

“The Worker Longs for Rest and Relaxation” (1928)

Abstract

This report, written in 1928 by a 24-year-old textile worker identified only by her initials M.K., illustrates how little leisure and time for recreation workers had, even after the introduction of the eight-hour day in 1918. By the end of 1923, ten-hour workdays had become legal again at the instigation of employers' associations, and the working week in factories was usually six days. The author of this report also did shift work, which meant that she only had every second Saturday off. Living with her parents, she helped with household chores, and in the little free time she had, she was active in a trade union.

Source

The Worker Longs for Rest and Relaxation!

Certainly the word “weekend” stirs happy feelings in every worker’s heart. After six days of working for the company owner, Saturday afternoon and all of Sunday belong to him! Even if he cannot afford the usual weekend trip taken by the “upper crust,” he won’t let this ruin his mood. *The worker longs for rest and relaxation!* And he gets this relaxation if he takes proper advantage of his free time—in this case, his weekend. But unfortunately, factory owners all too often take measures that significantly dampen the worker’s mood. I can speak from experience. I work in the factory of the company ... *On Saturdays I have to work until eight in the evening.* Many female workers who do shift work are in the same situation. Of course, it only happens once every fourteen days, but every second Saturday is lost, all the same.

I still live in my parents’ house. *I still have enough time for organizational work, which I do with great pleasure. After all, I believe that the party and the unions are the central pillars of the labor movement.*

At five in the morning, when the clock sounds its alarm, I must get up right away so that I can be at the machine by six. It takes me about twenty minutes to get to work. Sometimes my female coworkers join me; often I walk alone. All sorts of thoughts and dreams go through my head. Most are probably unattainable at the moment, but they might come true if I am helped by everyone who is currently standing on the sidelines. The time draws near and the signal soon sounds for work to begin. I am taken back to the present, since it is not easy to make plans for the future over the noise of the machines and while doing the kind of work I have to do. Soon there will be a half-hour break for breakfast, but there are no breaks for the machines. In my section (preparatory spinning), it has been common for some time for us to take breaks at different times. A neighboring worker operates your machine in addition to hers while you are away. This is why the statutory break is not manifested as a loss of wages. During breakfast, I usually pick up a book or a newspaper, but sometimes I go over to my coworkers. There someone may ask: “Where were you last night?” “At the functionaries’ meeting, the party meeting, the meeting in the youth centre?” One of my coworkers may have taken a walk and everyone then relates what they saw and experienced. There’s still a long time to go before work ends at two o’clock, but this time passes, too, and I am glad when I can leave the factory.

Once I arrive home, I eat lunch right away and then run errands for my mother. Sometimes I mend clothes on the sewing machine. When the newspaper comes, I read it. If a meeting is scheduled for the same evening, I don’t want to miss it. After all, I can’t go to any meetings or assemblies during the week when I have to work until ten in the evening.

I have now described the course of a typical work day. Perhaps I have gone into too much detail. I don’t

want to suggest that one work day resembles the next. The factory work may remain the same, but not the housework.

And now to my much longed-for weekend. I cannot really speak of a free Saturday afternoon. As I mentioned at the start, every other week I have to work until eight in the evening. But if I have a Saturday afternoon for myself, I visit my coworkers and collect the society dues. Otherwise I collect them on Sunday morning. This means that Sunday afternoon belongs to me. Sometimes a good book gives me what I am longing for. If the weather is particularly nice, I go on an excursion with my parents or coworkers, which often turns into a real adventure. That's my weekend. So let's hope and fight for a better life for the working class together. This wish should be our religion.

M. K., N., twenty-four years old.

Source of original German text: "*Mein Arbeitstag—mein Wochenende*". *Arbeiterinnen berichten von ihrem Alltag 1928*, new edition by Alf Luedtke (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag GmbH, 1991), 44–46.

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