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Preface

On 2 July 1974 I began work as a miscellaneous machine operator at the engine division of Allied Corporation—a multinational that produced, among other things, a wide range of agricultural equipment. The piecework machine shop of the small-parts department reminded me of Donald Roy's famous accounts of output restriction. After rereading those articles, I was struck by the similarities between his observations and my own at Allied. But this was nothing unusual. I knew that machine operators in Britain responded to piecework in just the same way that Roy described, by goldbricking, quota restriction, and by establishing informal ties with auxiliary workers. I therefore turned to Roy's 546-page Ph.D. dissertation, crammed full of vivid details relating his experiences between 1944 and 1945 in a shop that produced railway jacks. In the opening chapters I discovered that the layout of the machines—the drills, mills, lathes, etc.—was quite similar to the layout in my own shop, and I drew the reasonable conclusion that machine shops are generally organized in similar ways. Moving further into his dissertation each day, I eventually came upon a reference to the Illinois Central