

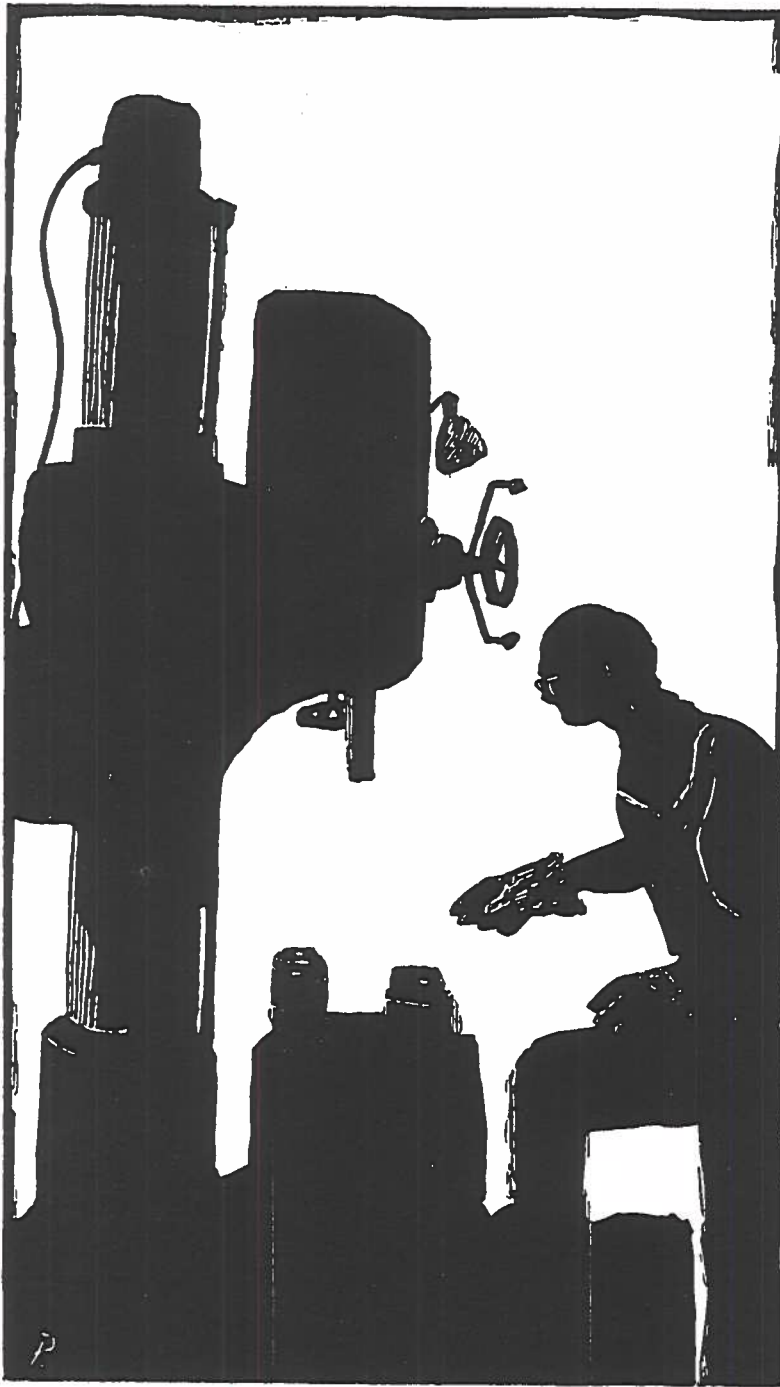
Piece Rates, Hungarian Style

Michael Burawoy

Editors' Introduction

ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES of state socialist workplaces are rare indeed.¹ Sociologists of those societies are usually content with (or restricted to) the perpetual survey, while access, language, and taste keep outside journalists and academics off the shop floor. Michael Burawoy wrote this account while working as a radial-drill operator in a Hungarian machine shop in 1984. He not only managed to get a job in a socialist factory but in one very similar to Allied, the South Chicago firm where he worked in 1974-1975.² Thus while this essay is primarily a report from the "hidden abode of socialist production," it is also comparative.

Experts agree that state socialist factories are unproductive and inefficient. Workers don't work very hard: with secure jobs and little return for effort, why should they? And worker effort aside, with planning comes the systemic nightmare of coordinating "inputs" and "outputs" such that state socialist enterprises can hum along as their capitalist counterparts can. Bureaucracy, poor management, and aged machinery are only the last nails in the coffin of socialist productivity. This case study questions every one of these beliefs. Burawoy presents a world of production that is actually more "efficient" than the machine shop he studied in capitalist Chicago. The work flow is smoother and the workers work hard. And in ironic counterpoint to the joke that prefaces this piece, these Hungarian factory workers actually *do* exercise more work control than did those at Allied—not as a result of socialist ideology or practice, but as an unintended consequence of planning. At the same time, however, they work without effective union protection.



Working at the radial drill.

Drawing by Enrique Chagoya (Picheta)

Burawoy leaves us to ask our own questions here. Elsewhere, he argues that production is politically constituted, not a black box where economic laws work out their own will.³ Case studies like this one are the building blocks of that argument. They examine the ways workers experience their lives and choices at work, and the political apparatuses that reproduce that life by helping to ensure that the economic moment, itself a set of relations, continues. Do the relations of exploitation described here appear more transparent, more intrusive, less "natural" than they do when we work under capitalism? Surely the potential of collective action is feared more by all interests here, where it would challenge so directly and immediately the state's political hegemony. On this Hungarian shop floor we can ask, as Burawoy did in South Chicago, does this "factory regime" manufacture consent or dissent?

—Carol Hatch

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There are three workers: an American, a West German and a Hungarian. The American eats five eggs and steak for breakfast and goes to work in his Buick. At work he is exploited. The West German has three eggs and ham for breakfast and goes to work in his Opel. He is also exploited at work. The Hungarian has one egg for breakfast and no meat. He goes to work on a bus but he is not exploited. At work he rules.

—Joke from the Hungarian shop floor

HUNGARY IS the consumer paradise of Eastern Europe. The Hungarian economic reforms of 1968, which gave more autonomy to state enterprises and more scope for private enterprise, have been consolidated and extended. The shortages of basic consumer goods that continue to benight other socialist economies have been more or less eliminated. Queues are now a curiosity—outside pawn shops, or for Cuban bananas. Meat, fruit, vegetables, all the basic and many luxury foods are always available and in many varieties. Every third family has a car, and almost all have refrigerators. State housing is still in short supply and apart-

I am grateful to János Lukács for all the discussions we had together and his crucial role in making the study possible. A grant from the National Science Foundation, while gratefully accepted, nevertheless made it difficult to appreciate what it is like to earn and exist on five thousand forints a month. What I do understand is largely due to the extraordinary openness with which Hungarian workers and managers greeted my appearance on the shop floor and their enthusiasm to take me into their lives. —M.B.

ments are pitifully small, but all over the country people are building themselves one- and two-story homes. Except among the Gypsy population, one is hard pressed to find the poverty and insecurity that afflict a quarter of the population of the United States. And the Hungarian welfare system offers basic guarantees in old age, child-rearing, and illness. Consumer paradises, however, like all earthly paradises, are built not out of fine words, economic formulas or political slogans, but out of hard work. For two months I entered the hidden abode of socialist production.

When I am on the morning shift, as I am today and all this week, I catch the number five bus at 5:32 a.m. It's summer and already light. The bus is jam packed. Two and three stops back, towards the outskirts of the town, it picked up workers from the housing estate where fifteen thousand people live in one-room, one-and-a-half-room, two-room and, for the exceptionally lucky, three-room apartments. Although some have managed to buy their apartments from the state, most pay a monthly rent of 400 to 1,000 forints (two to five days' work; the current exchange rate is 46 forints to one U.S. dollar). Can a family of four ever get used to such cramped quarters in anonymous concrete blocks? Is work, like the open-air swimming baths, a welcome escape? If it is, you wouldn't know it from the grim faces on the bus. Perhaps it's just too early to be jovial. Probably one never gets used to the coercive routine of coming to work. There's silence on the bus, and I avoid catching my foreman's eye. The bus winds its way through the town, and in twelve minutes we are outside the factory. It could be a factory anywhere in the world, except that hovering over it is a dull red star. Its name is inscribed in broken lettering on the front wall.

We pass though a new three-story building, housing the porter's lodge, the security check and the employment office. But most of the building is taken up by the workers' dormitory, built for long-distance commuters. These are usually young single men with skills to offer, although a few couples live here too. There's room for about a hundred workers, and at present there are about eighty. The rooms would be tiny enough for one person, but they manage to fit three beds together with a small shower and bathroom. At weekends workers go back to their homes, often in distant villages. This is not the sort of life one puts up with for long. But while it lasts it is at least cheap—160 forints (six hours' work) a month for a bed.

After leaving the building I join a straggling line of workers walking toward Department B, the older of the two main shops—older workers and older machines. The entrance to the shop marks the real barrier between the factory and the world outside. Once I cross the line I have to cease day-dreaming, wrench myself into the present and concentrate on the realities at hand. I greet my fellow workers, shaking hands with some and recognizing others verbally. The nuances of social address, complicated enough for Hungarians, are much more so for a foreigner in an ambiguous status like myself. I stumble through it, clock in, and make my way to the changing room. It's 5:48, and already night-shift workers are showering. I open my locker and take out my work boots, still dripping with oil from yesterday, and brown overalls. At least they were brown when I got them four days ago. Now they are more black than brown, covered with oil stains and impregnated with metallic dust. As sure a sign of a novice as any, but no one draws attention to it. Shoes and clothes are given out free, and every two weeks I change my overalls. Brown identifies me as a member of Department B, while the workers in the newer shop, Department A, are decked in a more attractive bright green.

I return to the shop. It could be any machine shop. The familiar smell of oil, the familiar sounds—screeching of automatic lathes, the hum of drills drowned out by the roar of automatic mills. It evokes the same mixed feelings of dread and awe as did the small-parts department of Allied, the engine division of a multinational corporation in South Chicago where I worked as a miscellaneous machine operator for ten months in 1974–1975. It's about the same size—two hundred feet square. There are over a hundred machines, in nine parallel lines separated by five aisles, with another central aisle cutting across the shop. Six of the lines are dominated by lathes and automatic lathes, while the others are composed largely of mills and drills. Most of the machines are Czech or Hungarian, although one or two of the modern numerical-control machines are West German. There's even a broach used for cutting irregularly shaped holes, such as keyways in steel pulleys. I shudder every time I look at it, remembering the times I nearly killed myself on a similar machine at Allied.

The center of the Allied shop was dominated by the scheduling office where we would pick up our work orders, the foremen's office, the inspectors' benches, and the crib, where we got our tools. Here the offices and crib are pushed against the wall; one of

the inspectors' benches is too, while two are centrally located. But the shop's most central point is marked by a huddle of people around the coffee maker—always kept going by the woman who runs the speed drills. For four and a half forints (ten minutes' work), Zsuzsa will pour you a small glass of strong Hungarian coffee. However, I wait for mine to be brewed by the Dobó Katica Socialist Work Brigade—the women mill operators who have adopted me as one of their own. The noise is temporarily reduced to a hum, as the night-shift workers have left and the day-shift workers are gathered around to exchange gossip, what they did the night before or will do this weekend. The buzzer goes and we slowly scatter to our machines. The roar begins again.

I OPERATE A RADIAL DRILL. Unlike other drills, with a radial drill the piece rather than the machine is clamped into position and the operator moves the spindle from hole to hole. From the steel base rises a column about two feet thick and ten feet tall, with a boom that extends six feet out from the column and swings around it. The head moves along the length of the boom. From its underside drops the spindle, which holds the chuck, into which various tools—drills, reamers, spot-facers, chamfers—can be inserted. So the spindle can be moved in three directions: horizontally, by pushing or pulling on the boom; vertically, by raising or lowering the boom on the column or by raising or lowering the chuck in the head; and in a horizontal, radial direction by moving the head backwards or forwards along the boom. A hollow steel table, with grooves used for clamping fixtures, raises the work to waist height.

How did I get landed with such a monstrosity? When I first appeared before the shop superintendent seven weeks ago as a prospective employee, I told him I had operated simple machines before. With no hesitation he marched me over to the vacant radial drill at the end of the line. There seemed to be no doubt in his mind where I belonged. I looked at the giant albatross and panicked. I wouldn't have dared touch such a machine at Allied. I protested feebly that I was not very skilled. Well, try it, he said. This was going to be a nightmare, I was certain. I soon understood why I had been dumped on the radial drill: no one else wanted it. The job was poorly paid and the norms were difficult to make; the machine demanded concentration and strength, and offered few opportunities for private earnings outside work—*maszek*. The trial

would begin after I was marched from office to office, collecting a dozen signatures from seemingly every department and organization in the factory, registering me as a genuine socialist worker.

My foreman, Kálmán, seemed pleasant enough—a young engineer, getting practical experience on the shop floor. He introduced me to János, who would or would not teach me the tricks of the trade. János is a slight, moustached Gypsy, a skilled operator with twelve years in the factory and six on the radial drill. That day he had seven tools carefully lined up on the bench to his left. I watched him pick up each in turn, slap it into the whirling chuck, changing the “speed” (revolutions per minute) and “feed” (downward pressure, measured in centimeters per minute) on the head. He then guided the tool to the specified holes by pushing, pulling and turning the head on the boom, simultaneously bringing down the spindle until the tool cut into the small steel part, shaped like a beer bottle and clamped into its fixture on the work table. When this operation was finished he raised the spindle and detached the tool from the still-whirling chuck, replacing it with the next in sequence and beginning the process again. Periodically, he unlocked the fixture and revolved it on its axis to begin a new series of holes. After about eight minutes the piece was finished, full of holes in different directions, and unbolted from the fixture. A new piece from the large tub to his right was clamped into the fixture, and János began all over again. The piece-time norm for this job is seventeen minutes; János does it in half. It’s an impressive sight—the easy flowing command with which this little man guides his machine in three directions, flicking tools in and out of the chuck. Would I ever be able to remember the exact sequence of tools and the holes each is supposed to cut? Would I ever dare slap a drill in and out of a chuck spinning at 1,000 revolutions per minute? Who said industrial work has lost its skill?

János was friendly enough. Realizing my trepidation, he tried to assure me that it was not as difficult as it looked, and in any case my jobs would be simpler to begin with. Soon he took me for a drink of “cola” at the buffet. Then Gabi introduced himself—the set-up man on the mills. Laci soon arrived on the scene. Everyone was curious about their new American worker. And then I was introduced to Lajos, the charge hand, who, it turned out, would really be responsible for my training. He is a charming, rotund, moustached fellow with curly hair and ruddy cheeks. I felt I was in good hands. He soon grasped my level and adjusted accordingly.

Certainly it was not like my old machine shop in South Chicago, where Bill, the day-shift operator who was supposed to train me, was curt and hostile, showing me the bare minimum. Bill, of course, had every reason to protect job secrets from competition. His power on the shop floor rested on the monopoly of knowledge acquired from ten years as a miscellaneous machine operator. For the first three months, I remember, it was a nightmare. Every day I came in nervous, wondering what I had screwed up the night before. Here I never worry much. Not only Lajos but the radial drill operators themselves, János and Péter, are always prepared to help me. They show me the real route to success: abandoning the instructions on the blueprint.

Of course, I am not a typical newcomer. I am no threat to János and Péter. I do not compete for their gravy work or show how loose their norms are. That was clear from the beginning. They could afford to be nice to me. I would be here for only two months. Even when they show me the shortcuts I don’t make more than 85 per cent, compared to everyone else’s 100-plus. And there are positive incentives to be friendly. I am Misi, the sociologist from America who has come to write a book about factory life in Hungary, a guest worker with a difference. I am a curiosity that will enliven their days. They exude a natural and genuine generosity so absent from the brittle, competitive atmosphere at Allied—although even there, when I became more experienced and Bill realized he was going to have to live with me, he became more friendly. We would joke around when our shifts overlapped and even sometimes share a “kitty”—work completed but not handed in, to be used in emergency situations when we couldn’t make the rate.

TODAY IS FRIDAY and everyone is thinking about the weekend. Even if it will mean more work, at least they will be working on their own gardens or weekend houses. They will decide the pace and own the product. But before the weekend I still have to get through the housings I began yesterday. The job has a lousy rate, and so I am not surprised Pista has not stolen them from me. When I’m on easier rates he sometimes does four hours overtime on my work after I have left. The gravy quickly disappears. There’s nothing I can do about it, despite all the moral support I get from János and the women of the Dobó Katica Brigade. They tell me Pista is a *kulák* and *csizmás paraszt* (boot-legged peasant). The prob-

lem is that Pista's automatic mill across the aisle from me often runs out of work, and if he doesn't manage to find more work for himself the shop superintendent will, generally lousy work. My first real encounter with Pista was one day when he stormed over to my machine swearing like a trooper about how he'd worked for the company twenty-one years and he was still being pushed around from one machine to another. He protested, "I'm a mill operator, not a rough grinder or a lathe operator. Who the hell does this reactionary management think they are?" That time he knuckled under, moved onto the lathe, worked like fury, stormed out three hours before the end of the shift and didn't come in the next day. On another occasion, not finding any work to his satisfaction, he marched off home soon after beginning the shift.

At Allied workers were never punted from machine to machine. When there was no work—it rarely happened—we were guaranteed pay at 125 per cent. Here too, at least in theory, we are guaranteed "standstill time" pay at 100 per cent, but workers are not satisfied with it. Nor is management. They prefer to transfer workers to other machines. Without the elaborate, union-protected job rights we had at Allied, workers's resistance depends on the bargaining power each can accumulate by virtue of his or her importance in the work process. Management's flexible deployment of labor is enshrined in the special bonus that foremen can distribute, a maximum of 300 forints a month (about one and a half days' pay). One of the criteria foremen use is operators' willingness and ability to work on a variety of machines.

But this doesn't affect me at all. I have difficulty operating one machine. My radial drill is not only the last in the line; it's also the oldest. According to the stamp on its base, it came from Csepel Machine Factory in 1959. Over the years it has developed a slight but noticeable wobble. It can shudder on the boom and the speed is difficult to change. But it does okay for the rough work it gets. And I can blame all my broken tools—I must hold the record—on my machine.

It's 6:30 a.m., and there are 104 housings left in the tub. Each requires five holes, carefully spaced around the circumference. I use an eleven-millimeter twist drill and the same speed and feed for each hole. Each piece, about twenty centimeters in diameter, is locked into the fixture by tightening a bolt with a wrench. After I have drilled the holes and taken the piece out of the fixture, I must break the edges of each hole by hand, turning a chamfering tool in

the hole. All this takes between two and three minutes, depending on my work mood. The norm time is four minutes. When I first did this job I thought it was gravy. Then János told me there was another operation with another fixture. I assumed he was joking, and so continued merrily at two minutes apiece—200 per cent, or so I thought. At last I was making some money. When I finished the series and was feeling rather pleased with myself, Lajos came round and said I had to spot-face them—enlarge the hole to a shallow depth, making a seat for a bolt head or nut, using a special tool called a spot-facer. I looked at Lajos as though he were crazy. "No!" I exclaimed. So he showed me the blueprint, and sure enough there it was, spot-face all five holes. I was furious but powerless. What a rip-off—one norm for two operations. From one moment to the next gravy turns to dust. The spot-facing takes another two minutes, so even though it is possible to do one piece in four minutes, it would be impossible to keep that rate up for eight hours. In any case, who works for eight hours?

So I never make 100 percent on this work. At Allied this wouldn't be so bad. When confronted with a lousy piece rate we simply took it easy and collected the guaranteed minimum of 100 per cent. Here it is quite another story. If you produce at 50 per cent, you are paid at 50 per cent. This is a socialist piece-rate system—payment strictly according to production. There may be employment security, but it is truly undermined by wage insecurity. The pressure doesn't let up. At the end of the month the piece times recorded on the "work papers" we hand in for each job are totaled and we are paid accordingly. At the end of my first month I received a grand total of 3,600 forints, about seventy dollars. My average percentage was 82, but that included pieces I had produced in the first week when I was paid an hourly rate based on my worker category. These pieces were added into the subsequent weeks' production, so that my actual production level, averaged over the entire month, was more like 70 per cent. János, on the other hand, produced at 107 per cent and received 8,480 forints for the month, after doing a lot of overtime. He wouldn't stick around the radial drill if he didn't get that overtime. That is the way management keeps its radial drill operators.

So as to avoid norm cuts, János doesn't hand in more than 110 per cent. But there is also a management-imposed ceiling of 110 per cent, which may be lifted on the twentieth of the month if shop supervisors think it necessary. Management wants to avoid

arhythmical work patterns associated with high percentage outputs in some parts of the month and no work available in other parts. It also tries to keep the overall factory percentage below 110 percent so as not to attract big norm cuts from the enterprise's central office. In this respect workers and management within the firm are in collusion against the central direction of the enterprise.

But there are ways to get around this upper limit without attracting attention from outside. Today, for example, János is working on the "beer bottles" again. He can produce two shifts' work in one. The night before last he came in at around 9:00. He showed me his time card. Kálmán had written in that he had arrived at 5:45. On other occasions operators punch in one another for overtime they don't actually work. This is not as devious as it sounds, since we are paid for the work we do, not the hours we put in. The effect of this manipulation is simply to reduce the official average percentage so that, say, workers producing at 140 percent will appear to be producing at only 108 percent. The company has also begun to pursue an alternative strategy by creating a "VGMK," an enterprise worker collective. Workers organize themselves into a collective in order to undertake some particular task assigned by management and to which management assigns a particular price. From the point of view of both management and the workers there are many advantages to this system, but two are particularly important. Income from VGMK work is not counted against the wage bill, and so is not part of the centrally-regulated average enterprise wage. And the time spent on VGMK work is not officially recorded. Thus if workers are officially paid at 110 per cent, they can receive the value of the extra 30 per cent they produce as VGMK earnings. Shop-floor management collaborates with workers, particularly the most scarce and needed workers, to circumvent official limits on their earnings.

At Allied things were simpler. We restricted our percentages to 140 per cent, or at least didn't hand in more than 140 per cent, so as not to attract the attention of the industrial engineers who studied our outputs. For all their scientific paraphernalia they didn't know which were the tight and which the loose rates. But here the system of norm cutting, apparently more arbitrary, is actually more effective. Norm cuts are dictated by the enterprise's head office based on the firm's overall performance. This figure, about two or three per cent each year, is translated into specific

norm changes through bargaining between workers and shop-floor management. Although industrial engineers don't actually know which are the loose norms, worker participation ensures that the looser ones tend to get cut, although the more vulnerable workers obviously suffer most. Surely this is the managerial dream—workers who cut their own rates!

But all this is quite irrelevant to me. I don't have to worry about rate busting or the 110 per cent ceiling. I can't even make 100 per cent on these damned housings. I can't help but wonder what this system would be like for a newcomer who depended on this wage. For the first week you are on a personal wage. During this time you are "trained" by a fellow worker and perhaps the charge hand or foreman will show you a thing or two. Then you are on your own. I had all the assistance possible and still made only 3,600 forints. That's hardly enough to support a single person, let alone a family. No wonder new operators don't last long on my machine.

NORMS ARE THE TRUE DICTATOR. They drive one to fury and panic. I soon realized that I would have to risk life and limb to make the rates. I came in once to find that Pista had already begun spot-facing some of the same housings I am doing today. The fixture was simple—two steel bars, two centimeters thick, bolted to the table in a V shape. It was obvious what I was supposed to do: hold the piece against the bars with one hand and bring down the spot-facer into the holes with the other. Knowing precisely what this was all about from my Allied experience, I was nervous at the thought. The piece might start shuddering against the bar, perhaps even leap over it, if my left hand wasn't strong enough to keep it in place. This piece of cast iron, the size of an average plate and the shape of a bowler hat, could then rip off a finger and fly into my chest. Machines don't recognize that they are run by fragile and fallible humans; they continue relentless.

I hovered around the machine, went for a walk, not knowing what to do. Lajos would never have allowed me to do it this way; he would have found another method. But he wasn't here. There was only Toni, who wasn't too concerned about safety. He simply showed me how to get hold of the piece with my hand. When Anna saw what was happening she immediately told me to leave it alone and called János. Annoyed that anyone should expect me to do it that way, he knocked the iron bars out of the table, flung them onto the floor in disgust, and found an alternative fixture—

the one stipulated in the blueprint, but one that clearly no one used. It required that you bolt the piece in place and, rather than moving the piece, swing the drill from hole to hole, taking twice as long. There was no way I could make the rate.

I am lucky, I don't have to make the rate. I can afford to preserve my body intact, since I still have a second job in Berkeley. And, as often happens in Hungary, my second job brings in more money than my first. The money I earn here is pocket money, *pálinká* money. So why do I care what my percentage is each day? Why do I calculate how many hours' work, "real work" at 100 per cent, I complete by the end of the shift? Is it the challenge to accomplish eight hours' work in a shift? The challenge of making the rates? The machine and its rates are an assault on my self-respect. When my performance is particularly low I am depressed and don't bother to add up the hours. But is challenge the whole story? How much challenge is there for János? He's done those beer bottles so many times now, it can hardly be a challenge—what keeps him going? Yes, money is an underlying factor, but there is something else involved in getting through the work day. It turns out to be much more exhausting to work slowly or irregularly. When one achieves a rhythm, when one is guiding the machine from hole to hole, turning the drill into the hole, flicking the feed on and off, slapping the tools in and out of the whirling chuck with fluency—in short, when one is controlling the machine rather than being controlled by it—time flies by and one is less exhausted. Unfortunately I am usually four or five hours into the shift before I get into rhythm, often already too tired to get moving. Today I am tired at 11:00 and I've only done thirty pieces. There are over seventy pieces still to do. Can I do it? It is certainly possible. So with renewed strength and concentration I begin the final assault. The last hours pass unnoticed as I see the pile gradually diminish.

Here there is no pressure from the foreman to hurry, as sometimes there was at Allied. There are no hot jobs that have to be done an hour ago, that require that I break the set-up and start on some new work. There is just me, my machine, the pieces and the norms. The norms are the decisive power. They are the veritable relations of production. They shape my private relationship with my machine. But it is private—I can seal myself off from everything around me, even the coercive reality of my day-to-day existence. But I can't transport myself into another world without courting danger: the machine and the tools demand my concen-

tration. The holes have to be the right size, in the right place. And I have to be in the "mood for work." How often I see János wandering around the shop waiting for the mood to strike. Today and yesterday it never really came. He had been out on a drinking spree and this upset his work equilibrium. Instead he made himself a stand for his fishing rod out of materials he picked up from a friend in the storeroom. Tomorrow he will lie in the sun on the banks of the Tisza. Fishing is his favorite pastime, an escape from the housing estate and the factory. A city dweller with contempt for peasants, he doesn't grow paprika, grapes, cherries, potatoes in some garden. For him that's just another work trap.

FOR THE PARTICULARLY PRIVILEGED, management superimposes a personal domination on top of the impersonal domination of the piece rates. Typically, it is women who suffer under this double burden. With increasing numbers of women employed, management has devised clever systems of exploiting gender domination. Take the women of the Dobó Katica Brigade, who work on the mills. They have the assistance of Gabi, who sets up their machines and attends to any mechanical problems. But to encourage Gabi to work hard, management pegs his earnings, like the earnings of the individual mill operators, to the average percentage of the group. He is in fact the boss, who tells the women what work to run on which machines and decides if and when they can take their holidays. He is the intermediary between the women and management, and he has every interest in goading them to increase their output. For the most part they put up with his prodding, but when he comes in somewhat tipsy, as he did last week, they ostentatiously begin to gossip with one another.

Why do they put up with this subordination? They explain to me that if they want to work here, they have no alternative. The division into women's jobs and men's jobs is always accompanied by some form of gender domination. If it isn't integral to the jobs, it is added. Thus Zsuzsa, who operates the gang drills, has her independence undercut by having the role of coffee-maker thrust upon her. How she makes her rates I never understand.

Do the Dobó Katica women see themselves, or are they seen, as secondary earners? Certainly not. Anna is forty-one. She has two children, a boy of twelve and a girl of nine. She lives in a small town about half an hour's bus ride away. Two years ago she had serious heart trouble. Her life is hard. Her husband is a lathe

operator in the same department but in the other production cycle. At home he's drunk a lot of the time. One morning Anna came in complaining that he had gone through a week's wages in one night. Anna has to clean and cook at the house of her mother, who is eighty and ill, as well as for her own family at home. At forty-six, Klára hasn't Anna's vitality or toughness, but she's always ready to suppress the seamy side of her life. Today she said she was tired because of her "night work"—her whole face beamed with laughter. Her husband is a printer and drinks a lot. She worries because he also drives a car. She lives in a neighboring village and commutes to work by bus. She also has two children, but they are much older than Anna's. And then there's Ági, the quietest of the three. She is forty-six too, but though she looks wearier than the others, like them she can always break into laughter when the occasion arises. When her daughter, who works in the crib on the other shift, comes by to visit, Ági lights up with pleasure and delight. At work these women feed the mills, at home they feed the family. The two jobs are equally exhausting, although there's no doubt which they prefer. But as Anna told me, "Life is hard but not hopeless." She lives for her two children, and would do almost anything for them.

Anna, Klára and Ági arrived together five years ago, and they have worked on the same shift and the same machines ever since. With Gabi, they form one half of the Dobó Katica Brigade. The other half is made up of three women and their setter from the other shift. Like everyone else, they switch shifts every week. The department also has another woman who migrated from the shop floor to the office, where she is a clerical assistant to the scheduling man. She records all the brigade's activities in a neatly-kept diary, with photographs of the nine members and Kálmán, the managerial representative. The diary records the two Communist Saturdays worked—one day's labor donated for a children's hospital and one day for the National Theater—and three hundred hours of communal work on the factory grounds and donated for the construction of a new cultural center. Then there are records of excursions they've taken together, parties they've had, and political meetings they've attended, such as the big one on war and peace organized by the regional party offices. The Dobó Katica women seem proud of their brigade. Last year they came first in the brigade competition and won nine thousand forints. That probably about covered their unpaid work. The runners-up got five thousand forints.

What's behind the brigades? They are not obligatory; why does anyone join them? No one really likes the brigades, but pressures from outside the factory, from the enterprise headquarters and the party, demand their establishment. So orders are passed down from on high to the shop superintendent: "Form Socialist Work Brigades!" The superintendent then expects each foreman to establish at least one brigade in his section. Given the hostility, this can be quite a tall order, but his bonuses depend on it. He approaches a likely candidate for leader, holding out the possibility of winning all this money. Whether there are also promises of favorable treatment is not clear. But it is more than likely that the formation of brigades will appeal more to vulnerable workers, such as women, than to experienced and skilled workers, who will have no part of such "nonsense." Certainly based on my experience here and in the champagne factory that I worked in a year ago, women workers seem to dominate in the brigade competition. By committing themselves to brigade work the women might hope to establish themselves more firmly within the shop, putting themselves in a better bargaining position.

Thus, Anna was furious when she didn't receive any monthly premium, known as *mozgóbér* ("moving pay"), for several months running. It is as if she felt her membership in the best brigade, her diligence at work, her meticulous cleaning of her work area, entitled her to the bonus. In practice, however, the premium is awarded to the more skilled and experienced workers, whose cooperation is essential to the effective organization of the shop. Such workers have no interest in brigade membership, and unlike Anna, they cannot be easily replaced.

There's another side to the feminization of work—deskilling. At Allied everyone set up their own machines, although there was a setter who might sometimes help out. Setting up was the part of the job that required the greatest skill and expertise. I can't imagine Allied workers tolerating the expropriation of that skill, its concentration in the hands of a single setter, while they just feed the machines. Nor can I imagine János, Péter and the other radial drill operators succumbing to such a system. Deskilling can proceed smoothly only if the old operators find satisfactory jobs elsewhere while the new operators are part of a more vulnerable labor force, and so it goes hand in hand with feminization. It's probably no accident that it was Gabi, a dedicated party member, who oversaw this transition.

The fact that these women face double labor (at home and in the factory) and double subordination (gender and class) doesn't mean that the men don't work hard too. Although he is the boss, Gabi's hourly wage is not much higher than Anna, Klára and Ági's. He earns more than they do because he does so much overtime. He too commutes from a village, about an hour and a half away. When he is on overtime and on morning shift he gets up at four a.m. to arrive at work at six. He leaves at six p.m. and arrives home not much before eight. He has dinner and goes to bed at ten or eleven. On weekends he works in his garden or helps his friends with theirs. In the shop he may sit around some of the time, but he is always ready to throw himself into his work should anything go wrong with one of the machines. He can look pretty worn out at the end of a shift.

FOR THE MEN, at least, drinking becomes the quick escape from work. One can get sozzled by oneself at home or in a *kocsma* (pub), or do it in collective style in a private cellar. My first Friday I did it in style. It was Laci's idea. He runs one of the numerically-controlled mills. Once he has set up and the machine is running according to plan, he seems to have quite a bit of time to loaf around. He entertained me during my first week. Like Gabi, Laci is an *ingazó* (commuter), but his village is nearer than Gabi's. Laci is in his early thirties and strikingly handsome. Last year his wife had a serious operation in Debráca to remove an ulcer. She's now recovering at home, but is still very weak. Laci seems to have one major obsession: sex. His cupboards are plastered with pin-ups. He's always making passes at the women on the shop floor, who generally greet his advances with bored contempt. He's also a heavy drinker. Together with Gabi he organized my welcoming party at Béla's cellar. Béla, who towers over most of us, works on the horizontal boring machine. After work that Friday, Laci, Gabi, Béla, his mate on the "horizontal" and I all went off to the cellar.

It was an old place hidden away in a hill, a cave with about fifteen wine barrels lining the walls, and a long table in an adjoining room. Béla's parents had been very successful wine growers until they were dispossessed of their land, first in 1945 and again with the consolidation into cooperatives in 1959. Each time his family had to begin again. Béla and his family now work two thousand *négyszögöl*, about three quarters of a hectare, growing some fruit and vegetables, but mostly cultivating vineyards. He

makes about fifty hectoliters of wine a year—two white wines and one red. Béla doesn't sell any—he consumes it all with friends and family. He must have a lot of friends. As a guest I had to drink all three wines, and so was soon *totál*.

I swayed back to the town with Laci and Gabi. On the way we stopped at an *expresso* for a coffee and rum, whereupon they began to pound me with questions about working-class politics in the United States. What does the average worker think about the nuclear arms race? As I was to find time and time again, Hungarian workers cannot understand the mentality that would lead people to vote for a warmonger like Reagan. They had been well disposed toward Kennedy and Carter, but now they have difficulty distinguishing the American bear from the Soviet bear. They want to think well of America, land of opportunity and wealth. I'm always asked how much I earn—an amount that's mind-bogglingly vast to a Hungarian worker. Even when cost of living is taken into account it's much more lucrative to be a machine operator in the United States than in Hungary. In terms of hours of work, a car costs at least four times as much in Hungary; trousers, shoes and dresses cost seven or eight times as much, and food is also often more expensive. Only transportation, rent, and some entertainment can be cheaper. On the other hand, equally incomprehensible are the levels of violence, poverty and unemployment in the United States. And when I try to talk about the deep-seated racism in the United States, they compare blacks to Gypsies, who they say are "lazy" and "criminal." In short, the comparison is complicated. But they do know they are much better off now than they were in 1956. Kádár has brought a continually increasing standard of living, but at a cost—an even greater increase in the expenditure of labor. They are running up the down escalator.

NEXT WEEK will be my last, and Laci is organizing another gathering at Béla's cellar, this time, he promises, with "goulash and shapely Hungarian girls." But Gabi isn't here today to finalize arrangements, and we aren't sure when he will return. He's taken two of his five weeks' holiday to work on the harvest in his village cooperative. In two weeks he gets five thousand forints, almost as much as he would get here in a month if he had no overtime. Miklós, the setter from the other shift, is working four hours overtime to cover half of Gabi's shift. He's having a frustrating time with the large numerically-controlled machine next to

mine. It has been breaking down regularly, and now is making a huge racket. As at Allied, some of the numerically-controlled machines are down a lot. When this happens to Laci's mill he loiters around, gossiping, or goes home. It isn't worth taking "standstill" pay. When the mill next to me breaks down, whatever member of the Dobó Katica Brigade is operating it is simply transferred to another mill. There are always more mills than operators.

The maintenance department has every incentive to get on with the job since their bonuses depend on keeping the down time below 320 hours a month for the whole shop. Józsi, one of the maintenance men, told me that they usually get their bonuses, if only because their boss is adept at juggling the figures. Sometimes Józsi has a lot of work to do, other days he has none. He told me that he averages three or four hours' work a shift. On afternoon shift he works less, and he often comes round to my machine to chat. But this week he has swapped shifts; his wife is expecting a baby any day. He is pretty nervous about it because the local doctors do not have a good reputation. He will have to hand over quite a sizable tip, two thousand forints (some ten days' work), if he wants to be sure of proper attention. Józsi, who met his wife while he was working in East Germany, is always comparing Hungary with East Germany, saying that apartments are easier to get and things are much cheaper there. Here they live in a one-room apartment, although it has a television and a hi-fi. He desperately wants to move into a bigger place but doesn't know how he can manage it. A lucky few are now buying apartments from the state—a two-room apartment for about 600,000 forints. One can get a loan from the state bank of 360,000 forints plus 40,000 for each child; with two children a family still has to find about 160,000 forints. The enterprise might help some but most must rely on some other source, either private work or help from their parents. Józsi just doesn't know where he can get the money, and he doesn't have the time or energy to start building his own house.

On payday Józsi came over and showed me his pay slip for the month—5,300 forints. "That's nothing, Misi. You can't live on that." He has no overtime, but as a maintenance worker he has a skill which can help him find work on the side. Józsi mends washing machines in his spare time, bringing in another 4,000 forints a month. His wife worked in a radiation laboratory until her pregnancy was well advanced. She gets five months' maternity leave at full pay from the state, and then for two and a half years while she

is looking after her child she will get 1,000 forints a month. But her earnings are nowhere near what they need for a new apartment. Life must be easier in the West, he assumes, but he knows from his own experience in West Germany how difficult it is to get a job.

SO TODAY it seems I have myself to myself without interruptions. Even the mill next to me has ceased its racket. I am concentrating on my housings when one of the seven inspectors comes over to me. He's a little old guy who hides his fussiness behind a veneer of friendliness. He asks me what happened to the two "connectors" that were missing from the series I completed yesterday. That series, surely the worst job I've ever had, has dogged my existence for over ten days now. The story began a week ago Wednesday. I had just given up a series of "housings" after smashing all the available spot-facers because there was too much steel to remove around the hole; so I was already depressed when these unfamiliar "connectors" arrived on the scene—skittle-like objects about six inches long with a round head that had been milled flat to make two parallel sides. The blueprint said you had to drill a hole perpendicular to the milled sides through the head, ream (smooth out) the hole, and chamfer the edges. But who takes any notice of the blueprint? With János's help I eventually found the right fixture and we decided it was best first to drill all the pieces and then ream them all. All this took time and experimentation, and by the end of the day I had only drilled twenty-six pieces.

The next day was sweltering. When I came in at two p.m. the factory was like an oven—the temperature must have been over 100 degrees. There's no effective cooling system; the roof is low and part glass. Lajos was away and not a single radial operator showed up until later. It was too hot to work. And then I saw that someone had done another hundred of the connectors but had ruined them by making the hole too small. I didn't know and still don't know who left me with this headache. Obviously, they realized what they had done. I finished drilling the remaining 170 pieces and then for half a shift hovered around my machine, frustrated, not knowing what to do with the faulty connectors—the holes were too small to be reamed. I was very depressed: Lajos wasn't around to help, and János had no suggestions. I told Kálmán I'd had it. I wasn't coming in tomorrow. I'd wasted almost two shifts, and that was enough. I didn't need to waste another

one. He tried to strike a deal with me: I could have tomorrow off if I did two lots of four hours' overtime next week. Some deal. Fuck that. There's no point in coming in if there's no work. I'm paid by the piece, not the hour. So I didn't go in on Friday, and I had already arranged to take Monday off as one of my two paid holidays. By Tuesday I expected someone else would have finished the connectors. But there they were, waiting for me, just where I had left them. At least Lajos was back. He started fooling around with the fixture, but it wasn't long before he realized that it wouldn't be possible to ream the defective pieces on my machine. The shop superintendent thought otherwise, so Lajos told him to have a go. To my delight, on the very first piece, with the reamer wobbling, he unhinged it from its sleeve. So we left the connectors and I started a new series of housings. What a relief!

That was Tuesday. Yesterday, Thursday, Lajos said I really had to finish up the connectors. But how? Well, he found another little fixture in which I could hold the connector by hand while I reamed. But it could only be done on a speed drill. Zsuzsa, who operates the speed drills, helped us set up. But I could see there was going to be trouble. Some of the holes in the connectors were so undersized that when the necessary pressure was brought to bear on the reamer my hand could not hold the piece steady. Sure enough, on Lajos's first attempt he couldn't hold the piece. It swung against the fixture and the reamer bent. We knocked it back into shape, and after successfully reaming two pieces he handed it over to me. Zsuzsa told me to go very slow, but I guess I wasn't slow enough. On one particularly tight hole which required more pressure on the reamer the piece slapped against the fixture. I let go with the drill still whirling and the reamer smashed. I was furious. Why the hell was I having to pay for someone else's screw-up! I marched to the office and thrust the smashed reamer under Kálmán's nose. He shook his head and told me that would cost me a lot of money and signed for a new one. I got it replaced, but now I was nervous and agitated. After two more pieces it smashed again. Shit. I'd had it. I was ready to quit.

At this point János and Lajos turned up. They didn't give up as easily as I, but then they didn't have to run the job. Well, they figured out a way of holding the connector more steadily in the fixture by resting it against a steel bar. This worked. Slowly I got through the hundred pieces with undersized holes without further mishap. Two of the pieces, however, had not been completed in an

earlier operation, so I tossed them into the next series and they were not registered as scrap. It is these two pieces that the old man has just come round to query. He says I can't just put them in the next series. That's officious baloney. So he forces me to sign for one more defective connector. It turns out that he really wants to talk me into exchanging some dollars. He hasn't a chance.

In the middle of the fiasco around the speed drill yesterday Lajos couldn't understand why the holes were so tight. I explained that someone else had done them with a drill that hadn't been ground properly. Zsuzsa on the speed drills and Anna and Ági on the mills all backed me up, telling Lajos it was his fault because he had been on holiday. They continued to beleaguer him about management's ineptness and how I had been led round the bush, wasting so much time. What had been a total disaster and humiliation found its compensation in the solidarity the women exuded.

AT ALLIED, while there may have been feelings of class consciousness, there were no such moments of solidarity. For all the trade union's importance, its effect was to atomize the workforce on the shop floor, reserving collective struggles for the triennial contract negotiations. The grievance machinery channeled struggles into the defense of individual rights and obligations, while the internal labor market encouraged workers to move to another job rather than fight out the issues in the present one. Here too struggles are individualized, not because of the presence but because of the absence of an effective union. There's no point in going to the union with a grievance, as I discovered when I wasn't paid for three hours overtime I had worked. I talked to Anna about it, and she laughed at the idea of going to the union representative. We decided to do it as a joke. The two representatives we consulted, both women, thought it was a joke too. I really had to go to the foreman, they said. So I went to Kálmán, who remembered he had given me the three hours and said he would file a grievance. I don't know if he did, but I never did get paid for that overtime.

So no one thinks of going to the union with any serious problem. Last year, when Anna was put on almost continuous weekend overtime, she went to the shop superintendent to complain that she could not do this because she had a family to look after. He simply told her that if she didn't like it she could leave. She explained to me how the union, the party, and management sit

together on the "director's council" and decide everything. When I told Janos that I hadn't gotten my overtime pay, he told me to go straight to the superintendent, rather than the foreman.

"Kálmán has no power."

"What about the union?" I asked innocently.

"What about it? They are useless. Nulla-nulla."

"But they at least provide cheap holidays," I protested.

"Yes, but only for those who don't do any work, the bosses. The real workers don't get a chance to go to the holiday homes. I'm not a union member, a party member or a brigade member."

"If they are all so useless why should anyone want to be a member?" I asked.

"When you want to get an apartment or a place in a nursery, these factors might be important."

In fact party, union and brigade membership are becoming less and less important as the enterprise has less control over life outside work. Now flats are distributed largely on a point system linked to earnings, family size, and other factors independent of political activity inside the enterprise.

What is the party's role inside the factory? This is a difficult question. About fifteen per cent of the workers are party members; these appear to be the more senior, experienced workers. The party secretary in Department B is one of the two scheduling men, a very popular young man. The party members meet every two weeks or so and are told of any managerial problems. They are expected to help in the achievement of production targets and keep an eye open for trouble. But the significant power of the party is a potential one. In theory it can block any decision, from the employment of a given person to the introduction of norm cuts to the approval of the annual plan, since it is a signatory to every important document. In practice it interferes very little. It is this potential power that probably makes workers cautious in their attitudes toward the party. When expressing his bitterness and resentment Józsi would lower his voice and tell me there are "red ears" all around. While I can joke about the party, no one else does. When a huddle of spectators gathered around my machine one night while I was trying to make out, I cried: "What the hell is this—a party meeting?" They liked that, laughed, and even told

the story to others. But I never heard anyone else joke about the party. In this respect the past casts a shadow over the present.

The party and union are essentially channels for communicating managerial decisions, and the absence of institutional means for expressing workers' collective interests fosters the individuation of struggles. But there is a basis for solidarity rooted in the organization of work. The one abiding characteristic of socialist economies is the generation of shortages, whether of workers, materials, machines, or investment resources. To be efficient in a socialist factory is to adopt a flexible work organization that can improvise effectively and rapidly. Labor is flexibly deployed by, for example, shunting experienced workers like Pista from machine to machine. At Allied job rights protected by the union and enshrined in the operation of the internal labor market prevented such arbitrary placement. Here flexibility is facilitated by the ample but by no means excessive supply of auxiliary workers—inspectors, set-up men, crib attendants, truck drivers and supervisors. At Allied these were cut to the bone in the name of capitalist efficiency, which created lines outside the inspector's window and the crib. The truck driver was turned into a king. This effectively turned piece worker against auxiliary worker, compounded by the ridiculous rules that came down from the bosses, further restricting the possibility of cooperation on the shop floor. Here there are also rules about checking the first piece and who should ride the lift truck, but no one takes much notice. Instead of being locked into opposition camps, nurtured by bureaucratic rules, the shop floor is a self-organizing autonomous unit. Every ten days it receives its production quotas and itself breaks them down into daily targets. Completed work and scrap move through the department with amazing speed. Here I have never seen the piles of defective pieces and unfinished engines that lined the aisles at Allied. As we approached the completion date for the half-year plan I waited for the mythical rush work to begin. Perhaps there was more overtime, perhaps the pace did become a little more hectic, but there was nothing like the rush work at Allied which recurred daily in the form of hot jobs and broken set-ups.

IN ORDER TO RESPOND to the constraints of a shortage economy, the socialist firm engenders a limited form of workers' control. So long as piece rates are not screwed down so tight that we are turned against one another in the struggle to make out, so long as

there are no arbitrary managerial interventions from on high, conception and execution can be effectively united on the shop floor. But this has consequences for attitudes toward management. Gabi, for example, refers to those who work and those who do nothing. Although a committed party member, he gets very resentful toward the *bürokrácia* in the "glass house" where the bosses twiddle their thumbs. "They don't know anything," he said, shaking a blueprint under my nose. The potential for shop-floor solidarity against the glass house is always there. Only on my first day in the factory did I see a hint of its reality.

Management wanted to boost output without showing it on the books as an increase in percentage performance. They proposed a two per cent cut in norms in exchange for an immediate two per cent increase in basic wages and a promise of no more norm cuts next year. Obviously in some sort of trouble with the central enterprise, management took the extraordinary measure of calling a hasty meeting with the workers. The leader of the economic planning department, essentially the personnel manager, addressed the workers in Department A, while the chief engineer addressed Department B. I attended the meeting in Department A. It was introduced by the union secretary for the department. The personnel manager then explained the deal, suggesting that this was a way of keeping up with wage increases in other parts of the enterprise. But workers were suspicious at this unprecedented move. Why was management calling this meeting, consulting us? How would management guarantee that there would be no norm cuts next year? Would they put it in writing? Why were they cutting norms across the board, rather than selecting loose ones as they usually do? One party member said he would have to vote against the proposal because under it he would not be able to make the 100 per cent that the party expects from him! Among those attending, thirty-four voted against and seven in favor. Those in favor were all party members, union officials and supervisors.

In Department B, on the other hand, the proposal was unanimously endorsed. This is the older department, with older workers. Relations between management and workers are more harmonious, and the rates are said to be looser. In Department A they make parts under a Western license. The rates are therefore tighter, the machinery more sophisticated, and the workers younger and more skilled. So operators in Department A have more reason to resist norm cuts, and greater power to do so because they are more

central to the firm's production and have skills that are badly needed by other enterprises. Nevertheless, they didn't believe that their opinion would have any effect on the outcome. Sure enough, the results were referred to the central trade union committee, which rapidly endorsed management's proposal. So why did management even hold the meetings? Perhaps they still remember the one-day strike that took place ten years ago when the new wage system was introduced. At that time the older workers lost their relative advantage vis-à-vis the younger workers and struck. Subsequently many of them left the plant.

SUCH COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE couldn't be further from my day-to-day life on the shop floor. It is 12:45, and the Dobó Katica women are already cleaning their machines and workplaces. On Friday their machines get an extra good clean. They are proud of their meticulous housekeeping. But I still have fifteen housings to drill. Determined to finish them off, I am flowing well with my old machine, and the possibility of coming to an end spurs me on to greater efforts. Pista comes round to inspect, to see if there will be any housings left for him to do in overtime. Even he is impressed by my pace, although not too happy. By 1:20 I finish the last one, and now I have to clean my machine and sweep up in the work area. I even take a rag to the old albatross itself, revealing a real green beneath the oily grime. I lock up my tools, scrub my hands and arms as best I can with the special soap, and I'm ready for lunch.

Although not entirely within the rules, I leave at 1:45 to go to the dining room. Lunch consists of a soup, a vegetable or pasta, and meat, and perhaps some fruit for dessert—all for eleven forints, twenty cents, or half an hour's work. Today it's cauliflower soup, liver fried in breadcrumbs with potatoes, and cherries to finish off. Tomás, the inspector whose desk is nearest to my machine, comes in with his factory companion, a woman who runs one of the lathes. They sit down next to me. I complain to him about the fussiness of his colleague who gave me a scrap notice for the connectors. He holds up his hands defensively, protesting that it has nothing to do with him. Indeed, Tomás seeks to maintain very friendly relations with the operators. Once when I had been drilling the thick oil-pumps, some hadn't fit into the fixture properly. After they were clamped in place they would still move around when I was drilling, and the holes were skewed. About six

were not good and sent back from the lathe, and another six defectives arrived from a previous series. Jokingly, Tomás asked me what he should do about them, how he should write them up. I told him, "Put them down to bad castings." He was suspicious but amused at my audacity. "I can't do that," he said, but he did. There was a similar problem of castings with the thin oil-pumps. Sometimes the grooves were not smooth enough to fit snugly onto the fixture, so the pumps couldn't be firmly clamped in place. I remember the problem of poor castings at Allied only too well. Some of the pulleys we had to balance came in with huge blowholes in them. It was virtually impossible to drill out the right amount of steel in the right place so that the pressure on the axle would be evenly distributed. Somehow we had to balance them, blowholes or no blowholes. We didn't get much sympathy from management.

I make my way back to the shop, where a number of people are already gathered around Zsuzsa's coffee percolator. They are discussing what they will be doing this weekend. Kálmán beckons me to come over. He tells me Lajos will be mixing concrete for his new house and suggests I help him. "His new house?" I repeat with some astonishment. Yes, Lajos is building himself a weekend house. Pista, it turns out, will also be mixing concrete for his own new house. Tomás, the inspector, will be hard at work with his mates drilling a well in his 2,000-square-meter garden. Indeed, many will be tending their gardens, plots of land rented from the city council for a nominal sum of sixty forints a year. It's usually the worst hilly land which, to get into shape, takes several years of sustained effort and much money. But then they can grow their grapes, cherries and peaches, cabbages and potatoes. They don't sell their produce but consume it at home. Others will be hiring out their skills, like Józsi repairing his washing machines. Laci will be running his mill all weekend. For the women the tasks of unpaid work are endless—washing, cooking, cleaning and nurturing. And János, I know, will be reclining on the bank of the Tisza, patiently waiting for the big catch.

The buzzer will be going in five minutes, and already the women are lining up. There's a note of urgency about their escape from this noisy, oily, heartless, metallic factory. I traipse off to the changing rooms to strip off my oily overalls, shirt and boots. Today I'm rather pleased with myself—I've scaled new heights in the realm of "housings." A line of bodies, rippling with fat around the mid-

riff, files into the shower room. Now in the shower cubicle I can feel isolated once more as the hot water floods down from above—refreshing and peaceful. I have to get dried and dressed to catch the bus at 2:23, but that gives me another five minutes of bliss.

I leave, passing through the shop again to punch out. I wave goodbye to Péter, still working away on his radial drill, as diligent as ever. He'll be there for another three and a half hours—his cigarette to comfort him and perhaps a dash of pálinká.

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- 1 The only ethnography of an East European factory floor available in English is Miklós Haraszti's *A Worker in a Worker's State* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1977). He also worked in a Hungarian machine shop but offers a quite different picture of atomization, impersonality, and coercion. Haraszti's firm was in an economic crisis and facing a withdrawal of state subsidies. See Burawoy's *Politics of Production* (London: Verso/NLB, 1985), chapter 4.
- 2 See Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
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