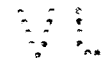


# MIDDLETOWN

*A Study in Contemporary American Culture*

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*Foreword by*  
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## FOREWORD

On every hand we hear the admonition, "The study of society must be made objective." When one asks what is meant by this, he is referred to the natural and the biological sciences. But while the average man has little difficulty in comprehending what is meant by objective in the study of electricity, bees, etc., he finds himself at a loss to visualize the objects of study in a social inquiry. There is nothing strange in this, because the professionals in social science are still far from confident that they have their hands upon the social reality. True, many attempts have been made to find the basic factors in society, but these factors have been sought, for the most part, in the laboratories of biology and psychology, which is not unlike groping behind the scenes and digging under the stage, disregarding the comedies, tragedies, and dramas in plain sight. On the other hand, experience with social phenomena is bringing us nearer and nearer to a realization that we must deal directly with life itself, that the realities of social science are what people do. Seemingly in full realization of this, the authors of this book have patiently observed an American community and sketched out for us, in the large, the whole round of its activities. No one had ever subjected an American community to such a scrutiny; probably few would regard it as worth while. Rather have we been taught to set store by studies of the individual on one hand, and on the other, on the gathering of intimate statistics as to wages, living conditions, etc., for groups in our national population at large, as coal miners, teamsters, working girls, etc. The first of these seems to have been ordered upon the theory that maladjustments of individuals might be dealt with effectively if one knew a true sample of personal histories, and, in the main, studies of this kind have justified their making. The second seems to rest on the assumption that occupational groups present collective problems which can be dealt with on a national level, the maladjustments in this case arising in the failure of these groups to articulate properly with other groups. Here

## Chapter IV

### THE DOMINANCE OF GETTING A LIVING

A stranger unfamiliar with the ways of Middletown, dropped down into the city, as was the field staff in January, 1924, would be a lonely person. He would find people intently engaged day after day in some largely routinized, specialized occupation. Only the infants, the tottering old, and a fringe of women would seem to be available to answer his endless questions.

In a word—

- 43 people out of every 100 in Middletown are primarily occupied with getting the living of the entire group.
- 23 of every 100 are engaged in making the homes of the bulk of the city.
- 19 of every 100 are receiving day after day the training required of the young.
- 15 of every 100, the remainder, are chiefly those under six years, and the very old.

Not only do those engaged in getting the living of the group predominate numerically, but as the study progressed it became more and more apparent that the money medium of exchange and the cluster of activities associated with its acquisition drastically condition the other activities of the people. Rivers begins his study of the Todas with an account of the ritual of the buffalo dairy, because "the ideas borrowed from the ritual of the dairy so pervade the whole of Toda ceremonial."<sup>1</sup> A similar situation leads to the treatment of the activities of Middletown concerned with getting a living first among the six groups of activities to be described. The extent of the dominance of this sector in the lives of the people will appear as the study progresses.

<sup>1</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas* (New York; Macmillan, 1906), p. 16, also p. 38: "The lives of the people are largely devoted to their buffaloes. . . . The ordinary operations of the dairy have become a religious ritual and ceremonies of a religious character accompany nearly every important incident in the lives of the buffaloes."

At first glance it is difficult to see any semblance of pattern in the workaday life of a community exhibiting a crazy-quilt array of nearly four hundred ways of getting its living—such diverse things as being abstractors, accountants, auditors, bank cashiers, bank tellers, bookkeepers, cashiers, checkers, core makers, crane operators, craters, crushers, cupola tenders, dye-workers, efficiency engineers, electricians, electrical engineers, embalmers, entomologists, estimating engineers, illuminating engineers, linotypists, mechanical engineers, metallurgists, meteorologists, riggers, riveters, rivet makers, and so on indefinitely. On closer scrutiny, however, this welter may be resolved into two kinds of activities. The people who engage in them will be referred to throughout the report as the Working Class and the Business Class.<sup>2</sup> Members of the first group, by and large, address their activities in getting their living primarily to *things*, utilizing material tools in the making of things and the performance of services, while the members of the second group address their activities predominantly to *people* in the selling or promotion of things, services, and ideas. This second group supplies to Middletown the multitude of non-material institutional activities such as “credit,” “legal contract,” “education,” “sale for a price,” “management,” and “city government” by which Middletown people negotiate with each other in converting the narrowly specialized product of their workaday lives into “a comfortable evening at home,” “a Sunday afternoon out in the car,” “fire protection,” “a new go-cart for the baby,” and all the other things that constitute living in Middletown. If the Federal Census distribution of those gainfully employed in Middletown in 1920 is reclassified according to this grouping we find that there are two and one-half times as many in the working class as in the business class—seventy-one in each 100 as against twenty-nine.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Other terms which might be utilized to differentiate these two groups by their vocational activities are: people who address their activities to things and people who address their activities to persons; those who work with their hands and those who work with their tongues; those who make things and those who sell or promote things and ideas; those who use material tools and those who use various non-material institutional devices.

<sup>3</sup> See Table I for the basis of this distribution.

Four of the twenty-nine in each 100 grouped with the business class belong to a group of users of highly-skilled techniques—architects, surgeons, chemists, and so on—who, though addressing their activities in getting a living more to things than to people, are not here grouped with the

No such classification is entirely satisfactory. The aerial photographer inevitably sacrifices minor contours as he ascends high enough to view a total terrain. Within these two major groups there is an infinite number of gradations—all the way from the roughest day laborer to the foreman, the foundry molder, and the linotype operator in the one group, and from the retail clerk and cashier to the factory owner and professional man in the other. There is naturally, too, a twilight belt in which some members of the two groups overlap or merge.

Were a minute structural diagram the aim of this study, it would be necessary to decipher in much greater detail the multitude of overlapping groupings observable in Middletown. Since what is sought, however, is an understanding of the major functional characteristics of this changing culture, it is important that significant outlines be not lost in detail, and the groups in the city which exhibit the dominant characteristics most clearly must, therefore, form the foci of the report. While an effort will be made to make clear at certain points variant behavior within these two groups, it is after all this division into working class and business class that constitutes the outstanding cleavage in Middletown. The mere fact of being born upon one or the other side of the watershed roughly formed by these

working class because all their other activities would place them with the business class. It should be borne in mind throughout that the term business class, as here used, includes these and other professional workers. Since it is the business interests of the city that dominate and give their tone, in the main, to the lawyer, chemist, architect, engineer, teacher, and even to some extent preacher and doctor, such a grouping by and large accurately represents the facts.

Careful consideration was given to the applicability for the purposes of this study of the conventional tripartite division into Lower Class, Middle Class, and Upper Class. This was rejected, however, for the following reasons: (1) Since the dominance of the local getting-a-living activities impresses upon the group a pattern of social stratification based primarily upon vocational activity, it seemed advisable to utilize terms that hold this vocational cleavage to the fore. (2) In so far as the traditional three-fold classification might be applied to Middletown today, the city would have to be regarded as having only a lower and a middle class; eight or nine households might conceivably be considered as an upper class, but these families are not a group apart but are merged in the life of the mass of businessfolk. R. H. Gretton, while pointing out the difficulty of separating out any group in present-day industrial society as “Middle Class,” defines it as precisely that group here called the business class: “The Middle Class is that portion of the community to which money is the primary condition and the primary instrument of life. . . . It . . . includes merchant and capitalist manufacturer . . . [and the] professional class.” *The English Middle Class* (London; Bell, 1917), pp. 1-13.

two groups is the most significant single cultural factor tending to influence what one does all day long throughout one's life; whom one marries; when one gets up in the morning; whether one belongs to the Holy Roller or Presbyterian church; or drives a Ford or a Buick; whether or not one's daughter makes the desirable high school Violet Club; or one's wife meets with the Sew We Do Club or with the Art Students' League; whether one belongs to the Odd Fellows or to the Masonic Shrine; whether one sits about evenings with one's necktie off; and so on indefinitely throughout the daily comings and goings of a Middletown man, woman, or child.

Wherever throughout the report either Middletown or any group within the city is referred to as a unit, such a mode of expression must be regarded as simply a shorthand symbol. Any discussions of characteristics of groups are of necessity approximations only and the fact that the behavior of individuals is the basis of social behavior must never be lost sight of.

## Chapter V

### WHO EARN MIDDLETOWN'S LIVING?

Who are the forty-three people out of every 100 in Middletown who specialize day after day in getting its living?

Four out of five of them are males. Today as in 1890 a healthy adult male, whether married or unmarried, loses caste sharply by not engaging with the rest of the group in the traditional male activity of getting a living.

Among the women, however, no such constancy of tradition is apparent. "What has become of the useful maiden aunt?" asks a current newspaper advertisement of a women's magazine, showing a picture of a woman in her late thirties dressed in sober black, and bearing the date "Anno Domini 1900." "She isn't darning anybody's stockings," it adds succinctly, "not even her own. She is a draftsman or an author, a photographer or a real estate agent. . . . She is the new phenomenon in everyday life." Thirty-five years ago when the daughter of a prominent family became the first woman court reporter in the city, an old friend of her mother's protested that such work would "un-sex" her. The State Factory Inspector in 1900 shook his head over the spectacle of the new influx of women into industry:

"It is a sad comment on our civilization when young women prefer to be employed where they are compelled to mingle with partially clad men, doing the work of men and boys, for little more than they would receive for doing the work usually allotted to women in the home. . . . [One fears] the loss of all maidenly modesty and those qualities which are so highly prized by the true man. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Throughout the entire state one woman in every ten, ten years old and over, was classified by the 1890 Census as occupied at getting a living, as over against one in six in 1920,

<sup>1</sup> *Eighth Biennial Report of [the State] Dept. of Statistics, 1899-1900, pp. 212-13.*

while at the latter date nearly one in four in Middletown was so occupied. This fact, coupled with the recent rise of two business women's luncheon clubs, one of them with the brisk motto, "Better business women for a better business world," would surprise the Middletown editor who so confidently proclaimed in 1891 that "it is true that qualities inherent in the nature of women impede their progress as wage-earners. . . . Women are uniformly timid and are under a disadvantage in the struggle for a livelihood."

The general attitude reflected in such characteristic school graduation essays of the 1890 period as "Woman Is Most Perfect When Most Womanly" and "Cooking, the Highest Art of Woman" contrasts sharply with the idea of getting one's own living current among the Middletown high school girls of today: 89 per cent. of 446 girls in the three upper classes in 1924 stated that they were planning to work after graduation, and 2 per cent. more were "undecided"; only 3 per cent. said definitely that they did not expect to work.<sup>2</sup>

But the married woman in business or industry finds herself much less readily accepted than her unmarried sister. As late as 1875 the Supreme Court of the state held that a wife's earnings were the property of her husband, and even today there is a widespread tendency to adhere to the view of a generation ago that the employment of married women involves an "ethical" problem.<sup>3</sup> Wives who do not themselves work may grumble that married women who work displace men and lower wages, and that they neglect their children or avoid the responsibility of child-bearing, while through their free and easy as-

<sup>2</sup> Six per cent. did not answer. See Appendix on Method regarding this questionnaire given to the three upper years of the high school. Large allowance must be made for subsequent changes of mind. It is not "the thing" today for a girl to admit that she plans to marry and be dependent, though the point is, of course, precisely that such an attitude has come to prevail so strongly since 1890. It is noteworthy that Middletown offers relatively few positions of intrinsic interest to a girl of the business group who has graduated from high school; this operates after Commencement to deflate considerably the zeal for working.

It should be borne in mind that many girls of this age not in high school are already actually working.

<sup>3</sup> As, for example, in Carroll D. Wright's *The Industrial Evolution of the United States* (New York; Scribner, 1901), p. 3.

Here, as in the case of child-rearing and of the institution of marriage discussed in later chapters, the relatively slower rate of secularization of the home and family than of business and industry is apparent.

sociation with men in the factory they encourage divorce. Many husbands, in their turn, oppose their wives' working as a reflection upon their ability as "good providers." These objections are, however, in the main, back-eddies in a current moving in the other direction. The Federal Census for 1920 showed that approximately twenty-eight women in every hundred women gainfully employed in Middletown were married, and among those employed in "manufacturing and mechanical industries," thirty-three in every hundred.<sup>4</sup>

These married women workers, according to the Census distribution, go largely into working class occupations. Only one of forty business class women interviewed had worked for money during the previous five years (1920-24), and she in work of a semi-artistic nature. Of the fifty-five wives out of a sample of 124 working class families<sup>5</sup> who had worked at some time during the previous five years (1920-24), twenty-four pointed to their husbands' unemployment as a major reason for their working, six to money needed for their children's education, five to debt, four spoke of "always needing extra money," or "It takes the work of two to keep a family nowadays," three of needing to help out with "so many children"; the other answers were scattered: "Just decided I'd like to try factory work. I was tired of housekeeping and had a baby old enough [five months] to be left"; "I needed clothes"; "I wanted spending

<sup>4</sup> A check by the Industrial Secretary of the local Y.W.C.A. on 889 female employees in twenty-four factories, retail stores, banks, and public utilities in 1924 showed 6 per cent. divorced, 4 per cent. widowed, 38 per cent. married, and 52 per cent. single.

The percentage of women workers who are married has more than doubled since 1890 in the state in which Middletown is located. It is significant of the trend that the pre-war unwritten rule in certain local plants that a woman automatically loses her job when she marries is disappearing. Cf. Mary N. Winslow, *Married Women in Industry* (Washington, D. C.; Bulletin of the Women's Bureau, No. 38, 1924), p. 6 ff., for qualification of this trend toward equal acceptance of married women in industry.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix on Method for detailed account of the selection of these and of the forty business class families interviewed, the methods of interviewing, and the occupational distribution of both groups of families. It is important to bear in mind in consideration of all data based upon these two groups of families that, whereas the 124 working class families represent what is believed to be a fair sample of the various levels of Middletown's working class in the dominant manufacturing and mechanical industries, the forty business class families include a somewhat larger proportion of the prosperous and influential than would be characteristic of the entire group. Only families with children of school age were included in either group.

money of my own"; "Other women could and I felt like I ought to"; and "The mister was sick and I had to."

The cases of a few representative women will make more specific the complex of factors involved in the wife's working:

In one family, characteristic of a large number of those in which the mother works, a woman of forty-five, mother of four children aged eighteen, sixteen, fifteen, and twelve, had worked fifteen months during the previous five years at two different factories. At the first she worked ten hours a day for \$15.15 a week, stopping work because of a lay-off; at the second nine and a half hours a day for approximately the same wages, stopping because her health "gave out." She went into factory work because "We always seemed to have a doctor's bill around. The mister had an operation and I wanted to help pay that bill. Then he got back to work and was laid off again. He was out of work nine months last year. The children needed clothes and I had to do it." But although the mother did what she could at home after her day at the factory and washed and ironed on Sundays, the oldest daughter had to leave high school and give up going to the Girl Reserves to look after the children. "I made a big mistake in leaving them. The youngest got to running away from home with other girls. *Then* was the time I should have been home with her."

Another type of situation, less frequent than the above, appears in a family of five—a woman of forty-six, her husband of forty-nine, a farmer prior to 1920 and now employed fairly steadily at semi-skilled machine shop work, and their three boys of nineteen, thirteen, and ten. The oldest boy is in the small local college and the mother works continuously at factory work in order that all three boys may go through high school and college, "so that they can get along easier than their father." In a recent stretch of family unemployment the boy borrowed \$125 to keep on at his schooling, both parents going on his note. The family manages by all buckling to the common job: husband and boys have taken over much of the housework; the boy of ten has dinner ready when the family gets home at noon.

In some more prosperous families securing a higher standard of living as well as education for her children leads the mother to work. One mother of two high school boys, a woman of forty-two, the wife of a pipe-fitter, goes outside her home to do cleaning in one of the city's public institutions six days a week. "I began

to work during the war," she said, "when every one else did; we had to meet payments on our house and everything else was getting so high. The mister objected at first, but now he don't mind. I'd rather keep on working so my boys can play football and basketball and have spending money their father can't give them. We've built our own home, a nice brown and white bungalow, by a building and loan like every one else does. We have it almost all paid off and it's worth about \$6,000. No, I don't lose out with my neighbors because I work; some of them have jobs and those who don't envy us who do. I have felt better since I worked than ever before in my life. I get up at five-thirty. My husband takes his dinner and the boys buy theirs uptown and I cook supper. We have an electric washing machine, electric iron, and vacuum sweeper. I don't even have to ask my husband any more because I buy these things with my own money. I bought an icebox last year—a big one that holds 125 pounds; most of the time I don't fill it, but we have our folks visit us from back East and then I do. We own a \$1,200 Studebaker with a nice California top, semi-enclosed. Last summer we all spent our vacation going back to Pennsylvania—taking in Niagara Falls on the way. The two boys want to go to college, and I want them to. I graduated from high school myself, but I feel if I can't give my boys a little more all my work will have been useless."

This increasing employment of married women, which at the last Census involved nearly a thousand wives from the upwards of nine thousand families then in Middletown, must be viewed as a process of readjustment jammed in among the other changes occurring in the home and other sectors of Middletown life. Fifty-six per cent. of the 124 working class wives interviewed had not worked for money during the five years 1920-24, while 75 per cent. of 102 of their mothers on whom data was secured had not worked for money during their entire married lives. These figures undoubtedly dwarf the extent of the shift, as the interviews took place in most cases during the day and therefore included few women continuously employed away from home at the time. Of the twenty-five mothers of the 1890 period who worked for pay, all but one worked either at home, e.g., taking in washing, or at work such as sewing and cleaning that took them away from home only occasionally, while thirty of the fifty-five present-day wives who had worked had worked in factories or other places necessitat-

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 absence from home all day and every day.<sup>6</sup> These women, two-thirds of them reared in a farm or village environment in which family life centered about the wife and mother in the home, must now attempt to integrate with these early habits the diverse business of being a wife and mother in a city culture where from time to time their best energies are expended for eight and a half to ten hours a day in extraneous work away from home.

Thus, from one point of view the section of Middletown's population that gets its living by working for money is becoming larger; to a greater extent than thirty-five years ago women share this activity with men.

From the point of view of age, however, the section of the population which gets the city's living is somewhat narrower. In general, it appears that male members of the working class start to work from fourteen to eighteen, reach their prime in the twenties, and begin to fail in their late forties, whereas the young males of the business class tend to continue their schooling longer, start to work from eighteen to twenty-two, reach their prime in their thirties, and begin to fail somewhat later than the working class in cases where ripening years do not actually bring increased prestige. The whole working population tends to start to work from two to five years later than in 1890.<sup>7</sup> The compulsory school laws in force today make school attendance obligatory for all children until fourteen, allow working before sixteen only under very restricted condi-

<sup>6</sup> These figures may not be used in comparing urban conditions in the nineties and today, since fifty-seven of the 113 working class wives for whom data were secured on place of childhood residence had lived on farms, fifteen in villages, and only forty-one in towns and cities. They do, however, reflect the actual magnitude of the readjustment these women in Middletown today are having to make.

Of the forty wives of the business class interviewed, seven had been brought up on farms.

<sup>7</sup> Whereas the working class constitutes 71 per cent. of those who get the city's living, 52 per cent. of 309 boys in the three upper years of the high school answering a questionnaire on vocational choices were sons of working class fathers.

Cf. Chs. XI and XIII for the number of years spent in school by members of the business and of the working class and for the fresh problems this in-between generation is creating in the home.

tions which tend to encourage remaining in school, and retain some control of working conditions until eighteen. In 1890, when there were no compulsory school attendance laws and two boys and a dozen girls constituted a year's graduates from the high school, an abundance of boys available for factory work was a civic asset. The press of this early period reported a deputation from the national Flint Glassmakers' Union as looking over Middletown before locating a coöperative glass factory "to make sure there will be no trouble in securing sufficient juvenile help," and the editor lamented that "Boys are not as plentiful as blackberries." Forty-one per cent. of the 425 employees of the leading Middletown glass plant in 1892 were "boys," according to the Report of the State Statistician for 1891-92. State laws forbade the employment of boys under twelve years of age or for longer than ten hours a day, but "they had little practical effect, because no special officers were designated to administer them."<sup>8</sup> A state report in 1897 spoke of the "dwarfed and undeveloped appearance" of many of the boys in the factories in Middletown's section of the state, "who had been engaged in the factories from the age of ten years or younger."

But although the labor of children in their early teens or younger has ceased in Middletown, youth plays a more prominent rôle than ever before in getting the city's living; in fact, among the numerically dominant group, the working class, the relative positions of the young and the old would appear to be shifting. "When tradition is a matter of the spoken word, the advantage is all on the side of age. The elder is in the saddle."<sup>9</sup> Much the same condition holds when tradition is a matter of elaborate learned skills of hand and eye. But machine production is shifting traditional skills from the spoken word and the fingers of the master craftsman of the Middletown of the nineties to the cams and levers of the increasingly versatile machine. And in modern machine production it is speed and endurance that are at a premium.<sup>10</sup> A boy of nineteen may, after a

<sup>8</sup> W. A. P. Rawles, *Centralizing Tendencies in the Administration of [the State]*, (New York; Columbia University Press, 1903), p. 315.

<sup>9</sup> Goldenweiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 407-8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the discussion of the displacement of skill by the machine in Chapter VI below.



few weeks of experience on a machine, turn out an amount of work greater than that of his father of forty-five.<sup>11</sup>

An analysis of the ages of all male workers, exclusive of office personnel, in three leading Middletown plants shows that two of the three (plants II and III in the Table), both modern machine shops, have respectively 19 and 27 per cent. of their male workers in the twenty to twenty-four age group, although only 12 per cent. of the city's male population aged fifteen years and over in 1920 fell in this age group. At the other end, although 27 per cent. of the male population of fifteen years and over was aged forty-five to sixty-four, only 17 and 12 per cent. respectively of the male workers in these shops are of this age; in the group aged sixty-five and older were 7 per cent. of the male population, but only 1 and 2 per cent. respectively of the workers in these shops. Plant I, on the other hand, which dates back to the end of the eighties, is not of the predominant machine shop type, and has the reputation of being "one of the few places in town that tries to look out for its older workers," follows closely the population distribution.<sup>12</sup>

For the state as a whole, which has undergone a heavy industrial development since 1890, the percentage of increase between 1890 and 1920 in the male population of the fifteen to twenty-four age group engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries was roughly seventeen times greater than the percentage of increase in the total male population of this age;

<sup>11</sup> It is not uncommon for a father to be laid off during slack times while the son continues at work.

Cf. regarding earnings of workers under twenty-one: *Minors in Automobile and Metal-Manufacturing Industries in Michigan* (Washington, D. C.; Children's Bureau Publication No. 126, 1923), p. 12 ff.

<sup>12</sup> See Table II. Plant II is a high-speed modern machine shop owned by one of the great automotive corporations of the country and known locally as "hard-boiled": it has half again as high a percentage of young men twenty to twenty-four years old as Plant I, one-fifth higher twenty-five to forty-four, and two-fifths lower forty-five to sixty-four. (Plant II, however, has been running only about fifteen years and only five years under the present ownership.) Plant III, another machine shop plant producing metal products, draws 16 per cent. of its total personnel (both male and female) from the sixteen to nineteen year group, and 30 per cent. from the twenty to twenty-four group, or nearly half of its entire personnel (46 per cent.) from that section of the population under twenty-five years, while only 11 per cent. of all its workers are forty-five or over, despite the fact that it has been operated in Middletown since the nineties. Both of these plants are typical of current conditions, although it should be borne in mind that these large industrial plants represent the trend in its most advanced form.

in the twenty-five to forty-four group, four and one-fourth times greater; in the forty-five to sixty-four group two and one-half times greater; in the sixty-five and over age group only one and two-thirds times.<sup>13</sup>

Like many another trend in Middletown this increasing demand for young workers appears in a different light to the two groups concerned in it. To managerial members of the business group, it naturally appears largely as a problem of production:

*The head of a leading machine shop:* "I think there's less opportunity for older men in industry now than there used to be. The principal change I've seen in the plant here has been the speeding up of machines and the eliminating of the human factor by machinery. The company has no definite policy of firing men when they reach a certain age nor of hiring men under a certain age, but in general we find that when a man reaches fifty he is slipping down in production."

*The general manager of another prominent machine shop:* "Only about 25 per cent. of our workers are over forty. Speed and specialization tend to bring us younger men. We do not have an age line at which we fire men."

*The personnel manager of another outstanding machine shop:* "In production work forty to forty-five is the age limit because of the speed needed in the work. Men over forty are hired as sweepers and for similar jobs. We have no set age for discharging men."

*The manager of another large plant in which 75 per cent. of the men are under forty-five:* "We have a good many routine jobs a man can do if he is still strong. We try to find a place for these older men even when they are as old as fifty-five if there is no danger in their working near machinery."

*The superintendent of a small foundry:* "Molders are working up to sixty-five in Middletown at present. After a man reaches forty to forty-five he begins to slow down, but these older, experienced men are often valuable about the shop. But that's not true in the machine shops. There a man is harnessed to a machine and he *can't* slow down. If he does, his machine runs away with him."

<sup>13</sup> No detailed study was made of the types of work performed by aging industrial workers. It is usually not a question of their total superannuation but rather of their slipping down the scale to work of a sort carrying less prestige or less pay, e.g., sweeping up about the plant, as indicated in the quotations cited.

*The superintendent of a foundry:* Fifty per cent. of the men now employed by us are forty or over, but the company has decided to adopt a policy of firing every employee as he reaches sixty, because it takes a man over sixty so long to recover from accidents and the State law requires us to pay compensation during the entire period of recovery."<sup>14</sup>

*The superintendent of another major plant:* "The age dead line is creeping down on those men—I'd say that by forty-five they are through."

The old-age dead line as it looks from some apparently characteristic homes of Middletown working class families is suggested by the answers of certain of the 124 wives to the staff interviewers' question: "What seems to be the future of your husband's job?" These answers exhibit a more obvious pessimism, perhaps, because it was a time of local unemployment and many of the working class families were preoccupied with the immediate urgency of keeping a job or getting a new one.<sup>15</sup>

*(Husband a laborer, age forty.)* "Whenever you get old they are done with you. The only thing a man can do is to keep as young as he can and save as much as he can."

*(Husband a foreman, age fifty-six.)* "Good future if he's not getting too old. The [plant] is getting greedier and pushing more every year."

*(Husband a molder, age fifty-one.)* "He often wonders what he'll do when he gets a little older. He hopes and prays they'll get the State old-age pension through pretty soon."

*(Husband a machine tender, age thirty-nine.)* "The company is pretty apt to look after him [i.e., not lay him off]. But when he gets older, then I don't know."

*(Husband a machinist, age forty-four.)* "They keep men there until they die."

*(Husband a machinist, age forty-six.)* "I worry about what we'll do when he gets older and isn't wanted at the factories and I am unable to go to work. We can't expect our children to support us and we can't seem to save any money for that time."

<sup>14</sup> This shows how action aiming to "solve" one "social problem" frequently aggravates another. At certain of the Middletown plants men over fifty are barred from the "mutual aid" insurance plan for a similar reason.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ch. VII below on promotion for further answers to this question.

*(Husband a pattern maker, age forty.)* "He is forty and in about ten years now will be on the shelf. A pattern maker really isn't much wanted after forty-five. They always put in the young men. What will we do? Well, that is just what I don't know. We are not saving a penny, but we are saving our boys." (Both boys attend the small local college.)

As noted above, approximately half of the working class wives interviewed were farm-bred. If roughly the same proportion holds for their husbands, perhaps a third of the men in Middletown are having to shift from a world where the physical decline is gradual and even the very old are useful to a new environment in which "economic superannuation takes place abruptly and earlier in life and stands like a specter before the industrial worker."<sup>16</sup> In a culture in which economic authority is so pervasive, the maladjustment of habits occasioned by loss of vocational and financial dominance by the elders may be expected to have extensive repercussions throughout the rest of the living of the group.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, among the business class of Middletown, to a somewhat greater extent than among the working class, advancing age still appears to mean increasing or stable earning power and social prestige. Among some members of the lower ranks of the business class, however, such as retail salespeople and clerical workers, old age is increasingly precarious as aggressive outside chain stores or new owners are more and more dominating local retailing methods. For instance, outside Jewish capital recently took over one of the men's clothing stores and inaugurated a strict sales rule docking any clerk who spends three-quarters of an hour with a customer and fails to make a sale. This rule has resulted in the dropping of at least one of the older, slower clerks.<sup>18</sup> And even in the professions,

<sup>16</sup> Abraham Epstein, *Facing Old Age* (New York; Knopf, 1922), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. in this connection James Mickel Williams' *Our Rural Heritage* (New York; Knopf, 1925), p. 67.

Cf. Ch. XI for discussion of the decline of parental dominance over children, particularly in their late teens.

<sup>18</sup> Old age is not generally considered a "social problem," though signs of social strain connected with it are increasingly common—e.g., the relation between smaller houses shorn of "spare bed rooms" and the apparently diminishing tendency of married children to take elderly parents into their homes, noted elsewhere. The attitude toward old age appears to be going through the same cycle traveled by child labor, accident compensation, woman suffrage, factory inspection, and other social changes: for years there

such as teaching and the ministry, the demand for youth is making itself felt more than a generation ago.

Racially, those getting Middletown's living are very largely native-born white Americans. Negroes, both in 1890 and today, have totaled only about 5 per cent. of the earners, virtually all of them being in the working class.

A further factor, that of apparent variations in "intelligence" among the people getting the city's living, cannot be ignored. Whatever the extent of modification of native endowment by varying environmental conditions in the traits measured by "intelligence tests," these tests do by and large seem to reflect differences in the equipment with which, at any given time, children must grapple with their world. A cross-section of the white population was secured in the form of scores (Intelligence Quotients) of all white first-grade (1A and 1B) children in the public schools, according to the Terman Revision of the Binet-Simon Intelligence Tests, administered by the professional Binet school psychologist.<sup>19</sup> Five of the twelve schools draw their children from both business and working class to such an extent as not to be clearly classifiable as predominantly one or the other; three schools with a total of

was no "problem," the situation was aggravated by other social changes, became more acute, until two factions emerged, the one "for" doing something publicly about it and the other "against" doing something about it—until one side won and the new measure became taken for granted, or changed institutional factors rendered the issue obsolete. Limitation of child labor, factory inspection, workmen's compensation, and tax-supported employment offices were opposed step by step by one group in Middletown as "socialistic" and making competition with other centers more difficult; they were pushed with equal persistence by another group. Provision for old age is just reaching the stage in Middletown of occasional questionings of the adequacy under machine production in urban surroundings of the traditionally assumed benefits of the threat of old age as an incentive to saving, and also of the adequacy of the poor house as the wisest instrument for caring for the aged needy. In 1925 the Middletown Eagles, a working class lodge, actively backed the state lodge in introducing an old-age pension bill into the Legislature, while a business group opposed and defeated the bill.

<sup>19</sup> The only white first-grade pupils not included were eighty-three children in the Catholic parochial school and four in the city's one private school. Scores for these children were not available.

It is not intended here to underwrite current extravagant claims for intelligence tests. These scores are presented simply in the belief that they do represent, however inadequately, certain variations which must be taken into account in the study of this community.

97 first-grade children and four schools with 290 first-grade children may, however, be fairly accurately classified as markedly business class and working class, respectively. Their scores compare as follows with those of the total 667 first-grade children in the city:

	Percentage Distribution of 97 Chil- dren Chiefly of Business Class Parents	Percentage Distribution of 290 Chil- dren Chiefly of Working Class Parents	Percentage Distribution of 667 Chil- dren in All Schools
"Near Genius" (I. Q. 140+) .....	0.0	0.0	0.2
"Very Superior" (I. Q. 120-139) ....	7.2	1.0	3.7
"Superior" (I. Q. 110-119) .....	18.6	5.5	9.7
"Normal or Average" (I. Q. 90-109) ..	60.8	51.0	52.6
"Dull, rarely feeble-minded" (I. Q. 80-89) .....	11.3	25.5	21.0
"Borderline, often feeble-minded" (I. Q. 70-79) .....	2.1	10.7	8.1
"Moron" (I. Q. 50-69) .....	0.0	5.9	3.0
"Imbecile" (I. Q. 25-49) .....	0.0	0.4	1.2
"Idiot" (I. Q. Below 25) .....	0.0	0.0	0.5
	100.0	100.0	100.0

The tendency to diverge suggested by the first two columns above should be borne in mind throughout the entire range of earning a living, making a home, leisure time, training the young, religious, and community activities to follow.

A final point worth noting in regard to those who get Middletown's living is the constant process whereby Middletown tends to recruit its population from the outlying smaller communities about it and itself in turn to lose certain of its young potential leaders to larger cities. A check of the Middletown residents in the graduating classes of the high school for the years 1916-19, for the number who in May, 1925, still lived in Middletown and the number living elsewhere, revealed the fact that roughly half of the 135 boys and a third of the 221 girls residing in Middletown when they graduated from high school in the four years 1916-19 had not returned to the city to live five years later. For example, of eighteen boys in the class of 1916, eight were nine years later in Middletown, one elsewhere in the state, four in other of the East-North-Central group, and five elsewhere in the United States. These migrants undoubtedly contain a fairly high percentage of the more ener-

getic young men of the type who go off to college. On the other hand, of the seven boys graduating from the high school of a small neighboring town in 1908, every one has left the little town: two going to Middletown, where one is president of the young business men's Dynamo Club of the Chamber of Commerce, two to another near-by city, and three others to cities still more remote.

Nobody knows exactly what such a depletion from above and enrichment from below means to the life of a city. It is, however, pertinent to bear it in mind as a possible factor influencing the energy and quality of all the activities of Middletown, notably the degree of resistance to social change. One student of American life has remarked that "frequently the loss of even the best tenth will cut down by 50 per cent. the effective support the community gives to higher interests."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> E. A. Ross, *The Social Trend* (New York; Century, 1922), p. 45.

Tuesday 7. Apr.

## Chapter VI

### WHAT MIDDLETOWN DOES TO GET ITS LIVING

Little connection appears between most of the nearly four hundred routinized activities in which these men and women are engrossed day after day in their specialized places of work and the food, sex, and shelter needs of human beings. A few of these workers buy and sell quantities of food, clothing, and fuel made by other specialized workers in other communities, and a few others spend their days in making houses for other members of the group. Only to a negligible extent does Middletown make the food it eats and the clothing it wears. Instead, it makes hundreds of thousands of glass bottles or scores of thousands of insulators or automobile engine parts. The annual output of a single plant, employing a thousand of the city's total of 17,000 who get its living, aggregates \$12,000,000; everything this plant makes is promptly shipped away, and perhaps one-tenth of 1 per cent. of it ever returns as a few obscure parts hidden in some of the automobiles Middletown drives.

And this gap between the things the people do to get a living and the actual needs of living is widening. Radical changes in the activities of the working class in the predominant industries of Middletown during the last four decades have driven the individual workman ever farther from his farm and village background of the eighties.<sup>1</sup> Inventions and technology continue rapidly to supplant muscle and the cunning hand of the master craftsman by batteries of tireless iron men doing narrowly specialized things over and over and merely "operated"

<sup>1</sup> In the pages that follow more space is devoted to the activities of the working class in getting a living than to those of the business class. A number of considerations prompted this treatment: (1) the heavy numerical preponderance of the working class; (2) the more sweeping changes in the types of work performed by them, including that from hand to machine labor, with all the social dislocations involved therein; (3) the fact that the working man's life is buttressed or assailed at more points exclusively by his job; he is supported by fewer kinds of social and other ties, while his life

or "tended" in their orderly clangorous repetitive processes by the human worker. The newness of the iron man in Middletown is reflected in the fact that as recently as 1900 the local press reported only seventy-five "machinists" in the city.<sup>2</sup>

The coming of machine brains and brawn is vividly revealed by the tool-using processes in a local glass plant in 1890 and today. Then, the blowing of glass jars was almost entirely a hand skill. The furnace in which the glass was melted held eight to fourteen "pots" of molten glass, each pot being the focus of the activities of a "shop" or crew of two highly-skilled "blowers" and three boy assistants—one "gatherer," one "taking-out boy," and one "carry-in boy." Through a narrow, unprotected ring-hole the gatherer collected a small gob of glass on a long iron blow-pipe from the blistering interior of the pot. Moving back to a tub six feet from the furnace, he quickly smoothed the ball of glass in a "block" and passed it to one of the blowers. The latter swung to the rhythm of his work at a distance of eight feet from the furnace, setting the pipe to his lips, swinging it up until the glowing ball on the other end was above the level of his lips, blowing, lowering the balloon of glass into the jaws of a waiting mold shut with a foot treadle, blowing a third time until a thin bright "blow-over" of molten glass oozed over the mouth of the mold and he could twist his pipe free from the thin glass without hurting the part of the jar inside. It took as a rule three deep breaths to a jar and he averaged about twenty-five seconds to a jar—something under 100 dozen quart jars a day. At his side on a stool

is more frequently and drastically disrupted by such purely job occurrences as lay-offs and accidents; and (4) the greater reticence of the business class in talking to strangers about certain intimate matters, e.g., their hopes and fears about their work and the details of their financial status, which forced the research staff to content itself with data on the working class alone at certain points. More detailed study of the work of the business class, however, would obviously have been desirable.

<sup>2</sup> The sweeping industrial changes since the end of the eighties are suggested by the fact that the evolution of the iron and steel industry, second in the 1919 census in value of product, did not begin on a large scale until about 1887; the automobile industry, third in value of product in 1919, was non-existent in the late eighties; the motion picture industry was non-existent; the chemical and electrical industries were in their infancy. "Ninety per cent. of the total growth of the electrical industry as a whole has occurred during the past twenty-five years." (*Electrical World*, Fiftieth Anniversary Number, Vol. 84, No. 12, September 20, 1924, p. 640.) "In the early eighties there was no college in this country where one could take a course in electrical engineering." (*Ibid.* p. 566.)

by the molds sat a third worker, the taking-out boy, who took the red-hot jar from the mold and placed it on a tray for a fourth worker, who carried it several yards to the annealing oven. The three boys in the shop kept the two blowers going. It was hot, steady work with only a couple of five-minute halts from 7:00 to 10:00, when a fifteen-minute "tempo" occurred, during which one of the boys might be sent across the street with a row of buckets strung on a long pole for beer; then at it again from 10:15 to 12:00 with one or two more five-minute breaks; lunch, 12:00 to 1:00; work, 1:00 to 3:00; another fifteen-minute "tempo"; and then the last leg till 5:00, each of the two afternoon "spells" with one or two brief breaks. On hot days in early summer the pauses might have to come every half hour; in midsummer the plants closed down entirely. It is important to note that the speed and rhythm of the work were set by the human organism, not by a machine. And with all the repetition of movement involved, the remark of an old glass-blower should be borne in mind, that "you never learn all there is to glass-blowing, as there's always some new twist occurring to you."

The annealing ovens of 1890 were stacked full of hot jars by a "layer-in boy" using a long fork, the oven sealed, heated to 1000° F., and then left for seventy-two hours to cool. The jars were then removed, again by hand, the irregular "blow-over" of glass about the lip of each jar chipped off by hand and then ground smooth by girls standing in front of revolving iron plates covered with wet sand, washed by other girls, and then carried to the packing room. One twelve horse-power engine furnished all the mechanical power for this entire plant at the end of the eighties.

Today this entire process, save the last step of transporting to the packing room, occurs without the intervention of the human hand. The development of the Owens and other bottle-blowing machines shortly after 1900 "eliminated all skill and labor" and rendered a hand process that had come down largely unchanged from the early Egyptians as obsolete as the stone ax. Batteries of these Briareus-like machines revolve endlessly day and night, summer and winter, in this factory today, dipping in turn as they pass a ghostly finger at the end of each of their ten or fifteen arms into the slowly revolving pot of molten glass. Enough glass to make a jar is drawn up, molded

roughly in a blank mold, which mold withdraws while a second or finishing mold rises, closes about the red-hot glass, compressed air forces the glass into the crannies of the mold—and a jar is made. As giant Briareus circles endlessly round and round, each arm in turn drops its red-hot burden on to an automatic belt conveyor which winds its way to the "lehr"—the modern annealing oven. Into the electrically operated lehr the jars march, single file, and take their places on the slowly moving floor, to journey for three hours under the care of pyrometers and emerge eighty feet farther on, cool enough to be handled with the naked hand.

In 1890, 1,600 dozen quart jars could be turned out in a one-shift day from an eight-pot furnace manned by twenty-one men and twenty-four boys. Today one furnace manned by three ten-arm machines and a human crew of eight men turns out 6,600 dozen quart jars in a one-shift day of the same length.

Similar, though perhaps not so spectacular, changes have occurred throughout the other departments of the plant.<sup>3</sup> It is in these other departments that one observes particularly the speeding-up process of the iron man. In the room in which zinc caps for the fruit jars are punched, the punches were operated by a foot-treadle in 1890 and, at the will of the operator, about seventy caps could be punched in a minute. Today the power-driven machines hit a pace hour after hour of 188 punches a minute, or at the rate of two caps a punch, 366 caps a minute. The noise necessitates shouting close to the ear if one is to be heard.

Even more characteristic perhaps of the machine age in Middletown is the high-speed specialization of the several automobile part plants. Having in this new automobile industry little previous heritage of plant and machinery, the planning and control of the engineer have had a clear field for the introduction of machine production methods.<sup>4</sup> Specialization in

<sup>3</sup> In 1890 a man with a two-wheel truck trundled six dozen jars at a time to the packing room, whereas today one man with an electric tow motor hauls 150 dozen jars. Freight cars today are loaded by a conveyor that extends into the car. Automatic mixers operated by electricity have replaced men with shovels in the batch room where the sand and other ingredients are mixed for the furnace.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Veblen's comment regarding the significance for the industrial rise of modern Germany of "the break with an earlier and traditional situation in trade and industry [which] left German enterprise hampered with fewer

tool processes is proceeding rapidly.<sup>5</sup> Here, for instance, is what a typical worker in a local plant making automobile parts does to get a living. The worker is drilling metal joint rings for the front of a well-known automobile. He stands all day in front of his multiple drill-press, undrilled rings being brought constantly to his elbow and his product carted away. Three times each minute, nine hours a day, he does the following set of things: He picks up two joint rings with his left hand, inserts them in his iron man with both hands, turns two levers waist-high with both hands to close jigs, pushes up shoulder-high lever with right hand, takes hold of levers at waist line with both hands and turns the rotating table with its four jigs half-way round, pulls shoulder-high lever with right hand, pulls shoulder-high lever with left hand, removes the two rings which have been drilled with right hand, while he picks up two new rings with his left hand, inserts the two new rings into the drill press with both hands—and does the process all over again.<sup>6</sup>

In still a third type of plant, a foundry, changes have involved chiefly the process of making the sand molds and the methods of conveying the materials about the plant. All the castings were made in a leading Middletown foundry in the nineties by highly-skilled hand molders, "bench molders," whereas, despite strong union opposition, 60 per cent. of the castings today are made by machine molders who need only a fortnight or so of training. In the transporting of materials a magno-electric crane and three men today pile two and one-half times as much scrap into a furnace as twelve men could

conventional restrictions and less obsolescent equipment and organization on its hands than the corresponding agencies of retardation in any of the contemporary English-speaking countries." *Imperial Germany* (New York; Huebsch, 1918), p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> "From the beginning, division of labor and inventions were stimulated by each other. Directly a job was divided up into simple elements, it became comparatively easy to devise a tool or machine for doing that particular work, and profitably if the market were large enough to keep the machinery in full use. Conversely, the increased effective use of machinery tended to greater and greater division of labor; and this interaction of machinery and the division of labor acted in turn on the development of the factory and the organization of big business, owing to the economic advantage of the continuous employment of specialists and specialized machinery." P. Sargant Florence, *Economics of Fatigue and Unrest* (New York; Holt, 1924), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> In estimating his production, on which his pay is based, the company allows 10 per cent. of this worker's time for taking care of his machine, and 10 per cent. for rest and delay.

thirty years ago in the same time. "The men in the nineties carried boxes of scrap on their heads; it was heavy work and it was hard to keep a man on the job." Today the crane transports from one end of the plant to the other in a minute and a half materials it took a man a half day of fifteen journeys to wheel in 1890. As Frederick W. Taylor remarked, for such work "the Gorilla type are no more needed."

Other Middletown tool-using activities record similar changes. The diary of an employee in a leading confectionery shop in 1893 gleefully announces the installation of a machine to turn the ice cream freezers. Two men with a compressed air pick and chisel outfit known as a "paving breaker" can today accomplish as much work as fifteen laborers under the old pick-and-shovel-spit-on-your-hands régime. One Middletown industry, manufacturing annually enough woven wire fence to enclose half the United States, which began when a farmer's inventive son who knew the labor of rail-splitting devised a hand-power wire fence weaver, today produces with a single power machine sixteen times as much fence as the early hand machine.

If the working class in Middletown does not make the material necessities of its everyday life, the activities of the business class appear at many points even more remote. As the population has forsaken the less vicarious life of the farm or village and as industrial tools have become increasingly elaborated, there has been a noticeable swelling in the number and complexity of the institutional rituals by which the specialized products of the individual worker are converted into the biological and social essentials of living. It is by carrying on these institutional rituals that the business group gets its living.

In the main these are elaborations of similar, if simpler, devices of the nineties, not exhibiting such spectacular changes as that involved, for instance, in the shift from hand to machine processes. Thus the "general manager" of the glass factory of a generation ago has been succeeded by a "production manager," a "sales manager," an "advertising manager," a "personnel manager," and an "office manager." The whole business structure is dominated by the necessity for keeping costly machines busy. As the business man moves intently to and fro "hiring," "laying off," "arranging a new line of credit," "putting on a bargain sale," "increasing turnover," "meeting competition," "advertising," and otherwise operating his appro-

prate set of rituals under the rules prescribed by "business," he seems subject to almost as many restrictions as the machine dictates to the worker who manipulates its levers.

Chief among these devices for converting the actual products of labor into the necessities and satisfactions of life is the exchanging or arranging for exchange of money for usable things in stores, banks, and offices. Retail selling remains much the same kind of thing that it was a generation ago, though, to be sure, the pace has quickened since the middle of the eighties, when a leading retailer recorded placidly in his diary at the end of the day, "Quiet in the way of trade. Farmers are busy and kept at home," or "We have had a fair trade today—sold twenty screen doors." But here, too, specialization is apparent. The Busy Bee Bazaar and the Temple of Economy on Main Street are being displaced by brisk, competing men's wear, women's wear, electrical, gift, leather-goods, and other "specialty" shops. A swarm of chain stores is pressing hard upon the small independent retailer, who had things far more his own way in the nineties; during an apparently characteristic ten months from April, 1924, through January, 1925, three Middletown clothing stores and one shoe store were taken over by selling agencies having at least one store in another city, and four new chains entered the city with one or more branches.<sup>7</sup> Trade papers, new to Middletown since the nineties, hammer away at the local retailer about "increasing turnover," while selling promotion men sent out by manufacturers' associations worry him at his civic club luncheons by telling him that his "clerks sell only 15 per cent. of their time," and "salaries ought to be paid on a sliding scale based on individual sales."<sup>8</sup>

The allied business institution of "credit" is coming rapidly to pervade and underlie more and more of the whole institutional structure within which Middletown earns its living. Middletown in the early eighties may almost be compared to an English provincial town in the middle of the eighteenth century when "there was little capital laid down in fixed plant and

<sup>7</sup> These four chains included one clothing store, two food stores, and one ten-cent store. The last of these did not open a store at the time but bought a central location necessitating the removal of two established retail businesses.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ch. VII for a description of the trend in the number of hours worked in retail stores away from the leisurely open-all-day-and-all-evening plan of thirty-five years ago.

the machinery of finance and credit was very slight." When the fathers of the present generation in Middletown wanted to buy a piece of land they were likely to save up the money and "pay cash" for it, and it was a matter of pride to be able to say, "I always pay cash for the things I buy." "In 1890," says a local banker who was then a rising young business man, "you had to have cash to buy. I wanted to buy a \$750 lot and had only \$350 in cash. The man wanted cash and there was no place in town where I could raise the money, so I lost the place."<sup>9</sup> A store on Main Street was usually owned lock, stock, and barrel by the man in spectacles who sold a customer three yards of calico or a pound of ten-penny nails. This man, when he bought five bolts of calico from the man whose workers made it, might also have paid cash for the goods. A great many private citizens kept their surplus money in a trunk or hidden away about the home, though some might take it to Mr. — at the Middletown County Bank or even buy government bonds. People dreaded "being in debt," but a man who owned a house or a business might in an emergency borrow small sums of the local banks.

Today Middletown lives by a credit economy that is available in some form to nearly every family in the community. The rise and spread of the dollar-down-and-so-much-per plan extends credit for virtually everything—homes, \$200 over-stuffed living-room suites, electric washing machines, automobiles, fur coats, diamond rings—to persons of whom frequently little is known as to their intention or ability to pay.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the building of a house by the local carpenter today is increasingly ceasing to be the simple act of tool-using in return for the prompt payment of a sum of money. The contractor is extensively financed by the banker, and this more and more frequently involves such machinery as "discounting second-mort-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ch. IX for a discussion of the facilities for home financing today.

<sup>10</sup> This sudden expansion of the miraculous ability to make things belong to one immediately under the installment payment plan has telescoped the future into the present. It would be interesting to study the extent to which this emphasis upon the immediately possessed is altering Middletown's habits as touching all manner of things involving the future, e.g., the increasing unwillingness today, noted elsewhere, of young working class boys to learn more than is necessary to operate a single machine so as to earn immediate big pay, regardless of the future and of how this early specialization may affect their chances to become foremen. Elsewhere will be noted the frequent loss of homes today—with resulting disorganization of many kinds—by people who attempt to purchase "on time" with inadequate resources.

gage notes." A veteran official of a local building and loan company summed up the present-day optimistic reliance upon credit for all things great and small: "People don't think anything nowadays of borrowing sums they'd never have thought of borrowing in the old days. They will assume an obligation for \$2,000 today as calmly as they would have borrowed \$300 or \$400 in 1890."

As the study progresses, the tendency of this sensitive institution of credit to serve as a repressive agent tending to standardize widening sectors of the habits of the business class—to vote the Republican ticket, to adopt golf as their recreation, and to refrain from "queer," i.e., atypical, behavior—will be noted.

Advertising has grown rapidly since 1890, when the local press first began to urge that "advertising is to a business what fertilizer is to a farm." Local grocers rely less upon the mild advertising of giving the children a bag of candy or cookies when they pay the monthly bill and now scratch their heads over "copy" for the press. The first electric sign was hung out before a local store in 1900 and the press pronounced the "effect . . . dazzling." Today all sorts of advertising devices are tried: a local drug chain hires an airplane to blazon "Hook's Drugs" on the sky; a shoe store conducting a sale offers one dollar each to the first twenty-five women appearing at the store on Monday morning; semi-annual "dollar days" and "suburban days" are conducted by the press, Ad. Club and Merchants' Association; and an airplane drops a thousand coupons in the town's "trading area," each coupon good for from \$0.25 to \$5.00 worth of trade in some local store. The advertising carried in the leading daily paper is six times that in the leading daily of 1890.<sup>11</sup>

In response to these elaborations of the business system, the law, concerned in large part with facilitating its operation and maintaining the sanctions of "Private Property," "Free Competition," and "Individual Initiative" upon which it rests, has likewise grown in complexity, notably through the addition of "corporation law."<sup>12</sup> It is characteristic of the trend in the

<sup>11</sup> See Table XXII for distribution of this advertising by kind.

<sup>12</sup> "No invention of modern times, not even that of negotiable paper, has so changed the face of commerce and delighted lawyers with a variety of new and intricate problems as the creation of incorporated joint-stock companies. America, though she came latest into the field, has developed



folk-ways of this city and its overwhelming preoccupation with business that just as the high school "professor" has been surpassed in salary and prestige by the vocational teacher, and the dominance of the professional man has been largely usurped by the business man, so the prestige of the judge in the legal profession has yielded to that of the corporation lawyer.

Yet, pervasive as these elaborations in ways of doing business are, externally and in terms of the actual activities involved they exhibit less tendency to change than do those of the working class. There is little here comparable to the shift of the glass-blower learning to tend an Owens machine, the teamster learning to run a motor truck, or the compositor a Mergenthaler linotype. The merchant, the retail clerk, the banker, the lawyer still do, with some exceptions, essentially the same things that they did in 1890; they sit or stand at desks or tables dealing with people in face-to-face relations or through writing or advertising copy at a distance, arranging for them to exchange money for things or to carry on other standardized relations with each other according to increasingly complicated developments of the old devices. It is not so much a question of business men doing different kinds of things in Middletown as compared with a generation ago as of their doing the same things or specialized segments of the same things more intensively.<sup>18</sup>

With these nearly four hundred kinds of work available in Middletown and many more in adjacent localities, and with presumably a wide range of human aptitudes and propensities represented in the city's population, an intricate matching of jobs and personalities must contrive somehow to solve itself before young Middletown starts to work. Most of the city's boys and girls "stumble on" or "fall into" the particular jobs that become literally their life work. The pioneer tradition that "you can't keep a good man down" and the religious tradition of free rational choice in finding one's "calling" have helped to foster a *laissez-faire* attitude toward matching the individual and the job.

these on a grander scale and with a more refined skill than the countries of the Old World." James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (New York; Macmillan, 1897), Vol. II, p. 655.

<sup>18</sup> The work of teachers, doctors, and ministers is treated in subsequent chapters.

But the complacency of even a generation ago in this regard is less general in Middletown today. Living in all its aspects leans upon money more than ever before, and the conviction is growing that chance should not be given such a free rein in so crucial a matter as finding one's livelihood. Not satisfied with the vocations chance has dealt them, many parents want to do something more for their children, but, particularly among the working class, they are frequently at a loss as to how to go about it. Such ideas as working class parents have for their children's future are largely negative: "I hope they won't have to work as hard as their father"; or, "He don't want the girls to go into no factory if he can help it." For many, the magic symbol of education takes the place of any definite plans for vocation: "We want them to have a good education so they can get along easier than their father"; and, "If they don't have a good education, they'll never know anything but hard work."

If a child of a business class family shows particular fitness or desire for a certain vocation he is usually encouraged to go on with it, provided it will yield money or social position comparable to or better than his father's. In the absence of marked individual aptitude, family preferences of varying degrees of relevance and the easy attraction of the familiar carry great weight, and latent abilities may go undiscovered. In this group, also, parental uncertainty frequently takes refuge in exposing the children to as much education as possible.

Religious groups supplement such counsel as parents are able to give by setting forth the claims of the life of a minister or missionary. But the most marked, though as yet incipient, effort to guide the young among the maze of occupations appears in the public schools. Aside from the occasional suggestion of individual teachers, this consists in two recently established devices: a solitary "vocational guidance" class in the junior high school which seeks to introduce pupils collectively to the training for and opportunities in various trades and professions, and a series of "chapel" talks given to the high school seniors by local men each April and May on the "opportunities" in Business, in the Ministry, in Law, in Education, and similar more obvious "callings." These last are usually general talks urging the graduates to be "concerned" about the work they enter, to have "vision" and "determination." Their tone is indicated by the concluding words of one speaker: "This is a

great old world; America is one of the most wonderful countries on the face of the earth, and we must prepare our lives to serve our country—prepare for worth-while occupations." The vocational work in the high school also furnishes a trial-and-error sifting among certain tool-using occupations pursued chiefly by the working class.<sup>14</sup>

But such new sorting devices affect relatively few of Middletown's children. For the most part they "go to work" by taking advantage of some vacancy they or their families happen to hear about and spend the rest of their lives doing that thing with what satisfaction it may or may not happen to afford. The pressure of the customary in confining the choice of Middletown's youth to the obvious jobs available in the city can scarcely be over-emphasized. As the zero hour for starting to work draws near, the tendency to conform grows more apparent. The vocational plans of a random sample of 225 young boys aged eight to fourteen revealed a range of wished-for occupations that included "running a museum," "being an astronomer," "being a cartoonist," an architect, a musician, and other uncommon preferences. It is probably safe to say, however, that few of these boys will eventually find their way into work so far from the usual group habits. What will probably become of them, even those who go on to high school, is suggested by Book's study of the vocational choices of high school seniors in this state:

"Only sixteen different lines of work were chosen by our total group of more than 6,000 seniors. Some of these occupations were selected by so few seniors as to make them almost negligible. The occupations selected most often by the boys were engineering (31 per cent.) and farming (24 per cent.); by the girls teaching (47 per cent.) and clerical work (34 per cent.). . . . We have boys and girls coming into our high schools from all classes and occu-

<sup>14</sup> Of 120 pupils who have graduated from the Middletown high school with a degree in electricity since the course was inaugurated, fifty-two have gone into the electrical trade or to study electrical engineering in college, while sixty-eight have gone into other lines. Of eighty-one who have graduated in the drafting course, forty-five are draftsmen or in related trades or in engineering schools, while thirty-six are in other trades. In the printing course eleven out of fifty-six boys who have taken the training are now printers.

pational groups. The high school is unconsciously directing them towards a few lines of work—the traditional professions."<sup>15</sup>

But, though boys naturally tend to gravitate towards the stock occupations understood and recognized by the community, owing to the spread of high school education and other factors they apparently enter the same line of work as their fathers somewhat less commonly than a generation ago. City directories show fewer persons having the same name engaged in the same work. An analysis of the vocational preferences of a sample of 309 Middletown high school sophomore, junior, and senior boys as compared with the occupations of their fathers shows a marked tendency among these children who have gone to high school, especially those of working class parents, to break away radically from the work of their fathers. Of the 309 fathers 52 per cent. are working class men, and 48 per cent. belong to the business and professional class. Only 20 per cent. of the 309 boys answered the question, "What are you planning to do to earn a living?" by indicating some manual activity of the working class sort—a third of the 20 per cent. listing industrial jobs, a quarter building trades jobs, and a third printers, barbers, railroad men, etc.; 18 per cent. want to go into business other than the professions; while 54 per cent. wish to enter learned or technological professions, fully half of them as engineers, architects, chemists, etc., a quarter as doctors, lawyers, and ministers, and the final quarter as teachers, musicians, and writers.<sup>16</sup> These totals greatly underestimate the actual shift away from the occupations of the fathers, particularly among the working class: e.g., of the sixty-two boys who want to enter manual livelihoods, only twenty-two want to enter tool-using occupations in the manufacturing and mechanical industries, although 121 of the fathers are so engaged; while five boys want to be wood workers, fourteen printers, and ten electricians, not one of the

<sup>15</sup> William F. Book, *The Intelligence of High School Seniors* (New York; Macmillan, 1922), pp. 139-142. The influence of high school vocational work is too recent to be adequately reflected in this study. As will be pointed out later, the vocational work, too, confines itself largely to preparing children for a few dominant tool skills.

<sup>16</sup> Seven per cent. were uncertain, and 1 per cent. fell in a miscellaneous group answering boxer, acrobat, etc.

fathers is either a wood worker or a printer, and only two are electricians. Fourteen sons want to be teachers, while only two of the fathers are teachers, the fathers of at least twelve of the would-be teachers being working men. Thirteen sons want to be doctors, while only seven fathers are doctors, and actually at least ten of these thirteen sons are not children of doctors and eight of them are working class children. Eighty-five boys want to be engineers, architects, chemists, etc., although only eleven of the fathers are so classified.

It is, of course, impossible to say how far these choices will carry over into the work actually done by these boys. The assignment of life occupations, for the most part so casual, with the emphasis in the selection more upon the work available than upon the subtleties of the individual, tends to fasten upon getting a living an instrumental rather than an inherently satisfying rôle. This tendency must never be lost sight of as we observe Middletown getting its living, making its homes, spending its leisure, and engaging in other vital activities.

Furthermore, eighty-five out of each hundred of those engaged in earning the city's living work for others and are closely directed by them, while only the remaining fifteen are either independent workers or persons whose work involves some considerable independence and ability to "manage" others.<sup>17</sup>

This whole complex of doing day after day fortuitously assigned things, chiefly at the behest of other people, has in the main to be strained through a pecuniary sieve before it assumes vital meaning. This helps to account for the importance of money in Middletown, and, as an outcome of this dislocation of energy expenditure from so many of the dynamic aspects of living, we are likely to find some compensatory adjustments in other regions of the city's life.

<sup>17</sup> Computed after Hookstadt from the U. S. Census occupational distribution for Middletown for 1920 (cf. Carl Hookstadt, "Reclassification of the U. S. 1920 Occupational Census by Industry," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. XVII, No. 1).

## Chapter VII

### THE LONG ARM OF THE JOB

As one prowls Middletown streets about six o'clock of a winter morning one notes two kinds of homes: the dark ones where people still sleep, and the ones with a light in the kitchen where the adults of the household may be seen moving about, starting the business of the day. For the seven out of every ten of those gainfully employed who constitute the working class, getting a living means being at work in the morning anywhere between six-fifteen and seven-thirty o'clock, chiefly seven. For the other three in each ten, the business class, being at work in the morning means seven-forty-five, eight or eight-thirty, or even nine o'clock, but chiefly eight-thirty. Of the sample of 112 working class housewives reporting on this point, forty-eight (two out of five) rise at or before five o'clock, seventy-nine (nearly three-fourths) by five-thirty, and 104 (over nine-tenths) are up at or before six. Among the group of forty business class housewives interviewed, none rises before six, only six at six, fourteen at any time before seven, and twenty-six rise at seven or later.

This gap between the rising hours of the two sections of the population touches the interlocked complex of Middletown life at many points. A prominent citizen speaking on the curtailing of family life by clubs, committees, and other organized activities urged the parents of the city to "Help solve the boy problem by making breakfast a time of leisurely family reunion." He did not realize that such a solution could apply to only about one-third of the city's families, since in the other two-thirds the father gets up in the dark in winter, eats hastily in the kitchen in the gray dawn, and is at work from an hour to two and a quarter hours before his children have to be at school. Or take another local "problem"—the deadlock between north and south sides of the city in the spring of 1925 over daylight saving time; the working class majority overwhelmed

the measure before the city officials on the plea that in summer their small dwellings cool off slowly, often remaining warm until after midnight, and that they can ill spare an hour of cool early-morning sleep before they must get up to work. The business men, on the other hand, urged the need of daylight time because of golf and because standard time put local business at a two-hour disadvantage in dealing with Eastern business. Each group thought the other unreasonable.

The rising hours of business and working class differed less thirty-five years ago, as early rising was then somewhat more characteristic of the entire city. Nowadays one does not find doctors keeping seven to nine o'clock morning office hours as in 1890. During the eighties retail stores opened at seven or seven-thirty and closed at eight or nine, a thirteen-hour day.<sup>1</sup> About 1890 a six o'clock closing hour, except on Saturdays, was tried by a few merchants, and gradually the practice prevailed. Today stores open at eight or eight-thirty and close at five-thirty.

Ten hours a day, six days a week, was the standard rhythm of work for Middletown industrial workers in 1890.<sup>2</sup> In 1914, 73 per cent. of them, according to the Federal Census, worked sixty hours a week or longer. By 1919 only 33 per cent. worked sixty hours or longer, although another 35 per cent. worked from fifty-five to sixty hours a week. The coming of the now almost universal Saturday half-holiday is the outstanding shift in industrial hours of work since 1890.

Year in and year out, about 300 working men work all night and sleep during the day. Periodically, however, a force of 3,000-4,000 men is either shifted from day work or recruited afresh by leading plants to work at night, thus establishing con-

<sup>1</sup> In the leading men's clothing store in 1890 the hours were 7 A.M. to 10 P.M. on Monday, 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. Tuesday to Friday, and on Saturday 7 A.M. to midnight. Stores were frequently open parts of such holidays as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

In 1890 the Middletown jewelry clerks "organized a union . . . and waited upon their employers and made known their desire of being off duty at 7.30 each evening and allowed to attend all ball games." "We are glad to say," adds the press account, "that, rather than have trouble, the jewelry men have acceded to their demands."

<sup>2</sup> All four of the representative Middletown iron works and the four leading wood-working plants listed in the 1891 state *Biennial Report* had a ten-hour day. Among the glass workers, where there was a high degree of organization, two plants had a nine-hour day and two a ten-hour day.

tinuous day and night use of machinery.<sup>3</sup> These periods of night work continue usually five to six months, after which the workers are discharged or shifted to day work. The repercussion upon home, leisure time, community life, and other activities of these periodic dislocations of the rhythms of living, when anywhere from several hundred to three or four thousand heads of families "go on night shift," should be borne in mind; the normal relations between husband and wife, children's customary noisy play around home, family leisure-time activities, lodge life, jury duty, civic interest, and other concerns are deranged as by the tipping over of one in a long line of dominoes. "I work nights, judge, and sleep during the day, and I haven't been able to keep in touch with George," pled a father to the judge of the juvenile court in behalf of his son. The fact that, with few exceptions, this dislocating factor affects only the working class has direct bearing upon the differential concern of the two groups for such things as the civic welfare of "Magic Middletown."

Not only does the accident of membership in one or the other of the two main groups in the city determine the number of hours worked and the liability to night work, but it also determines to a considerable degree whether one is allowed to get a living uninterruptedly year after year or is subject to periodic partial or total debarments from these necessary activities.<sup>4</sup> The most prosperous two-thirds of the business group, at a rough estimate, now as in 1890, are virtually never subject to interruptions of this kind so long as they do good work, while the other third is somewhat subject to cessation of work, though to a less extent than the working class. When "times were very bad" in 1924 the leading department store laid off small groups of clerks alternate weeks without pay. During 1923 the office force of a leading machine shop plant dropped

<sup>3</sup> Only three times, for five or six months each, in the five years between January 1, 1920, and January 1, 1925, have "times" been sufficiently "good" in Middletown for this to happen generally throughout the major industries of the city. At other times night shifts are put on for short periods to meet the needs of individual plants.

<sup>4</sup> The institution of an annual vacation of one or two weeks with pay is another point at which the rhythms of work of working man and business man differ. Among the latter, vacations are today a well-nigh universal rule, but no working man gets vacations with pay, save an occasional foreman who may get a single week. Cf. discussion of the growth of the vacation habit since 1890 in Ch. XVIII.

at one time during the year to 79 per cent. of its peak number, while the wage-earners declined to 32 per cent. of the peak.<sup>5</sup>

Among the working class, however, the business device of the "shut-down" or "lay-off" is a recurrent phenomenon. If the number of working men employed in seven leading Middletown plants<sup>6</sup> on June 30, 1920, be taken as 100, the number allowed to get a living on December 31, 1921, was sixty-eight; on December 31, 1922, ninety-three; on June 30, 1923, 121; on December 31, 1923, 114; on June 30, 1924, seventy-seven; on December 31, 1924, sixty-one; on June 30, 1925, eighty-one.<sup>7</sup> The month-by-month record of one of these plants, a leading machine shop, during 1923, again taking the number employed on June 30, 1920, as 100, was:

January .....	61	May .....	117	September .....	57
February .....	75	June .....	92	October .....	48
March .....	93	July .....	66	November .....	43
April .....	110	August .....	63	December .....	46

In one leading plant 1,000 is regarded as the "normal force." When interviewed in the summer of 1924, about 250 men were actually getting a living at this plant, though the bosses "think of about 550 [of the normal 1,000] as our men." The other 450 are floaters picked up when needed. In another large plant the number of men employed on December 31, 1923, was 802,

<sup>5</sup> The relative seriousness of "bad times" to business and working class personnel is revealed in Willford I. King's *Employment Hours and Earnings in Prosperity and Depression* (New York; National Bureau of Economic Research, 1923), p. 53 ff., in the estimate for the continental United States of the percentage of maximum cyclical decline over the period of industrial strain from the beginning of 1920 through the first quarter of 1922 in the total hours actually worked, as follows:

	Enterprises having less than 21 employees.	Enterprises having 21-100 employees.	Enterprises having over 100 employees.	Total enterprises of all sizes.
Commerce and trade ...	1.27%	5.81%	9.04%	2.78%
Retail only .....	1.31	4.66	10.84	2.75
All factories .....	8.21	19.21	38.56	29.97
Metal and metal products only .....	17.89	52.10	52.65	50.25

In this connection the predominance of metal industries in Middletown should be borne in mind.

<sup>6</sup> These seven plants were used by a local bank as an index of local employment in its monthly summaries of local business.

<sup>7</sup> These intervals are uneven because the data were available only for the dates given.

and six months later, June 30, 1924, was 316, but only 205 of these men worked continuously throughout the entire six months with no lay-offs.

Of the sample of 165 working class families for whom data on steadiness of work was secured, 72 per cent. of the male heads of families lost no time at work in the twelve months of 1923 when "times were good," another 15 per cent. lost less than a month, and 13 per cent. lost a month or more; during the first nine months of 1924, throughout the last six of which "times were bad," only 38 per cent. of the 165 lost no time, another 19 per cent. lost less than a month, and 43 per cent. lost a month or more.<sup>8</sup> Among the forty families of business men interviewed, only one of the men had been unemployed at any time during the two years, 1923-24—and that was not due to a lay-off.<sup>9</sup>

It is difficult to say whether employment tends to be more or less regular in Middletown today than a generation ago. Sharper competition throughout markets that have become nation-wide, the rise of the new technique of cost-accounting, the resulting substantial overhead charges on expensive plant and machinery, and the imperturbability of machines in the doggiest of "dog-days" discourage today the easy custom of closing down the plant altogether which flourished among the flimsy factories and hand-workers of a generation ago. A characteristic summer news item in the *Middletown Times* for June 12, 1890, says: "Ninety per cent. of the glass houses in the U. S. A. close on Saturday until the first of September." Short shut-downs of two weeks or so at other times in the year were not uncommon. And yet, despite modern compulsions to maintain at least minimum production, and in fact because of such impersonal techniques as cost-accounting, lay-offs have become much more automatic than the reluctant personal decision of a sympathetic employer.<sup>10</sup> The sheer increase in the

<sup>8</sup> See Table III.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix on Method for the way in which the families interviewed were selected.

<sup>10</sup> "On the transition to the machine technology . . . the individual workman has been falling into the position of an auxiliary factor, nearly into that of an article of supply, to be charged up as an item of operating expenses." Veblen, *The Nature of Peace* (New York; Huebsch, 1919), pp. 320-1.

Cf. J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832* (London; Longmans, 1920), especially Chs. I, II, and VI.

size of present-day plants<sup>11</sup> operates to make these periodic increases and curtailments in working force more obligatory when the need for them arises.<sup>12</sup>

As in the case of the lowering of the old-age deadline, described in Chapter V, the phenomenon of recurrent industrial unemployment assumes totally different aspects as it is viewed through the eyes of a business man or of a working man. For the dominant manufacturing group, the peremptory little figures on the cost sheets require that there shall always be on hand enough workers to take care of any fluctuations in business. The condition of there being more men than available jobs, though dreaded by the working man, is commonly called by his bosses "an easier labor market."<sup>13</sup> In March, 1924, when the long slump of unemployment was commencing and employers in other cities ran "want ads." in the Middletown papers offering work, two special delivery letters were laid by the plate of the president of the Middletown Advertising Club at one of its weekly luncheons, asking the Club to use its influence to suppress such advertisements because they tended to draw unemployed machinists from town. The president of the club agreed

<sup>11</sup> The Middletown press in 1890 hailed as "a gigantic concern" a new industry which was to have "when in full operation" 200 hands. The largest working group in the city in January, 1891, was 225. In 1923, eleven plants each employed more than 300—three of the eleven employed more than 1,000, while one of these three regards its "normal force" as over the 2,000 mark.

<sup>12</sup> See N. 5 above regarding the relative impact of "hard times" on enterprises of different sizes. According to King's evidence, whether owing to the fact that "the small employer keeps less accurate accounts," to the fact that "the small employer, being well acquainted with his employees, is so much interested in the welfare of the latter that his relationships with them are not governed primarily by purely business considerations," or to other factors, the bump tends to hit the big enterprises several times as hard as the little fellows.

<sup>13</sup> This business men's psychology is well illustrated by the following statement by one of the city's influential manufacturers: "In 1922 we were so rushed with orders we couldn't possibly fill them or get enough men here in town to carry on, so we had to import some men from Kentucky and West Virginia. Our men from our local district here, born and bred on the farms near here, knowing the use of machinery of some sort from their boyhood, reliable, steady, we call 'corn-feds.' These men we brought in from the mountains we called 'green peas.' We brought two train loads of them down. Some of them learned quickly, and some of them didn't. Most of them have drifted back by now. We figured it cost \$75-\$200 to train each one of them, and there was such a demand for labor about town that they didn't stay with us. They drifted about from shop to shop, and of course when the slump came we fired them and kept our old men."

that this was "something the Ad. Club certainly ought to back," and the representatives of all papers agreed to suppress the advertisements. The sentiment of the club was that it was important that plenty of skilled workers be kept in town.<sup>14</sup>

"People come to the house a great deal and tell me they can't get work," remarked the wife of a prominent business man. "Of course, I don't really believe that. I believe that any one who really tries can get work of some kind." This remark appears to sum up the philosophy of unemployment of many of the business class in Middletown. Others believe, as one outstanding business man put it, that "About the only thing that might be improved in the condition of working men today is unsteady employment. But that cannot possibly be helped. An employer cannot give employment to workmen if he cannot sell his goods."

To the working men, however, unemployment as a "problem" varies from a cloud the size of a man's hand when "times are good" to a black pall in a time of "easy labor market" that may overspread all the rest of their lives. It happened that times were not good during the late summer and fall of 1924 when the staff interviewed Middletown families. Over and over again, the wives interviewed answered the question, "What seems to be the future in your husband's job?" in terms of:

"He's to be laid off Saturday."

"He's just lucky if this job keeps up. He never knows from day to day whether his job will be there."

"He can't tell when he'll be laid off. One day he comes home thinking the work is over and then the next day he believes it will last a few weeks longer."

<sup>14</sup> To the bosses there is no "problem" in the abrupt posting, rarely more than a day in advance, of the announcement of a lay-off, or in the absence of any machinery for talking over with the men the reasons for the lay-off or its probable duration, or in the practice of "hiring at the gate."

During the depression of the summer of 1924 much press publicity was given to the announcement that a local plant would take on a thousand men the following Monday. The men crowded about the plant gates on the appointed day and a total of forty-eight were hired.

Cf. pp. 37-8 of Shelby M. Harrison's *Public Employment Offices* (New York; Russell Sage Foundation, 1924) for reasons why employers favor hiring at the gate. Cf. also Whiting Williams' *What's on the Worker's Mind* (New York; Scribner's, 1921), pp. 6-7, for the worker's view of this system.

For many of them the dread had become an actuality:

"I know people that have been out of work since June," one woman said in October, "and they're almost crazy because of it. Maybe if more people understood what it means something could be done about it."

"Not even the foreman knew the lay-off was coming," said one quiet, intelligent-looking woman who with her husband had been laid off in a leading plant the night before, at the close of the first week in December. "Last week the whole plant worked overtime every night on straight time pay. A petition asking for more wages was circulated by the men, but my husband and two others wouldn't sign it because they thought it was no time to ask for a raise with so many out of work. Now we're told the lay-off came because of the petition, because orders have stopped coming in. We can't figure that out. . . . What'll we do? I don't know, but we must not take the boy out of school if we can any way get along."

"He's awfully blue because his job is gone," said another wife in November. "He's trying to get work at ——. He hopes his old job will open up again in the spring."

Several of these women, all of them having husbands over thirty-five, said that their husbands had taken or would want work that paid less and had less future if it seemed likely to be "steady" and less subject to lay-offs. Steady work appeared to be generally valued by these older workers above high wages.<sup>15</sup>

The commonest working class solution of the problem of unemployment is to "get another job." Of the 182 sample workers for whom data was secured on this point, including 124 with children of school age, over a quarter (27 per cent.) had been with their present employers less than a year, over a third (38 per cent.) less than two years, and over half (55 per cent.) less than five years.<sup>16</sup> This "getting another

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Whiting Williams' statement: "If there is one thing I have learned on my labor travels it is that 'the job's the thing.' Wages are interesting, but the job is the axis on which the whole world turns for the workingman." (*Op. cit.*, p. 39.)

<sup>16</sup> See Table IV. These figures do not mean that these men had had no unemployment during these periods or had not in many cases worked temporarily in other plants until their regular jobs "opened up again."

Between January 1, 1919, and October 1, 1924, of 178 men for whom these data are tabulable, 46 per cent. had had one job, 20 per cent. two jobs, 22 per cent. three jobs, and the remaining 12 per cent. more than three.

job" frequently involves leaving the city: "In the summer we took to the Ford and went looking for work." "He has a job now over in — [twenty-five miles away] and likes it so much he may stay on there."<sup>17</sup>

Failing in finding another chance to get a living, the whole family settles down to the siege.<sup>18</sup> Of 122 housewives, who gave information regarding readjustments occasioned by unemployment,<sup>19</sup> eighty-three reported unemployment during the preceding fifty-seven months. Sixty-eight, the great majority of those reporting unemployment, had made changes in their routine habits of living to meet the emergency.<sup>20</sup> Of these,

Here again brief fill-in jobs were not counted, provided a man returned to his old job when "work opened up."

It should be remembered that the interviewers had to rely upon the wife for these data in nearly every case, though every effort was made to see that she did not omit any pertinent data.

<sup>17</sup> This migratory tendency which modern industry invites and the Ford car enormously facilitates may be expected to have far-reaching influence throughout the rest of the workers' lives: e.g., the more frequent moving of working class families noted in Ch. IX and the decline in neighborliness and intimate friends among the wives noted in Ch. XIX. Cf. the statement by Roscoe Pound in *Criminal Justice in Cleveland*: "Some studies made during the war indicate that the moral implications of an increasingly migratory laboring population call for serious consideration. Our institutions presuppose a stable, home-owning, tax-paying population, of which each individual has and feels a personal interest in its legal and political institutions and bears his share in the conduct of them. Irregularity and discontinuity of employment and consequent migration from city to city, or back and forth between city and country, preclude the sort of society for which our institutions were shaped." (Cleveland; Cleveland Foundation, 1921; Part VIII), pp. 610-11.

<sup>18</sup> At least two factors make the incidence of unemployment more difficult for the worker today than formerly: (1) The decline of trade unions and of neighborhood spirit (cf. Ch. VIII). (2) The extension of the precarious habit of leaning the present upon the future by long-term commitments to pay for the purchase of a home (cf. Ch. IX), insurance, household appliances, education of the children, and so on. To take but the case of life insurance: in the sixteen years between 1910 and 1926 the number of individual policies in force with one national company in Middletown and a portion of the surrounding county increased from 3,800 to 23,000; this number should be reduced by approximately 40 per cent. to get the number of policy holders.

<sup>19</sup> These data are based upon the memory of the housewife; she had no opportunity to check up her recollection by talking to her husband. Undoubtedly certain minor lay-offs and times when work was reduced for short periods to three or four days a week were overlooked. These figures are therefore probably conservative throughout.

<sup>20</sup> This does not include cessation of saving and inroads upon accumulated savings. If this factor be included, it is probably safe to say that unemployment affected the behavior of the entire group.

- 47 cut on clothing;
- 43 cut on food;
- 27 of the wives worked for pay either at home or away from home;
- 14 of the 60 carrying some form of insurance got behind on payments;
- 6 moved to a cheaper home;
- 5 of the 20 having a telephone had it taken out;
- 4 of the 35 with children in high school took a child from school.<sup>21</sup>

Such comments as the following by some of these housewives reflect the derangement of established habits in "bad times":

*As touching savings.* "We had been saving to buy a home but lost all our savings paying rent while he was laid off." "We had to use up all our savings to keep going." "We lost both our auto and our house. We had paid \$334.00 on the auto and had just a little over a hundred to pay. We had been paying on the house a little over a year." "My husband has just gone everywhere for work. We would have been out of debt now if he hadn't been out. It seems like a person just can't save. We started to buy a house a couple of years ago and his company would have paid the first payment, but the very next day he got his arm broke. I never plan nothing any more." "We haven't lost our life insurance yet. Last year we had to let a thousand-dollar policy go when he was out."

*As touching shelter.* "We don't know where the rent for this month is coming from. We're out of coal, too." "We have cut down all we can on food and the phone is the next thing to go. I am not strong enough to wash as I used to when he was laid off. He hates to see the phone go. It's the only way we hear from our children."

*As touching food.* "Now they have a new man in the grocery and we're afraid he won't allow us to charge things so long. We had a \$60.00 grocery bill when he went back to work in 1922." "We get on the cheapest we can. Our living expenses are never more than \$5.00 a week" [family of five]. "We have been buying no fresh milk this year, using only canned milk" [a family including two boys age seven and nine]. "We just live as close as we can all the time. I tell the children if they get a little candy for Christmas this year they'll be lucky; they haven't had anything

<sup>21</sup> These changes did not usually come singly, and the families involved in the above categories therefore overlap.

but clothes and things they absolutely need for the last two or three years." "We have cut our food all we can and have beans and potatoes two times a day with about \$2.00 worth of meat scattered through the week. I don't know what we'll do if there isn't work soon." "Last winter our grocery bill ran eight or nine dollars a week. Now it is five or six dollars, partly because we trade at a cheaper place and partly because we're economizing."

*As touching leisure time.* "I haven't been able to afford a movie show since January" [ten months].

The forced choices during times of unemployment reveal sharply the things some of these working class people live by:

A woman who had just returned to the store a new winter coat because her husband had lost his job said she planned to cut down on "picture shows"—"but I'll never cut on gas! I'd go without a meal before I'd cut down on using the car."

Another woman said: "I'll give up my home last. A friend of mine belongs to several clubs and won't resign from any of them even though her husband has been laid off three months. She says she'll give up her home before her clubs."

One woman spoke for many others when she said: "We'll give up everything except our insurance. We just can't let that go." The head of a local insurance company reported that unemployment has relatively little effect upon insurance policies. Of the 100 working class families for whom income distribution on certain items was secured, all but seven reported money spent for life insurance in annual amounts ranging from \$2.25 to \$350.00.<sup>22</sup>

To Middletown as a whole in its corporate group capacity, unemployment as a "problem" virtually does not exist. At most it becomes a matter for privately supported charity to cope with. In the extreme bad times of the winter of 1921-22 when local unemployment overwhelmed these charitable agencies, a supplementary fund of \$40,000 was raised by popular subscription to be distributed in doles. And yet it was in February of this winter, when local hardship was most acute, that the City Council voted to discontinue support of the highly successful

<sup>22</sup> See Table VI.



tax-supported free employment office launched during the War and in operation for two and one-half years.<sup>23</sup>

The mobility afforded by new modes of transportation combines with these periodic waves of employment, unemployment, and reemployment to diminish the tendency for the workers in a given factory to live together immediately about the plant. Everybody in Middletown in 1890 got to work by walking, and workers tended to settle in the immediate neighborhood of a given factory; as a new factory was located on the outskirts of the community it formed a magnet drawing new dwellings close about it.<sup>24</sup> Today, when one gets about the city and the country surrounding it by bicycle, fifteen-minute street-car service, regular bus service, and five interurban lines, and approximately two out of every three families in the city own a passenger automobile,<sup>25</sup> decentralization of residence is apparent. A check of the residences of all workers in the shops of three local plants, a total of 2,171, showed that 28 per cent. lived within one-half mile of their places of work and 55 per cent. less than a mile away, while 45 per cent. lived a mile or more away; 20 per cent. of the men lived outside the city and from three to forty-five miles away,<sup>26</sup> and 14 per cent. of the women lived from three to nineteen miles away. Two of these

<sup>23</sup> The failure of the Council to vote the \$1,500 needed for the upkeep of the office caused its abandonment. Both Chamber of Commerce and Trades Council had favored the employment office and a leading local paper called it "one of the best investments ever made by the city and county." One powerful councilman, connected with a leading industry, is said to have led the opposition to the bureau, and is quoted as declaring the office of "no assistance whatever to the manufacturers or to the laboring man. If a man wants work in this city he can get it without going through the employment office." The office was abandoned and part of the director's salary left unpaid, although the State Attorney General ruled that the city was liable for it.

This incident affords an instance of the way much of the group business is conducted in Middletown and of the relative inarticulateness and helplessness of the group in the face of a powerful minority. The weaker of the two Middletown dailies called in vain for a frank statement of the nature of the "nigger in the woodpile" from "certain persons" who have made "a protracted effort . . . to end the official existence of the bureau."

<sup>24</sup> E.g., the following from the local press in 1890: "Work has commenced on the Westside Glass Works. The location of this factory at Westside has caused a great demand for residences in that vicinity."

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ch. XVIII for discussion of ownership and use of automobiles.

<sup>26</sup> Five men went back and forth together in an automobile from a city of the same size forty-five miles distant.

Distances up to three miles were figured "as the crow flies" and are therefore somewhat underestimated. (See Table V, N. 2.)

plants are old industries that have been in Middletown since gas boom days, while the third is a modern machine shop, located in Middletown more than a decade, of the sort that today dominates the city's industrial life. In the latter only 19 per cent. lived within one-half mile and only 43 per cent. within a mile, while 57 per cent. live over a mile away, and 29 per cent. of the males lived three to forty-five miles away, the number of women employed being negligible.<sup>27</sup>

This trend towards decentralization of workers' dwellings means that instead of a family's activities in getting a living, making a home, play, church-going, and so on, largely overlapping and bolstering each other, one's neighbors may work at shops at the other end of the city, while those with whom one works may have their homes and other interests anywhere from one to two-score miles distant.

Meanwhile, in season and out, regardless of such vicissitudes as unemployment, everybody who gets a living in Middletown is theoretically in process of "getting there"; the traditional social philosophy assumes that each person has a large degree of freedom to climb the ladder to ever wider responsibility, independence, and money income.<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, in six Middletown plants employing an average of 4,240 workers during the first six months of 1923<sup>29</sup> there were ten vacancies for foremen over the period of twenty-one months from Jan-

<sup>27</sup> See Table V. These addresses represent the summer force. In the machine shop, the bulk of whose employees require little training, the winter force is heavily recruited from farmers. (Cf. King, *op. cit.*, p. 91, for the reason agricultural labor flocks to the machine shops.) In response to a protest from local labor that they discriminated against city labor in the winter in favor of this cheaper-priced farm labor, Middletown manufacturers informed the Chamber of Commerce that they "consider [the] county a unit and not the city." The ease with which farmers can "when times are good" get work in machine shops and the general diffusion of Ford cars and surfaced roads is prompting some workers to return to small farms, preferably midway between Middletown and another small industrial city, where a garden can help out on food and work be drawn from either city.

Cf. in Ch. IX the data on the housing mobility of the working class families interviewed.

<sup>28</sup> Thirty-four per cent. of 241 high school boys answered "true" to the extreme statement, "It is entirely the fault of a man himself if he does not succeed," while 16 per cent. more were "uncertain," and 49 per cent. thought the statement "false," the final 1 per cent. not answering. Forty-five per cent. of 315 girls thought the statement "true," while 9 per cent. were "uncertain," 44 per cent. marked it "false," and 2 per cent. did not answer.

<sup>29</sup> Average of total payrolls as of December 31, 1922, and June 30, 1923, less estimated averages of 600 foremen and office workers.

uary 1, 1923, to October 1, 1924.<sup>80</sup> This means that in a year and three-fourths there was a chance for one man in 424 to be promoted.<sup>81</sup> The total number of men estimated by the plants as of sufficient experience on January 1, 1923, to be eligible for consideration for promotion to foremanship was 531. Of this picked group one man in fifty-three got his chance in twenty-one months.<sup>82</sup>

The chance of promotion as it appears to the working class may be glimpsed from the answers of the wives in 105 of the 124 sample families to the question, "What seems to be the future in your husband's job?" It was a time of considerable local unemployment. Ten of the 105 husbands were already out of work, and "future" meant hope for the naked chance to begin getting a living again at anything; for twenty-two other wives future meant nothing beyond the possible date when "the mister" would be laid off—for two of them this future was no further off than "next Saturday"; to four others the future meant predominantly a fear of the old-age dead line; to eleven others a "good" future meant, "He'll probably have steady work"; nineteen others were hopeful in regard to their husbands' work and their chances in it;<sup>83</sup> while the remaining thirty-nine faced the future with no expressed hope of getting ahead. Of these thirty-nine, thirty-two, while not at the moment out of work or driven by an active fear of unemployment, voiced keen discouragement. Such answers as the following from this last group, to whom, with those unemployed or fearing a lay-off, the future shows no outlet toward greater

<sup>80</sup> One of the six plants reported vacancies over only eighteen months, from January, 1923, through June, 1924.

The condition of the Middletown labor market during these eighteen months can be seen in its setting from the index numbers of employment in seven leading plants given earlier in this chapter.

<sup>81</sup> The job of assistant foreman is not considered here, as it apparently counts for little. Promotion to a foremanship is the real step up.

<sup>82</sup> Not only were promotions infrequent, but during these twenty-one months a number of foremen were temporarily demoted to the ranks when forces were reduced, e.g., night shifts abandoned.

R. R. Lutz found that in the course of a year only one man in seventy-seven in a group of 618 eligible men in the metal trades in Cleveland had a chance of promotion. *The Metal Trades* (Cleveland; Cleveland Education Survey, 1916), p. 100.

<sup>83</sup> In one of these cases here counted as "hopeful" the wife said: "It's hard to say. There's not much opportunity for advancement but he is reading trade papers and studying his trade all the time to be able to take advantage of any opportunity that comes."

security or recognition, reflect an outlook on life that probably conditions profoundly all their other activities:

(*Husband a machinist, age thirty-eight.*) "Well, he's been doing the same thing over and over for fifteen years, hoping he'd get ahead, and he's never had a chance; so I don't suppose he ever will."

(*Husband a machinist, age twenty-six.*) "There's nothing ahead where he's at and there's nothing to do about it."

(*Husband a machine-tender, age forty-six.*) "There won't never be anything for him as long as he stays where he is and I don't know where else he can go."

(*Husband a foreman, age thirty-eight.*) "He's been there nine years and there's no chance of promotion. The work is so hard he's always exhausted. He wants to get back on a farm. He's been lucky so far in not being laid off, but we're never sure."

(*Husband a factory laborer, age thirty.*) "He'll never get any better job. He'll be lucky if they keep him on this one."

And yet the chance of becoming a foreman, small as it is, would appear to be somewhat better than it was a generation ago. The experience of individual plants, cited below, suggests that foremen have increased more rapidly than the number of workmen. On the other hand, increasing technological complexity and the resulting tendency to insert college-trained technical men into a force between foremen and owners appear to hinder a workman's progress beyond a foremanship more than formerly.

New technical developments such as the automobile and multiplied uses of electricity have opened new doors to some working men, enabling them to become owners of garages, filling stations, or electrical shops. The sharp increase in size, complexity, and cost of the modern machine-equipped shop, however, makes the process of launching out for oneself as a small manufacturer somewhat more difficult than a generation ago.

In general, the greater accessibility of those on the lower business rungs to sources of credit through lodge, club, church, and social contacts would seem to make fresh opportunities through the starting of a small industrial shop, retail store, or business of their own easier for them than for the working class. No

direct study was made of the chance for promotion among the business group, and the local sentiment is such that one may not talk to business men and their wives about their personal advancement as one may to the working class. Close contact with Middletown's small shopkeepers and clerks as well as with the more powerful members of the business group throughout nearly a year and a half, however, yielded a distinct impression that psychologically the business families of the city tend to live, in the main, not on a plain stretching unbroken to the horizon, but on ground sloping upward, however gently. Contact with the working class, supplemented by interviews with the sample of wives and some of their husbands regarding the latter's chances of advancement, brought an equally clear impression that psychologically the outlook of the working class is somewhat flatter. The new rush of the children of the business man to college and of the working man's children to high school and college is increasing the vertical mobility of the children by offering all manner of short-cuts to the young man or woman with an education, but once established in a particular job, the limitations fixing possible range of advancement seem to be narrower for an industrial worker.

Vocational accidents are yet another differential accompaniment of getting a living for the two groups. Such accidents are practically unknown among the business class. For an average of 7,900 working men and women in the thirty-six factories constituting the industrial population of the city during the first half of 1923,<sup>34</sup> however, 824 accidents serious enough to involve a loss of time from work were recorded during this six-month period. If this period can be taken as representative, roughly one in each five persons of the working class employed in factories in Middletown has an accident serious enough to make him stop getting a living for a while each year. Fifty-seven per cent. of these injured workers lost less than eight

<sup>34</sup> Payrolls of 7,743 and 9,655 on December 31, 1922, and June 30, 1923, respectively, were averaged, and since none of the accidents recorded concerned a member of the office staff, an estimated total of 799 office employees was deducted from the payroll average of 8,699, the above figure of 7,900 resulting. A few very small industrial plants for whom records were not available are not included in the thirty-six above, also such groups of workers as the building trades, a few railroad mechanics, and other workers not in factories. The records of accidents were taken directly from the cards in the files of the State Industrial Board which administers the State Workmen's Compensation Law.

days, 13 per cent. lost eight days to two weeks, 1 per cent. two to three weeks, and the remaining 29 per cent. three weeks or more. Three of the 824 injured during these six months were killed, one other was expected to die at the time the figures were tabulated, two lost one eye and three lost permanent partial use of an eye, three lost a hand and six partial use of a hand, eight lost a finger and sixteen partial use of a finger, and so on.

We can only infer a trend toward fewer accidents. In view of the fact that in the year ending September 30, 1920, there were only 922 amputations out of a total of 42,994 accidents reported throughout the entire state, numerous records like the following in the Middletown press in 1890 suggest a very different frequency: In one leading plant, employing about 200 hands, three men were injured in one day in three different accidents—one losing a hand, a second having a foot mashed, and a third losing a finger. The last-named is reported as "another to lose a finger in the machinery where no less than five have been nipped off in the past month or so." A superintendent in a leading plant employing about 200 men in 1890, when asked if working conditions then gave rise to a good many accidents, exclaimed:

"I should say they did! We kept a horse and buggy busy all the time taking men from the plant to the doctor."

"Not literally, of course?"

"No, not literally, but we used to have one almost every day."

The compulsory presence in each plant today of a first-aid kit undoubtedly reduces infections; <sup>35</sup> hernias are fewer, as there is less heavy lifting; plants are better built and aired, and such conditions, conducive to pneumonia and rheumatism, as those described by a glass worker in 1890, are far less common: "We worked dripping with sweat, burning up on the side facing the pots and freezing on the other side in winter in the draughty old plants." On the other hand the speed of the iron man has brought new health hazards all its own—nerve strain due to noise and speed, new types of localized ailments due to specialization of activity curtailing movement in many cases from the larger body segments to a few small muscles used over and

<sup>35</sup> One plant has a doctor in attendance, a second a graduate nurse but no doctor, two others have practical nurses, another a matron but no nurse, and a number use the local Visiting Nurses' Association, the company paying for the service in each case. All this is new since 1890.

over. Two under-officials in the packing room of a large glass plant agreed in saying that "there have been several nervous breakdowns since the installation of the belt conveyor bringing the jars to the women packers." And one added, "This system may be good for the plant, but it certainly isn't good for the girls."

Prior to 1897, when the first factory inspector was appointed in the state, the workman carried the full burden of accident under the common law principles of "assumed risk," "contributory negligence," and the "fellow servant" doctrine. In 1915 the trend towards group participation in such matters eventuated in a State Workmen's Compensation Law under which the industrial plant, and thus ultimately the general public, bear a share of the burden.<sup>36</sup>

This process of the socialization of accident hazard is a phase of a larger trend towards impersonality in industrial operations in Middletown. Under the existing type of corporate ownership the presidents of three of the seven largest Middletown industrial plants today reside in other states, and two of the three plants are controlled by directors few of whom have ever even been in Middletown. This wide separation between a plant and the real authority over it combines with the increasing extent and complexity of the units of operation and the introduction of technically trained personnel to make it, in general, farther from the "floor" of a Middletown shop to the "office" today than a generation ago. Thus one plant whose sixty men in 1890 were officered by a president, a secretary who was also the chief engineer, a superintendent, and no foremen, today has for a force less than three times as large, a president, a vice-president (both largely inactive), a treasurer and general manager, a secretary who is also chief engineer, a superintendent, assistant superintendent, and three foremen. A second plant whose 200 men in 1890 were officered by a president, a vice-president

<sup>36</sup> The jungle of conflicting elements in a "social problem" is reflected in this case by two local situations: (1) The situation described in Ch. V in which the adoption of casualty insurance has led in one large plant to a policy of "firing" all employees at sixty. (2) The fact that the company which is perhaps doing more than any other among the largest half-dozen in the city to care for its aging workers was reported by the State Industrial Board as "not in good standing"; this company, owned and operated by public-spirited citizens, had in 1925, according to the State Board, been carrying its own risk for three and a half years without the legal permission of the Board.

who was also general manager, a secretary and treasurer, and two foremen, is operated today, with six times the original staff of workers, by a president, a vice-president and general manager, a treasurer, an assistant secretary, an assistant treasurer (largely inactive), an auditor, two superintendents, and thirty foremen. A third plant, a machine shop not locally owned and new since 1890, has a staff of 800 directed by a president (living out of the city), a resident vice-president who is also general manager, a second vice-president (inactive), a secretary, a comptroller, a factory manager, a general superintendent, three division superintendents, and twenty-five foremen.

More than one manufacturer said that he was no longer able to know his working force and their problems as he used to. One gains an impression of closer contact between many managers and their workers thirty-five years ago; we read in the press of 1890 of a plant closing down and owners and 176 workmen attending the funeral of one of the workers. On another occasion the management, unable to dismiss the force for a day at the county fair, ordered into the plant one hundred pounds of taffy from the fair grounds. Yet another old-time employer when he sold his plant a few years ago stipulated in his contract with the purchasers that the latter were to take over the entire force and keep all employees long enough to learn their worth before discharging any of them. This same man is reported to have sent \$500 to each of his foremen when he sold out, and he endowed a room at the local hospital for his old workers and their families.

A few Middletown industrial plants make an attempt to bridge the gap between shop and office by such devices as shop committees and short term training groups, including lectures on engineering and metallurgy by extension lecturers from the state university. One factory has a safety committee and another a nominal "council of foremen," with an appointed head. The character of these groups appears in the exclamation of one leading manufacturer, representative in this respect of the entire group, when asked about his "shop committee": "You don't mean collective bargaining or anything of that sort, I hope? *We're* running this plant and want no mistake about that. We won't tolerate any shop councils or anything of that sort." This plant is reported on reliable authority to have "thrown all sorts of obstructions in the way of the insurance people getting

together with their foremen to talk over safety means in the plant." Personnel and welfare managers, appointed by four plants, occasionally exercise a personal oversight of the workers' problems; in one prominent plant, however, the kind of personnel adjustment work done is reflected by the emphatic statement of the personnel manager: "If a man is fired by a foreman, he stays fired. A thing a man does once in one department he'll do again in another."

These various devices, together with the carrying by at least three plants of a blanket life-insurance policy for all employees, the passage of the State Workmen's Compensation Law, and the appointment of state factory inspectors, represent tendencies to diminish somewhat the disparity between the accompaniments of getting a living for the working class and for the business group. But, while these new devices are attempting to solve the "social problems" involved in getting a living, the long arm of the job in this swiftly changing culture is touching the lives of workers as well as business class with new problems.

## Chapter VIII

### WHY DO THEY WORK SO HARD?

One emerges from the offices, stores, and factories of Middletown asking in some bewilderment why all the able-bodied men and many of the women devote their best energies for long hours day after day to this driving activity seemingly so foreign to many of the most powerful impulses of human beings. Is all this expenditure of energy necessary to secure food, clothing, shelter, and other things essential to existence? If not, precisely what over and beyond these subsistence necessities is Middletown getting out of its work?

For very many of those who get the living for Middletown the amount of robust satisfaction they derive from the actual performance of their specific jobs seems, at best, to be slight. Among the business men the kudos accruing to the eminent in getting a living and to some of their minor associates yields a kind of incidental satisfaction; the successful manufacturer even tends today to supplant in local prestige and authority the judge, preacher, and "professor" of thirty-five to forty years ago. But for the working class both any satisfactions inherent in the actual daily doing of the job and the prestige and kudos of the able worker among his associates would appear to be declining.

The demands of the iron man for swiftness and endurance rather than training and skill have led to the gradual abandonment of the apprentice-master craftsman system; one of the chief characteristics of Middletown life in the nineties, this system is now virtually a thing of the past.<sup>1</sup> The master mechanic was the aristocrat among workmen of 1890—"one of

<sup>1</sup> Less than 1 per cent. of those listed by the 1920 Census as engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries in Middletown were apprentices. Of 429 workers in Middletown wood, glass, and iron and steel industries in 1891, 51 per cent. were apprentices or had served apprenticeships. If the laborers be excluded from the group, 64 per cent. of the remaining 342 either were apprentices or had been apprenticed, and, taking the iron and steel

the noblest of God's creatures," as one of them put it. But even in the nineties machinery was beginning to undermine the monopolistic status of his skill; he was beginning to feel the ground shifting under his feet. The State Statistician recorded uneasy protests of men from all over the State.<sup>2</sup> Today all that is left of the four-year apprenticeship system among 9,000 workers in the manufacturing and mechanical industries is three or four score apprentices scattered through the building and molding trades.<sup>3</sup> "It's 'high speed steel' and specialization and Ford cars that's hit the machinist's union," according to a skilled Middletown worker. "You had to know how to use the old carbon steel to keep it from gettin' hot and spoilin' the edge. But this 'high speed steel' and this new 'stelite' don't absorb the heat and are harder than carbon steel. You can take a boy fresh from the farm and in three days he can manage a machine as well as I can, and I've been at it twenty-seven years."

With the passing of apprenticeship the line between skilled and unskilled worker has become so blurred as to be in some shops almost non-existent. The superintendent of a leading Middletown machine shop says, "Seventy-five per cent. of our force of 800 men can be taken from farm or high school and trained in a week's time." In the glass plant whose shift in processes is noted in Chapter VI, 84 per cent. of the tool-using personnel, exclusive of foremen, require one month or less of training, another 4 per cent. not more than six months, 6 per

plants and the glass houses separately, this percentage mounts to 79 per cent. and 70 per cent. respectively. These figures must be used cautiously, since the manner of selecting the sample of 429 workers is not stated. (*Fourth Biennial Report of [the State] Department of Statistics, 1891-2, pp. 57, 130, 317.*)

Cf. in Chapter V the discussion of the tendency of young workers to displace the older master craftsmen.

<sup>2</sup> "It is getting harder to find employment at molding every year." "Machinery and specialty men are used in large establishments altogether. I think in about twenty years a mechanic will be a scarce article in this country." "Men are put in as master mechanics who could not build a wheelbarrow. . . . Any one can do one thing over and over, so he is just put on a machine at \$1.00, or perhaps \$1.25, a day." [Italics ours.] (*Fourth Biennial Report, 1891-2, pp. 26-41.*)

<sup>3</sup> The Personnel Department of a leading local automobile parts plant listed but four apprentices (all in the tool room) among the more than 2,000 employees on their "normal force." Another plant listed only two apprentices (also in the tool room) in a normal force of 1,000.

cent. a year, and the remaining 6 per cent. three years.<sup>4</sup> Foundry workers have not lost to the iron man as heavily as machinists, but even here the trend is marked. In Middletown's leading foundry in the early nineties, 47 per cent. of the workers (including foremen) had three to six years' training. This trained group today is half as great (24 per cent.) and 60 per cent. of all the castings produced are made by a group of newcomers who cast with the help of machines and require only a fortnight or so of training.

"Do you think the man who runs a complicated machine takes pride in his work and gets a feeling of proprietorship in his machine?" a responsible executive in charge of personnel in a large machine shop was asked.

"No, I don't," was his ready reply. "There's a man who's ground diameters on gears here for fifteen years and done nothing else. It's a fairly highly skilled job and takes more than six months to learn. But it's so endlessly monotonous! That man is dead, just dead! And there's a lot of others like him, and I don't know what to do for them."

"What," asked the questioner, "do you think most of the men in the plant are working for?—to own a car, or a home, or just to keep their heads above water?"

"They're just working. They don't know what for. They're just in a rut and keep on in it, doing the same monotonous work every day, and wondering when a slump will come and they will be laid off."

"How much of the time are your thoughts on your job?" an alert young Middletown bench molder was asked.

"As long as there happens to be any new problem about the casting I'm making, I'm thinking about it, but as soon as ever I get the hang of the thing there isn't 25 per cent. of me paying attention to the job."

The shift from a system in which length of service, craftsmanship, and authority in the shop and social prestige among one's peers tended to go together to one which, in the main, demands little of a worker's personality save rapid, habitual reactions and an ability to submerge himself in the performance of a few routinized easily learned movements seems to have wiped

<sup>4</sup> Nearly half the three-year group are carpenters and plumbers, i.e., not primarily factory workers but members of the strongly organized building trades.

out many of the satisfactions that formerly accompanied the job. Middletown's shops are full of men of whom it may be said that "there isn't 25 per cent. of them paying attention to the job." And as they leave the shop in the evening, "The work of a modern machine-tender leaves nothing tangible at the end of the day's work to which he can point with pride and say, 'I did that—it is the result of my own skill and my own effort.'"

The intangible income accruing to many of the business group derives in part from such new devices as membership in Rotary and other civic clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, Business and Professional Women's Club, and the various professional clubs.<sup>5</sup> But among the working class not only have no such new groups arisen to reward and bolster their work, but the once powerful trade unions have for the most part either disappeared or persist in attenuated form.

By the early nineties Middletown had become "one of the best organized cities in the United States."<sup>6</sup> By 1897, thirty "locals" totaling 3,766 members were affiliated with the A. F. of L. and the city vied with Detroit and other cities as a labor convention city. In 1899 the first chapter of a national women's organization, the Women's Union Label League, was launched in Middletown. At this time organized labor formed one of the most active coördinating centers in the lives of some thousands of Middletown working class families, touching their getting-a-living, educational, leisure-time, and even in a few cases religious activities. On the getting-a-living sector the unions brought tangible pressure for a weekly pay law, standardized wage scales, factory inspection, safety devices and other things regarded as improvements, and helped in sickness or death, while crowded mass meetings held in the opera house collected large sums for the striking workers in Homestead and elsewhere. A special Workingmen's Library and Reading Room,<sup>7</sup> with a paid librarian and a wide assortment of books, was much frequented. Undoubtedly the religious element in the labor movement of this day was missed by many, but a Middletown

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of these groups see Ch. XIX.

<sup>6</sup> From a letter from the Secretary of the Glass Bottle Blowers' Association of the U. S. and Canada, Sept. 27, 1924. A member of the executive board of this Association, who came to Middletown in 1893, says the city was "next to Rochester, N. Y., the best organized town in the country."

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Chapter XVII.

old-timer still refers enthusiastically to the Knights of Labor as a "grand organization" with a "fine ritual," and a member of both iron and glass unions during the nineties is emphatic regarding the greater importance of the ceremonial aspects of the unions in those days, particularly when new members were received, as compared with the bald meetings of today. As centers of leisure time the unions ranked among the important social factors in the lives of a large number of workers. Such items as these appear in the Middletown press all through the nineties:

A column account of the Ball and Concert given by Midland Lodge No. 20, Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers in Shirk's Hall, described it as "the largest event of its kind ever given in [Middletown] or the Gas Belt . . . 1,200 to 1,500 present."

An account of the installation of officers and banquet of the Painters' and Decorators' Union records the presence of 200 visitors, including wives and children. A "fine literary program was rendered." The Chief of Police was the guest of honor, and the ex-president and secretary of the Middletown Trades Council spoke. Nearly every member of the police force was present. The hall was decorated with American flags. There was singing, and the new invention, the gramophone, was featured. After the literary program came dancing.

"The Cigar Makers' 'Blue Label' nine played a very hotly contested game with union barbers' nine yesterday [Sunday] P.M."

"Yesterday P.M. [Sunday] the Bakers met at Hummel's Hall on invitation of Aug. Waick, our president, who set up a keg and lunch. We had a meeting, installed officers, then a good time."

Labor Day, a great day in the nineties, is today barely noticed.<sup>8</sup>

From the end of the nineties such laconic reports as "Strike defeated by use of machinery" mark increasingly the failing

<sup>8</sup> In 1891 the entire city participated in the first Labor Day celebration—commencing at 4 A.M. with an "artillery signal of forty-four rounds" and proceeding throughout a crowded day of bands, parade, greased pole, bicycle races in the street, pie-eating contest, reading of Declaration of Independence, two orations, greased pig, baseball, dancing all day, to a grand finale of fireworks at the fair grounds. But today the parade has been abandoned entirely. In 1923 an effort was made to draw a crowd to hear a speaker, free ice cream being used as an inducement, but in 1924 no ceremonies were even attempted.

status of organized labor in Middletown. According to the secretary of one national union, "the organized labor movement in [Middletown] does not compare with that of 1890 as one to one hundred."<sup>9</sup> The city's civic clubs boast of its being an "open shop town."

The social function of the union has disappeared in this day of movies and automobile, save for sparsely attended dances at Labor Hall. The strong molders' union, e.g., has to compel attendance at its meetings by making attendance at one or the other of the two monthly meetings compulsory under a penalty of a dollar fine. There is no longer a Workingmen's Library or any other educational activity. Multiple lodge memberships,<sup>10</sup> occasional factory "mutual welfare associations," the diffusion of the habit of carrying life insurance, socialized provision of workmen's compensation, and the beginning of the practice in at least three factories of carrying group life-insurance for all workers, are slowly taking over the insurance function performed by the trade unions. Of the 100 working class families for whom income distribution was secured, only eleven contributed anything to the support of labor unions; amounts contributed ranged from \$18.00 to \$60.00.

Likewise, public opinion is no longer with organized labor. In the earlier period a prominent Middletown lawyer and the superintendent of schools addressed an open meeting of the Knights of Labor, and the local press commended the "success of the meeting of this flourishing order." When Samuel Gom-

<sup>9</sup> From a letter from the Secretary of the Glass Bottle Blowers' Association of the United States and Canada, September 27, 1924.

Numerically at least this is an overstatement, though it may reflect the power of the organized group in the community in the two periods. In 1893 there were 981 union members in Middletown, as against 815 in 1924, when the city was two or three times as large. Some of the present total are aging workers who keep up old union affiliations for the sake of insurance benefits. The building trades, typographical workers, pattern makers, and molders are still well organized, though the first are feeling the competition of non-union workers from outlying small towns who invade the town daily in their Fords, while already, as pointed out above, in a leading foundry 60 per cent. of the castings are made by non-union men trained in a fortnight.

<sup>10</sup> Sickness, death, and old-age benefits are with many the sole reason for membership in working class lodges today. Mooseheart and Moosehaven, the two national "homes" for children and the aged maintained by the national order of Moose, are popular in Middletown and offer advantages which only a few of the older and richer unions, inaccessible to the great mass of local workers, can approach.

Cf. discussion of lodges in Ch. XIX.

pers came to town in ninety-seven he was dined in the mayor's home before addressing the great crowd at the opera house. The press carried daily items agitating for stricter local enforcement of the weekly pay law, or urging public support of union solicitations for funds for union purposes, or calling speeches at labor mass-meetings "very able and enjoyable addresses." The proceedings of the Glass Workers' Convention in Baltimore in 1890 were reported in full on the first page. Such a note as this was common: "During the last few months there have been organized in this city several trade organizations and labor unions . . . and much good has resulted therefrom." At a grand Farmers and Knights of Labor picnic in 1890, "a perfect jam, notwithstanding the rain," the speaker "ably denounced trusts, Standard Oil, etc.," according to the leading paper. The largest men's clothing firm presented a union with a silk parade-banner costing nearly \$100.<sup>11</sup> Today the Middletown press has little that is good to say of organized labor.<sup>12</sup> The pulpit avoids such subjects, particularly in the churches of the business class, and when it speaks it is apt to do so in guarded, equivocal terms.<sup>13</sup> A prevalent attitude among

<sup>11</sup> It should not be inferred that the workers had things all their own way. Strikes and lock-outs were frequent, and the boycott was freely and effectively used against local business men who sold non-union goods. The diary of one elderly merchant complains that "a great many were compelled to show a left-handed sneaking approval." But the significant point is that labor was powerful and class-conscious, and the workers apparently gained added stature in many of their vital activities from their membership in this powerful union movement.

<sup>12</sup> One of the two daily papers spoke editorially on one recent occasion of unions as "fine things for those who work with their hands" but went on to decry any activity by the local union "composed of our own 'folks'" in trying "to drag into its own affairs the 'folks' that are international or national, and do not know our own local problems."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the following press report, sent to the paper by the minister himself, which summarizes a sermon in the largest church in Middletown on national "Labor Sunday," 1924: "[The preacher] based his sermon on that portion of the Lord's Prayer which calls upon God 'to give us this day our daily bread.' He pointed out that when this prayer is repeated one does not ask God 'to give me my daily bread' but is broader and takes in all mankind in the words 'us' and 'our.'"

"The speaker took up briefly the labor situation in the United States as regards the laborer and the employer, and declared that 'we do not have in [Middletown] the conditions that exist elsewhere,' implying that no serious labor problem is in existence here. Brotherhoods among laboring men have done much good for the laborer and have brought to him certain rights, he said, but in some cases, especially where public welfare is involved, they have gone too far."



the business class appears in the statement of one of the city's leaders, "Working men don't need unions nowadays. There are no great evils or problems now as there were fifty years ago. We are much more in danger of coddling the working men than abusing them. Working people are just as well off now as they can possibly be except for things which are in the nature of industry and cannot be helped."

This decrease in the psychological satisfactions formerly derived from the sense of craftsmanship and in group solidarity, added to the considerations adduced in the preceding chapters, serves to strengthen the impression gained from talk with families of the working class that, however it may be with their better-educated children, for most of the present generation of workers "there is no break through on their industrial sector." It is important for the consideration of other life-activities to bear in mind this fact, that the heavy majority of the numerically dominant working class group live in a world in which neither present nor future appears to hold as much prospect of dominance on the job or of the breaking through to further expansion of personal powers by the head of the family as among the business group.

Frustrated in this sector of their lives, many workers seek compensations elsewhere. The president of the Middletown Trades Council, an alert and energetic molder of thirty and until now the most active figure in the local labor movement, has left the working class to become one of the minor office-holders in the dominant political machine. Others who do not leave are finding outlets, if no longer in the saloon, in such compensatory devices as hooking up the radio or driving the "old bus." The great pressure toward education on the part of the working class is, of course, another phase of this desire to escape to better things.<sup>14</sup>

For both working and business class no other accompaniment of getting a living approaches in importance the money received for their work. It is more this future, instrumental aspect of work, rather than the intrinsic satisfactions involved, that keeps Middletown working so hard as more and more of the activities of living are coming to be strained through the bars

<sup>14</sup> Cf. in Ch. XIII the importance to working class parents of education for their children.

of the dollar sign.<sup>15</sup> Among the business group, such things as one's circle of friends, the kind of car one drives, playing golf, joining Rotary, the church to which one belongs, one's political principles, the social position of one's wife apparently tend to be scrutinized somewhat more than formerly in Middletown for their instrumental bearing upon the main business of getting a living, while, conversely, one's status in these various other activities tends to be much influenced by one's financial position. As vicinage has decreased in its influence upon the ordinary social contacts of this group,<sup>16</sup> there appears to be a constantly closer relation between the solitary factor of financial status and one's social status. A leading citizen presented this matter in a nutshell to a member of the research staff in discussing the almost universal local custom of "placing" newcomers in terms of where they live, how they live, the kind of car they drive, and similar externals: "It's perfectly natural. You see, they know money, and they don't know you."

This dominance of the dollar appears in the apparently growing tendency among younger working class men to swap a problematic future for immediate "big money." Foremen complain that Middletown boys entering the shops today are increasingly less interested in being moved from job to job until they have become all-round skilled workers, but want to stay on one machine and run up their production so that they may quickly reach a maximum wage scale.<sup>17</sup>

The rise of large-scale advertising, popular magazines, movies, radio, and other channels of increased cultural diffusion from without are rapidly changing habits of thought as to what

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Maynard Keynes on "the habitual appeal" of our age "to the money motive in nine-tenths of the activities of life, . . . the universal striving after individual economic security as the prime object of endeavor . . . the social approbation of money as the measure of constructive success, and . . . the social appeal to the hoarding instinct as the foundation of the necessary provision for the family and for the future." (*New Republic*, Nov. 11, 1925.)

<sup>16</sup> Cf. in Ch. XIX the places where both business and working class men and women see their friends.

<sup>17</sup> According to one veteran foundry foreman: "In the old days of the nineties a boy was shaped and trained by his foreman. When he started his apprenticeship for the molder's trade he was lucky to make \$3 or \$4 a week. At the end of the first year he was making, maybe, a dollar or \$1.25 a day; at the end of the second year perhaps \$1.50 or \$2.00; the third year, \$2.25; and then at the end of the fourth year he received his card and \$2.75 a day. Meanwhile his foreman had shifted him about from job

things are essential to living and multiplying optional occasions for spending money.<sup>18</sup> Installment buying, which turns wishes into horses overnight, and the heavy increase in the number of children receiving higher education, with its occasions for breaking with home traditions, are facilitating this rise to new standards of living. In 1890 Middletown appears to have lived

to job until, when he became a molder and went on a piece-work basis, he knew his job from every angle and could make big money. But the trouble nowadays is that within a year a machine molder may be making as much as a man who has been there fifteen or twenty years. He has his eyes on the money—\$40 to \$50 a week—and resists the foreman's efforts to put him on bench molding where he would learn the fine points of the molder's trade."

<sup>18</sup> It is perhaps impossible to overestimate the rôle of motion pictures, advertising, and other forms of publicity in this rise in subjective standards. Week after week at the movies people in all walks of life enter, often with an intensity of emotion that is apparently one of the most potent means of reconditioning habits, into the intimacies of Fifth Avenue drawing rooms and English country houses, watching the habitual activities of a different cultural level. The growth of popular magazines and national advertising involves the utilization through the printed page of the most powerful stimuli to action. In place of the relatively mild, scattered, something-for-nothing, sample-free, I-tell-you-this-is-a-good-article copy seen in Middletown a generation ago, advertising is concentrating increasingly upon a type of copy aiming to make the reader emotionally uneasy, to bludgeon him with the fact that decent people don't live the way *he* does: *decent* people ride on balloon tires, have a second bathroom, and so on. This copy points an accusing finger at the stenographer as she reads her *Motion Picture Magazine* and makes her acutely conscious of her unpolished finger nails, or of the worn place in the living room rug, and sends the housewife peering anxiously into the mirror to see if *her* wrinkles look like those that made Mrs. X— in the ad. "old at thirty-five" because she did not have a Leisure Hour electric washer.

Whole industries are pooling their strength to ram home a higher standard of living, e.g., the recent nation-wide essay contest among school children on home lighting conducted by all branches of the electrical industry. In addition to the national prizes of a \$15,000 house and university scholarships, local prizes ranging all the way from a radio set and dressing table to electric curling irons and basket-ball season tickets were given to the thirty best Middletown essays. In this campaign 1,500 Middletown children submitted essays on how the lighting of their homes could be improved, and upwards of 1,500 families were made immediately aware of the inadequacies of their homes as regards library table lamps, porch lights, piano lamps, and convenient floor sockets. As one of the winning local essays said: "I and all my family have learned a great deal that we did not know before, and we intend improving the lighting in our own home."

The "style show" is a new and effective form of Middletown advertising that unquestionably influences the local standard of living. On two successive nights at one of these local shows a thousand people—ten-cent store clerks, tired-looking mothers with children, husbands and wives—watched rouged clerks promenade languorously along the tops of the show cases, displaying the latest hats, furs, dresses, shoes, parasols, bags and other accessories, while a jazz orchestra kept everybody "feeling good."

on a series of plateaus as regards standard of living; old citizens say there was more contentment with relative arrival; it was a common thing to hear a remark that so and so "is pretty good for people in our circumstances." Today the edges of the plateaus have been shaved off, and every one lives on a slope from any point of which desirable things belonging to people all the way to the top are in view.

This diffusion of new urgent occasions for spending money in every sector of living is exhibited by such new tools and services commonly used in Middletown today, but either unknown or little used in the nineties, as the following:

*In the home*—furnace, running hot and cold water, modern sanitation, electric appliances ranging from toasters to washing machines, telephone, refrigeration, green vegetables and fresh fruit all the year round, greater variety of clothing, silk hose and underwear, commercial pressing and cleaning of clothes,<sup>19</sup> commercial laundering or use of expensive electrical equipment in the home,<sup>20</sup> cosmetics, manicuring, and commercial hair-dressing.

*In spending leisure time*—movies (attendance far more frequent than at earlier occasional "shows"), automobile (gas, tires, depreciation, cost of trips), phonograph, radio, more elaborate children's playthings, more club dues for more members of the family, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., more formal dances and banquets, including a highly competitive series of "smartly appointed affairs" by high school clubs;<sup>21</sup> cigarette smoking and expensive cigars.

*In education*—high school and college (involving longer dependence of children), many new incidental costs such as entrance to constant school athletic contests.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In the Middletown city directory for 1889 there were no dry cleaners and only one dye house. Today a city less than four times the size has twelve dry cleaners and four dye houses. The habit of pressing trousers is said not to have "come in" until about 1895.

<sup>20</sup> The hand-washers of 1890 sold for \$7.50-\$10.00, while the modern machines cost \$60.00 to \$200.00.

<sup>21</sup> A dance no longer costs \$0.50, as in the nineties, but the members of clubs are assessed about \$4.00 for their Christmas dances today. Music used to be a two- or three-piece affair, but now it is an imported orchestra costing from \$150 to \$300. A boy has to take a girl in a taxi if he does not have the use of the family car. One does not go home after a dance but spends a dollar or so on "eats" afterwards. Expensive favors are given at annual sorority banquets.

<sup>22</sup> See Table VI for distribution of expenditures of 100 working class families.

In the face of these rapidly multiplying accessories to living, the "social problem" of "the high cost of living" is apparently envisaged by most people in Middletown as soluble if they can only inch themselves up a notch higher in the amount of money received for their work. Under these circumstances, why shouldn't money be important to people in Middletown? "The Bible never spoke a truer word," says the local paper in an editorial headed "Your Bank Account Your Best Friend," "than when it said: 'But money answereth all things.' . . . If it doesn't answer all things, it at least answers more than 50 per cent. of them." And again, "Of our happy position in world affairs there need be no . . . further proof than the stability of our money system." One leading Middletown business man summed up this trend toward a monetary approach to the satisfactions of life in addressing a local civic club when he said, "Next to the doctor we think of the banker to help us and to guide us in our wants and worries today."

Money being, then, so crucial, how much money do Middletown people actually receive? The minimum cost of living for a "standard family of five" in Middletown in 1924 was \$1,920.87.<sup>23</sup> A complete distribution of the earnings of Middletown is not available. Twelve to 15 per cent. of those getting the city's living reported a large enough income for 1923 to make the filing of a Federal income tax return necessary.<sup>24</sup> Of the 16,000-17,000 people gainfully employed in 1923—including, however, somewhere in the neighborhood of a thousand married women, some of whom undoubtedly made joint returns with their husbands—210 reported net incomes (i.e., minus interest, contributions, etc.) of \$5,000 or over, 999 more net incomes less than \$5,000 but large enough to be taxable after subtracting allowed exemptions (\$1,000 if single, \$2,500 if married, and \$400 per dependent), while 1,036 more filed returns but were not taxable after subtracting allowed deductions and exemptions. The other 85-88 per cent. of those earning the city's living presumably received either less than

<sup>23</sup> Based on the budget of the United States Bureau of Labor and computed on the basis of Middletown prices. See Table VII.

<sup>24</sup> These income tax data, fallible as they are, owing to non-reporting and other possible errors, are used here simply as the best rough estimate available. There are at the outside probably not over two- or three-score people in Middletown who made income tax returns who are not actually engaged in getting a living.

\$1,000 if single or less than \$2,000 if married, or failed to make income tax returns. A cross section of working class earnings is afforded by the following distribution of 100 of the working class families interviewed according to their earnings in the preceding twelve months:<sup>25</sup>

	Distribution of Families by Fathers' Earnings Only	Distribution of Families by Total Family Earnings
<i>Total number of families</i> .....	100	100
<i>Earning less than minimum standard of \$1,920.87</i>		
Families of 5 members or more .....	42	39
Families of 4 or 3 members (including families of 2 foremen) .....	35	35
<i>Earning more than minimum standard of \$1,920.87</i>		
Families of 5 members or more (including one foreman) .....	10	13
Families of 4 or 3 members (including 6 foremen) .....	13	13

The incomes of these 100 families range from \$344.50 to \$3,460.00, with the median at \$1,494.75 and the first and third quartiles respectively at \$1,193.63 and \$2,006.00.<sup>26</sup>

The relative earning power of males and females in Middletown is indicated by the fact that in a characteristic leading Middletown plant during the first six months of 1924 the weighted average hourly wage of all females (excluding office force and forewomen) was \$0.31 and of all males (excluding

<sup>25</sup> See Table VI for distribution of income of these 100 families by members of family earning and for distribution of certain major items of expenditure throughout the year.

Six of the twelve months (Oct. 1, 1923, to Oct. 1, 1924) covered by these income figures were good times in Middletown and six months were relatively bad times locally, though the latter was not a period of national depression. This would tend to make the 1924 average income less than on a "big year" like 1923—though 50 per cent. good and bad times is more representative of the actual chance to get a living in Middletown today than either a completely good or bad year would have been.

See Appendix on Method regarding choice of families in connection with the fact of the presence of nine foremen's families in the sample.

The minimum standard for a family of less than five members would be less than \$1,920.87, and consequently certain marginal families of three or four grouped above with those earning less than the minimum would on a more exact calculation be transferred to the group earning more than the minimum standard.

<sup>26</sup> The incomes of the husbands alone of these 100 families exhibit a spread from \$344.50 to \$3,200.00, with the median at \$1,303.10 and the first and third quartiles at \$1,047.50 and \$1,856.75 respectively.

office force and foremen) \$0.55. The bulk of this plant is on a ten-hour basis, fifty-five hours per week, making the average annual income for fifty-two weeks, provided work is steady, \$886.60 for females and \$1,573.00 for males. In three other major plants similar average wages for males were \$0.55, \$0.54 and \$0.59. In general, unskilled female labor gets \$0.18 to \$0.28 an hour and a few skilled females \$0.30 to \$0.50.<sup>27</sup> Unskilled males receive \$0.35 to \$0.40 an hour and skilled males from \$0.50 to \$1.00 and occasionally slightly more.

As over against these wages of women in industry in Middletown in 1924, ranging from \$10.00 to \$18.00 a week in the main, the younger clerks in the leading department store received \$10.00 a week, and more experienced clerks a flat rate from \$8.00 to \$17.00 a week plus a bonus, if earned—the whole amounting occasionally “when times are good” for a veteran clerk to \$30.00 to \$40.00 a week.

A detailed calculation of a cost of living index for Middletown in 1924 on the basis of the cost of living in 1891 reveals an increase of 117 per cent.<sup>28</sup> A comparison of the average yearly earnings of the 100 heads of families in 1924 with available figures for 439 glass, wood, and iron and steel workers in Middletown in 1891 reveals an average of \$1,469.61 in the former case and \$505.65 in the latter, or an increase of 191 per cent. today.<sup>29</sup> Or if we take the earnings of school teachers as an index, probably conservative, of the trend in earnings, as against this rise of 117 per cent. in the cost of living, it appears that the minimum salary paid to grade school teachers has risen 143 per cent. and the maximum 159 per cent., and the minimum salary paid to high school teachers 134 per cent. and the maximum 250 per cent. The median salary for grade school teachers in 1924 was \$1,331.25, with the first and third quar-

<sup>27</sup> Willford I. King says wages of females the country over are “about three-fourths those of males.” (*Op. cit.*, p. 144.)

<sup>28</sup> See Table VIII for the increase by major items and also for the method of computing this index.

<sup>29</sup> The 1891 earnings are taken from the *Fourth Biennial Report* for the state in which Middletown is located, dated 1891-2, pp. 57, 130, and 317. This Report gives the average income of 225 Middletown adult male glass workers as \$519.49, of sixty-nine wood workers as \$432.32, and of 145 iron and steel workers as \$519.06—or an average for the entire 439 of \$505.65. Too much weight obviously cannot be put upon these 1891 figures, as nothing is known either as to the method of their collection or as to their accuracy.

tiles at \$983.66 and \$1,368.00 respectively. The median salary for high school teachers was \$1,575.00, with the first and third quartiles at \$1,449.43 and \$1,705.50 respectively. Substantial increases in the incomes of persons in certain other representative occupations are suggested by the fact that the salary of a bank teller has mounted from \$50.00 or \$65.00 a month in 1890 to \$166.67 a month in 1924, that of an average male clerk in a leading men's clothing store from \$12.00 a week in 1890 to \$35.00 today; a doctor's fee for a normal delivery with the same amount of accompanying care in both periods has risen from \$10.00 to \$35.00, and for a house call from \$1.00 to \$3.00.

Thus this crucial activity of spending one's best energies year in and year out in doing things remote from the immediate concerns of living eventuates apparently in the ability to buy somewhat more than formerly, but both business men and working men seem to be running for dear life in this business of making the money they earn keep pace with the even more rapid growth of their subjective wants. A Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep in the Middletown of 1885 to awake today would marvel at the change as did the French economist Say when he revisited England at the close of the Napoleonic Wars; every one seemed to run intent upon his own business as though fearing to stop lest those behind trample him down. In the quiet county-seat of the middle eighties men lived relatively close to the earth and its products. In less than four decades, business class and working class, bosses and bossed, have been caught up by Industry, this new trait in the city's culture that is shaping the pattern of the whole of living.<sup>30</sup> According to its needs, large numbers of people anxious to get their living are periodically stopped by the recurrent phenomenon of “bad times” when the machines stop running, workers are “laid off” by the hundreds, salesmen sell less, bankers call in loans, “credit freezes,” and many Middletown families may take their children from school, move into cheaper homes, cut down on food, and do without many of the countless things they desire.

The working class is mystified by the whole fateful business. Many of them say, for instance, that they went to the polls and

<sup>30</sup> R. H. Tawney speaks of the rise of industry “to a position of exclusive prominence among human interests” until the modern world is “like a hypochondriac . . . absorbed in the processes of his own digestion.”

voted for Coolidge in November, 1924, after being assured daily by the local papers that "A vote for Coolidge is a vote for prosperity and your job"; puzzled as to why "times" did not improve after the overwhelming victory of Coolidge, a number of them asked the interviewers if the latter thought times would be better "after the first of the year"; the first of the year having come and gone, their question was changed to "Will business pick up in the spring?"

The attitude of the business men, as fairly reflected by the editorial pages of the press which today echo the sentiments heard at Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce, is more confident but confusing. Within a year the leading paper offered the following prescriptions for local prosperity: "The first duty of a citizen is to produce"; and later, "The American citizen's first importance to his country is no longer that of citizen but that of consumer. Consumption is a new necessity." "The way to make business boom is to buy." At the same time that the citizen is told to "consume" he is told, "Better start saving late than never. If you haven't opened your weekly savings account with some local bank, trust company, or building and loan, today's the day." Still within the same year the people of Middletown are told: "The only true prosperity is that for which can be assigned natural reasons such as good crops, a demand for building materials, . . . increased need for transportation," and ". . . advancing prices are due to natural causes which are always responsible for prices. . . . As all wealth comes from the soil, so does all prosperity, which is only another way of saying so does all business." But again, "natural causes" are apparently not the chief essential: "There can be no greater single contribution to the welfare of the nation than the spirit of hopefulness. . . ." "[This] will be a banner year because the people believe it will be, which amounts to the determination that it shall be. . . ." Still another solution for securing "good times" appears: "The most prosperous town is that in which the citizens are bound most closely together. . . . Loyalty to the home town . . . is intensely practical. . . . The thing we must get into our heads about this out-of-town buying business is that it hurts the individual who does it and his friends who live here. Spending your money at home in the long run amounts practically to spending it upon yourself, and buying away from home means buying the comforts and

luxuries for the other fellow." "A dollar that is spent out of town never returns." One looking on at this procedure may begin to wonder if the business men, too, are not somewhat bewildered.

Although neither business men nor working men like the recurring "hard times," members of both groups urge the maintenance of the present industrial system. The former laud the group leaders who urge "normalcy" and "more business in government and less government in business," while the following sentences from an address by a leading worker, the president of the Trades Council, during the 1924 political campaign, sets forth the same faith in "free competition" on the part of the working class: "The important issue is the economic issue. We can all unite on that. We want a return to active free competition, so that prices will be lower and a man can buy enough for himself and his family with the money he makes." Both groups, as they order a lay-off, cut wages to meet outside competition, or, on the other hand, vote for La Follette in the hope of his being able to "do something to help the working man," appear to be fumbling earnestly to make their appropriate moves in the situation according to the rules of the game as far as they see them; but both appear to be bound on the wheel of this modern game of corner-clipping production. The puzzled observer may wonder how far any of them realizes the relation of his particular move to the whole function of getting a living.<sup>31</sup> He might even be reminded of a picture appearing in a periodical circulated in Middletown during the course of the study: A mother leans over her two absorbed infants playing at cards on the floor and asks, "What are you playing, children?"

"We're playing 'Patcher,' Mamma. Bobby, patcher card down."

In the midst of such a partially understood but earnestly followed scheme of getting a living, the rest of living goes on in Middletown.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Walton Hamilton's *The Case of Bituminous Coal* (The Institute of Economics Series, *Investigations in Industry and Labor*. New York; Macmillan, 1925), pp. 251-2.