During a time when French peasants were seizing power from the nobles, Edmund Burke tilted his pen in defense of tradition and inequality. Two centuries later, this same mission has been taken on by a small but influential group of Americans, comfortably rallying under the banner Neo-conservatism. The neo-conservative philosophy rests squarely on 18th and 19th century notions of republican government which called for limited government, well-controlled masses, and active involvement in public affairs by a self-appointed elite. America's problem today, as the "neo-cons" see it, is that the modern welfare state promised too much to too many, and this has led to social chaos and a crisis of authority. Back up! they say. The time has come to restore social order and reassert the legitimacy of conservative political, social and economic institutions.

There is nothing new in what neo-cons preach, yet their zeal has recently attracted widespread publicity, and suddenly their leading members are everywhere policy is being made. Daniel P. Moynihan, a prized pedant, is presently a U.S. Senator from New York. Irving Kristol, a founding editor of the neo-con journal Public Interest, is well-known for his regular contributions to the Wall Street Journal in which he bolsters corporate morale (one column of his was entitled 'Businessmen of the World Unite!') and derides liberals for their intolerance of private enterprise. Several neo-cons have been members of the prestigious Trilateral Commission, including Samuel Huntington, Jr., who co-authored a Commission report called The Crisis of Democracy. Huntington's conclusion that the crisis of democracy was due to an "excess" of democracy fit in well with the neo-conservative teachings.

Other well-known neo-cons include Harvard professors Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell, National Security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and cold-war political scientist Robert Tucker, whose advice during the 1974 oil embargo was for the U.S. to invade the Middle East. His book, the Inequality of Nations, presents an unabashedly racist and chauvinist argument for dealing aggressively with the Third World. This view, along with staunch support for Israel and a near-rabid anti-communism, frequently appears in the pages of Commentary, a widely-circulated neo-con magazine.

For many neo-conservatives, it is not long since they abandoned liberal positions which advocated social engineering through government spending programs. But the social disruptions of the 1960s have discredited this approach and were sufficiently fright-
ening to dampen enthusiasm for serious reform. Consequently, more and more former liberals have joined the neo-conservative call for healing a troubled society. Key to their objective are restoration of the nuclear family, strong support for bourgeois morality, and strict repression of society’s ‘underclass.’

This, of course, is quite compatible with current business intentions. Indeed, neo-con arguments are the basis on which the imposition of austerity has been shrouded with an air of legitimacy. And hence, a happy symbiotic relationship has developed, in which advice on how business can protect itself is exchanged for generous financial support for individuals and organizations on the neo-con side of social policy debate.

One of these organizations, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), is the fastest-growing think tank in the country, currently enjoying support to the tune of $6 million a year. Its purpose is to shower government officials and influential academics, as well as the media, with a never-ending stream of tapes, journals and books. AEI contains much of the pseudo-academic flavor which neo-cons relish. However, Kristol and others have also made themselves readily available to a wide assortment of business lobbies, including the important Business Roundtable. At lavish Roundtable luncheons, top corporate executives, including Thomas Murphy of GM, meet with labor union officials and key politicians in order to further their increasingly similar interests. Such fraternities are right in keeping with the neo-con call for bolstering a ruling elite.

The 1970’s partnership of rightwing verbiage and corporate resources has proven itself in battle. In 1978, its Congressional victories ranged from defeat of labor law reform to deregulation of natural gas prices. Across the country, crime control was strengthened through a widespread return to capital punishment and longer prison terms, while programs to track down husbands of women on welfare and get them to support their families, answered neo-con goals of restoring the family and limiting government expenditures.

Like all proud elitists, neo-conservatives regard popular movements as evil, and, as a direct corollary, those who further such movements are condemned for encouraging unreasonable expectations. A striking example of this appeared in an article published in Commentary magazine soon after the NYC looting spree in the summer of 1977. The author, Midge Decter, criticized
those who sympathized too openly with the urban poor. She wrote: "the young men who went rampaging on that hot July night were neither innocents nor savages; they were people in the grip of the pathology that arises from moral chaos. They were doing something they knew to be wrong but had been given license for, and had not been able to find the inner resources to overcome their temptation."

Neo-con concern over the growth of a 'new class' of traditionally cooperative people who are now willing to support fundamental changes, leads neo-con writers to direct much of their ire at young academics and government activists ("the regulators"). Neo-cons are simply not interested in relating to people outside the well-to-do and educated sectors of the middle class. Just as looting can be blamed on soft liberals, so the struggles for better housing, health care and better working conditions are not accepted as indicators of the need for change. By limiting themselves to ideological attacks on the remaining liberals, the neo-cons evade the fundamental issues of class and power.

The question is what effect this aggressive disdain for dealing with popular struggle will lead to. In foreign policy, a neo-con emphasis on national self-interest led to a debacle for the U.S. government in Iran. It was only a matter of time before eruption overcame a regime installed by shortsighted policy and the CIA. An analogous strategy exists on the domestic front and it remains unclear how long victory will be on the side of the neo-cons and their corporate allies. For the time being, the problem for the rest of us is the absence of a movement of resistance strong enough to turn the tide.

**OFF THE JOB: THE RENEWED STRUGGLE TO SHORTEN THE WORKING DAY**

An important element in the growing rebellion against work on the part of the U.S. labor force is the increased pressure to reduce the amount of time spent on the waged job. People are pushing harder for a shorter working day, workweek, workyear, and overall worklife (through earlier retirement). As a result, union leaders--responding to autonomous worker moves to reduce work time through absenteeism--have finally resumed the official effort to shorten the workweek, a campaign that has not advanced much since the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act established a 40-hour workweek.

In 1976 the United Auto Workers Union signed a contract with Ford that included an extra seven "paid personal holidays" per year. The union claimed that this was a major move toward instituting a four-day week with no reduction in wages, though some Ford managers said privately that their objective in agreeing to the holidays was to control the high level of absenteeism in auto. Last year, leaders of the U.A.W. and other "progressive" unions formed the All Unions Committee to Shorten the Work Week, which stressed the role of a shortened work week in reducing unemployment. Business is still opposed to the proposal, saying it would raise labor costs 15 percent, while union leaders such as UAW head Douglas Fraser claim the rise would be offset by reduced unemployment insurance costs and high productivity.

Along with the efforts to reduce the length of the workweek for full-time jobs, more and more people have been cutting down their individual waged work time by seeking part-time jobs. The U.S. labor market now includes some 20 million part-time positions, and more than 18 percent of the labor force voluntarily works less than 35 hours a week.
On the one hand, the rise in part-time work is yet another reflection of the general refusal of work: struggles for higher wages have allowed many people to work fewer hours, and others use "off the books" work in the underground economy to lessen their dependence on their official occupation.

At the same time, business is increasingly using part-time workers to undercut or cope with the struggles of full-time employees. Managerial literature today increasingly speaks of the advantages of part-timers, including the greater flexibility afforded in work scheduling and in firing workers when they are no longer needed, reduced labor costs because part-timers receive limited health and retirement benefits, and part-timer's supposedly higher rates of productivity. In addition, offering part-time work is said to give employers access to large, new pools of labor, particularly housewives, students, and retired people. There is a factory in the black ghetto of St. Paul, Minnesota, that is staffed entirely by part-timers. The plant, which is owned by Control Data Corporation and which serves as a bindery for computer manuals, has two "mini-shifts": one in the late morning for mothers (including some women forced off welfare) whose children are in school, and another in the late afternoon for students after classes. Such an arrangement fits perfectly into the current capitalist strategy of replacing government payments to the unwaged with closely controlled private sector jobs which do not interfere with the activities of family and school.

Another aspect of both the refusal of full-time, permanent work and the quest by business for greater flexibility in dealing with workers is the growth of temporary jobs. A huge industry has developed--estimated at more than $1.5 billion and involving up to three million (mainly clerical) workers a year--consisting of firms that, in effect, rent workers to employers who need additional "manpower" for a limited period of time. The workers, many of whom are housewives returning to the waged labor force, remain employees of the contracting company although they work in the offices of the client company. They are thus not eligible for the same wage rates and benefits as the permanent employees of the client company, and it is only recently that the contractors have been forced to provide minimal health and retirement benefits for them. The advantages of this arrangement for the contractor (who usually charges the client 50 percent more than what is being paid the worker) and the client are so great that many clients are using "temps" in long-term positions. The result is that more and more supposedly temporary workers are receiving the minimal wages and benefits paid by contractors while doing what amounts to permanent work for the client company.

Yet again, as in the case of part-time work, many people seek out temporary jobs in order to have more flexibility in their own schedules. And although temps can be dismissed from a particular assignment at any time, so also can they quit whenever they like and resume work again elsewhere.

In general, then, what we are seeing is a progressive disintegration of the full-time, permanent job--as a result of both capitalist attempts to better control their workers and worker attempts to better control their lives. The real showdown will come when part-time and temporary workers join with full-timers in demanding reduced labor time without reduced wages and benefits.