

## 2 ***Work-based Society***

Our basic strategy will be to set up an opposition between an ideal-typical work-based society on the one hand and a consumption-based society on the other. This will allow us to examine the characteristics of one type in direct contrast with the characteristics of the other. In deploying this dualism we are not suggesting that either social type has ever existed in its purest form, or that these are the only ways of categorising the leading features of societies which currently exist in the industrialised West. Nor are we claiming that one type will always and inevitably give way to the other in faithful historical sequence. What we are hoping to do however, is to develop some closer sociological understanding of the mechanisms of social transition, specifically as they may relate to increasing levels of affluent consumption. Although it would be most satisfying to reach firm conclusions about whether and how one manifestation of the status quo is or is not giving way to another, our initial expectation is to find that production and consumption are complimentary realms of activity – in the language of social theory, a duality – and thus that all advanced industrial societies currently display elements of both ideal types. It is also noted however, that there is a growing tendency (not least in the minds of many sociologists) to take work-based activities so much for granted that other realms of activity appear to have become dominant. Whether the essence matches up with the appearance is one of the things we hope to discover.

### ***Defining the work-based society***

We should begin by elaborating our ideas about what constitutes a work-based society. Essentially we are suggesting that in this social type people regard work – defined here simply as formal paid employment<sup>1</sup> – as their central life interest in the sense that they attribute greater significance to the benefits which come from this realm of activity than they do from any other realm. Although paid work, and especially work performed in the shadow of capital accumulation always involves a degree of compulsion, we are also interested in the way that people are somehow content or reassured that working activities saturate their lives. Whether this sometimes

**16** **WORK, CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE**

reluctant consent is built to last is one of the questions we will be addressing shortly, but it seems reasonable to accept that the idea of work-centredness found in work-based society is something about which people have positive expectations. In Gramscian terms, work is hegemonic to the extent that people continue to be prepared to participate in it despite the inconveniences it involves. Work is also hegemonic in that this realm provides a common core of experience for people, a core which is itself crucial to social stability and growth. To adopt a postmodern hermeneutic for a moment, work in work-based society is not simply a burden and a necessity, a means of putting bread on the family table, but a performance of the whole individual which defines through action what the relationship is between worker, bread, table and family.

We will compile evidence of the concreteness of work-based society from three main sources. First, we can look at measures of *work intensity* meaning essentially how many of the population are involved in paid employment, and the number of hours they typically work. Second, we can look at *work-centredness* meaning the extent to which individuals orient their lives and expectations around working activities. Third, we can look at the attitude of mind, the world view, the ideational envelope of the *productivist work ethic* and consider why it has become so dominant. This will pave the way for our discussion in the following chapter of the role and nature of affluence in work-based society. The main point we will want to make is that within capitalism at least, generating financial income (and for most people today this means what they can earn through paid employment) is fundamental. At its simplest, affluence depends on how much income one has and how freely one is able to spend it.

**WORK INTENSITY IN WORK-BASED SOCIETY**

The simplest measure of the degree to which a society is work-based is the proportion of people's lives it occupies. It would be difficult to argue convincingly that a society was not work-based, or was becoming progressively less work-based, unless it could be shown that the proportion of the population's time and energy it typically occupies is low or is reducing (as we shall see in Chapter 4, one of the assumptions often associated with consumption-based society is the notion that work-time decreases and leisure time increases). Taking economic activity (the proportion of the population of working age who are employed, self-employed or actively looking for work) as a fair reflection of work-intensity, and using the United Kingdom as a case in point, government statistics show that rates of economic activity are not only high but in some categories such as part-time

working, are increasing. In Spring 2002 'there were 27.7 million people in employment' which was 'the highest number ... since the series began in 1959'. Between 1987 and 2002 'the total number of people in employment has risen by 3 million as more people are working and fewer people are unemployed' (*Social Trends*, 2003: 78). The writers of the report conclude that in the United Kingdom 'there are more people in employment than at any time [since 1945]' and that nearly 60 per cent of households in 2002 can be described as 'work rich' in that all members of that household who are of working age, are working (*Social Trends*, 2003: 76 and Table 4.6).

The enthusiasm for paid employment has also remained strong amongst women, and especially for part-time paid employment (25 per cent of employees work part-time and 82 per cent of part-time workers are female). Following Hakim we can note that 'Women's full-time employment rates have been virtually stable since 1881', and that: 'All the increase in employment in Britain in the post-War period ... consisted of growth in female part-time jobs ...' (Hakim, 1996: 61-63) The evidence developed by Hakim clearly shows that even if rates of increase are disputed (Gershuny concludes for example, that during the 1980s and 1990s; 'for both men and women, hours of work have been rising pretty steadily' Gershuny, 2000: 53), there has been no significant *decrease* in rates of economic activity.<sup>2</sup> If there is any actuality in the notion that people in the United Kingdom are working less intensely than in previous decades, there is little evidence that these people are female. It will not be long before rates of economic activity for males and females are the same or before there will be equal numbers of males and females in the United Kingdom workforce. We might add that these developments show that, even if it were at least partly true in the past, work-based society is no longer a place where income-getting is the sole preserve of male household members.<sup>3</sup>

As one would expect, if rates of economic activity are high, rates of unemployment are relatively low. Using the International Labour Office (ILO) measure, in 2002 in the United Kingdom, the unemployment rate for all females aged over 16 was 4.6 per cent and for males was 5.8 per cent (*Social Trends*, 2003: Table 4.19). As if having one job were not enough, this report also notes that 'around 4 per cent of those in employment' (employee or self-employed) in the United Kingdom 'had a second job ... 5 per cent of women and 3 per cent of men' (*Social Trends*, 2003: 81).

### **Time for work**

Of course work-intensity is not just about whether or how many people have a paid job (or even how many paid jobs people have) but how many hours they spend doing those jobs. If everyone aged 16 to 75 had a paid job it might not follow that the total quantity of paid work done had

increased if they all only worked two days per week. This simple point plays an important part in Hakim's arguments, one of which is that official statistics fail to distinguish within the category of part-time working, between a marginal worker doing only a few hours' causal work per week, and someone working up to 29 hours per week. Although both are counted as 'employed' there is clearly a very significant difference in the contributions they make (Hakim, 1996). Beginning with an informal calculation of our own, if we assume an average waking day of 17 hours, and deduct a further 1 hour of waking time for keeping our bodies clean and 2 hours for keeping ourselves fed<sup>4</sup>, we could say that as a broad approximation we have 14 waking hours available per day or 98 per week. In an average working week with five days at work and two days not (and leaving aside for a moment the complexities of flexible working arrangements – for a discussion see Felstead and Jewson (eds) (1999)), this means that in 2004 somebody with a typical 37-hour full-time job spends nearly 38 per cent of their available waking time per week actually at work (37 hours as percentage of the 98 available). Over an average year in which 48 weeks are spent working this amounts to around 35 per cent of waking hours ( $48 \times 37$  hours as percentage of 5,096 total waking hours) and over an average lifetime of 75 years, 37 of which are typically spent working, work accounts for 17.2 per cent of the entire waking lifetime ( $1,776 \times 37$  years as percentage of 382,200 total waking hours).

Current UK government data suggest that although the nominal number of hours of those working 'full-time' is between 35 and 40 hours per week (The European 'working time directive' – implemented 1 October 1998 – seeks to limit working so that including overtime, 'working time shall not exceed an average of 48 hours for each seven days'; for commentary see McMullen, 2000), many full-time employees and especially men are working a good deal more than this: 'around 25 per cent of working men and 11 per cent of working women aged 25 to 49 years were working more than 50 hours per week' and 'nearly 1.4 million men and 0.25 million women are working in excess of 60 hours per week' (*Social Trends*, 2003: 88 and Table 4.26).<sup>5</sup> This report does however draw attention to the fact that as many as 18 per cent of male and 33 per cent of female full-timers aged 25 to 49 are not happy with this situation and regard themselves as 'overemployed' in the sense that they would prefer 'to work fewer hours for less pay'. Against this however, must be set the 10 per cent of male and 9 per cent of female full-timers who regard themselves as 'underemployed' in the sense that they 'want to work more hours' (around 40 per cent of part-timers feel underemployed) (*Social Trends*, 2003: Tables 4.28 and 4.29).

Around the margins of working time strictly measured we should add other time spent in preparing for work. These are bits-and-pieces of time

which are soaked up by work. This temporal collateral damage of work includes such things as being suitably turned out, having appropriate clothing and other equipment, and arguably being sufficiently well fed to cope with the working day. Even if one allows that a deduction should be made for non-work periods at work such as rest and meal breaks, any gains here are easily off-set by time spent travelling to and from work. Compared with the routines of localised working around the mills, mines, steel works and docks of the early to mid-years of the twentieth century when the majority of the working population walked to work, the contemporary regimes of often long-distance commuting certainly seem more rather than less intense. Whether the burden of servicing the work-related needs of household income-getters is carried out by income-getters themselves or by other household members, the true extent to which the domestic activity of households is directly related to the demands of paid work should certainly be included in our measure of time spent in work-related activity (Hakim, 1996; Bradley et al., 2000; Gershuny, 2000).

A little more obliquely, we could also consider including in our audit of work and directly-work-related time an allowance for the time we have invested in gaining the qualifications necessary to work at all. Whilst basic literacy and numeracy are obviously part-and-parcel of the general learning process, there are other kinds of qualifications which have very little use outside their field of application. A redundant or retired engineer for example might never again have to set a lathe or make calculations about clearances and tolerances. As we know from studies of the experience of unemployment, one of the losses which people feel most keenly is of a sense of purpose and satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> As and when one leaves a job for the last time the question of why she or he bothered to spend so much of their lives doing that particular thing hangs in the air like a guilty conscience especially if one has no further use for the skills and experiences the job required (Sayers, 1998). Like work itself, doing the training and gaining the qualifications are largely means to an end rather than ends in themselves. Continuous messages from employers' organisations about skills shortages and the need to retrain, the whole managerial philosophy which travels under the banner 'investing in people', and even messages from the social-sciences funding councils about increasing the training component of doctoral programmes, constantly reiterate the expectation that the work of learning to work is never done.

One could argue that assessing work-intensity only in terms of official measures of the economic activity rates and hours of work of those currently and directly participating in paid employment (bodies that the data are actually able to record), underestimates the extent of work-related activity across the population as a whole. For example, many of the activities of those falling into categories such as people in full-time

**20 WORK, CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE**

education or training, the unemployed, the sick, the disabled, the retired, and those under working age, are oriented towards the demands of work, past present or future. The clearest factor mitigating economic activity is the number and age of dependent children within the household, and especially if it is a lone-parent household. In 2002, the economic activity rates of lone mothers was 57 per cent compared with 73 per cent for the female working-age population as a whole (this figure falls to 39 per cent if the dependent child/children are aged under five years) (*Social Trends*, 2003: Table 4.3). We might also want to include in this category forms of market and non-market work which tend to be undercounted in, or to fall outside, official measures of economic activity. In her review for example, Hakim includes people engaged in 'marginal market work' (less than ten hours per week) such as family workers, those in the informal economy, seasonal and temporary workers. In the non-market category she includes voluntary work, domestic, reproductive and caring work. According to Hakim however, we should not overestimate the contribution of these 4 million or so marginal workers in the informal economy because 'the number of *hours worked* are too trivial to make a great difference to the conventional measures of the size of the labour force and the *earnings* involved are too small to dramatically alter their financial dependence on others' (Hakim, 1996: 40).

We should also note that work-intensity is not evenly spread across the population as economic activity rates are mitigated by differences in cultural expectations and in levels of education and qualifications. United Kingdom data for 2001–2 show for example, that employment rates are very much higher for those with higher qualifications than for those without, and amongst White, Indian or Pakistani people than amongst Black or Black British people (*Social Trends*, 2003: Table 4.10). Rates of self-employment are also much higher amongst members of the Pakistani or Chinese community than amongst members of the White, Black Caribbean or Black African communities (*Social Trends*, 2003: Table 4.16). Differential access to employment opportunities has also been noted as one of the major constituents of 'polarisation' between different groups or classes of women. Bradley et al., conclude for example, that 'young middle-class women with higher degrees can grasp the opportunities on offer, while those without qualifications from working-class backgrounds may find themselves facing the same restricted labour market choices as their mothers ...' (Bradley et al., 2000: 89).<sup>7</sup>

Whilst it is certainly true that not every member of the household works (although as we have seen the proportion of work-rich households in Britain is increasing), we are all dependent on those that do (we do not have to stretch this point too far in order to include dependency on the state as a kind of society-wide household responsibility). It is the high

degree of dependency on that proportion of the population which is actively in work which is one of the characteristics of work-based society. As is frequently observed, the ageing of the population in the United Kingdom and other Western economies amounts to an increased burdening of those that are in work. Government statisticians reported in 2003 for example, that 'the number of people aged 65 and over will exceed the numbers aged under 16 by 2014'. Between 1970 and 2001, the proportion of the European population aged over 65 years increased from 12 to 17 per cent (*Social Trends*, 2003: 31–2).

As many studies of the experiences of unemployment and job insecurity have shown (see for example Heery and Salmon (eds) (2000)), being without work, or excluded from work is not at all the same thing as being free of the needs and expectations which work is normally and habitually performed in order to fulfil. To preview a point we will be discussing shortly, the fundamental essence of the productivist ethic is that work provides the most appropriate, some would say 'rational' means, of putting us in touch with the resources we need to satisfy our various needs. Leaving aside the complex (and somewhat rare) possibility that work can itself become an end (an end-in-itself or wertrational action in Weber's terms), it is typically regarded as just a means to an end (a zweckrational action). If one loses access to what have become the conventional means of achieving these ends, the ends are still there and still need to be satisfied. Hunger, cold, lack of creative and social opportunity are not caused by lack of work; they are part of the amalgam of expectations and needs which work was invented to satisfy. If one is not satisfied with the means currently available for satisfying one's needs and expectations, then one only has three alternatives: (a) minimise one's needs, (b) find alternative means of satisfying them, or (c) give oneself over to mortality.

### **WORK-CENTREDNESS IN WORK-BASED SOCIETY**

We have already alluded to the idea that work dominates the lives of people in work-based society because they somehow expect it to do so. Few people express much surprise at the fact that they will ordinarily spend over a third of their weekly waking time during the middle years of their lives working. It is also generally accepted that a good deal of one's time before entering the workforce will be devoted to preparing for that happy day, and that the manner of one's retirement will largely depend on how successful one's working years have been. In trying to account for this general acceptance of the dominance of work (an acceptance which renders it dominant) we need to do two things. In the following section we will consider the kinds of justificatory devices people use to square the demands

## 22 WORK, CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE

and burdens of work with a willingness to continue being involved in it. How do we legitimise the fact that 17 out of every 100 of our waking hours throughout our lives will be spent doing something which we might very well prefer not to do? This means looking at the work ethic of productivism, the ideology which surrounds work in a work-based society and binds people to it. First though, and before we look at the substantive rationality of work-based society, we need to look briefly at the relationship between work and the expectations people have about what it provides.

### ***The need to work***

In terms of the formal rationality of work in work-based society there is no need to belabour the point that work provides the central mechanism in society through which people can gain access to resources necessary to fulfil various categories of needs (Ransome, 1996; Slater, 1997b). Following the largely unambiguous findings of empirical research into these matters we can simply state that the principal expectations which people have of work are for material and psychological security (principally through income and continuity of employment), opportunities for creativity (i.e. having interesting and challenging work), and opportunities for social contact (Ransome, 1996). The prevailing organisation of work is believed to be, and for all practical purposes actually is, the only way currently available of enabling people to meet these needs.

If work is accepted as being a means to an end, then the dominance of a particular set of working arrangements depends on how well it enables us to meet those ends: are current working arrangements properly functional, are they fit for purpose? If we are imagining a society in which work dominates all other realms of activity, then logically the ends to which work are the means must also dominate all other ends. The idea of work-based society makes no sense at all if (a) the working arrangements it contains fail to provide a mechanism through which people can adequately satisfy their needs, or (b) the needs it enables people to satisfy are not actually very important to them. A work-based society is precisely one in which that category of activities we label work provides the only currently available and realistic means of satisfying our most urgent needs.

Given the amount of time and other resources which are given over to working it is truly remarkable how few alternative conceptions there are about work and how it could be organised in the industrialised West. Indeed when alternative concepts are proposed they are usually given



very little serious consideration (Frankel, 1987, refers for example, to the 'post-industrial utopianism' of writers such as Illich, 1971, 1973, 1975; Bahro, 1984, 1985; Toffler, 1970, 1980, and Gorz, 1982, 1985). Clearly other conceptions of work have been deployed in the past, and despite suggestions of a global convergence towards the Western model (Arrighi, 1994; Waters, 1995; Castells, 1996), other societies today operate successfully with quite different conceptions of work. So how are we to account for the fact that our particular conception has become so dominant?

The answer is simple if one looks in the right place. It is not so much that everyone agrees that the current Western concept and thus organisation of work is superior to all other possible conceptualisations and organisations (although it has been pretty successful), but that the underlying needs which people have are seen as universal, and current working arrangements are seen as allowing, at least in principle, adequate if not equal means of satisfaction for all. There is society-wide (and indeed industrial-society-wide) agreement that work is the dominant realm of activity because current working arrangements are accepted as being the best way for people to meet their needs. Even if one argues that capitalism has manipulated people's perception of needs and how they can best be satisfied so that they fit neatly with its particular way of administering to them (Lee, 1993; Lodziak, 1995; Slater, 1997b), the fact remains that the current work paradigm does provide people with an effective means of satisfying their needs. Arguments over particular techniques for getting people into work, organising and paying them (all detailed and for many rather boring aspects of the formal rationality of paid employment) are somehow seen as less important than, or are subsidiary to, a more fundamental acceptance that everyone has the same basic needs. It is agreement over ends which takes priority and there is very little room for manoeuvre over which needs and in what order we choose to try to satisfy them. There are no people who do not need food, shelter and opportunities for creativity, and thus no category of persons for whom the category of activities we label work has no application. This also accounts for why the contents of the category 'work' tend to be quite similar across societies who have followed the same historical trajectory. Other than in nuance and detail the manner and pattern of paid employment found in North America is very much the same as that found in Europe and Australasia. Why are they the same? Because there is agreement that they are the best, the most practical and rational way, of enabling people to satisfy their needs. Which needs? The needs we all have in common and are familiar with. It is only when current arrangements fail to allow people to meet their needs (for example during periods of job insecurity) that the mechanism of employment comes under

fresh scrutiny, and even then it is only the details which may alter not the underlying structure of employment.

### **THE PRODUCTIVIST WORK ETHIC**

Compared with alternative concepts of work,<sup>8</sup> the Western concept has become dominant because it draws a great deal of support from an underlying acceptance, even enthusiasm, for a highly productivistic conception of human activity and nature. This conception is reflected in what Belk (following Sartre, 1943) refers to as 'the basic states of our existence; having, doing, being' (Belk, 1988 in Millar, 2001, Vol. III: 193). The extraordinary vitality of the productivist ethic comes from the fact that it nourishes all three of these roots of human existence, and very often simultaneously. Whether we express ourselves primarily through our actions, our possessions or through what Fromm refers to as a 'being mode of existence' (Fromm, 1976 in Belk, 1988), productivism is key to all of them.

Furthermore, and highly significant for our definition of affluence in terms of standard of living (which is itself dependent on income), in modern *capitalist* society, not only has all productive activity become 'work', but work has become 'work for economic ends': 'If a single criterion of the possessive market society is wanted, it is that man's labour is a commodity, that is, that man's energy and skill are his own yet are regarded not as integral parts of his personality, but as possessions, the use of which he is free to hand over to others for a price' (Macpherson, 1962: 47). As Gorz has put it more recently, in modern (and postmodern) society work is 'work done with payment in mind. Here *commodity exchange*, is the principal goal. One works first of all to "earn a living" ...' (Gorz, 1989: 221 original emphasis). Given the overwhelming emphasis on 'rationality' in the conduct of economic affairs in modern societies (capitalist and non-capitalist alike) the rewarding of work by wages means, as Schwimmer (1979: 287) puts it, that 'all economically useful activities are fully comparable by a yardstick transcending their diversity'.

Not only then, does paid work dominate other realms of activity but a particular definition of work has come to dominate the concept of work itself. We are confident in describing the societies of the industrialised West as work-based, not simply because they are dominated by productive activity, since this is a prerequisite of all human societies and throughout history, but because of the particularly productivistic, the particularly workerly conception of work around which such assertively work-based societies have oriented themselves. Because of the very close association it conjours between the innovation of systems of production, and

people's perception of the needs they have, Western productivism makes particularly aggressive and demanding assumptions about the level at which various needs could or should be met: '... unlimited need – the constant desire for more and the constant production of more desires – is widely taken to be not only normal ... but essential for socio-economic order and progress' (Slater, 1997b: 28–9). Notwithstanding powerful arguments from the Green lobby (see Chapter 6), we will continue to have highly ambitious expectations about the satisfaction of needs as long as the advanced industrial infrastructure has the capacity to 'deliver the goods'. Only when this capacity has been overreached will we actually consider the possibility that we have reached the limits of our needs. As Baudrillard puts it: 'The system only sustains itself by producing wealth and poverty, by producing as many dissatisfactions as satisfactions, as much nuisance as "progress". Its only logic is to survive and its strategy in this regard is to keep human society in perpetual deficit' (Baudrillard, 1998: 55).

Adopting the perspective of an aggressive productivism means giving paid work top position in the hierarchy of activity. The things people do outside the realm of work simply do not have the same kind of status or utility as those done in work. This distinction between real needs and trivia, between worthwhile activity and frivolity, establishes in the mind a whole series of dualisms, between for example, work and play, or work and leisure, between the high-status public paid activity of men and the low-status private unpaid activity of women. Within hard-core productivism, the alleged exclusivity of work as a means to satisfying specific and urgent needs, the particularly ambitious interpretation of the levels to which they can be satisfied, and the non-negotiability of them leaves very little room for alternatives to develop and grow. It is an all-enveloping conception of work which smothers competitor conceptions almost before they see the light of day. In terms of challenging the core status of paid work in work-based society, it is a relatively trivial matter to argue for flatter organisational hierarchies or just-in-time methods of manufacture, when compared with the extremely daunting task of challenging the assumptions about human nature upon which productivism bases itself.

### ***The rationalities of the work paradigm in work-based society***

Adopting Weberian terminology, we can say that the productivist conception of work has become dominant because it is accepted as being formally rational in terms of the means it employs (i.e. industrialism), and substantively rational in terms of the ends to which those means are

directed (i.e. the satisfaction of needs). Making a convincing case either that there are alternative means and ends within the realm of work, or that there are worthwhile alternative realms of activity outside or beyond the realm of work itself is difficult because this means resisting these aggressive and fully-established rationalities and developing new ones.

Although the fact it has repeatedly been 'called in evidence' in wider discussions about the existence of otherwise of post-something society, gives the impression that it involves something more radical and substantive, arguments over post-Fordism, flexible specialisation and so on, represent a much more limited debate about the formal rationality of *the means and techniques* employed to produce goods and provide services (Amin (ed.), 1994; Kumar, 1995; Ransome, 1999). Changes in how things are produced, in what way and by whom, clearly do impact upon people's working lives (although it must be said that it is only sociologists of work who take much interest in other people's working arrangements), but discussion of them adds very little to our knowledge of the substantive rationality of contemporary production: 'Utility ... is the core of a formal concern with how we calculate in pursuing our interests rather than a substantive concern with what those interests are or how they came about' (Slater, 1997b: 44).

As Weber has so usefully pointed out, describing and assessing the technical merits of a particular piece of action is much more straight forward than trying to understand *why* it takes place. What the debates over Fordism and post-Fordism do illustrate is that relatively significant changes can take place in the day-to-day business of working *without* there being any consequent reconsideration of the substantive rationality of productivism. The fact that the productive system has the capacity to innovate is evidence of just how firmly established it has become, not of its imminent decline.

The essential characteristic of work-based society then, is that a particularly robust and resilient work paradigm has become the primary and principal object of people's activity. As I have argued extensively elsewhere (Ransome, 1996 and 1999), this paradigm is hegemonic in the sense that it articulates a set of shared ideas and beliefs about what work is and what its purposes are. In terms of its own function within the social structure, the productivist work ethic aides hegemony by uniting in the mind what is already united in action. If people willingly act together in the same labour process, and if, as we have argued, work is a means to an end, then the work ethic provides a means of articulating in an intellectual or ideational way, the shared purposes of work. In this sense, the work ethic is part of what Durkheim called the 'collective or common

consciousness', 'the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society [having] specific characteristics that make it a distinctive reality' (Durkheim, 1933: 79–80). In making an essential contribution to the overall belief system of work-based society, the productivist work ethic aids social stability. Following Gramsci, Williams has defined this as a 'socio-political situation' in which 'the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium: an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society' (G. Williams, 1960: 587; see also Ransome, 1992).

The importance of an hegemonising ideology of productivism within work-based society also plays a leading role in the 'regulationist' model developed by left-thinking economists to explain important aspects of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism during the 1980s (aspects which include the wider political and cultural context). Again following Gramsci, Lipietz suggests for example, that 'the struggles, armistices and compromises' which surround the emergence of a reliable 'mode of regulation' in the political sphere, are equivalent to struggles over 'competition, labour conflict and the regime of accumulation in the economic sphere' (Lipietz, 1994: 339). (See also Aglietta, 1979.)

In terms of the basic content of the substantive rationality of the work ethic of productivism in the West, we need look no further than Weber's classic account in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1976). Although some refinements have been made and some of the religious gloss has faded, the principles of economic conduct he describes for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of hard work and industriousness, diligence, thrift, and frugality, and the combination of (spiritual) soul-saving and the (pragmatic) saving of capital continues to provide an essential point of departure (Marshall, 1982; Ransome, 1996). The persistence of these principles of economic conduct owes a good deal to the fact, as indicated by Weber and subsequently by others, that they sanction limitless accumulation and presume that needs are boundless and can never therefore be fully satisfied. Neither one's soul nor one's capital can be saved too much. The very last thing the productivist needs is to be told that there is no longer any need to go on producing. If your whole concept of self is based on the presumption of purposive action, and if you believe that this can only be achieved by means of activities which have been categorised as work, then the prospect of being deprived of the opportunity to produce through work would be a complete nightmare. The productivist work ethic thus becomes self-reliant and self-justifying in that it defines for itself the ends to which it is directed. In Weberian terms, and following Lowith, the substantive

rationality of productivism 'becomes itself an end or an end in itself' (Lowith, 1982: 47).

### **SUMMARY**

In summary then, we can say that the key characteristic of work-based society is that work, in the form of paid employment, has become the dominant realm of activity. Work dominates people's lives both practically and ideationally. Practically, it overshadows all other realms of activity in terms of the proportion of our lives and energy it takes up. Whether one measures work intensity in terms of levels of economic activity, hours spent at or preparing for work, or the extent of direct or indirect dependency on those who are involved in paid work, it is difficult not to reach the conclusion that people in work-based society today are at least as highly work-centred and work-oriented as they have been since the emergence of industrialism. Taking the United Kingdom as a case in point, moderate shifts in patterns of working between men and women, or between full- and non-full-time employment have actually had very little impact on the sum of work being done. If anything, this sum is increasing rather than decreasing. Convincing evidence of any weakening of the work-based character of that society is difficult to find.

Ideationally, people in work-based society accept that work is the only means available through which they can satisfy their needs and expectations. These needs and expectations are themselves a product of what can be achieved if one whole-heartedly applies the (formally rational) techniques of modern economic production. Such achievements are only limited by what the techniques of production allow. This often willing acceptance of work survives any suggestion that there might be better or simply different ways of achieving these ends because it invokes intellectual, emotional and even moral support from a fully-established productivist world-view. In work-based society, all creative urges, all imagination and sociability, can be convincingly represented as reflecting the essential productivism which lies at the core of human nature. The productivist philosophy of having, being and doing, and the industrial work-ethic virtually become one and the same thing. Work in work-based society is truly paradigmatic because we are prepared to accept that both as a concept and as a practice, productivism provides an adequate means of interpreting the motivations and meanings of our actions, and therefore of justifying and legitimating them; the market 'is seen as a mechanism which automatically secures the substantive values of liberty, progress and justice' (Slater, 1997a: 52).

**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Hakim offers a more formal definition:

*Work* is any productive activity, any activity that produces goods or services. *Employment* is any work done for pay or profit, any work producing goods or services that are traded in the market economy. The key distinction is between *market* work and *non-market* work ... . The substitution rule or third-person criterion is used to distinguish between activities in the fuzzy borderline area between work and non-work. If an activity would lose its value (utility) if a substitute did the task, it is not work ... studying is not work, because the value of it would be lost if the task was performed by a substitute. (Hakim, 1996: 22–3)

<sup>2</sup>In challenging what she regards as a mistaken assumption underlying many accounts of 'the feminisation of work' of dramatic increases in employment amongst women during the twentieth century, Hakim argues that: '*The only increase in female employment since the 1950s, and indeed since 1851 or before, is the massive expansion of part-time jobs*', (Hakim, 1996: 63, emphasis added). She presses this point by emphasising that when full consideration is given to the fact that 'it takes 2.4 part-time employees to provide the same number of work hours as one full-time employee ... the real contribution of part-timers to the workforce is much smaller than the headcount suggests'. She concludes that although by the mid-1990s 'part-time employment accounted for 22 per cent of all jobs ... [they] still only accounted for 10 per cent of all hours worked ... full-time employee jobs ... still account for three-quarters of total work hours ...' (Hakim, 1996: 67).

<sup>3</sup>For discussions of women's participation in income-getting before and during the twentieth century see: Pahl, 1984; Walby, 1986; Fine, 1992; Charles, 1993; Hakim, 1995.

<sup>4</sup>The UK 2000 Time Use Survey' showed that both men and women spend around 8 hours sleeping, just under two hours eating and two hours travelling. Women spent up to 5 hours a day on 'household and family care', 'shopping and services', and 'childcare' compared with around 2 hours 40 minutes for men, reported in *Social Trends*, 2003: Table 13.1. For a comprehensive analysis of time use within and outside the home see Gershuny, 2000.

<sup>5</sup>Data from the *New Earnings Survey* show that for all employees in the United Kingdom in 2002, overtime accounted for over 4 per cent of gross weekly earnings. This ranged from 11.8 per cent for male manual workers to 1.5 per cent for female non-manual workers (*Social Trends*, 2003: Table 5.10).

<sup>6</sup>Sayers has commented for example that research shows: 'the great majority want work and feel a need for work, even when they find it unsatisfying in all sorts of ways: dull, repetitive, meaningless.' These aspects are reflected by research into the negative effects of unemployment which 'have shown a lowering of self-esteem and morale, and increases in the suicide rate and the incidence of psychiatric treatment' (Sayers, 1987: 18).

**30** WORK, CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE

<sup>7</sup>Developing the notion of polarisation between women more generally, Hakim concludes: 'The polarisation process that started in the 1980s has produced a sharp divide between these home-centred women and the minority of career-oriented women for whom employment is just as central to their lives as it is for men' (Hakim, 1996: 215). We will be discussing the impact of work on identity in Chapter 7.

<sup>8</sup>For points of departure see Wallman (ed.), 1979; Godelier, 1980; Pahl (ed.), 1988. For a full discussion see Ransome, 1996.