[Review of the book *British Unemployment, 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy*]

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[Review of the book *British Unemployment, 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy*]

**Abstract**
[Excerpt] Garside's book fills an important gap in the literature on interwar unemployment by providing a comprehensive account of the various types of public policy that government officials, politicians, businessmen, and union leaders advocated as means for reducing unemployment, and by emphasizing the effect of the changing nature of the unemployment problem on the debates on public policy. The book's one major shortcoming is that it contains very little analysis of the effects of government unemployment policies.

**Keywords**
Britain, unemployment, interwar period, labor, public policy

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**Comments**

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torical roots, but the French paper neglects to make that important point.

The essays are descriptive and institutional, not analytical or theoretical, regarding economic issues. For example, most essays discuss how programs structure incentives to return to work and present some data on program outcomes. But they do not estimate the magnitude of the effects. And when one author cites rates of return to work for disabilities of varying duration to decide the appropriate interval for intervention, he goes beyond what his data can support.

This book is a valuable addition to the literature. Much valuable information is presented on important issues, among them the importance of integration or separation of rehabilitation and disability benefit agencies; whether integrated medical and vocational teams or separate specialists are used; whether workers are automatically referred for rehabilitation or must apply; eligibility requirements; the role of labor market conditions in qualifying for benefits; quotas for hiring disabled workers; methods of assessing disability; coordination of disability assessment and vocational rehabilitation; the hierarchy of rehabilitation objectives (return to work for the same employer in the pre-injury job, return in a modified job, extensive retraining, and so on); incentives to hire workers (such as wage subsidies, trial work, and limits on duration of subsidies); incentives for workers to participate in rehabilitation; emphasis on early intervention; and differences between law and actual practice in many countries. Because the individual country essays do not employ a common, integrated framework, the reader has to work to pull together the lessons. But the effort is well worth it.

John A. Gardner
Senior Economist
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The reduction in the workweek from 70 or more hours to 40 or fewer is one of the most significant changes in Western society since the industrial revolution. Combined with annual holidays and retirement pension systems, the reduction in the workweek has given workers time for leisure, family life, and intellectual and social activities outside of work. It has created a consumer society unforeseen just a century ago.

Gary Cross provides a detailed study of the campaign for leisure. He reconstructs the ideology of the short-hours movement, including not only the views of labor activists and union leaders but also those of businessmen, efficiency experts, and government officials. He shows how short-hours campaigns in France and England moved from fringe crusades to cross-class coalitions, attracting elite support by promising to raise efficiency to pay higher wages while also spurring greater consumption.

Although this book is a fine work of intellectual history, it will frustrate many economic and labor historians. Cross is best at presenting the developing ideology of the short-hours campaign. Little attention, by contrast, is devoted to the workplace, either labor's campaign for shorter hours or management's search for productivity gains to pay twentieth-century workers higher wages for fewer hours of work. Scholars can learn much from Cross's work about what was said about shorter hours. But the quest to understand why leisure time was won must continue.

Gerald Friedman
Assistant Professor of Economics
University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Historical Studies


This book presents a detailed survey of unemployment policy in interwar Britain. Garside focuses on the debates over policy options for dealing with the persistent and large-scale unemployment that existed throughout the period rather than on the causes of unemployment or the effects of government unemployment policies.

The book is divided into four main parts. The first part describes the many changes during the interwar period in the generosity and funding of government benefits for the unemployed. Garside maintains that the policy
changes were driven largely by changes over time in the extent and nature of unemployment. The second part, which concerns the "international context" of public policy, describes the debates over the return to the gold standard, the adoption of protective tariffs, and the adoption of policies to stimulate the emigration of the unemployed to colonies or the Dominions. The third part concerns structural and regional unemployment, and government involvement in rationalization of industries, labor transference, and industrial (regional) diversification. The final section, on "macroeconomic policy options," describes the debates over the adoption of public works projects and deficit-financed fiscal policy.

Garside's book fills an important gap in the literature on interwar unemployment by providing a comprehensive account of the various types of public policy that government officials, politicians, businessmen, and union leaders advocated as means for reducing unemployment, and by emphasizing the effect of the changing nature of the unemployment problem on the debates on public policy. The book's one major shortcoming is that it contains very little analysis of the effects of government unemployment policies. For example, Garside devotes two chapters to describing proposed changes to the unemployment insurance system, but he quickly dismisses the hypothesis that the generosity of unemployment insurance affected the level and duration of unemployment, a topic that has been hotly debated in the recent literature on interwar unemployment. Similarly, he devotes only one paragraph each to discussing recent estimates of the effect on unemployment of "sticky" wages and the return to the gold standard.

Although Garside's failure to examine the possible effects of the various policy options is regrettable, the book nevertheless represents an important addition to the literature on unemployment policy in interwar Britain.

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Throughout labor's history, "rank-and-file" or "reform" movements have existed in many unions. Over the past 25 years, these movements have played significant roles in the United Steelworkers (Steelworkers Fight Back), the United Auto Workers (New Directions), and, probably most significant, the United Mine Workers (Miners for Democracy). The nation's largest union, the Teamsters, has also experienced this phenomenon, with several different rank-and-file groups emerging during the 1960s and 1970s. Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), through membership growth and its 1979 merger with the other most significant dissident group, the Professional Drivers Council (PROD), became the leading force for reform within the union as the 1980s began. La Botz's book chronicles the rise of these rank-and-file organizations, focusing in particular on the origins, activities, and accomplishments of TDU.

Early in the book, the author provides a useful synopsis of the growth of the Teamsters union, including insightful discussions of the roles of the three Teamsters presidents who shaped the organization—Daniel Tobin, Dave Beck, and Jimmy Hoffa. This summary also provides an illuminating treatment of the relationship between organized crime and the union, including its beginnings, its impact on the organization, and its ramifications for the membership of the union.

Most of the book, however, focuses on the various reform movements within the Teamsters. La Botz—who, as a former TDU activist, makes no claim to objectivity—tells the story of these efforts by rank-and-file Teamsters to change their organization in a slightly unconventional way: through the eyes of the reformers themselves. The author begins his discussion of this subject by tracing the reform movement back to its origins in the 1960s. Each of the reform organizations born during this period among long haul truck drivers, steel haulers, United Parcel Service employees, and others is examined in terms of the conditions that led to its formation and the goals and activities of the various groups. The personal stories—backgrounds, work histories, union activities—of key individuals in these groups are woven into the discussion of the reform organizations themselves. This approach gives the reader more than a sterile recounting of the organizational history of the reform movement by providing insight into the people involved and the ideals and principles that drove them.

By the late 1970s, TDU emerged as the primary reform organization in the union.