.

(v) *Unregulated competition means that firms can make profit by extending hours and reducing employee flexibility.* A consequence of this is that firms find it harder to introduce family-friendly policies if their competitors are not (e.g., Hochschild, 1997). Firms thus offer jobs at long hours and without flexibility, which makes it easier for men to take them up than women, which reinforces the gender wage gap at work and the caregiving gap at home.

(vi) *The norm that a career requires full-time, continuous, work is penalizing to caregivers* (Sirianni & Negrey, 2000).<sup>8</sup> The consequence is that women must choose between work or family, and invariably cannot “have it all” (Slaughter, 2012).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this means that women, and mothers in particular, are deprived of the best jobs and the highest-earnings since these tend to be tied to full-time work.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In 2007, full-time employed woman in the US earned an average of 80% of male weekly earnings (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2009, p. 7).

<sup>5</sup> A massive 22% of American men work over 50 hours per week (compared to only 3.5% in the Netherlands) (Jacobs & Gerson, 2000, p. 94). Relatedly, 75% of employed parents in 2008 report not having enough time with their children (Tang & Wadsworth, 2010, p. 12).

<sup>6</sup> Only 6% of American firms provide all or most of employees with opportunities for switching between full and part-time work and back again; only 2% provide opportunities to work some hours regularly from home; and only 27% have the ability to change their start/quit times (Matos & Galinsky, 2012, p. 14).

<sup>7</sup> For example, only 46% of part-time employees in the US report that they have access to personal health insurance offered by their employers, compared with 91% of full-time employees. Likewise, only 4 in 10 part-time employees have access to paid vacation (compared to 8/10 of full-timers) (Tang & Wadsworth, 2010, pp. 29, 41).

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in her interviews with managers, Hochschild quotes one manager explaining that full-time work is “all I know how to understand as a basis for getting ahead” (1997, p. 93).

<sup>9</sup> For example, 49% of women earning more than \$100,000/year are childless (Tyson, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Mothers’ share of total parental earnings is far less than parity, ranging across the OECD from 18% to 38% (Gornick & Meyers, 2009, p. 10).

(vii) *The importance of wealth and high consumption-ability to the contemporary ideal of a good life makes full-time work seem vitally important.* This makes it harder for men or women to opt out of the full-time rat race, and puts indirect cultural stigma on those who prioritize unremunerated caregiving.

Given these interlocking processes, the basic normative principle of universal caregiving is that men and women should have similar caregiving responsibility. Ultimately, the ideal is for both men and women to have sufficient time for caregiving as well as sufficient flexibility to balance their work and care responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> That means that the ideal for both is part-time flexible work. Moving towards this requires reforming present work arrangements so that, on the one hand, men do more caregiving and less outside work, while, on the other hand, women acquire increasing flexibility at work to avoid being trapped in either caregiving or the labour market. So moving towards universal caregiving requires three things: enhancing the availability of good part-time jobs, reducing the hours of full-time work (so that men can take up more of the caregiving), and increasing the flexibility of work (so that employees of all genders have jobs that are more caregiving-friendly).

## 2. Current Best Practices

Looking around the advanced market societies in the Anglo-American world, it is striking that good, flexible PTW is uncommon, whereas long hours are the norm.<sup>12</sup> This is a puzzle: if there is demand for shorter hours, why don't employers provide it (in exchange for a lower wage)? The answer is that market systems often contain important biases against work time reduction (WTR) which need to be understood if they are to be overcome. Scholars of work time tend to point to five main systemic biases against WTR (Bosch & Lehndorff, 2001; Hayden, 1999; Hinrichs, Roche, & Sirianni, 1991a; Schor, 1991). First, benefit payments are often biased against WTR. If firms must make benefit payments on a per person rather than a per hour basis (as is commonly the case in the US and Canada) then it is significantly more expensive for firms to have two employees working 20 hours than one employee working 40 hours. Second, fixed employment costs (such as those associated with training and recruitment) make it cheaper for firms to hire fewer workers on longer hours. Third, reducing hours can require a costly shift in work re-organization. Fourth, firms will be resistant to reducing hours if they fear that it will be difficult to find additional workers of comparable skill and experience. Finally, firms often use long hours as a way of identifying work commitment and loyalty. For all of these reasons, employers almost always prefer to reward standard productivity increases over time with increased wages rather than decreased hours. Consequently, workers are

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<sup>11</sup> "Flexibility," is an extremely contested word, meaning opposing things for employers and employees. From the employer's perspective, flexibility usually refers to the arranging of work schedules around the needs of the business; the ultimate goal of which is for the employer to be able to turn labour power on or off at a moment's notice like "water from a tap" (Hinrichs, 1991, p. 40). From the employee's perspective, flexibility refers to arranging the work schedule to fit her personal preferences. In this essay I use the term "time sovereignty" (a phrase first used by Bernhard Teriet (Hinrichs, 1991, p. 41)) synonymously with the worker-focused meaning of "flexibility."

<sup>12</sup> The American labour market is significantly segregated into decent full-time jobs (of long hours by European standards), and precarious, poorly paid PTW (Bell, 2000).

usually able to acquire reduced hours only in times of strength (due to strong union membership, tight labour markets, or a broad national consensus in terms of the need for worksharing for urgent unemployment reduction) (Hinrichs, Roche, & Sirianni, 1991b).

That said, WTR is not an entirely negative prospect from the perspective of business; it offers some potential advantages too. WTR can increase productivity by reducing worker fatigue or boredom. It can attract high-quality labour (particularly women) who are only willing to work reduced hours. And it can often be combined with the reorganization of production to allow for enhanced productivity (for example, by rearranging shifts so that machines can be run longer). This means that attempts to reduce work time are most likely to be successful when they are able to minimize the costs to business while maximizing the benefits.

With this in mind we can now ask what the current best practices are with respect to work arrangements for universal caregiving. We look at three practices: good PTW, reduced full-time work, and time sovereignty at work. In each of these cases we explore real world examples and investigate how such practices were able to be institutionally achieved in the face of business opposition.

### *2.1 Good Part-Time Work*

We have seen that universal caregiving would rest, ideally, on an economy of widely-available, good, part-time jobs for all. While such an ideal is a long way off we can make progress towards it by, on the one hand, increasing the availability of such jobs outright (as this section describes), and, on the other hand, by reforming the full-time inflexible work that currently is the norm to be more part-time and flexible (as the next two sections describe).

For PTW to be viable for universal caregiving it needs to be both “available,” and “good,” since the norm in the Anglo-American world is for such work to be unavailable, or where it is available, to be available only under poor conditions. In the US, for example, only 6% percent of employees have the ability to move to part-time at the same position (Matos & Galinsky, 2012, p. 13). And the part-time jobs that do exist generally pay significantly worse pro-rata than full-time jobs, as well as being more precarious, and offering worse promotion opportunities, which leads to them being disproportionately gendered and racialized (Bell, 2000).

So what are the best practices in this regard? For *good* PTW, the crucial requirement is that such jobs offer pay and benefits (including pensions, sick leave, vacations, etc.) that are proportional to their full-time counterparts. This practice of pro-rating pay and benefits for part-time work is common in Europe. Indeed, since the 1997 European Union Directive on Part-Time Work, which aimed to “eliminate discrimination against part-time workers and to improve the quality of part-time work,” most European countries have made discrimination against part-time workers illegal (Gornick & Meyers, 2009, p. 34).

In terms of the *availability* of part-time jobs, there are two important mechanisms for increasing this. The first is the ability for parents to work part-time after the birth or adoption of a child. Reduced-hours with job protection is available as part of parental leave in 12 out of 15 EU member states and in Norway (Hegewisch, 2009, p. 6). For example, since 1978, parents in Sweden have had the right to reduce their daily work hours by 25% until the child is eight years old. In Norway, parents are entitled to work 50, 60, 75, 80, or 90

percent of their usual hours (at proportional pay) for up to two years, as well as being able to formally request reduced hours until the child is ten. Similarly, in Austria, both parents may reduce their hours or change the scheduling of hours until the child is seven-years-old, with a right to return to full-time work thereafter (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008, p. 11).

The second mechanism for increasing the availability of PTW is the introduction of a right to adjust hours. While most European countries allow adjustments to hours for new parents, three countries – France, Germany, and the Netherlands – have actually introduced a right for *all* employees to adjust their hours for any reason they like. Employees must provide a reasonable notification period, and such changes cannot be altered sporadically (they represent permanent contractual changes), but when employees do make such a request the employer cannot refuse on a whim, but only if she can show that there would be serious business costs associated with providing the hour adjustment. Courts in these countries, and especially in the Netherlands, have not accepted minimal costs as adequate grounds for refusal, but have expected businesses to shoulder a certain amount of costs in order to adjust hours to employee' needs.

Probably the best example of promoting good, part-time work is the Netherlands. In the early 1980s the Netherlands had very high levels of unemployment (reaching 12%). The Wassenaar agreement of 1982 strove to reduce this through worksharing (i.e., reducing the hours of full-time work in order to share the work around). The idea was that workers would provide wage moderation to restore profitability in exchange for a shorter workweek. From the 1990s, the motivation for WTR shifted from reducing unemployment to other aims, such as improving productivity by granting employers more “flexibility,” providing workers with more free time and time sovereignty, and improving work-family balance to further gender equality. So WTR in the Netherlands has been accomplished in recent years by a reduction of full-time hours, on the one hand, as well as a dramatic increase in part-time work, on the other. From 1983-1996 the fraction of employees working part time (i.e., less than 35-hours) went from 21% to 36.5% (LaJeunesse, 2009, p. 225). By 2009, a remarkable 48% of the labour force was engaged in part-time work. In other words, PTW is no longer a marginal phenomena but has become mainstream employment, even though it is still highly gendered (76% of part-timers are women) (Sandor, 2011, p. 12).

Not only does the Netherlands have a large number of part-time jobs, but such jobs are, for the most part, good jobs. Since 1996 it has been illegal for employers to discriminate between full and part-time workers in the provision of pay, benefits, and employment opportunities (Hayden, 1999, p. 151). Additionally, part-time workers receive pensions too (LaJeunesse, 2009, p. 225). The Netherlands also has the highest proportion in Europe of firms with high-qualified part-time positions (47% of firms offer this) (Sandor, 2011, p. 27). The gap between part-time and full-time wages is only 5%, and, overall, less than 5% of part-time work can be described as involuntary (LaJeunesse, 2009, p. 225). So while part-time work remains very gendered, Booth and van Ours (2010) report that partnered women in PTW have high job satisfaction, with only 3% of female part-timers preferring full-time work.

The Dutch have increased the availability of PTW through their parental leave legislation as well as through innovative time sovereignty legislation. In terms of parental leave, the law is explicitly aimed at creating a more equal division of domestic and paid work between parents. The explicit goal is a 150 percent arrangement, where each partner works “three-quarter time,” instead of the more common current arrangement in which fathers work full-time and mothers work half-time (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008, p. 20). In terms of rights to time

sovereignty, in 2000 the Netherlands passed the Working Time Adjustment Act, which Graaf and Batker (2011) called, “perhaps the most important piece of time-balance legislation ever.” This legislation provides employees who have worked at a firm of more than 10 employees for at least one year with a legal right to change their hours irrespective of the reason for such change and also to remain in the same occupational position.<sup>13</sup> Employers must show serious business, organizational, or health and safety objections before they are able to reject a claim to adjust hours (LaJeunesse, 2009, p. 223).

So what are the major lessons here as to the institutional feasibility of good, PTW? First, the European example clearly demonstrates the feasibility of establishing proportional pay and benefits for part-time work to increase the attractiveness of such work. Second, increasing the availability of options for part-time work seems not to have been particularly costly. In her comparative review of European flexible work policies, Hegewisch concludes that

employers’ experience of the introduction of flexible working statutes has been largely positive, or at least unproblematic. This has been the case as much in the UK... as in the Netherlands and Germany.... Fears prior to the introduction of the laws particularly focused on three factors: that new rights would unleash an unmanageable flood of requests; that there would be considerable costs related to the accommodation of requests; and that the introduction of a statutory right would result in a substantial number of legal complaints from employees whose requests was rejected. These fears proved largely unfounded. Only a tiny number of refusals have led to litigation..., the proportion of employees making requests has stayed largely constant..., and only a small minority of employers have mentioned costs as a barrier to the introduction of flexible working (Hegewisch, 2009, pp. 45-46).

The bottomline is that good, PTW is entirely feasible. Best practices indicate three essential features: make part-time jobs *good* jobs by ensuring proportional pay and benefits; make such jobs more widely available through parental legislation, and, most importantly, through new rights to time sovereignty via some sort of Hours Adjustment legislation; and finally, protect employers from significant costs and by requiring a standard notification period and establishing a right to refuse requests for hours adjustments on serious grounds (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008, pp. 20-21).

While those three features are essential, the Dutch case seems to have been particularly successful because of several facilitating factors which we can speculate also play a role. First, a relatively comprehensive social welfare state (the Netherlands spends 20.3% of GDP on social programs, compared to 14.6% in the US (Pontusson, 2005, p. 145)) increases people’s security which makes them less dependent on full-time work to acquire basic goods like healthcare, pensions, education, transportation, etc. Second, reduced inequality (the Dutch Gini is 25.1 compared to 36.3 in the US (Pontusson, 2005, p. 154)) reduces the pressure of “keeping up with the Joneses,” or at least means that keeping up with one’s neighbours requires less money, and so makes part-time salary more attractive (Bowles & Park, 2005). Third, changing work patterns have gone hand-in-hand with changing cultural values. For example, the FNV (the federation of Dutch unions) launched a campaign in the 1990s to encourage men to work part-time by explicitly attempting to change cultural values, developing slogans like, “Good morning, I’m your father” (Hayden, 1999, p. 153). Bosch & Lehdorff (2001) point out that across

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that 47% of all requests reported by employers in 2007 were for increased hours. These had virtually identical success rates as those for reduced hours (Hegewisch, 2009, p. 23).

developed countries, if you ask people if they desire increased wages, or the same wage with reduced hours, most people prefer the money (roughly 55% of workers in 1994 prefer more money while 35% prefer more time). The Dutch (and the Danish) are the exceptions, with 43% of Dutch people preferring money and 52% preferring time (2001, p. 221). These shifting values seem to be having an effect. Today, 12% of Dutch men are working part-time (still much less than women, but 50% more than the European male average) (Sandor, 2011, pp. 2, 12). Indeed, it seems likely that there is a mutually reinforcing change occurring: new options for part-time work are fostering changed gender expectations (for example that a “real man” may well want to work part-time so as to be a more devoted caregiver), which in turn is fostering higher take-up of part-time work.

From a feminist perspective there are two significant dangers of part-time work. The first is whether PTW means poverty wages. And indeed, while this problem is not as dire as in the US, part-time work in Europe is still likely to pay less (pro-rata) than full-time work (Sandor, 2011). This has been significantly ameliorated in Europe through legislation making part-time pay and benefits commensurate, nevertheless, particularly for people in low-wage service and retail occupations the threat of poverty associated with PTW is very real. Poverty is not only a problem intrinsically, but is also likely to make part-time work, and hence universal caregiving, an unattractive prospect. So feminists need to be cognizant of this and continue to research ways to alleviate such poverty, such as higher minimum wages, higher unionization, increased public services, or perhaps even a basic income (e.g., Van Parijs, 1995).<sup>14</sup>

The second danger is whether PTW will segregate women in the labour market. The evidence is fairly clear that having an equal opportunity for part-time work is *not* sufficient for men and women to actually take it up in equal amounts. For example, women in Europe work part-time at a rate of 32%, which is four times that of men (8%) (Sandor, 2011). Macdonald attributes this discrepancy to the strong cultural pressures on women to be “good mothers” and devote themselves intensely to caregiving (2009, p. 423). In addition this just as surely reflects cultural pressure on men to be “good providers” and think they have what Tronto (2013) called a “pass” on caregiving responsibilities. What these facts make clear is that having institutional *options* of part-time work is necessary but not sufficient for gender equality. To actually achieve universal caregiving requires, in addition to new institutional options, changes in *culture*, so that more men start to desire to take up the options of part-time work (in order to increase their caregiving responsibility) with far greater frequency.

## 2.2 Shorter Full-Time Work

There are profound differences in the number of hours that are worked across the developed countries. Average annual hours per employee in France and Germany are 1493 and 1463, which is about 27% less than in the US (at 1878 hours). The Netherlands has the world’s shortest hours – at 1366 (Hayden & Shandra, 2009, p. 588).

Throughout industrial history there have been two major aims of WTR: as a defensive policy to reduce unemployment, and as a progressive policy to increase leisure,

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<sup>14</sup> The Nordic examples are exemplary in this respect. After taxes and transfers only 4.3% of the population remains poor, compared to 11.7 % in the US (Pontusson, 2005, p. 171).



dignity, and in more recent years, work-life balance and gender equity. Since the 1980s the former concern has been particularly prominent in France, Germany, and Italy, whereas the latter concern has been most visible in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands. How have major reductions in hours been accomplished? We saw above that in the case of the Netherlands a major part of the story was the increase in part-time work. Whereas in France, which we look at now, WTR has recently been achieved mainly via a reduction in full-time hours, through the famous 35-hour week.

The 35-hour week came into being through two pieces of legislation introduced by the centre-left government under Lionel Jospin.<sup>15</sup> Its main aim was to reduce unemployment through worksharing. The first legislation, Aubry I (named after Martine Aubry, the Minister of Labour), introduced in June 1998, had three main aspects. First, a reduction of the standard workweek from 39 to 35 hours by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 (2002 for firms with 20 or fewer employees). Second, a call to labour unions and employers to launch sector-wide and firm-level negotiations on WTR. Third, the introduction of financial incentives for firms to reduce their hours (these incentives took the form of lower payroll taxes offered for a period of five years to firms that reached an agreement with a union or employee representative to reduce work time by at least 10% and create at least 6% additional jobs. The quicker a firm reduced its hours, the more generous the aid it received).

Even though Aubry I was quite generous in its aid to business, the main business association, MEDEF, was strongly opposed. The central economic danger with WTR is whether it will increase unit labour costs. If WTR is accompanied with full wage compensation, as the French unions were demanding, then less hours would be worked for the same pay, meaning labour costs would rise (assuming they are not offset in other ways, such as by productivity gains). This is very problematic because increased labour costs imply reduced profits (causing some firms to go under), and can also hurt the competitiveness of French firms internationally – both of which would end up hurting rather than helping the employment situation. So while there is much agreement in theory that increased labour costs can be economically damaging, the debate in France centered around whether, in practice, labour costs would actually rise, with MEDEF predicting dangerous rises and the government promising no rises. Unsurprisingly, MEDEF also opposed the 35-hour legislation on political grounds of anti-interference into what they saw as “their” domain.

The business opposition led to Aubry I being watered down though the introduction of Aubry II, introduced in the autumn of 1999. Aubry II specified that working hours could be measured as an average of the whole year, as opposed to a weekly average (provided that weekly hours did not exceed 48 or an average of 44 over 12 weeks). Such “annualization” meant that firms could make their employees schedules more “flexible” by reducing hours some weeks, when demand was lower, and increasing hours during periods of high demand. Aubry II also eliminated the need to create a minimum number of jobs in return for payroll tax cuts. The aid was available to all firms that reached a 35-hour agreement as long as it simply expressed a commitment to creating or saving jobs. In this way Aubry II was somewhat disappointing for the Left – it was less tied to increasing employment (which undermined an important social justification for the subsidies), and it promoted employer-centered flexibility that

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<sup>15</sup> The following account draws primarily from Hayden (2006) and LaJeunesse (2009).

increased the risk of intensification of work and created less predictable schedules, which threatened the quality-of-life and gender equity aspect of WTR.

Nevertheless, Hayden's (2006) comprehensive review of the evidence suggests that the 35-hour week was relatively successful in achieving its aims. There were significant overall reduction in hours; from 1997 to 2002, the average workweek of full-timers in firms with more than ten employees fell by 3.2 hours to 35.6 hours – an impressive reduction of 8.2% of overall working time. The measures were likely responsible for a significant portion of the employment boost (although the exact extent of this has been hotly debated). Income cuts were rare but wage moderation was frequent (52% of those who moved to 35 hours before 2000 experienced a wage freeze, averaging 26 months, 22% saw lower than usual wage gains, and 27% felt no effect on their incomes). For our purposes, one notable change is that the 35-hour week gave both genders more time for parenting – 63% of women, and 52% of men, with children under 12, said that the legislation allowed them to spend more time with their children. When asked how WTR affected their daily lives, both at work and outside, 59% of workers said their lives had improved, while only 13% said their quality of life had deteriorated. Female managers were the most satisfied with the changes – 73% of whom said that their daily lives had improved. The least likely to be satisfied were unskilled female workers; but even here more than double the number (40% compared to 20%) thought the changes had improved rather than worsened their daily lives. Employed women with children under the age of 12 were among the biggest winners: 71 percent said their daily life improved, while only 4.8 percent said it had worsened.<sup>16</sup>

In France, WTR was achieved through government legislation which spurred collective agreements on the ground, while in Germany, for example, WTR has been mainly achieved by collective agreements without the need for national legislation (Hayden, 1999). What is important to emphasize is that reducing work time and improving (or even maintaining) decent work time standards is far easier to accomplish within a regulatory framework.<sup>17</sup> In countries with centralized bargaining institutions (be they interventionist governments or widespread union coverage), like most of Europe, workers have been able to set a framework for standard hours so that there is no direct competition over working time (i.e., firms cannot try to increase profits by having workers work longer and longer hours). Without such a framework, market competition between firms tends to lead to longer or more unsociable hours. This is part of the reason why hours in decentralized labour markets, like Japan and the US, remain so long,<sup>18</sup> as well as why firms in the UK have been competing with each other to offer ever more “flexible” hours, culminating in the phenomenon of zero-hour contracts (Pyper & McGuinness, 2013). Hochschild captures the dilemma well in one of her interviews in a

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<sup>16</sup> In subsequent years, conservative governments have somewhat relaxed the working time requirements, allowing for more overtime, and in President Sarkozy's words, “more work for more money” (Michon, 2009). Nevertheless the law has remained, overall hours have not rebounded, and the 35-hour week is now fairly well institutionalized (Hayden, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Hinrichs argues that a framework for standardizing work is important for several reasons: it prevents competition between workers in terms of working hours, it serves as a “ratchet” for further gains vis-à-vis capital, it provides a standard of full-time work with a corresponding normative claim for a family wage, and it clearly differentiates workers' personal time from work time (1991, pp. 37-38).

<sup>18</sup> The Japanese case, which has long been infamous for its very long hours, is instructive in this regard. See Deutschmann (1991).

large American firm, when a senior manager declares that, “Fifty or sixty hours a week. That’s what other corporations are doing. To be competitive, that’s what we need to do. In my gut, I can’t believe we can do it very differently” (1997, p. 70).<sup>19</sup>

An example of best practices in this regard is the Swedish Working Hours Act of 1982. This act set out the minimal standards for work-time, thereby preventing Swedish firms from attempting to outcompete each other by lengthening or worsening work hours. The act specifies that normal working hours must not exceed 40 hours per week; that night work between midnight and 5am is prohibited (with some exceptions); that an employee must have continuous weekly rest of 36 hours per 7-day period; that a rest break must be taken after five hours of work; and that overtime must not exceed 48-50 hours every four-week period or 200 hours per year (Weigelt, 1991, p. 212).

The difficulty is that there are a number of forces pushing against the standardization of hours in this way. Standardization is usually the opposite of what business wants (witness the push in the US and the UK over the last twenty years to deregulate work). The general pattern in Europe has been for unions to get WTR in exchange for allowing more diversified and “flexible” schedules, which make it harder for unions to enforce minimum standards across the board (Hinrichs et al., 1991b). Additionally, contemporary populations often have diverse desires when it comes to ideal working hours; the conventional union goal of standardized full-time work for all is increasingly unattractive for a pluralistic workforce. There is thus a tension here: on the one hand, standardization is crucial for preventing downward competition that erodes time sovereignty. As Hinrichs points out, the establishment of standardized working-hours has been “one of the major achievements of the working class” (1991, p. 37). On the other hand, standardization itself is a form of inflexibility, which may be disliked by employees as well as employers. So from the perspective of universal caregiving, the ideal to aim for, I think, is a collective framework of regulated work time, like the Swedish Working Hours Act, *within which* workers acquire a certain degree of time sovereignty. This would enable different caregivers to schedule their work hours in different ways to suit their respective needs, without such flexibility undermining the overarching protective nature that standardization provides.

Let’s take a step back now to review the institutional feasibility of these reforms. Reforms for WTR have been feasible when they have not overly threatened the bottom line. The most serious resistance to WTR is the worry that it will increase labour costs (and therefore threaten profits which in turn will threaten future investment and employment), so this is the real-world constraint that has to be faced. It is important to emphasize that, empirically, where we have seen successful examples of WTR in recent years, it has happened without raising labour costs (Hayden, 1999; Hinrichs et al., 1991b). When WTR is implemented in such a way that is neutral for labour costs, business will still likely object, but such objections are likely to be ideological and less detrimental on the actual functioning (i.e., the investment and employment level) of the economy.

So for us the key question is this: how can a society reduce its full-time hours in a viable manner (i.e., without increasing labour costs and therefore damaging the bottom

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<sup>19</sup> This is not simply ideology. Hochschild (1997) further describes how the firm eventually felt it necessary to scrap its employee-flexibility and work-life balance initiatives in order to compete with non-unionized firms in southern US states.

line)? There are three main ways (which are often combined in practice). First, workers can offer wage moderation, i.e., freezing wages or accepting lower pay raises. This was common in the French case. Similarly, in Germany, IG Metall succeeded in reducing hours through collective agreement from 40-hour weeks in 1985 to 35-hour weeks by 1995 in exchange for wage moderation (Hayden, 1999, p. 144). Second, WTR can be paid for by increased labour and capital productivity (part of which comes from the natural productivity increases that occur regularly but slowly in a market economy, and part of which comes from the introduction of increased employer-focussed flexibility and the intensification of work). Third, the state can offer financial support to firms that increase employment through reduced work time. This financial support can usually be offered by the state without serious burdens to its finances, since reducing unemployment leads to important savings in other public costs, such as welfare and unemployment insurance. The French 35-hour law made significant use of this technique.

So while each of these strategies is plausible, Hayden (1999) rightly points out that none of them are costless to workers. The first strategy slows the growth of income, the second can increase the intensity of work, or worsen time sovereignty, and the third can increase taxes. In addition, Bosch and Lehndorff (2001) emphasize that successful WTR requires that the other major disincentives identified above need to be accommodated. In particular, changing the benefit payment structure from a per worker to a per hour basis, and at least partially socializing the costs of training workers (since business will be resistant to WTR if there are insufficient additional skilled workers to hire, meaning they have to pay for the training themselves).

The bottomline is that significant WTR is entirely feasible. France provides an important general model: a national campaign to encourage wide-spread collective bargaining that is based, fundamentally, on an exchange of WTR for wage moderation. Such an exchange means that workers agree to stay at the same income level by taking their share of future productivity gains not in wages but in reduced hours. In other words, hours are reduced but labour costs do not rise since they are paid for by slowly accumulating productivity combined with state support.

From a universal caregiving perspective, there is one important problem, or at least caveat, with the reduction of full-time hours. The issue is that shorter hours have often been achieved in exchange for more “flexibility” (from the employers point of view), such as annualization, increased on-call time, night or weekend shifts, or more frequent schedule changes. From a caregiver’s perspective there is a difficult tradeoff here. Caregivers get more time off work, which is deeply important, but simultaneously they may lose some control over their schedules. This allows us to see that time sovereignty is not simply a matter of the *quantity* of time off, but it is also a measure of its *quality*. Caregivers require both.

### 2.3 Time Sovereignty

The third and final pillar of work changes necessary for universal caregiving is time sovereignty. We have already discussed two crucial aspects of time sovereignty – the right to flexible paternity leave, and the right to adjust hours. Here we add one further aspect which is necessary to enable caregivers to balance their work and caregiving

responsibilities in an on-going and continual way: flextime.<sup>20</sup> Flextime (sometimes called “flexitime”) is widely desired. In the US a massive 87% of all employees report that if they were looking for a new job, flextime would be “extremely” or “very” important (Tang & Wadsworth, 2010, p. 1). Likewise, in Europe, employees identify flextime as their single top priority in terms of their firms’ working-time policies (Riedmann, 2006, p. 49). Unfortunately it is still relatively rare. In the US only 27% of firms offer the bulk of employees access to flextime (Matos & Galinsky, 2012, p. 14).<sup>21</sup>

Again, we find the best practices of flextime in various western European countries. The European Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work–Life Balance (ESWT), the authoritative survey in the field, surveying over 21,000 firms, found that managers report that the main driving force behind the introduction of flextime is employee desire for it. However, managers report that their firms typically benefit too (which likely explains their willingness to acquiesce to employee demand) due to better adaptation of working time to the workload, lower absenteeism and a reduction of paid overtime hours (Riedmann, 2006).

The ability of workers to exercise time sovereignty in terms of the scheduling of their shifts has a negative and a positive dimension. The negative dimension is the protection against sudden or unpredictable scheduling changes. Unpredictable hours are extremely disruptive of caregiving because they undermine caregivers ability to plan, or to respond to changes in the needs of the cared for. In European firms today (of more than 10 employees), 17% give less than 4 days notice of schedule changes, 24% give between 4 days and 2 weeks, and 53% give more than 2 weeks notice (Riedmann, 2006, p. 33). So the current best practice is two weeks or more. A notification period of this length is an important ingredient for universal caregiving.

Relatedly, another important negative right is the right to refuse overtime for care reasons. Presently eight countries in Europe provide a right in this regard. This has been the case in Switzerland since 1964 where employees with caregiving responsibilities have the right to refuse overtime. Similarly, in Norway, employees may refuse overtime if it clashes with childcare needs. Likewise in France employees have the right to refuse a change in scheduling, or overtime, if the schedule conflicts with family responsibilities (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

The positive dimension of time sovereignty, the one we usually associate with flextime, is the ability of employees to actually *choose* their preferred start and end times (within a standard “time corridor”). Flextime is usually defined as the ability of employees to “vary the beginning and end of their daily working time, in order to adapt it to their personal needs and preferences” (Riedmann, 2006, p. 3). Currently, the best practices of flextime are found in Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, roughly 68% of workplaces offer flextime to 82% of their employees, and in Finland roughly 64% of workplaces provide flextime to 78% of their employees. Furthermore, the ability to adjust start/end times is only one aspect of flextime. Another kind of flextime is the establishment of systems of “annualized working hours” or “working time accounts.” These are schemes that allow overtime hours to be banked for use as periods of time off

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to flextime, the ability to work from home (“flexplace”) would be an important advance for caregivers. However, we sidestep this issue here since there is less data on this practice.

<sup>21</sup> In Europe, 48% of the personnel managers in establishments (with ten or more employees) reported the existence of some form of flexible working time arrangement for some of the workforce (Riedmann, 2006, p. 4).

work – often with the whole year (or even longer) as the reference period within which the time account has to be settled. These currently exist in 13% of European firms, with best practices in Austria (where 28% of firms provide such accounts) and Sweden (where 27% of firms provide it) (Riedmann, 2006, pp. 4, 7).

So what can be said of the institutional feasibility of flextime? The evidence is quite clear that introducing flextime has been, for the most part, a win-win scenario for employees and employers. The comprehensive ESWT survey concludes that the majority of managers – i.e. the group who might be thought to be the most resistant to flextime – are actually largely supportive of it. 61% of managers said introducing flexible work led to higher job satisfaction; 54% said it led to a better adaptation to the workload; 27% said it led to lower absenteeism; 22% said led to reduction in paid overtime; 20% said it led to other positive effects; whereas only 10% said it led to communication problems; 5% said it led to increased costs; and 4% said it led to other negative effects (Riedmann, 2006, p. 9).

Given this broad level of managerial support (combined with employees' even more emphatic desire for it) there is a puzzle about why flextime hasn't long since been established as the norm. I suspect the answer is likely to do with institutional inertia, and the inherent conservatism of managers to stick with what they know. Hegewisch and Gornick find some evidence for this in the European case law.

The case law confirms that one of the big barriers to greater workplace flexibility is a negative gut response from many managers – “it can't be done” – no matter what the actual evidence.... [This leads to a situation where] employees will not make a request in the first place, either out of fear for their jobs or career progression or because they cannot imagine how their job might be done differently. This is the case as much in high-powered career jobs... as in low wage industries, particularly in those where men primarily work (2008, pp. 25-26).

So given that there does not seem to be a strong material basis for resistance, we can expect the spread of flextime to continue. And if it is indeed true that much of the resistance to flextime is due to unfamiliarity with it, governments interested in fostering universal caregiving could likely speed up its dissemination quite easily and without even resorting to the usual strategies of regulation or incentivization, simply by facilitating business familiarity with flextime practices.

### **3. A Real Utopian Model of Flexible Part-Time Work**

In this final section the goal is to investigate how we might combine the various strands of best practices identified above into a coherent overarching model of the work arrangements necessary for universal caregiving. If such a model is to be worth talking about it must be economically feasible for the social democratic countries, at least in the medium term.<sup>22</sup>

A universal caregiving society requires in its work arrangements three crucial elements.

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<sup>22</sup> This model could hopefully apply one day in neoliberal countries too, but given the lack of the basic prerequisites – political acceptability of widespread government intervention in the market, a wide tax base, and significant union strength – it is clearly a more distant prospect. Furthermore, the focus here is on *economic feasibility* broadly-construed; I leave aside the equally important questions of political feasibility, the nitty-gritty sociological questions of political parties, social movements, and opposition forces, since such questions require a level of contextual specificity that is far beyond the scope of this paper.

- (i) Fundamentally, the majority of jobs in the economy would be good, part-time jobs, with pay and benefits proportional to full-time work. In order for such jobs to be taken up in large numbers (by men as much as women), a number of policies to incentivize part-time work would need to be pursued.
- (ii) Short full-time hours. In much of Europe a 30-hour week is a feasible goal. This requires, among other things, a framework of work-time regulation, which would delimit standard hours, stipulate breaks, limit overtime, ensure pay equity and non-discrimination, and guarantee rights to caregiving leave.
- (iii) Time sovereignty. In particular, this would include a universal right to adjust total hours (in all cases where there is not a compelling business case against it), a right to at least a two-week notification period for scheduling, a right to refuse overtime, and a right to flextime.

This model thus combines the best practices that we saw above: the Dutch practice of widespread good, part-time jobs, the French practice of reduced full-time hours, the Swedish practice of work-time regulation, the Dutch and German practice of rights to work-hour adjustments, and the Swedish and Finnish practice of flextime.

A society with such things would effectively redress the problems enumerated in Section 1. Good PTW would allow men to devote more time to caregiving and women to have the flexibility to move in and out of the labour market, while providing a decent standard of living.<sup>23</sup> Shorter full-time hours would provide more time for caregiving and reduce the stresses of time-poverty and work-life imbalance. A framework of work-time regulation would promote pay equity and prevent odious competition between firms eroding decent standards of working hours. Time sovereignty would vastly facilitate men and women being able to balance their caregiving with their work responsibilities. More broadly, having a range of institutional options for part-time and flexible work would likely foster complementary changes in gender norms as more men and women would find it easier to take on dual roles as simultaneous caregivers and earners. The vision of caregiving as central to a good life, which animates the model, would also likely reduce the overwhelming importance of consumption, thereby reducing the need for long working hours.

The crucial question, for our purposes, is whether such a model is economically feasible. Let us briefly consider each element in turn.

The Dutch example shows that making part-time work a prominent part of the economy is indeed possible: PTW has grown from roughly 20% of the workforce to about 50% in the last thirty years. The Netherlands also provides important lessons as to the feasibility of making PTW *good* work (through mandating pay and benefit parity), and making PTW widely *accessible* (through guaranteeing rights to parental leave and hour adjustments). However, the Dutch example also shows the major constraints that

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<sup>23</sup> In the Netherlands, for example, most women work part-time (the average female working week is 26 hours) and earn, on average, €24,000 per year (Grünell, 2008). So a couple working part-time would make close to €50,000 – very comfortable by international standards – not to mention the high levels of social security and public services.

exist: the primary obstacle to a wide adoption of PTW is *not* institutional, but cultural. Without cultural changes people will not take up part-time work in large numbers, men will not take up PTW in equal proportion to women (thus maintaining gender segregation), and time sovereignty options may well be used, again particularly by men, to *increase* not decrease hours. This means that the feasibility of large-scale PTW depends to a significant degree on encouraging the widespread take-up of this kind of work. Incentivizing PTW therefore requires changes in four areas: material incentives, shifting gender norms, shifting the model of a career, and reducing the ethic of consumerism.

First, PTW will be more attractive when it has less material drawbacks. A number of things could help in this regard. Higher minimum wages would be a good first step toward making PTW more attractive. More ambitiously, a more comprehensive welfare state (providing good quality universal healthcare, education, and pensions, etc.) would allow workers to choose PTW without fearing greater insecurity; similarly, having a broader range of free or publicly-subsidized services and amenities (from parks to pools) would make a life of moderate income more appealing. We know from the Nordic example that such comprehensive welfare states are indeed feasible (Pontusson, 2005, 2011). In addition, higher taxes are an important policy tool for incentivizing PTW. Not only do higher taxes help indirectly by paying for a more robust public sector, they can also help to reduce inequality which in turn reduces the Veblenian pressure to work long hours to pay for conspicuous consumption (Bowles & Park, 2005). The tax system could also be used to incentivize men to take up PTW in larger numbers, perhaps through higher taxes on full-time work (*vis-à-vis* part-time), higher taxes on overtime work, or higher marginal tax rates overall (to disincentive long hours in general) (Alesina, Glaeser, & Sacerdote, 2006; Prescott, 2004).

Second, increasing the take-up of PTW requires a shifting of gender norms, particularly so that men desire to work less and caregive more. This is indeed happening, albeit slowly. For example, in the US, Coltrane finds evidence that men are embracing the role of nurturing father much more than they used to (2009, p. 390). Likewise, in Sweden the fraction of parental leave benefits taken by fathers has increased substantially from 0.5% in 1974 to 11.4% in 1994. Furthermore, there is evidence that institutional incentives can play a role in changing gendered behaviours. To take one example, in Sweden, the introduction of the “use it or lose it” incentives for fathers has been credited with significantly increasing take up of parental leave (reaching 18.7% in 2004, with fathers accounting for 43.2% of leave users (Zippel, 2009, p. 213)). It seems entirely plausible that such changing behaviours will reinforce changing norms. Brighthouse and Wright put the point like this: “the more people see men in public taking care of small children – pushing baby carriages, changing diapers in airports, supervising kids at playgrounds, having them in shopping carts at grocery stores – the more such behavior will be seen as ‘normal’ .... [and] over time, the more it is likely to be viewed as normative as well” (2009, p. 87). The evidence suggests that when fathers start working less, and mothers go from being unemployed to working part-time, fathers *do* start doing more of the caregiving (Coltrane, 2009) – which suggests that the model of universal PTW advocated here can indeed have beneficial caregiving results.

Third, widespread PTW requires a new model of a “career.” At present the standard notion of a career, with the benefits and security associated with it, is premised



on a vision of the “serious” and “hardworking” individual, which in turn is signified by full-time, continuous, and uninterrupted work (Sirianni & Negrey, 2000). Such an understanding of a career is, of course, extremely biased against caregivers who require significant interruptions for childbearing and other forms of caregiving, and who need significant reductions and flexibility in their work time. We need instead a vision of a career that is marked by dedication but not by full-time or inflexible work – a model of a part-time career, where working-time ebbs and flows around the major contours of life and caregiving responsibilities. There is no reason to think that this is impossible, since the understanding of a career and the prerequisites for promotion are, to a large degree, culturally contingent. Indeed, the fact that 47% of firms in the Netherlands offer highly-qualified part-time positions, is at least partial evidence of the plausibility of changes in this direction (Sandor, 2011, p. 27). A new model of a part-time career could perhaps be aided by tougher legislation against any promotion discrimination suffered by part-time workers.

Lastly, PTW requires a reduction of the ethic of consumerism (to be replaced with an ethic of caregiving);<sup>24</sup> as long as people measure the success of their lives according to their ability to consume, PTW will remain an unattractive and stigmatized option. Mitigating consumerist values is, in many ways, the most daunting aspect for feminists seeking universal caregiving. This is not to say that it is impossible to change cultural values, even those as dominant as consumerism is today. Culture is always changing, and in the broad tapestry of human history our present society is very unusual for being so consumption centric. Most past civilizations have been oriented towards clear visions of the good life, which consumption was only a means to but never an end in itself (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2012). So the task of contemporary feminists (and Greens and others) is to construct a vision of a good life, with caring at its centre, that has a firm sense of when enough is enough.

Turning now to the second element of our model, Europe makes it clear that it is possible to significantly reduce full-time hours. In many countries in western Europe, a 30-hour week is now a feasible project, whereas in other countries, a 35- or 38-hour week is a more realistic goal. A precise target of working hour is less important than a strategy for significant reductions. We have seen that it is indeed feasible to collectively reduce hours by 4-8%, the equivalent of two or three hours of a week’s work, in a five-year period, without increasing labour costs or damaging economic competitiveness.<sup>25</sup> This reduction can be promoted via a number of useful policies – such as increasing vacation time or discouraging overtime – but the most promising generalizable mechanism is encouraging relatively long-term collective agreements that exchange wage moderation (either wage freezes or slower raises) for consistent reductions in work time. Here the

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Roberts and Brandum put the point well when they argue that we need a vision of the good life that is more concerned with “spending time with the Joneses” rather than keeping up with them (quoted in Hayden, 1999, p. 75).

<sup>25</sup> The Dutch reduced their working hours from 1800 to 1397 over a 25-year period (the equivalent of a 4.4% reduction in each five year period). In Germany, IG Metall workers went from a 40 to a 35-hour week over ten years (i.e. a 6.25% reduction in five years) (Hayden, 1999, pp. 144, 149). And French workers went from a 38.8 to a 35.6-hour week (i.e., a 8.2% reduction in five years) (Hayden, 2006, p. 511).

French model is apposite: a national campaign to encourage this exchange, galvanized and facilitated by state support (so that WTR is paid for by accumulating productivity on the one hand, and state aid on the other, in order to keep overall labour costs constant). It's worth pointing out that even though French workers work far less than Americans (and so earn somewhat less), the actual productivity per hour of the French economy is actually greater than in the US (Prescott, 2004, p. 3) – this suggests that there is nothing economically infeasible about a society choosing to prioritize free time over wages.

Reducing hours also requires a framework for work-time regulation. We know from things like the Swedish Working Hours Act, that it is feasible to regulate work time. We also know from the US experience that policies around non-discriminatory hiring, pay equity, and gender/sexual harassment, can be successful in reducing the gender gap in pay and seniority (Zippel, 2009). Whether it is feasible to combine the standardization of work time typical of western European labour markets in the 1970s and 1980s with the time sovereignty desired by a contemporary pluralistic workforce (not to mention the desire of employers for increased corporate “flexibility” in competitive global markets), is yet to be seen. I do not see any institutional reasons why time sovereignty within overarching standardized hours would be unworkable. The problem is the pragmatic, political one of whether progressive forces will be strong enough to acquire this given the reality of weakening unions and heterogeneous desires around work time.

What about the last element of the model – time sovereignty, in particular, universal rights to adjust hours and flextime? Germany, the Netherlands, and France, have introduced rights to adjust hours, with the Dutch Working Time Adjustment Act being exemplary in this regard. Although the empirical assessment of such legislation is admittedly very sparse, Hegewisch (2009) reports few problems with the introduction of these rights. It's interesting to note that in Germany, the introduction of the right to adjust hours was followed by a 6% increase in the rate of part-time work. The rate for men increased by over 4% compared with a EU average increase of just 1.5% over the same time (Sandor, 2011, p. 33). This is thus suggestive evidence that increased time sovereignty can indeed increase male part-time work, as we would hope. In terms of flextime, we know that many, and indeed growing numbers of firms across Europe have instituted it. And given the benefits that businesses themselves admit from introducing flextime (reduction of overtime pay, decreased absenteeism, etc. (Riedmann, 2006)) there is no reason to believe that universal rights to it will be harmful to business (as long as business is sufficiently protected from capricious changes by insisting on significant notification periods, and allowing businesses to refuse flextime requests if they can show compelling cost or health and safety concerns).

In sum, the model of good, flexible, PTW does indeed seem feasible. Of course, that does not at all mean that universal caregiving is inevitable. But only that *if* we are able to shift cultural and institutional barriers (an admittedly big if), in the direction that parts of western Europe have already started to move, *then* we have reason to believe that universal caregiving could be a reasonably stable social system of egalitarian gender relations. Clearly, in many countries the present balance of social forces is such that these changes are unlikely. In the neoliberal countries, for instance, working people over the last thirty years have not even been strong enough to acquire *any* of the increases in productivity gains (almost all the gains have been monopolized by the rich), which means that they are even further away from being able to dictate the *form* that their remuneration

should take (e.g. leisure as opposed to raises) (LaJeunesse, 2009, p. 191). But that is no argument against the normative worth of such a model, it is only a warning about the difficulty of its implementation.

The final point to make is that although we have emphasized the positive benefits of gender equality that are likely to come from the aforementioned reforms, there will undoubtedly also be costs. Two stand out. First, we can expect a universal caregiving society, which makes a large collective shift from working to caring, to have slower rates of economic growth than present society. But whether this is a problem is a deep and difficult question. Folbre warns us against being too quick to dismiss normative aspirations on the ground of economic cost: “We should never be intimidated by accusations that improved care is too costly to consider. What’s the economy for, anyway, if not to help us realize our vision of a good society?” (2009, p. 120). Growth for growth’s sake, after all, is the ideology of the cancer cell.<sup>26</sup> And in our present society – one that is starved of caregiving, gender unequal, and pressing dangerously close to ecological limits – a shift away from a conception of wealth as the never-ending accumulation of things, towards a vision of wealth as the increase of free time and the deepening of relationships – seems entirely rational.<sup>27</sup>

Second, the society envisioned here will be one in which most, if not all, families rely on PTW to sustain them, and will therefore be less financially well-off than they would be from working full-time. While this will be true for families regardless of their income, it is a much more serious problem for those at the lower end of the income scale. For people near the poverty line – single mothers, new immigrants, workers of colour, etc. – PTW must at the very least provide a living wage. In order for this to be the case a range of measures alluded to earlier should be pursued: ensuring wage and benefit parity with full-time jobs, increasing minimum wages, expanding unionization (particularly in the service and retail sectors), providing public subsidies for people to go to school or college to increase their human capital,<sup>28</sup> and, more ambitiously, implementing a basic income.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has explored the workplace arrangements that would be necessary to sustain a society characterized by universal caregiving. The central argument has been that such a society requires, at base, a wide availability of good, flexible, part-time jobs for all. Realistically, moving in this direction would require reforms on several fronts: creating good part-time jobs where they do not exist, and slowly transforming the full-time inflexible jobs that *do* exist in the requisite direction – reducing their hours and increasing their flexibility. In order to examine the feasibility of such reforms we have

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<sup>26</sup> This phrase is usually attributed to environmentalist Edward Abbey. For a discussion of the ecological case for moving towards a steady-state economy, see Daly (2007), Jackson (2009), and Schor (2010).

<sup>27</sup> Of course, it needs to be admitted that for poor countries, a lack of growth is a more serious issue. As Hassim (2009) reminds us, caregiving policies for the global North, which has been the focus here, cannot be simply cut-and-paste into the global South.

<sup>28</sup> The Swedish practice of Active Labour Market Policies, which subsidizes people if they move to areas where they can get jobs, or subsidizes their retraining, is an important model in this regard (Pontusson, 2005)

<sup>29</sup> For feminist debates about basic income, see (Ackerman, Alsott, & Parijs, 2006; Bergmann, 2004).

examined the best practices that currently exist of good part time jobs, shorter full-time hours, and time sovereignty. Combining the evidence from these best practices allows us to extrapolate a feasible model of work arrangements that could sustain a caregiving society based on these core elements.

A universal caregiving society requires changes in many areas, and work arrangements are only one part of the story (parental leave, childcare, and early education, are equally vital). And even in this one area, the institutional and cultural changes required are profound enough that it is impossible to assert with any confidence when or if they will be accomplished. Nevertheless, the evidence reviewed here should make us cautiously optimistic that changing our work structures in the aforementioned ways is indeed plausible and economically feasible, contingent of course, on whether we are able to summon the political will to do so.

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