

Whatever Happened to Work-Time? An Enquiry into the Manufacturing of Industrious Revolution, Jharia Coalfields 1890s-1970

Dr Dhiraj Kumar Nite

A radical interpretation of the history of work-time suggests that workers won the battle in the short-hour movement but lost the war (Thrift, 1996, 1990; Hobsbawm, 1964). My study furthers the argument that control of the processes of labour and life has remained an ever contentious terrain of industrial relations. Mineworkers in the Jharia coalfields appropriated the metaphor of astronomical calendar and clock-time with a view to obviate the arbitrary and tyrannical elements of time-keeping authority. At the same time, they saw their efforts as a way to unify social time with work-time routine so as to formalise flexibility in work and bring security to their employment. Workers' aspirations for a modicum of control over the processes of life and work determined the route to the industrious revolution rather than to only change tastes and aspirations regarding consumption, as de Vries (2008) and Voth (2000) suggest. Employers also secured certain advantages: work-year and work-week lengthened despite a shortened workday. It is my further argument that the short-hour movement did not yield anything injurious to the industrious revolution. The paper rests on archival and historical-anthropological materials gathered in 2003-09.