RIOT.

In *Riot. Strike. Riot.* Joshua Clover located the first stirrings of a transition from riot to strike in the Luddite and Swing Riots of the 1810s and 1830s. These were riots in repertoire but were aimed at fixing the wage for labour power, while early riots sought to fix the price for bread. There was, however, an incident near Blackburn, Lancashire in October 1779 that was both a riot and about conditions of labour, namely layoffs from factory jobs.

Josiah Wedgewood, the pottery manufacturer, was traveling to Bolton to care for an ailing son when he encountered a large group of people who had been out "destroying some engines, & meant to serve them all so through the country," he wrote to a friend on October 3:

> Many of the workmen having been turn'd off lately oweing to a want of demand for their goods at foreign markets has furnish'd them with an excuse for these violent measures. The manufacturers say the measures which the Irish have adopted in their non-importation agreements have affected their trade very much. These are melancholy facts, upon which I forbear to comment. They do not stand in need of much illustration, but we must pray for better times.

Six days later, Wedgewood continued his narrative, explaining that the group he had encountered the previous Saturday had not been the main body of the rioters:

> ...for on the same day, in the afternoon, a capital engine or mill, in the manner of Arcrites [Arkwright's], and in which he is a partner, near Chorley, was attacked; but from its peculiar situation they could approach to it by one passage only, & this circumstance enabled the owner, with the assistance of a few neighbours, to repulse the enemy and preserve the mill for that time. Two of the mob were shot dead upon the spot, one drowned, & several wounded. The mob had no fire arms & did not expect so warm a reception. They were greatly exasperated & vowed revenge: accordingly they spent all Sunday, & Monday in collecting fire arms, & ammunition and melting their pewter dishes into bullets.

On the 16th of October, Wedgewood concluded his account with a foreboding of harsh military measures being planned against the rioters:

> I hear nothing further of the Lancashire rioters only that some soldiers are sent to oppose them with orders not to fire over the poor fellows heads, but right amongst them, & to do all the execution they can the first fire, by way of intimidating them at once. This may be right for aught I know, and cause the least blood shed in the end; but it is dreadful, and I hope there will be no occasion for the military proceeding to such extremities. I do not like to have the soldiery familiarised to spilling the blood of their countrymen and fellow citizens.

The massacre Wedgewood dreaded did not transpire, however. A report in the *Annual Register Chronicle* stated that when they learned of the military's plans, "the mob did not think it prudent to proceed to any further violence." The journal gave the number of rioters as "two thousand or upwards" but confirmed that two were killed, adding that eight were wounded or taken prisoner.

In the year following the riots, a local magistrate, Dorning Rasbotham, published a pamphlet titled *Thoughts on the Use of Machines in the Cotton Manufacture* whose rhetorical reverberations have continued to the present day. The pamphlet identified its author only as "A FRIEND of the POOR."

On the first page he elaborated, "I am, from the bottom of my heart, *a Friend to the Poor*. I wish to plead *their cause*, and to speak in *their favour*, I feel tenderly for the *poor man* and his *family*." This affection was not entirely disinterested. "What would become of the rich," he wondered, "if there were no *poor* people to *till* their grounds, and *pay* their rents?" Squire Rasbotham was evidently also a friend of the *italics*.

The pamphlet's most enduring lesson came in its concluding remarks, three pages from the end. To set the stage for it, the author entertained the counterfactual that "*machines* in general were *hurtful* to trade, and to the poor, and, that it were much to be *wished*, they had never been *invented."* Even if that were the case, he reasoned, it would be prudent to "make the *best of them*, we possibly can." There are some people who may be astonished by this rationale, he admitted:

> There is, say they, *a certain quantity* of labour to be performed. This used to be performed by *hands*, without machines, or with very little help from them. But if now machines perform a *larger share* than before, suppose one *fourth part, so many hands* as are necessary to work that fourth part, will be *thrown out of work*, or suffer in their wages. The principle itself is *false*. There is not a precise limited quantity of labour, beyond which there is no demand. Trade is not hemmed in by *great walls*, beyond which it cannot go. By bringing our goods *cheaper* and *better* to market, we open new markets, we get *new customers*, we encrease the quantity of labour necessary to supply these, and thus we are encouraged to push on, in hope of *still new* advantages. *A cheap market will always be full of customers*.

Rasbotham was not attributing this false principle to the poor but to those who may find his case for making the best of a necessary evil astonishing. In subsequent iterations of the fixed amount of work refrain, it evolved into the fallacious "theory" supposedly motivating the objections of workers to machines and their demands for, particularly, shorter hours of work.

Our "Friend to the Poor" had not conjured "the certain quantity of labour" out of thin air. The 1771 edition of *A New General English Dictionary* defined "task" (v.) as "to appoint a person a certain quantity of work to be done in a certain time." Nor was the expression alien to nascent political economy. John Graunt, pioneer of population statistics and collaborator with William Petty in the development of "political arithmetick" reasoned in his *Observations on the Bills of Mortality* (1662) that "if there be but a certain proportion of work to be done; and that the same

be already done by the not-Beggars; then to employ the Beggars about it, will but transfer the want from one hand to another…"

Note the conditional 'if.' Proportionality was central to Graunt's methodology. The word "proportion" appears no fewer than 68 times in *Observations*. Graunt's analysis of mortality statistics relied on the practical art of bookkeeping to record the balance between debits of deaths and credits of births and immigration.

Graunt's concluding apologia for all his "laborious bustling and groping" was that knowledge of the population's total, sex, age, employment, etc. would make trade and government more certain and regular, "for, if men knew the People, as aforesaid, they might know the consumption they would make, so as Trade might not be hoped for where it is impossible."

In a parting shot, Graunt remarked upon "how small a part of the People work upon necessary Labours and Callings." In his estimation, there were all too many who "do just nothing, only learning to spend what others get"; so many "voluptuaries" and "gamesters by trade," many who "live by puzling poor people with unintelligible Notions in Divinity and Philosophy" or "by perswading credulous, delicate, and ligitious Persons, that their Bodies or Estates are out of Tune" and so on. By contrast, "how few are employed in raising and working necessary Food and Covering" and "how few do study Nature and Things! The more ingenious not advancing much further than to write and speak wittily about these matters."

Graunt's posthumous rebuttal to Rasbotham could well be that it is no less presumptuous to assume that there *isn't* a certain quantity of work to be performed than to assume that there *is*. One must do the "laborious bustling and groping" to determine the *actual* proportions. Or, to put it less delicately, "those, who cannot apprehend the reason of these Enquiries, are unfit to trouble themselves to ask them." If we don't know the proportions between beggars, not-beggars, and the work to be done, schemes for putting beggars to work may be worse than futile.

Almost half a century after Rasbotham published his tract, the "unscrupulous blockhead," John Ramsey McCulloch, praised the magistrate's "sensible address" in a footnote to an article in the *Edinburgh Review* on the cotton manufacturing industry, concluding with the admonition, "There is, in fact, no idea so groundless and absurd, as that which supposes that an increased facility of production can under any circumstances be injurious to the labourers." McCulloch's article, including the Rasbotham footnote, became the basis for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on Richard Arkwright, ensuring its continued wide circulation for several decades.

Some iteration of the lament that workers fallaciously assume there is a certain -- or fixed -- amount of work to be done appears in almost every decade of the 19th and 20th centuries. By the middle of the latter century, it had become a staple of introductory textbook economics.

In mentioning McCulloch's salute to Rasbotham, I have leaped past a conspicuous case, the Luddite uprising. The alleged fallacy is sometimes referred to as the Luddite fallacy. The Luddites produced quite a bit of its own literature. I am not aware of any statement asserting that there is only a fixed, certain, or given amount of work to be done. There is, however, the

statement of the prosecutor, Mr. Richardson, in the trial of three men accused of murdering the manufacturer, William Horsfall:

> I have not the means of making such observations as I have frequently and lately heard made, upon the delusion which has prevailed upon that subject, amongst the lower orders. It has been supposed that the increase of the machinery by which manufactures are rendered more easy, abridges the quantity of labour wanted in the country. It is a fallacious argument: it is an argument, that no man, who understands the subject at all, will seriously maintain.

The prosecutor's address is odd in that it initially disclaimed personal knowledge of the alleged delusion, which the he nevertheless attributed to "the lower orders" and not specifically to the accused. The prosecuter then went on to describe the victim as a man of "warm feeling, of great and good understanding who saw the fallacy of these arguments." What Richardson *may* have meant by "warm feelings" was that he was outspoken and passionate in his opinions. The insuation was that the victim was murdered *because* of his "good understanding."

There was, however, no evidence presented at the trial about the alleged delusion. An informer, Benjamin Walker, testified that the defendant, George Mellor, had said to him "that there was no method of smashing the machinery, but by shooting the masters." While this may have been material to Mellor's intent, it says nothing about any conviction that "machinery abridges the quantity of labour wanted." Richardson's excursion into alleged delusions that prevail amongst the lower orders was a *non sequitur* that perhaps was aimed at stirring up the jury's prejudice against the defendants.

Three of the first four notable incantation of the fallacy claim came from government officials. Rasbotham was a magistrate. Richardson was a crown prosecutor. The third, Edward Carleton Tufnell, was a Poor Law Commissioner who had been seconded to be an examiner for a Royal Commission on the employment of children in factories, which had been established by the Whig government to head off ten-hour legislation backed by a coalition of Tories and Radicals.

In his 1833 report to the commission, Tufnell offered his opinion that the agitation for a Ten-Hour Bill by factory workers was motivated by "the blunder of confounding a rise caused by increased demand with a rise caused by increased difficulty of production." This was a fairly mild, if reactionary, charge. A year later, Tufnell published anonymously, *Character, Object and Effects of Trades' Unions*, which offered a more aggressive and hostile condemnation of trade union motives and tactics.

Tufnell made his abhorrence of unions explicit, His definition of a trades union as "a Society whose constitution is the worst of democracies — whose power is based on outrage — whose practice is tyranny — and whose end is self destruction." In their *History of Trade Unionism,* Sidney and Beatrice Webb speculated the book was published "there is reason to believe at the instance and at the cost of the Whig Government." Long excerpts from the pamphlet, along with effusive praise for it, appeared in the following months in *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Monthly Review* and *The Gentlemen's Magazine.* The pamphlet also received

glowing reviews (known in the publishing trade as "puffery") from the *Times of London, The Chronicle, Blackwood's,* and the *British Magazine and Monthly Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Information, Parochial History, and Documents Respecting the State of the Poor, Progress of Education, etc.*

After repeating his claim about the motive of causing a price rise by restricting output, Tufnell launched into his denunciation of the Ten-hour bill as a "trick":

> Here we have the secret source of nine-tenths of the clamour for the Ten-hour Factory Bill, and we assert, with the most unlimited confidence in the accuracy of our statement, that the advocacy of that Bill amongst the workmen, was neither more nor less than a trick to raise wages -- a trick, too, of the clumsiest description; since it is quite plain, that no legislative enactment, whether of ten or any other number of hours could possibly save it from signal failure.

Restriction of output had long been a defensive tactic of industry, most famously illustrated by the limitation of the vend orchestrated by Newcastle coal producers from 1771 to 1845. Medieval guilds, which were combinations of masters, fixed prices by limiting production for centuries. This is not to suggest that restriction of output was, or wasn't, the "secret source" for the factory bill or that if it had been it would have succeeded. But Tufnell's denunciation was unsubstantiated and inconsistent with historical fact. It was unsubstantiated, inconsistent, and influential in subsequent anti-worker, anti-union rhetoric.

Workers and unions were not oblivious to the fixed amount of work rhetoric. Sometimes they even employed it in the conditional tense exploring what might happen *if* a given quantity of work was distributed in different ways. A good example occurs in *Labour, Its Unequal Distribution and Unnecessary Excess* (1858) by Robert Dick, M.D.

> ...let us suppose that there is a certain amount of work to be done, and that there are twelve men to perform it. Now, this work may be accomplished in one of two ways. The whole twelve men may be set to execute each his equal share of the task; in which case, it may be supposed, that after its completion, there shall be sufficient time, strength and inclination left to these men, to exercise and perfect themselves, as "moral, intellectual, spiritual, recreative, contemplative and religious beings," which indeed they are, as well as working beings.
>
> But there is another mode of having this labour performed. It is to set three men out of the twelve to execute the whole of it; and if all the twelve men are 'helpless, optionless men, detached from the soil, and not having its solid and certain independence to plant themselves on... it is clear that they must accept implicitly the terms of the capitalist employer; and if for his selfish, individual interest and profit it be, that the work should be performed by three men only of the twelve, they have no alternative but submission.

> And what are the consequences? That the three men are brutalized by over-work, and live, eat, and sleep, only to work; while nine men are thrown out of employment and have no alternative but starvation on the one hand, or on the other, that of obtaining food either by crime, or by mean, unmanly, and degrading shifts, which lower and corrupt human nature.

Dick's numbers are exaggerated. What if instead nine workers are brutalized by over-work while only three are thrown out of employment and become paupers? "But," our blockhead economist will object. "there is *not* a certain amount of work to be done!" Very well, let us suppose an increase in the amount of work to be done by one quarter and employ an additional two men to do it. Now we have 11 overworked and 'only' four unemployed. The unemployment rate has *plummeted* from 25% to 26.67%! Without knowing the actual proportions between necessary labour and people to do it, the fact that the work to be done is "not a fixed amount" is meaningless.

STRIKE.

The late 1860s and early 1870s produced a plethora of Tufnell-inspired rhetoric. Tufnell was even "plagiarized in the most shameless manner" by James Ward, in *Workmen and Wages at Home and Abroad* (1868). Ward (if that was even his actual name) plagiarized from both Tufnell's book and an unsigned 1867 *Quarterly Review* article, "Trades Unions." The latter article objected to the "narrow and short-sighted views" of the workman who regards the revenue of his employer "as a given quantity, and concerns himself solely with its division between him and his master." After reciting several more given quantities, the author sums up, "To any one accustomed to even the most elementary principles of political economy, to state these views is to refute them. We have touched the fallacy which lies at the bottom of this whole system." An article in the *Edinburgh Review* the same year, with the same title (!), pronounced the same verdict:

> At the bottom of these contrivances for artificially increasing the amount of employment, there seems to lurk the fallacy of supposing that the labour required to be done in any department of trade, or in the country generally, is a fixed quantity; therefore, in order to secure an aliquot portion of it to the greatest number, the labour must be spread out thin.

In his report on the engineers' strike in Newcastle for a nine-hour day, the London correspondent for the *New York Times*, signed, "F.H.J." dismissed the stated motives and objectives of the Nine Hours' League as devious. He alleged that the League was in reality pursuing a nefarious "ulterior design" of strangling production so that employers would be coerced into hiring ever more incompetent or lazy workers and paying them extortionate wages, "Their theory is that the amount of work to be done is a fixed quantity, and that in the interest of the operatives it is necessary to spread it thin in order to make it go far."

The repetition is tedious. That's the point. The drumbeat of derogatory depictions of trade unions in the 1860s and 1870s coincides with an increasingly organized and confident labour movement in Great Britain as well as a crumbling political economy orthodoxy. In 1864, the International

Workingmen's Association was founded. In 1869, William Thornton's *On Labour* and John Stuart Mill's review of the book fatally undermined the authority of the "wages fund" doctrine of classical political economy that decreed no alternative to the law of supply and demand. In 1871, Frederic Harrison managed to parlay a minority report into legislation that finally gave unions the right to strike. In 1872, Thomas Brassey's *Work and Wages* definitively refuted economists' and employers' assumptions about the linear relationship between hours of work and output using data from the era's largest railroad construction company, established by his own father. In his review of Brassey's book Harrison was unsparing in his criticism of the political economy orthodoxy:

> The complaint one makes against that anti-social jargon, which so easily passes for economic science, is that it is in ludicrous opposition to the common observation of facts. Political economy professes to be a science based on observation. But the bitter pedantry which often usurps that name usually assumes its facts, after it has rounded off dogmas to suit its clients. In practice this magazine of untruth escapes detection for two reasons. One is that the facts relating to labour are invariably seen through the spectacles of capital. The employing class is virtually in possession of the whole machinery of information; and all judgments are tinged with the tone current among them. Thus we see the very newspapers which celebrate the amusements of the rich in a hundred different forms, scandalized at the coal miners objecting to grub in the pits every day in the week. Laziness, ingratitude, and extortion, seem the proper terms for sportsmen and fine ladies to apply to the men and children who swelter half their lives underground. The second reason which obscures the truth about industry is, that the facts about capital are almost never honestly disclosed....

In 1871 John Wilson concocted an ingenious and ingenuous twist on the fixed amount of work accusation. Now that the wages-fund doctrine had been discredited, Wilson attributed labour's demands to a "Unionist reading of the Wage-fund theory." Four years earlier, an anonymous review in the *Quarterly Review* had affirmed the old doctrine but criticized unions with trying to "get as much out of the fund as possible" without regard to "the community of interests between master and workman." Now in the same journal, Wilson rejoiced that the theory "is henceforth shunted fairly out of the way of future discussion of all questions affecting labour and labour's wages." Well, shunted out of the way except for accusing the trade unions of having their own version of the wage-fund theory...

> ...founded on the same assumptions of a permanent wage-fund, in the hands of capitalists, the conclusion that it was possible for that portion of the working people organized in Unions to cause the lion's share of that fund to come into their own hands, to the exclusion, as far as possible, of outsiders -- that is to say the whole body of workpeople outside the Unions.

Wilson's argument is thus that trade unions are not simply predatory on capital but also -- and perhaps especially -- on non-unionized workers. One is almost tempted to admire the sheer audacity of such rhetorical prestidigitation. But only almost because the trick had consequences.

No less an economics authority than Alfred Marshall subsequently pedaled the fixed amount of work refrain under the sobriquet of the fixed *work-fund* fallacy.

> ...the argument that wages can be raised permanently by stinting labour rests on the assumption that there is a permanent fixed work-fund, i.e. a certain amount of work which has to be done, whatever the price of labour. And for this assumption there is no foundation. On the contrary, the demand for work comes from the national dividend; that is, it comes from work. The less work there is of one kind, the less demand there is for work of other kinds; and if labour were scarce, fewer enterprises would be undertaken.

And with this glib quasi-plagiarism, the fixed amount of work fallacy claim ascended to economics textbook heaven where unexamined truism are immortalized as long as the promote the agenda. Versions of the claim are later to be found in widely prescribed textbooks by A. W. Flux, Frank Fetter, Raymond Bye, and Paul Samuelson among others. In U.S. Congressional testimony on hours of work in 1963, Clyde Dankert invoked Marshall's fixed work-fund in arguing for caution in reducing the hours of work by legislation. Dankert favored a modest reduction but not too much. He claimed there was an inconsistency between arguments that shorter hours could result in improved productivity and the argument that it could reduce unemployment. "The latter argument," he explained, "is really based on the assumption that there is just so much work to be done, there is what economists sometimes call a fixed work fund."

Maurice Dobb had a better handle on what economists sometime call a fixed work- fund:

> It is not aggregate earnings which are the measure of the benefit obtained by the worker, but his earnings in relation to the work he does — to his output of physical energy or his bodily wear and tear. Just as an employer is interested in his receipts compared with his outgoings, so the worker is presumably interested in what he gets compared with what he gives.

Using Dobb's example of earnings in relation to the amount of work, there is no inconsistency between arguments for work time reduction based on improved productivity and arguments based on expanded employment. The two effects are complementary. The 1928 edition of Dobb's *Wages* put it in even stronger terms:

> What was implied in the economists' retort to the advocates of the so-called Work-Fund leads to the apparent paradox that the more the workers allow themselves to be exploited, the more their aggregate earnings will increase (at least in the long run), even if the result is for the earnings of the propertied class to increase still faster. And on this base is erected a doctrine of social harmony between the classes. But it does not follow that the workers will prefer to be exploited to a maximum degree, or that attempts to limit this exploitation are based on fallacious reasoning.

Economists sometimes called the alleged assumption a fixed work-fund but more often now they refer to a lump-of-labour fallacy. Soon after Marshall's *Principle of Economics* appeared with its

work-fund, David Frederick Schloss's "Why Working Men Dislike Piece Work," offered an alternative nickname for the ubiquitous fixed amount of work error. Schloss's coinage would surpass Marshall's to become the canonical buzz word. In his article Schloss told of a rather quaint encounter with a working man who was making washers on piece-work. The man told Schloss that he was making twice as many washers as when he was on daily pay. "*I know I am doing wrong*." says the workman, "*I am taking away the work of another man.*" But, he assures Schloss, he has the union's permission.

The basis of this belief, which is in a large measure responsible for the unpopularity of piecework, is that noteworthy fallacy to which I desire to direct attention under the name of 'the theory of the Lump of Labour.'

> In accordance with this theory it is held that there is a certain fixed amount of work to be done, and that it is best in the interests of the workmen that each shall take care not to do too much work, in order that thus the Lump of Labour may be spread out thin over the whole body of work-people. As the result of this policy, it is believed that the supply of available labour being in this manner restricted, while the demand for this labour remains (as it is supposed) unchanged, the absorption into the ranks of the employed of those who are now out of work will follow as a necessary consequence.

Schloss, a Jewish immigrant from Germany, was possibly intrigued by London slang. He used the same expression in an earlier piece on "The Jew as Workman," "Does the Jew..." Schloss asked, "seek to grab more than his just share of the 'lump of labour'?" "Lump work traditionally referred to day labour or work by the task. It was precarious employment as Henry Mayhew depicted it in *London Life and the London Poor*. "It is this contract or lump work which constitutes the great evil of the carpenter's, as well as of many other trades... the lower the wages are reduced the greater becomes the number of trading operatives or middlemen." In the 1880s, Charles Booth conducted a "sequel" to Mayhew's investigation, *Life and labour of the people in London.* Schloss was a researcher on that enterprise, as was Beatrice Potter (Webb). Perhaps "lump" caught Schloss's attention because it is cognate of German *lumpen.*

DISPOSABLE POPULATION

Schloss's lump of labour brings us almost to the end of the 19th century. At the same time, the associations of Schloss's lump with lump work and lumpenproletariat presents an opportunity to retrace our steps to pick up on the theme of disposable population, surplus population, and the disposable industrial reserve army.

Marx's military metaphor is more apt than one might guess. In 1808, when Thomas Chalmers's *An Enquiry Into the Extent and Stability of National Resources* was published, the word *disposable* was followed by *force* or *forces* no less than 17 percent of the time in British English books. Population followed 43 percent of the time. These were references to the argument in Chalmers's book, so his "disposable population" skewed the results. In peak years 1804 and 1812, *force* or *forces* accounted for more than half the instances of *disposable*. In the

early 19th century disposable was essentially a military term designating those groups of soldiers who could readily be redeployed to reinforce an attack or a defense.

Chalmers's metaphor thus built on the military sense in designating a portion of the population not engaged in producing either subsistence goods or "whatever enters into the general standard of enjoyment of the peasantry." Chalmers argued that "[a]fter the subsistence of the necessary population" that, is those engaged in producing food and ordinary comforts, there remained "an immense quantity of surplus food... and an immense population supported by that food." This remainder population is what Chalmers designated the "disposable population." Chalmers's view was that the disposable population was a good thing because it is available to produce (and consume) luxuries and, in times of conflict, be called up as soldiers.

In the *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx referred to Chalmers's 1832 *On political economy: in connexion with the moral state and moral prospects of society* as "in many respects [a] ridiculous and repulsive work." "Profit," Marx quoted Chalmers as saying, "has the effect of attaching the services of the disposable population to other masters, besides the mere landed proprietors, . . . while their expenditure reaches higher than the necessaries of life."

The quotation stands alone in the *Grundrisse* with no further explanation or context. By contrast, Marx devoted close attention to disposable *time* in Notebooks IV and VII of the *Grundrisse*, including a remarkable paragraph in the latter in which he repeats *disposable time* -- in English -- seven times. Marx cited *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties* as a the source for the statement "wealth... is disposable time, and nothing more."

The author of that 1821 pamphlet, Charles Wentworth Dilke was a follower of William Godwin, as had been Chalmers until he heard Thomas Robert Malthus's criticism of Godwin and became a disciple of Malthus. Given the rather limited usage of disposable income and disposable time in 1821 when Dilke's pamplet was published it seems plausible that Dilke's disposable time was a shot at Chalmers, especially because Dilke lamented the growth of "unproductive classes" whose occupations overlap considerably with Chalmers's disposable population (and incidentally with Graunt's catalogue of all those who are not "employed in raising and working necessary Food and Covering.")

Chalmers had a different perspective on the certain quantity of work question, admitting that in some occupations where "there is a certain quantity of work to be done; and this quantity, generally speaking, does not admit of being much extended, merely on the temptation of labour being offered at a cheaper rate." Chalmers proposed three possible remedies to excessively low wages. The first, which he opposed, was to supplement the low wages with charity from public funds. This may only prolong the distress, he argued. The second was to find new work through public works or charitable investment. To this he remarked that the scale of this remedy was usually too modest compared to the needs. Chalmers's favoured remedy involved "a change of habit amoung the workmen themselves." The working people needed only to save up enough of a fund with which to weather a period of depressed trade and wages: "Let these men only be enabled, on the produce of former accumulations, to live through a season of depression while they work moderately, or, if any of them should so chose it, while they do not work at all."

Something similar to that happened generationally in the 1960s when a youth counter-culture emerged on the prosperity of their parents. The authorities were not amused.

Chalmers was not alone in proposing this kind of self-help remedy. Charles Knight of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge advised workers, “When there is too much labor in the market, and wages are too low, do not combine to raise the wages; do not combine with the vain hope of compelling the employer to pay more for labor than there are funds for the maintenance of labor: but go out of the market.”

Meanwhile, Mr. Wentworth, the benevolent employer in Harriet Martineau’s *A Manchester Strike* had this sage advice, “And how are the masters to help you if you go on increasing your numbers and underselling one another... They do what they can for you in increasing the capital which you are to subsist; and you must do the rest by proportioning your numbers to the means of subsistence.”

Marx cited this remedy "put in the mouth of her 'beau ideal' of a capitalist," by political economy "in the guise of an old maid." He continued in the next paragraph with this observation: "Capitalist production can by no means content itself with the quantity of disposable labour power which the natural increase of population yields. It requires for its free play an industrial reserve army independent of these natural limits." A few pages earlier, he had launched into the heart of his discussion of surplus population with a blunt assertion. "But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis," he wrote, “...this surplus population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost.”

"This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation." Marx summed up his discussion of the progressive growth of the relative surplus population:

> The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, develop also the labour power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army increases therefore with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working class, and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism.

Disposable labour power, disposable industrial reserve army, disposable population, one begins to detect a common theme. These disposables "belong to capital quite as absolutely *as if the latter had bred it at its own cost."* Which is to say capital *didn't* breed them. What about disposable *time*? "If the labourer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the

capitalist." "Hence, it is self-evident that the labourer is nothing else, his whole life through, than labour power, that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and law labour time, to be devoted to the self-expansion of capital."

COLONISATION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

In a coda to the first volume of *Capital*, Marx sarcastically praised the "great merit" of E.G. Wakefield "to have discovered... in the Colonies the truth as to the conditions of capitalist production in the mother country." The formula recalls his account of Nassau Senior having been summoned by the cotton manufacturers "from Oxford to Manchester, to learn in the latter place, the political economy that he taught in the former."

In the final paragraph of the section on "The modern theory of colonisation" -- which is, of course, also the closing paragraph of volume one of *Capital* -- Marx admitted he was "not concerned here with the condition of the colonies":

> The only thing that interests us is the secret discovered in the new world by the political economy of the old world, and proclaimed on the house-tops: that the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of self-earned private property; in other words, the expropriation of the labourer.

That expropriation is not a relic of the past but an ongoing compulsion, as Marx's discussion of surplus population in the chapter on "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" explained. Colonisation is not something that happens in the colonies and stays in the colonies. Primitive accumulation is not something that happened in the past and stays there.

In his "Afterword" to the paperback edition of *Riot. Strike. Riot.* Joshua Clover observed that ″The Secret of Primitive Accumulation" could well have been the first chapter of *Capital*'s first volume. "But then it would be some seven hundred pages away from "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation...." Clover likened the adjacency of those two chapters to the concerns of his book: the politics of the arc from expropriation to immiseration. There is, of course, another side to that politics -- the side of the police and vulgar political economists I have been examining here. Marx scorned Wakefield's idea that the "coexistence of capital and wage-labour" in old Europe resulted from a "social contract." His response suggested that colonisation in the old world was no less "systematic," than what Wakefield prescribed for the new world,

> Now, one would think, that this instinct of self-denying fanaticism would give itself full fling especially in the Colonies, where alone exist the men and conditions that could turn a social contract from a dream to a reality. But why, then, should "systematic colonisation" be called in to replace its opposite, spontaneous, unregulated colonisation?

In fact the colonization of the old world was no more spontaneous or unregulated than the dispatch to Blackburn in 1779 of three companies of the York militia. 70 reserves of the 25th regiment, 100 young recruits, and the arming of 300 "respectable house-keepers." That is to say

a *disposable* force totaling 800-900 armed men. Squire Rasbotham's pamphlet turned out to be an uncannily successful ideological framing of the conflict. After echoing anonymously through the British anti-union propaganda in the 19th century, the lump-of-labour fallacy and its alias, the work-fund fallacy, became dogma in 20th century U.S. economics curricula.

The fallacy claim arrived in America decisively in 1901 or soon after. An appetizer had appeared the year before in an article in *The Engineering Magazine* by Charles Buxton Going. But for Going, "the 'lump of labour' and other economic fallacies" characterized *British* trade unionism and did "not appear in full vigour in the efforts and aims of the present labour unions of the United States." Even the spelling of labour with a "u" signified the foreignness of the concept.

Between November of 1901 and January of 1902, a series of article in the *Times of London* on "The Crisis in British Industry" alerted American manufacturers to the advantages of simultaneously vilifying and disparaging their union opponents with a single mystifying fallacy claim. The *Times* series described the rationale for the eight-hour day as being the absorption of all the unemployed by "obtaining employment for a larger number of persons on such work as there was already" instead of by the "laudable and much-to be-desired means of increasing the volume of trade..." The author of the series found this strategy objectionable because, without the disciplining factor of unemployment, "the workers would have the employers entirely at their mercy." The fallacy claim is nimble in that sometimes the counter claim is that fears of unemployment are unfounded. This time the claim was the eliminating unemployment would be a terrible thing.

Evidently inspired by the rhetoric of the *Times* article, the National Association of Manufacturers sounded the alarm in the U.S. that the eight-hour day was part of a general union strategy aimed at restricting output and thereby subordinating employers to the will of unionists. At its 1903 convention, the Association's president, David Parry, proclaimed his mission of "pulling up, root and branch, the unAmerican institution of trades unionism." He later wrote a dystopian novel, *The Scarlet Empire*, in which one of the lead characters vehemently denounces as "one of the most dangerous vaporings of ignorance" the theory of the Federation of Labor of the fictional Atlantis, "that there was a certain amount of work to be done…" The NAM's 115-page pamphlet against a federal eight-hour bill, *Eight Hours by Act of Congress Arbitrary, Needless, Destructive, Dangerous* (1904), cited restriction of output by unions as "surely one of the chief causes of the industrial decline of England." In 1906, the NAM brought William Collison, publicist of the strike-breaking National Free Labour Association and self-proclaimed informant for the *London Times* article, to the U.S. for a speaking tour.

Combating unions by attacking their allegedly vicious, fallacious and ineffectual "theory" became one of the core activities of the organization. Walter Drew's NAM pamphlet, "The Real Problem of the Eight-Hour Day," (1913?) exemplified the old, old fallacy claim: the unions' campaign for an eight-hour day, "is the statement as an economic fact of the old, old fallacy that men can restrict their output and thus make work for more men, and still have industry unaffected and providing work for all to do."

The strike-breaking vigilante group, Citizens' Industrial Alliance of America evolved from a suggestion of NAM president Parry at its 1903 convention. Parry was its first president. He was

succeeded the following year by cereal magnate and NAM director, Charles W. Post. In *The Brass Check*, Upton Sinclair cited Post's open boasts about how he "broke the newspapers and magazines to his will" :

> There is a law against workingmen getting together and enforcing a boycott; the Danbury hatters tried it, and the courts fined them several hundred thousand dollars, and took away their homes and turned them out onto the street. But if big advertisers choose to get together and boycott a magazine, the law of course would not dream of being impolite. At the very time that this Danbury hatters case was in the courts, the late C. W. Post was explaining in *Leslie's*, our barber-shop weekly, how he broke the newspapers and magazines to his will.
>
> On January 23rd, 1913, Mr. Post published in *Leslie's* an article, urging business men to organize and refuse to give advertisements to "muck-raking" publications... On April 10th Mr. Post contributed another article, describing his methods. He had his clerks go over all publications, listing objectionable matter, and he sent a form letter to offending publications, threatening to withdraw his valuable advertising unless they promised to be "good" in the future.

"And we have the old fallacy that eight hours a day will mean more men to be employed," was the familiar refrain in "The Proposed Federal Eight Hour Law and What it Means" reprinted by the CIAA's house organ, *The Square Deal*, in 1912.

At its 1923 convention, NAM president John Edgerton introduced Noel Sargent, manager of the Open Shop Publicity Bureau (subsequently renamed the Industrial Relations Department).

> Mr. Sargent has been getting out letters, collecting data, making addresses, and holding debates with eminent representatives of the other side of the question... He is teaching the teachers. He is teaching the professors and college presidents.

In its relations with the press, the Association sent out materials to newspapers, monitored the take-up of these stories by the papers, rewarded (with advertising revenue) those newspapers who towed the line and punished those who didn't through blacklists and boycotts. It made no secret of those activities; rather it extolled them as the organization's sacred and patriotic duty to uphold the US Constitution and the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament.

After fighting ruthlessly for three decades against unions and the eight-hour day the National Association of Manufacturers launched a billboard campaign in 1937 celebrating the "American Way" and taking credit on behalf of "industry" for "World's Shortest Working Hours," "World's Highest Wages," and "World's Highest Standard of Living."

Collison's National Free Labour Association and Post's Citizens' Industrial Alliance esteemed themselves counter-revolutionary forces, despite the revolution they fought against being a

fantastic distortion of the unions' intentions, demands, and tactics. As Marx and Engels pointed out in their manifesto, premature alarm against the spectre of communism has long been the first resort of reactionaries against their opponents.

But what if the reactionaries' feral instincts were right? After all, Marx's instructions to the delegates of the International Working Mens' Association on the resolution for the limitation of the working day had stated unequivocally:

> A preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive, is the limitation of the working day. It is needed to restore the health and physical energies of the working class, that is, the great body of every nation, as well as to secure them the possibility of intellectual development, sociable intercourse, social and political action.

Without the limitation of the working day, "all further attempts... must prove abortive." In his Inaugural Address to the IWMA, Marx hailed the Ten Hours' Bill as "not only a great practical success; it was the victory of a principle; it was the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class." Toward the end of his draft of volume III of *Capital*, Marx speculated on the "realm of freedom" stipulating that although it "begins beyond the realm of necessity... it can only flourish with this realm as its basis." Then he stated, "The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite." If Marx could come to these conclusions, why couldn't the counter-revolutionaries?

Over the course of the twentieth century, scorn for the alleged fallacy transitioned from a reactionary touchstone to a badge of respectability, worn by liberals as well as conservatives. Beginning in the first edition of 1948 and continuing until the 18th edition of 2004, Paul Samuelson's *Economics* -- hailed as "probably the most successful economics book ever published" -- contained a homily about a plausible explanation for union opposition to "wholesale" immigration, child labor, "mixed feelings" about women in the work force and advocacy of early retirement and fewer hours of work per week.

After musing that union policies could be interpreted as an attempt to "circumvent the law of diminishing returns" by keeping labor scare, Samuelson proposed "an alternative plausible explanation":

> Labor is almost always afraid that there will not enough jobs to go around—that there is only a certain "lump of work" to be done. If more people came into the labor market or if people work hard and efficiently, the result is thought to be unemployment. Certainly no other interpretation can explain the intermittent demand of labor for a working so short as 30 hours.

No other interpretation! By 1958, Samuelson had modified his lump of work/lump-of-labor explanation, giving the notion "its due," the notion may not seem fallacious for workers actually threated with the loss of their livelihood:

> This attitude is sometimes called by economists the “lump-of-labor fallacy.” We must give this notion its due. To a particular group of workers, with special skills and status, the introduction of technological change may represent a real threat. Viewed from their personal standpoint, the lump-of-labor notion may not seem so fallacious.

Also understandable would be people harboring such unfounded ideas when there is widespread unemployment that lasts for years:

> True enough, in a great depression, when there is widespread unemployment for years at a time, one can understand how workers may yield to lump-of-labor philosophy. But the lump-of-labor argument implies that there is only so much useful remunerative work to be done in any economic system, and that is indeed a fallacy.

To give Samuelson's notion its due, even in a great depression there is always "work to done." The question of whether anyone will pay them to do it is what causes workers to yield to the "philosophy" Samuelson called a fallacy. Finally, Samuelson capped off his discussion with a faux-Keynesian rational that all the real threats of unemployment that people *irrationally* feared could be eliminated or mitigated with the right mix of government policies:

> If proper and sound monetary, fiscal, and pricing policies are being vigorously promulgated, we need not resign ourselves to mass unemployment. And although technological unemployment is not to be shrugged off lightly, its optimal solution lies in offsetting policies that create adequate job opportunities, and not in restrictions upon production.

When Paul Samuelson graciously replied to my inquiry in 1999, it became clear he had no idea about the origin or provenance of the fallacy claim. "The 'lump-of-labor' fallacy that my textbook wrote about was widespread during the Great Depression of 1929-1935 and is still encountered in today's France," After that very brief recap of his lack of scholarship, Samuelson went on to recite the fallacy claim. Could it be that "my textbook wrote about" was a Freudian slip, an inadvertent disclaimer of authorship?

The publisher of Samuelson's *Economics*, McGraw-Hill was a leading member of the NAM's public relations committee during its anti-New Deal "American Way" campaign. In fact, the NAM campaign evolved in response to a McGraw-Hill initiative, The McGraw-Hill Public Relations Forums, directed by a former editor of *Business Week*, a McGraw-Hill publication. Might the "lump of work" have originated in a public-relations-minded editorial suggestion from Samuelson's publisher?

Contrast Samuelson's equivocations to the certainty of Henry Hazlitt's *Economics in One Lesson.* Hazlitt's polemic. published in 1946, mentioned the fixed amount of work fallacy three times. Among the versions of the fallacy Hazlitt denounced was the "full employment fetish" which is based on "the assumption that there is only a fixed amount of work to be done." Full employment policy is a fallacy because, in the classic "Treasury View," it diverts funds from

private investment. There is only a certain quantity of savings to go around is the philosphy behind Hazlitt's claim. He did not attribute this fetish to a particular author but he made the implication plain in the preface, "I hope I shall not be accused of injustice on the ground, therefore, that a fashionable doctrine in the form in which I have presented it is not precisely the doctrine as it has been formulated by Lord Keynes or some other special author."

The uneasy consensus between the liberals and the conservatives about what unions and workers foolishly believed has endured to the present century. Between 1993 and 2025, *The Economist* magazine featured denunciations of the fixed amount of work assumption 33 times. In recent years, the emphasis has shifted from shorter hours of work to immigration, global trade, and early retirement just as the emphasis shifted during the 19th century from machine hostility to shorter hours. ProQuest Central database returns over a thousand results between 2000 and 2025 for "lump of labor," "lump of labour," "lump of work" or "luddite fallacy." Only around 60 of those address work time reduction. The majority of articles (568) deal with retirement or immigration. Only about a quarter of the ProQuest Central search returns mention machines. We have come a long, long way from Dorning Rasbotham's thoughts on the use of machines.

Several years ago, I analyzed 539 lump of labor articles published between 1890 and 2010. Only 34 of those articles questioned the fallacy claim. Most of the articles simply recited the claim as rote fact. It wasn't a fact but what James Bonar called a "watchword." He defined a watchword as "a detached phrase that has taken the place of an argument. It is even, with sluggish minds, the substitute for an argument, a catch-word." In *Disturbing elements in the study and teaching of political economy*, Bonar went on to challenge the “in the long run” justification that Keynes would later skewer and specifically how it was directed at machines and workers, the “theory of compensation as regards the workpeople displaced by machinery” that Marx had earlier criticized in *Capital*:

> It is not easy to show that the invention of new machines will tend to increase wages. This was the tendency first supposed by Ricardo; but he changed his mind and wrote: "The same cause which may increase the net revenue of the country may at the same time render the population redundant and deteriorate the condition of the labourer. … the more orthodox position was that machinery tends in the long run to employ more labour than it has displaced; this was to be the consolation of the hand-loom weaver, thrown out of work by the factory system.

THE RETURN OF DISPOSABLE POPULATION

In a footnote in notebook IV of his *Grundrisse*, Marx observed that "the creation of surplus labor on one side corresponds to the creation of minus-labor, relative idleness (or non-productive labor at best) on the other." Marx singled out "paupers, flunkeys, lickspittles etc. living from the surplus product, in short, the whole train of retainers; the part of the servant class which lives not from capital but from revenue." But he also remarked that "the creation of disposable time is then also creation of time for the production of science, art etc." He then restated his initial comment in a more developed form:

> The course of social development is by no means that because one individual has satisfied his need he then proceeds to create a superfluity for himself; but rather because one individual or class of individuals is forced to work more than required for the satisfaction of its need - because surplus labour is on one side, therefore not-labour and surplus wealth are posited on the other. In reality the development of wealth exists only in these opposites: in potentiality, its development is the possibility of the suspension of these opposites

In *Theories of Surplus Value* Marx speculated about what would happen in the absense of such a suspension. If there was an advance of industrial productivity such that "whereas earlier two-thirds of the population were directly engaged in material production, now it is only one-third," the time set free would not be equally distributed in the form of leisure and self-provision, because "in capitalist production everything seems and in fact is contradictory." Instead, the revenue will go to support capitalists and a greatly enlarged mass of unproductive workers:

> It can be supposed that—with the exception of the horde of flunkeys, the soldiers, sailors, police, lower officials and so on, mistresses, grooms, clowns and jugglers—these unproductive labourers will on the whole have a higher level of culture than the unproductive workers had previously, and in particular that ill-paid artists, musicians, lawyers, physicians, scholars, schoolmasters, inventors, etc., will also have increased in number.

In the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists turned their attention to the question of a "new middle class" with some controversy about whether it was new, a class, or in the middle. Thomas Chalmers's disposable population had long been forgotten and played no part in those discussions. Nevertheless, these new middle classes are supported out of revenue just as were Chalmers's disposable population and Marx's unproductive labourers. The "correct" definition of unproductive labour, which Marx took from from Adam Smith, is "only that labour-power is productive which produces a value greater than its own." Growing your own vegetables is unproductive by this definition, although that may seem counter-intuitive. A few extra zucchinis for the neighbours makes it productive.

Yet again in *Capital,* in the section titled "The theory of compensation as regards the workpeople displaced by machinery," Marx addressed the expansion of unproductive employment

> ...the extraordinary productiveness of modern industry, accompanied as it is by both a more extensive and a more intense exploitation of labour power in all other spheres of production, allows of the unproductive employment of a larger and larger part of the working class, and the consequent reproduction, on a constantly extending scale, of the ancient domestic slaves under the name of a servant class.

Here is Marx saying repeatedly that the amount of work to be done is *not* fixed. In *Value, Price and Profit,* he unloads a torrent against "our friend Weston's fixed idea of a fixed amount of wages, a fixed amount of production, a fixed degree of the productive power of labour, a fixed and permanent will of the capitalist, and all his other fixedness and finality..."

Riot. Strike… Disposable Population by Tom Walker, May 15, 2025 draft

In spite of Marx's contempt for flunkies and lickspittles, unproductive work is not inherently purposeless or inessential as his inventory of "artists, musicians, lawyers, physicians, scholars, schoolmasters, inventors, etc." should clarify. But the disproportion of unproductive workers to productive workers and the unemployed does present barriers to accumulation. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx enumerated four essential characteristics of capital that impose inherent limits on accumulation. These were the limit subsistence imposed on the exchange value of labour power, the limit that realizability of surplus value imposed on surplus labour time, the limit that circulation imposed on production; and the fact that real wealth had to take a form "distinct from itself" in order to become an object of production at all. Capital constantly *overcomes* these barriers only to forget them and run up against them again at a higher level of development. "But from the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier and hence gets ideally beyond it, it does not by any means follow that it has really overcome it..."

Those inherent limits that capital imposes on accumulation, it also imposes on the unproductive labour. Art, music, scholarship, medicine, invention also is made to take a form distinct from itself, for example in the form of advertisements or of journalism that is molded to the requirements of the large advertisers. The hypertrophy of unproductive labour does not abolish the limits imposed the exchange value of labour power. Stagnation and inflation have replaced the old business cycle with change in government monetary and fiscal policies moderating the distributional effects. But the same contradictions persist behind the interventions.

"The whole development of wealth rests on the creation of disposable time." One might expect that such a definitive statement by such a famous thinker as Marx would elicit some commentary, puzzlement, or even controversy. But just the opposite. It is, apparently, a disposable thought. The statement crystalizes Marx's mature critique of political economy and gestures at what it could take to suspend the opposites between surplus labour on one side, and not-labour and surplus wealth on the other that he addressed in his discussion of disposable time in notebook IV of the *Grundrisse.* In notebook VII, Marx was explicit about what it would take to suspend those opposites:

> The more this contradiction develops, the more does it become evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien labour, but that the mass of workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labour. Once they have done so - and disposable time thereby ceases to have an antithetical existence - then, on one side, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, disposable time will grow for all.

Disposable population, the disposable industrial reserve army, and the appropriation of alien labour are the antithetical existence of disposable time. It is one thing to resist capital and its depredations. It is another to know what you are fighting for. The counter revolutionaries and colonialists seem to have an intuitive grasp of what they don't want you to fight for. Believe them.