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Work to Live or Live to Work? How Work Culture Has Influenced Workers Rights in France and the United States

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**Work to Live or Live to Work? How Work Culture Has
Influenced Workers Rights in France and the United States**

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Abstract

Work culture is something that employees live through but don't often think about. The basis of a work culture is rooted in the societies it is part of, most often associated with the countries where the work is based. There exists a strong relationship between work culture and the rights of workers. Workers rights aid in further emphasizing sentiments regarding work culture through legislation. A culture that places a heavy emphasis on work rather than on personal enjoyment outside of a work environment will have different labor laws than a culture that appreciates the finer things in life by making work a lower priority. This essay will examine the influence that work culture has on workers rights, specifically in France and the United States. Beyond my personal connections and experiences to the two countries, I chose France and the United States because they are both wealthy western countries, but have stark differences in their work cultures. I explored this topic by examining some of the key components regarding work culture and its influence on workers rights— the impact that societal cultures have, the legal components, economic influences, different mentalities associated with working, and the role that protests play. Throughout the essay, it will become clear that there exists a distinction between the two work cultures and that the relationship between the rights workers have and the ways in which they feel and act on it are very different in both countries. A work culture not only sets the tone of whether an employee will enjoy their job but how they will be treated as well. It's important for countries to have solidified labor laws that companies cannot take advantage of so that the workers are protected and are able to perform their jobs, whatever that may be, under fair and correct conditions.

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Introduction

As an employee carries out their tasks and responsibilities associated with their job, they are hardly thinking about their work culture. It's not often on the minds of everyday employees to think about what influences their personal sentiment towards their job, why staying later than normal working hours is considered being a good employee, how come there are certain dress standards expected out of the employees, and so on. Work culture is applicable to an employee with any behavior that is in connection to their job, whether that be in or out of the physical work space. Nonetheless, work culture remains an important part of one's job and how they carry it out. These behaviors leave an impact on how employees of said work culture feel about their jobs, in turn leading to the rights they have as workers – it becomes a circular effect. When an employee is part of a positive work culture, they will have a more positive outlook on their job and will feel more confident to request what they believe to be fair or better working conditions. If the work culture is optimistic and there are multiple employees making the same requests, more often than not a policy change will be made to reflect the requests. On the other hand, a negative work culture can leave an employee having a negative view on their job, often leaving them with a lack of confidence and sense of power in that job. With such a pessimistic feeling towards the job, it is less likely that the employee will have the courage to request better conditions as it is what they are used to and all they believe they can achieve. This cycle, in a less extreme sense, is representative of work cultures in the United States and France. French workers have more confidence in their abilities to make a change in labor related policies since their societal culture makes room for a positive work culture. On the other hand, there exists a rather toxic mentality when it comes to the American work culture of prioritizing work and constantly trying to achieve more.

This essay will look at what goes into these two work cultures that makes them how they are today. Through looking at the history of how key moments in history where work cultures had a shift, it will provide a blueprint on how employees became accustomed to the work cultures in the respective countries. Looking at Karl Marx's theory of alienation will create an understanding of the effects behind the United States' hustle culture and how it isolates an employee from their labor, their humanity, and themselves. The other theoretical concept that will be mentioned in this essay is the idea behind work-life balance, what it means, and how a work life and a personal life can interfere and blur the lines of a balance between the two. Following, the first part of the case studies will be exploring two key concepts that are present in their respective work cultures, hustle culture and joie de vivre. These two concepts provide a strong influence in how employees go about their days. The second portion of the case study focuses more on the legislative aspect of this essay, looking at different labor laws and benefits to understand how they are part of work culture and how they influence workers rights. Furthermore, I will be analyzing three main components that are strongly present in the makeup of today's work cultures. The first being how economic restraints have an effect on work culture, followed by the different work mentalities present in both countries, and finally the recent protests in both France and the United States and the power it holds in their respective work cultures.

Literature Review

To understand French and American work cultures and the influence they have had on workers rights in France and the United States, one has to look at literature explaining not only what work culture is, but the history that led up to work cultures, workers rights, and how that

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created the path for the development of it in modern times. Taking a look at work culture beyond the context of specific American and French work cultures creates an understanding of what exactly work culture is and what it encompasses beyond the specifics of the ones from the two countries. Through scholarly literature, I will provide a basis of context on different work culture definitions, as well as important points in history that have had an important contribution to workers rights. At the end of this literature review, I will be exploring the different theoretical frameworks that will be applied throughout this essay.

What is Work Culture?

Considering the main topic of this essay revolves around work cultures, it's important to understand what exactly a work culture is. Although there is no singular concrete definition, there are some working definitions on what a work culture is. There does not exist a lot of literature that specifically defines work culture, even less so when regarding scholarly literature. For purposes of this essay, I will be looking at relevant definitions and will be creating my own definition based on those. By creating my own definition, it allows me to better clarify what is meant by work culture throughout this essay. The two definitions that I will be focusing on stem from the 2005 California Law Review (Green) and sociologist Michael Burawoy's *Toward a Marxist Theory of the Labor Process: Braverman and Beyond*. In providing the definitions in the following subsections of this literature review, I will as well depict what works and what doesn't from the definitions I have chosen to highlight in this essay.

Definition 1 - California Law Review

The third issue of the 2005 California Law Review (Green) has a piece titled *Work Culture and Discrimination* written by Tristin Green, a Law Professor and Associate Dean for research. Her article discusses the hows and whys of the causation of work culture discrimination. In giving context for the piece, she does not specifically define work culture but rather speaks on what it is. She starts by saying that work culture is “a human process that is both separate from and intimately related to broader organizational structure and requirements” (Green, 630) continuing to add that it “establishes expectations as diverse as styles of interaction and conversation boundaries, modes of dress or other appearances signals, and day-to-day displays of competence” (Green, 632). Green’s attempt at a definition looks more at culture as a whole whilst practically disregarding the work portion of the term. Through broad and general terms and phrases, Green’s depiction of what a work culture is is too baseless and open ended to be seen as a proper definition for the term. In reading this quote, it gave me an understanding of the importance to directly state the work component in the definition so as to not give a definition of just culture.

Definition 2 - Marx, Braverman, and Burawoy

The second literature I pull from to help create my definition is one that encompasses a lot of the same concepts without using the terms “culture” or “work culture.” Sociologist Michael Burawoy looks at the theory of labor process through Karl Marx, famous thinker in the fields of economics, politics, as well as sociology and was the pioneer behind this theory. Burawoy also looks at American political economist and revolutionary Harry Braverman’s

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analysis on Marx's theory of labor of labor process. *Toward a Marxist Theory of the Labor Process: Braverman and Beyond* explains Marx's theory of labor process, which looks at the labor process and its different actors including the physical and mental labor involved and the time spent producing labor. Burawoy explains the way in which Braverman creates a point that the labor process is seen through "weav[ing] both the tendencies of the capitalist labor process and the capitalist social structure" (Burawoy 248). By looking at the labor processes and social structures surrounding the work, we begin to see aspects of what creates a work culture and its different behaviors. The issue with this piece and its lack of ability to be used as a concrete definition for work culture is that, in addition to not mentioning the terms culture or work culture, it limits itself to capitalist societies and workplaces.

My Definition

The definition I have created to fit into the understanding of work culture in both a general sense and in regards to the context of this essay looks at the association of work with the employee both in and out of the workplace while taking an anthropological approach towards it. Work culture is the set of behaviors that are involved with one's job both in and out of the office. These behaviors can include anything so long as there is a connection to the person's job or work in any way. These behaviors can range from a multitude of different things. An example of work culture would be the sentiment employees have towards an upper management or supervisor – is the relationship friendly or stagnant? Is there a clear hierarchy that leaves the other employees feeling insignificant in comparison or does the upper management respect their subordinates and give them opportunities to push boundaries? Beyond this, work culture also implies the relationship between the employee and the work itself. Does the employee bring the work home

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with them or leave it all as is once their shift is done? Will the employee allow their professional life to create a strain on their personal life? Work culture also includes expectations regarding the job and employee. Is the employee expected to come to work dressed a certain way or at a certain time? Is the employee expected to take on responsibilities beyond their job description? There are hundreds of different behaviors that are associated with work culture. This essay will look into some of the important ones that define the work cultures in France and America in relation to workers rights whilst using this definition when using the term *work culture*.

Historical Context

Work culture has existed for as long as the first person to have a job. Whether talked about or not, every part of history has had a work culture and those parts of history not only shaped how work cultures are today but how they influenced the rights that workers have. Two of the biggest historical revolutions that altered and shifted work cultures and workers rights are the industrial revolution, and the process of adopting globalization through deindustrialization. These two had strong impacts on the ways in which corporations were able to play on their increasing production and a worker's necessity of a job to increase their profits. While both periods took advantage of factory employees and their lack of legal rights either at the time or in their respective countries, they both played a role in the development of work cultures as a whole. Looking at the historical context of work culture allows us to understand how they have turned into the ones we know today and what allowed it to do so. If a work culture places little importance on things such as the safety of workers or the value of their work, it allows for their rights to be more flexible and less deserving.

Industrialism

As the industrial revolutions around the world saw a rapid advancement in technology that changed the ways in which things were produced, this changed work cultures as well. The new technologies during this time allowed factories to quickly gain traction and significantly increase their production rate. With production rates at their highest, therefore allowing for a larger profit, the workers did not reap the rewards from these benefits of industrialism like their employers did. As John Rafferty, an Encyclopedia Britannica editor tells us in *The Rise of the Machines: Pros and Cons of the Industrial Revolution*, “When factories sprung up in the cities and industrial towns, their owners prized production and profit over all else. Worker safety and wages were less important” (Rafferty). Once industrialization took over, the work culture changed into becoming a dangerous work environment with little to no regard for the workers themselves, leaving them with hardly any rights as employees of the factories. History.com’s website provides information on the Industrial Revolution, citing that while workers had to work long hours with low pay (History.com Editors), this became an accepted norm for a while as factory jobs were the only ones that were accessible to most lower and middle class families, creating a work culture that took advantage of the necessity for a job to force employees to work tiring hours in order to be able to make ends meet with a low wage.

Globalization and deindustrialization

The act of globalization has taken over the world in a similar way that industrialization did in its respective time period. Globalization as a general term is “used to describe how trade and technology have made the world into a more connected and interdependent place” (National Geographic Society). National Geographic Society provides information on their website

regarding the topics which they title *Globalization and Effects of Economic Globalization*. Through these we can get a better understanding of the role globalization has had in the historical context of work culture and workers rights. When looking at the impact that globalization has had on labor and manufacturing, the aspect that's being observed is the ways in which globalization has moved many factories from Western countries to underdeveloped countries or those with less human rights that would allow for the companies to pay less for production (National Geographic Society). This type of economic globalization and deindustrialization takes away jobs from more developed and wealthier countries, thus lowering the employment rate, and giving it to underdeveloped and poorer countries, thus adding to their economy (Russo and Lee Linkon). John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon explain the economic impacts that deindustrialization has in their paper titled *The Social Costs Of Deindustrialization*, explaining not only what impact it has on the economy but also how "unemployment brings reduced standards of living" (Russo and Lee Linkon). The poorer countries are used to a much lower wage than what the factory owners or contractors would be paying for the same production rate in the more developed country. In turn, as the factories turn to these more profitable options, they are not only paying the workers less but are also held to a lower standard of responsibility when it comes to the rights of these underpaid workers, creating sweatshops, as explained in the Constitutional Rights Foundation's website page of *BRIA 17 2 c Globalization and Worker Rights*. By removing the factories and taking away hundreds of jobs to have them be sent overseas, it undermines the value of the job and the relationship between the employee and their work (Russo and Lee Linkon), creating a more negative work culture for the employee. The process of deindustrialization and economic globalization does much more harm than good as

the only real benefactors are the corporations who are increasing their profits at the expense of poorly treated workers desperate for a job.

Theoretical Concepts

When looking at work culture and the influence it has on the rights of workers, there are different theoretical concepts and perspectives that could be applied to give meaning to the various discussions throughout this essay. I will be looking at Karl Marx's theory of alienation to explain the relationship between an employee and their work while also bringing two work-life balance theories to provide a blueprint as to the effects that poor work culture or a lack of proper workers rights can have.

Theory of Alienation

Karl Marx, a famous thinker in the fields of economics, politics, and sociology, created his theory of alienation in his book titled *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Purdue College of Liberal Arts states that Marx's definition of alienation is "the process whereby the worker is made to feel foreign to the products of his/her own labor" (Purdue College of Liberal Arts). It is important to remember that alienation in the context of this theory has a strong emphasis on the product of one's labor. This theory is based on the working conditions experienced through capitalist societies but can be applied to a broader system of work cultures as well. Since it is a complex text, author and professor Asher Horowitz has created a simplified version of the theory. In this theory, Marx looks at how labor creates alienation, stating that the four aspects of this are "alienation from the product of labour..., alienation from the activity of labour..., alienation from one's own specific humanity..., alienation from others, from society"

(Horowitz). The first two alienations have more to do with the physical elements of the labor; the product of labor refers to the results from the work and the activity of labor refers to the actions taken to produce said results. Whereas alienation from one's own specific humanity has to do with how the worker has to do with the worker mentally detaching from themselves and alienation from others or from society refers to the worker creating an isolation between themselves and from those around them. Through Marx's theory, a worker in a capitalist society, or a toxic work culture in the context of this essay, can not have a relationship with their work, either in the sense of what they produce or the act itself, nor can the worker have a connection or sense of belonging with themselves or society.

Work-Life Balance Theories

When discussing work cultures, it's important to look at the work-life balance that exists in the different cultures. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development developed an employee well being report that shows that nearly half of employees feel that their life is rarely in balance between work and personal life (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). The different work-life balance theories aid in the comprehension behind the work cultures and how they have influenced rights created for workers. A review article written by Fatima Khateeb titled *Work Life Balance- A Review of Theories, Definitions and Policies* defines work-life balance as "the achievement of fulfilling experiences in the different aspects of life that require various resources, like energy, time and commitment and these resources are spread across all the domains" (Khateeb, 28). For a well suited work-life balance, both the "work" and the "life" portions have to create a realistic possibility for a balance to exist. Looking at two different work-life balance theories outlined in Khateeb's article as well as Noah Shaw's

Study Examines 7 Theories that Help Us Better Understand Work-Life Balance, I will further demonstrate the importance of work culture in a work-life balance and how it may cause an imbalance through these theories. The first theory is the boundary theory. Boundary theory focuses on the separations created between the work life and the home life (Khateeb; Shaw). These separations are what allow for the balance, so long as the boundaries are kept and respected. In creating the separation of the two, it allows for a clear and uninterrupted work-life balance. When there exists a work culture that blurs the line of separation between the two, there can not exist a balance between work life and home life. A work culture that allows work life to interfere with designated home life time breaks these boundaries, whereas a work culture that doesn't allow this will make it a rarity or taboo to blur and break down the boundaries. The second work-life balance theory to be examined is the spillover theory. Spillover theory looks at the intertwinedness of one's work life and homelife by looking at how parts of the work life can have an effect on the home life and vice versa (Khateeb; Shaw). An example of this would be if Person A received a bad evaluation in the morning at work, resulting in frustration and later, once coming home that same night, still felt frustration for no reason other than the bad evaluation from that morning. Spillover theory says that this is the "spillover," work spilling its emotions, behaviors, or attitudes into personal life. The same can be said for the inverse – a sad morning resulting in a sad day at work. Spillover theory does not necessarily have to be in a negative light as it can be positive as well with effects of happiness, laughter, etc. Through this understanding, a negative or toxic work culture can result in a spillover of negative feelings with the home life portion of the balance. This can also work well with boundary theory, as these spillovers can also be a result of a lack of boundaries between work life and home life.

Case Study

When looking at work cultures and workers rights in specific contexts, we can better understand how they are shaped and formed. There exists a large difference between the work cultures in the United States and in France. These differences have as well influenced the ways in which the respective legislation goes about creating laws regarding workers rights. These two countries that are both progressive and international powers, hold very different values in regard to the behaviors of those that partake in their work cultures. Looking at this through a more general cultural and legal context will provide a basis for understanding why the two have such different work cultures and worker's rights. When evaluating the role that French and American culture has played in the shaping of work lives and specific labor laws and benefits in both countries, it becomes apparent why the two work cultures are so different from one another.

Culture's Role

It is evident that there are differences between American and French culture, but identifying and understanding these differences allow for clarity when discussing the impact they have and role they play in the work lives and environments. A large aspect of French culture is the idea of *joie de vivre* or joy of living, meaning that one tries to enjoy life and all it has to offer. This ideology flows into French work culture through different aspects such as vacation time and day breaks for example. Although this does not call for assumption that American culture obstructs enjoying life, it does however place a heavier emphasis on one's job and status which can in turn lead to longer working hours and feeding into hustle culture. The American work culture has more of a mentality that places work as a higher priority. In these ways, culture plays a direct role in the behaviors that are identified as part of work culture.

Hustle Culture In The United States

Although many definitions exist for the meaning of “hustle culture,” they are relatively the same, which is the constant dedication to one's work or job. This dedication unfortunately comes at the expense of self care and/or the person’s mental health. What results from hustle culture is a “narrative [that] promotes the idea that there's always more to strive for: more money to make, a bigger title or promotion to secure and a higher ceiling to smash” (Carnegie). Hustle culture has been prevalent in the United States for decades, making it a part of American work culture, and has allowed for a busy schedule to become a ruling mindset.

There exists this idea that one is only successful if they are busy. By taking part in long hours, the worker is in demand, showing their dedication, and making use of the worker’s time. In the journal article *Conspicuous Consumption of Time: When Busyness and Lack of Leisure Time Become a Status Symbol*, authors Silvia Bellezza, Neeru Paharia, and Anat Keinan conducted numerous studies in order to explain the association between a worker’s busyness and the perception of a high status as a result of. The article defines busyness as “long hours of remunerated employment and lack of leisure time” (Bellezza et al., 119). Through this definition, the article goes to explain that this view of one’s busyness plays a role in the way that they are perceived. The desire to constantly want to be busy in order to be perceived in a higher status is part of what drives hustle culture. The hustle is time consuming and therefore rewarding in the eyes of American work culture. The more time that an employee puts into work, the more alienated they will feel per Marx’s theory of alienation. By following hustle culture and putting in more labor, the alienation one will experience will grow even more.

This desire for busyness can also be seen through a Gallup article written based off their 2014 poll. This poll indicates that the American standard of a 40 hour work week is actually a low number compared to the true average amount of hours worked per week by full time employees, which Gallup states as 47 hours. Gallup's Director of U.S. Social Research Lydia Saad looks at the data collected and breaks down the different results, ranging from "only 8% of full-time employees claim to work less than 40 hours" to "a full 25% saying they put in at least 60 hours per week" (Saad). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as well show the extreme hours worked by employees through their employee well being report. The report shows that an overwhelming 68% work more than 40 hours per week, with 40% working 50 or more (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). It is not uncommon for Americans to work longer than their dedicated time or to take work home, leaving them working longer hours and seeming busy, interfering with the possibility for a proper work-life balance. Hustle culture breaks the boundaries that separate work life and home life by putting much more daily time into work life, therefore having it interfere with what is supposed to be home life because of the blurred boundaries between the two.

Joie de Vivre

In English, we have a saying that is taken from the French language and culture, which is *joie de vivre*, or joy of living. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines *joie de vivre* as "a feeling of great happiness and enjoyment of life" (Cambridge Dictionary). The French cultural idea behind *joie de vivre*, is to not let life pass by but to take in the moments and not waste time that could be used for enjoyment. This mindset is present in French work culture as well. There exists a French stereotype for not being hard workers and constantly taking breaks (BBC

Author). Although the latter is true, it does not mean that the French are not hard workers, they simply adapt their *joie de vivre* mindset to their work cultures. This means as well that they create a separation between their lives in the workplace and outside of it. Creating this boundary of separation allows for the stresses of work to stay there and to have a completely separate life from outside the office and avoid spillover.

The thought of having one's work life and home life separate from one another is an important characteristic to French culture, both in the general sense but for the French work culture as well. It can be seen as a sort of taboo to discuss work at a social event or vice versa, by asking personal questions at work. As Ruth Vargas discusses the different French business etiquettes in her article, she mentions the frowned upon manner of discussing work in social events, even if it may be a work event. "Unless your company specifies this is a work meeting, the French dislike talking about work during meals. Dinner is considered a social event" (Vargas). The separation of work and personal life is very important to French culture, as discussing work, something that may induce stress, during personal time, a time that is supposed to be relaxing, interferes with the *joie de vivre*.

Welcome 2 France, a website that helps provide information and service to those that are looking to move to France, has a section that delves into the French work culture and its different parts. Within this, there are two subsections that briefly describe this separation that exists between the two lives, saying that "it's relatively uncommon for employees to talk about personal lives and such during working hours" and warns readers to "expect that many French workers lead different lives outside of work" (Welcome 2 France). The French work environment is not as open and friendly as an American one. Not to say that co-workers don't talk to each other, but there isn't the "watercooler conversations" that exist in American work culture. By leaving the

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work at the office and the personal at home, one is able to keep those two completely separate and not face boundary issues by combining the two or allowing one to spill over into the other.

Legal Aspect

While having cultural implications, there exists legal context as well surrounding the work cultures in France and the United States. The two countries have different laws for different aspects regarding work culture and workers rights. Through observing the differences in the laws for the respective countries, one can understand how work culture has an influence on the laws and rights granted to workers.

Labor Laws

Labor laws exist to protect workers and their rights. In the two countries, the United States and France, the labor laws that exist are quite different, and in some ways are similar to the cultural traits associated with work life. The labor laws in France bring in the *joie de vivre* cultural element previously discussed. Labor laws in France make it so that employers do not interfere with an employee's work life balance and personal time that should be dedicated during the day. However, in the United States, the labor laws are a little more loose and these protections come more through unions instead.

As a member country of the European Union, France already has a basis of labor laws that they need to abide by. Although having to adopt these laws, French labor laws have always been fair and just to employees. Different aspects become a part of these laws such as the amount of maximum hours an employee may work in a day and/or week and their breaks. The global employment website Boundless has a guide to the French laws regarding working hours. These

working laws span from break times to the maximum amount of hours a worker is allowed to put in. Boundless explains that “French law is very strict with limiting employee's working hours” and that “employees cannot work more than 10 hours a day, 44 hours a week (on average of 12 weeks), unless specified on the collective agreement.” These laws were made to ensure that no employee is overworked, that they are able to have a decent rest period, and are able to enjoy a life outside of work as well. If an employee is to exceed these hours then they are entitled to overtime pay, which must be 110% of the employee’s regular pay (Boundless). If there is no overtime agreement set in place in the employee’s contract or agreed upon between the employer and employee beforehand, then “overtime pay should be 125% of the regular pay for the first eight hours and 150% thereafter” (Boundless). This ensures their compensation if they are to work overtime. The rights that are given to employees regarding breaks not only include regular breaks but as well daily rest and consecutive hours of rest in a week. A French employee is entitled to “twenty minutes rest break if they work more than six hours, at least 11 hours of rest daily, minimum weekly rest of 35 consecutive hours” (Boundless). Through these legally required breaks, it allows employees the same rights and enjoyment that they receive from the maximum hours laws. These laws reflect the *joie de vivre* aspect of culture to be part of French work culture by requiring ample time for rest outside of work.

American labor laws have different legislative bodies that play a role; federal, state, and local. The federal laws set a basis that the state and local governments must abide by, similar to France’s basis from the European Union. State and local governments are allowed to add their own provisions to their labor laws as long as it doesn't break the federal labor laws. Federal labor laws are a lot more vague and don't have that much substance to them, giving more leeway and freedom to the states to determine things such as whether or not to add mandatory break times

and/or maximum work times. According to the Department of Labor, the Fair Labor Standards Act, an important act for federal labor laws and rights, “does not limit the number of hours per day or per week that employees aged 16 years and older can be required to work.” Although states may add hour limits, federal law does not require them to. The same applies for break times, as the Department of Labor also states that “federal law does not require lunch or coffee breaks.” These aspects of a job, although often provided by an employer, are not legally required through federal laws, meaning that a state can choose to not require employers to provide their employees with a lunch break and a weekly hour cap.

Provided Benefits

France is famous for its healthcare system, whereas the United States is infamous for its healthcare system. This is one of the benefits that are taken into account when discussing benefits, whether they be government provided or part of an employee’s contract. Among these also include retirement benefits. The ways in which a citizen or employee comes about these benefits differ for the two countries as the two have different laws and expectations.

In America, the benefits that an employee may look forward to are part of their contract. Different acts and agencies have insured for certain benefits to be provided, such as the Affordable Care Act in regards to healthcare and Social Security Administration in regards to a retirement plan. However, there are still some standards that need to be met by either the employer or employee in order to benefit from these. Although providing these limited and vague laws, businesses, for the most part, have a lot of flexibility on what they offer a soon to be employee in their contract for their benefits. According to USA Fact’s 2018 analysis of a US Census Bureau’s data on coverage type shows that for people under 65 years of age, 60.7% are

covered by employer provided health insurance whereas only 22.8% are covered by public insurance. Most full time employees are offered medical insurance, but a retirement plan (Social Security and sometimes a 401K plan) can also be included. The government has somewhat more of a presence when it comes to retirement however. The Social Security Administration provides “a monthly check that replaces part of your income when you reduce your hours or stop working altogether.” This amount may not be enough for some to live off during retirement, so many rely on 401Ks, a form of retirement planning that is set up through their jobs. By tying these benefits, some of which are essential to one's life, to a job, it places a heavier emphasis and pressure on the employee to work hard and keep their job.

The benefit market in France is quite different, as France is known for its universal healthcare system and most recently for its pension reform. Most benefits are provided by the government or there exists laws that employers must provide other benefits. As previously mentioned, France has a universal healthcare system, meaning that there is no reliance on a job in order to have healthcare as the country provides “universal coverage for its residents,” as the Euro Health Observatory explains. Jobs can provide “mutuals” which are additions to the universal healthcare system, which are a nice addition but not necessary since the public health insurance “finances 83% of total health expenditure” (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies). There also exists retirement benefits for all French citizens that they are entitled to once they turn 64 years old. Although there are requirements that exist with being able to benefit from this, most French citizens are able to enjoy retirement off their government pension (CLEISS). Although French citizens do pay higher taxes, it does come back to them in the form of universal healthcare and a decent government pension.

Analysis

The culture of work and the ways it impacts the rights of workers go hand in hand. In this section, I will go more in-depth into those correlations as well as the slim similarities and vast differences between France and the United States regarding work culture and workers' rights. The two countries are wealthy and powerful nations with advanced economies, yet the value of work holds two different lights between the two. Interestingly, the United States holds more political and economic power yet has a lower standard of work in comparison to France. In every country, there exists pressure concerning jobs, but in the United States that pressure is heightened. There exists a reliance on having and keeping a job in regards to needing a salary and benefits that are tied to said job, such as health insurance or retirement programs (Handshake). In the United States, as compared to France, this reliance is stronger and therefore adds a burden to employees that in turn can easily lead to a sense of coercion and pessimism surrounding the job and the larger work culture. The outlook that an employee has on their work influences their job performance. Societal cultures can have a significant impact on how employees view, experience, and prioritize their jobs and whether they work in a positive versus negative work culture. In addition to analyzing the differences between French and U.S. work cultures and associated rights, I will discuss protests in the United States and in France, since both countries recently saw a rise in labor protests these past 2 years.

Added Pressure

Beyond social behaviors, there exists economic aspects to a work culture as well. Depending on the country, these aspects may be overlooked or seen as miniscule, whereas for

other countries these factors may be a deciding factor in whether or not to sign an employment contract. The differences between France and the United States in this regard lie mainly in the costs of university, healthcare, and living expenses, like housing. In the United States, the cost of tuition for colleges and universities, no matter the degree, can cost students tens of thousands of dollars per year. Although there exists ways to help lower the cost, it does not deter more than half of students graduating with a bachelor's degree to endure student loans (College Board), putting pressure on them once they are out of college to look for a higher-paying job in order to pay the loans off (Handshake). Looking beyond the pressures of student debt, the United States remains an expensive country. From everyday needs to an annual checkup, prices go up as wages do not (Furman and Powell), leaving employees or incoming workers prioritizing salary over other characteristics of a job opportunity (Ipsos) knowing they have costly expenses to endure. By having to pick a job where the salary is sufficient to be able to afford the cost of living and relying on one's job for benefits, it adds enormous pressure to the employee to make sure they keep their job.

Money on the Mind

When the cost of living is high and keeps rising, it is only natural for people to look for a larger sum of money. The rising costs of basic necessities in the United States has recent graduates turning to the higher paying job rather than the one they desire more once money is taken out of the equation in order to feel financially safe (Handshake). What puts financial pressure on new adults in the United States is having student debt, the impending medical bills, and the overall cost of living not equalling to the minimum wage. With 70% of college students experiencing financial stress (Grabmeier), it's natural for a recent graduate to turn to a higher

salary, but this forced choice can have a negative impact on the employee through job satisfaction, in turn leading to a poor work culture.

University life is seen as the last stepping stone before fully entering adulthood and the workforce. Unfortunately, many American students enter the workforce already in debt and having to start paying it off almost immediately. The College Board Higher Education Trend Report for 2022 explains that “Among 2020-21 bachelor’s degree recipients from public and private nonprofit four-year institutions, 54% graduated with debt and the average debt among borrowers was \$29,100” (College Board). More than half of graduates leave university with a diploma and accumulating debt. This financial burden that recent graduates know they will have to endure for multiple years puts an immense amount of pressure on the job they will choose out of college. “Graduates with debt are more likely to take substantially higher-paying positions and are less likely to choose lower-paying public interest roles” (Odumosu). Once the recent graduates step out into the world, not only are they faced with new challenges and dues, but have to pay off their education as well. When faced with economic uncertainties, it’s normal to become a little money hungry. The overwhelming weight of student debt makes recent graduates feel forced in their choice of employment choices knowing that they have fees to pay off.

Another large economic hardship that not only college graduates face but all Americans are medical bills. The United States is infamous for its lack of a universal healthcare system and extremely high prices when it comes to healthcare. Part of the reason for such high healthcare related prices has to do with the organizations that are controlling the behind the scenes of it – private equity firms. Private equity firms such as Blackstone, KKR, and Apollo Global Management own different healthcare companies including TeamHealth, Envision Healthcare, and RCCH Healthcare Partners respectively (Gautney 144). Private equity has a large stake in

American healthcare, giving them the ability to raise the prices they charge for medical services, regardless of whether or not the patient has health insurance and/or is covered. Health insurance will require the insurer to pay a certain amount per year before they start to cover expenses (a deductible) and will only cover part of the expenses, leaving those insured to still have a bill to pay. In the United States, healthcare is a highly profitable industry, in which substantial net worths are made on the backs of patients and everyday Americans, many of whom are being price-gouged for even the basic necessities. Whether it is the price of medication or a trip to the emergency room, any medical or health costs leave Americans with a lot of medical debt. Despite having employer based health insurance, 61% of Americans still find themselves unable to pay for their health bills (Winters). Considering that there exists large medical debt with insurance, the costs for someone without health insurance in the United States becomes even worse. This leaves employees worried about keeping their job not only to keep their healthcare but to be able to pay any medical bills as well.

Inflation has hit Americans hard, with rising prices in every industry making it harder to access everyday necessities. Unfortunately, the minimum or average wages have not kept up with the cost of living in the United States for decades. “The federal minimum wage, which was last raised in 2009, stands at \$7.25 an hour. When adjusted for inflation, the federal minimum wage last summer reached its lowest level since 1956” (Zahn). As the cost of living continues to go up, the minimum wage has been extremely stagnant. Costs of living and minimum wages differ from state to state and city to city, but even the city in the United States with the highest minimum wage does not leave residents with that pay to be able to live comfortably from it (MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning). The current gap between the average living wage and federal minimum wage stands at \$17.77 (MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning), a

large amount to have to make up for. The rising cost of living leaves employees feeling pressured to keep their jobs, reverting back to the sentiment of a forced job choice in order to be economically safe and be able to afford to live.

Work Mentalities

Work cultures have an influence on work mentalities. The ways in which an employee or a group of employees think and feel about their job is a result of different behaviors within work culture (e.g. the work environment/atmosphere, relationships with coworkers, treatment from higher-ups) and further enforces those behaviors, whether they be positive or negative. This part of work culture is more closely associated with the role that culture plays in shaping work cultures. The mentality of an employee as a result of the work environment that they are put in further enforces the behaviors that are put onto them, a receive and put out cycle. In this section, I will be further analyzing culture's role in work cultures and the mentalities it creates. Looking further into the toxicity of hustle culture in the United States and the freer *joie de vivre* in France will further the understanding of how the two create opposing mentalities where one lives to work while the other works to live.

Live to Work

The phrase "live to work" refers to those who create an understanding that their whole lives need to revolve around their work. They are alive just to work, putting a heavy emphasis on their jobs and less time towards their personal lives outside of work. We see this as evident through hustle culture in the United States. The mentality of having to be the first one in and last one out, needing to go above and beyond at work just to be recognized, and having to work

multiple jobs to make as much income as possible. This toxic mindset reflects Marx's theory of alienation (Marx) and how through constant work and making it a priority in one's life, the employee becomes alienated from society and their touch on humanity. Once they've reached this point, they can no longer enjoy life outside of work as it is now a part of their whole lives and not just their work lives.

When being accustomed to a "live to work" mentality, it often has the employee feeling like they are a prisoner to their job. Corporations who encourage a "live to work" mentality often treat their employees in a less humane way, knowing that they can. Once an employee is under the impression that they need to put in maximum time and effort into their jobs in order to keep it, they become vulnerable to those higher in the hierarchy taking advantage of that. "Studies have shown that many workplaces intentionally stoke fears of job loss in an attempt to motivate workers and reduce costs, since job insecure workers may be less likely to demand raises and other benefits" (Shoss et al.). These workplaces are able to create a fearful work environment because they know how much importance and value the employees put on their jobs rather than themselves. Companies are money-hungry and will try to turn a profit any way they can, oftentimes by exploiting their employees.

A common example of hustle culture is overtime. The mentality of placing such a high importance on work and low importance on personal life means that there no longer exists a healthy work-life balance, allowing for work time to intrude on the hours outside of one's job which is the "life" portion of the balance – what is considered personal time. Once again, this habit refers back to Marx's theory of alienation. A worker already putting in a normal amount of hours may feel isolation and alienation, but by putting in overtime hours it strengthens that feeling and pushes further the ability to break from it. "North American workers now put in an

average of nine hours of unpaid overtime every week” (Hanauer). These overtime hours not only go beyond regular working hours but are illegal as they are unpaid, making it free labor. Nine hours of additional labor is nine hours away from the employee’s personal life. When those nine hours are applied to the standard 40 hour work week, that means that the employee is spending at least 9 hours more per week working. The only reward to working these long hours is the pay (Hewlett and Buck Luce), yet these employees aren’t even receiving it. A sector of workers that is overworked and underpaid are domestic workers. Senior advisor in the General Assembly of the United Nations Tala Dowlatshahi defines domestic workers as “a person employed for remuneration in cash or in-kind in any household, on a permanent or temporary basis. Tasks to be performed include cooking, cleaning, child care and general maintenance around the home, depending on the country” (Dowlatshahi), further explaining the vulnerability of these workers as they are often migrant workers with no labor protections. Nonetheless, these migrant workers find themselves working anywhere from 8 to 18 hours in a single day (Dowlatshahi) performing physically demanding tasks for a small pay and oftentimes no benefits. In addition to overtime hours, employees also shorten their personal time through taking on a second or third job. Whether it’s to ensure job security if one fails or to have an extra source of income, “an estimated 44 million full-time employees have adopted side-hustles alongside their full-time jobs” (Sessions et al. 1379). This idea of having a side-hustle is one that has become normalized. Although some do take on a second or third job in order to be able to receive a living wage, some see it as an opportunity to make money on the side, keep working, or keep themselves busy. They continue to live in order to work, as they feel is one of their purposes in life.

Work to Live

On the other hand, the phrase “work to live” refers to people who work in order to be able to afford to enjoy life. These people work to live as they dedicate less time to their job and more time to their personal lives beyond work, a sentiment that is hardly seen in the United States, but rather is more present in French work culture. There exists less the mindset of having to work continuously and more one of enjoying life, a common European mentality. In not putting as much pressure into one’s job, it results in less stress both in and out of the office. In addition to it being part of the culture, French legislation is on the side of work to live as well. The government currently has a law that held that employees were not required to check or answer any emails outside of working hours and could not be penalized for it (BBC). Beyond the regular working day, the French enjoyment is also evident through the 5 week paid time off minimum that is also part of French legislation. The laws in place, influenced by the culture, allows employees to truly have a work life balance and be able to enjoy their lives beyond the premises of work.

The *droit à la déconnexion* or right to disconnect law disallows companies to make employees respond to any communication outside of their working hours. Companies with more than 50 employees are required to establish policies that provide regulation on communication after the work day is over. This law saw great support as it passed legislation in 2017. “Supporters of the new law say that employees who are expected to check and reply to their work emails out of hours are not being paid fairly for their overtime, and that the practice carries a risk of stress, burnout, sleep problems and relationship difficulties” (BBC). This law allows for a prioritization of mental health and a healthy work life balance while protecting employees from having to work outside of the office, having their work seep into their personal time. The concept

behind this law was developed a few years before the law was formally put into effect when the *Cour de cassation*, the highest legal court in France, ruled that an employee's termination over not responding to work related calls past business hours was invalid (Gonzalez). A few years later, as the modernization of technology was increasingly being used as an entryway to accessibility outside of the office and outside of working hours, French legislation stepped in. Enacting this law is one more step that the French government has taken to further ensure that its citizens are able to enjoy their lives beyond work.

French work culture is one that may be seen as lazy, but actually just puts a heavier emphasis on things that are looked at as a smaller aspect in other work cultures. Looking past the *droit à la déconnexion*, France has a shorter work week than the one that Americans are used to by having a 35 hour work week since the year 2000 (Ledsom). This legislation, which may possibly be revisited to introduce the possibility of a 32 hour week (Ledsom) is another example of how the French government reinforces French culture of enjoyment of life by making laws to reflect a healthy work life balance. As Chara Scroope explains when discussing French business culture, "hard work is admired, but generally the French frown upon workaholism" (Scroope). There exists a difference between working and overworking, a difference that's important to French culture. French people are not against working, but do not share the mentality of having it be the highest priority and making numerous sacrifices for one's job.

Working to be able to vacation is a prime example of the work to live mentality. Vacation is seen as something that is truly enjoyable and one of the most relaxing and rewarding parts of life. France is one of the many countries that has a paid time off system where you gain paid leave days as you work. France's Ministry of Economy provides legislation on the basis of how much paid time off employers are required to provide. "A full-time or part-time employee,

having worked for the same employer for a time equivalent to a minimum of one month of actual work, is entitled to paid leave of two and a half working days per month of work, therefore 30 days working days (five weeks) for a full year of work”¹ (Ministère de l'Économie). These five weeks are most often taken in August throughout France but can be taken at any point in the year, pending approval of the request. In putting legal requirements of at least 5 weeks of vacation, French employees are able to reap the rewards of their work during the year and relax from it. It allows them to feel that their work is going towards something beneficial for them and allows them to escape the work culture for a bit.

Protests All Around

From Occupy Wall Street in the United States to the Yellow Vests in France, both countries allow for and have a history of their citizens freely protesting. Although labor protesting is a common practice in France, it becomes a bit more complicated when looking at it through the lens of the United States. French workers often hold labor related protests and strikes leading to disruptions to the transportation systems, parts of retail companies, and other industries (Nugent). American strikes don't often have as much of a disruption nor of an impact as French ones do. Political analyst Eddy Fougier and political history professor Gerd-Rainer Horn state that a large reason for the difference in striking culture in the United States has to do with the political systems. The two party system in the United States creates a limitation on the amount of influence protests can have, in turn making it difficult for any policy changes to occur (Nugent). The role of unions in the United States also has an impact on the ways in which reform

¹ Translation of: *Le salarié à temps plein ou à temps partiel, ayant travaillé chez le même employeur pendant un temps équivalent à un minimum d'un mois de travail effectif, a droit à un congé de deux jours et demi ouvrables par mois de travail, soit 30 jours ouvrables (cinq semaines) pour une année complète de travail.* (Ministère de l'Économie)

Work to live or live to work? How work culture has influenced workers rights in France and the United States can come about, therefore having an influence on the view of the necessity of a labor protest. Although seeing a recent rise in labor protests in the United States, it is not a norm as it is in France. This societal sentiment surrounding protests and strikes becomes an important part of work culture and a clear example of how work culture has an influence on workers rights.

Norm of French Protests

Protesting in France is a very common action (Nugent). Labor protests and strikes in France occur often and, depending on the size of participation, can become extremely disruptive to aspects of everyday life that will be further explored in this section. Although I will be focusing on a specific recent movement, strikes in France in this century alone have resulted in over 300 lost work days (Yanatma). The movement that took the storm of the first half of 2023 stems from the introduction of legislation that has since been passed regarding pension reform in France (The Associated Press). This legislation sparked enormous reaction from French civilians who protested for months on end.

A proposal to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 was introduced to the National Assembly in February 2023 by French president Emmanuel Macron (Horobin and Adghirni). Having already mentioned pension reform in the past, “Macron was first elected in 2017 on a promise to make France's economy more competitive, including by making people work longer” (The Associated Press). This rise in retirement age is a result of a lack of pension funding as more of the French population becomes eligible for retirement benefits from the French government. The way in which the French pension system is set up is through employee taxes, meaning that when “French people spend less time working, and more time in retirement” (Horobin and Adghirni) the funds available for those in retirement become limited. Not wanting

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to find themselves without a pension while also not wanting the retirement age to increase, French workers have argued for a greater tax on its wealthier citizens or employers instead which is a proposition that has not been accepted as a replacement for the age increase (The Associated Press).

In the first few months of 2023 pension reform strikes were quickly rising, with March seeing more than 1.2 million protesters in a single day (Chrisafis). Nationwide calls for strikes led to multiple days of disruption to “French refinery deliveries, public transport and schools” (Tessier). These disruptions sporadically lasted from the beginning of January until mid May after the law had already been passed in April. Both local and regional trains and flights were being canceled and stores were closed so that the employees could take part in demonstrations. Seeing that the demonstrations were having such an influence on the general population but not on the politicians who were actually in charge of making this change, the protests in Paris escalated. Headlines surrounding “Paris is burning” took over news media outlets as protesters began to set fires around Paris, the country’s capital (Pineau and Foroudi). The rise in this kind of protest continued for a few weeks until the police stepped in due to the violence and the demonstrations began to lower in numbers. Nonetheless, there remained national days of protests that continued to take the streets, even after the law was signed (PBS Politics). Although bringing international attention, these strikes were not successful in their end goal of preventing the rise of the retirement age. This law and the strikes that came from it reminded the world of France’s nature to protest.

America's Rare Rise in Strikes

American employees find themselves in a different position when it comes to protesting. The act of protesting or striking is not nearly as common in the United States as it is in France, however, this past year saw its possibility through one of the biggest unionized labor protest movements in American history (Bronfenbrenner). Unions in the United States play a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights, negotiating fair wages and working conditions. Across different industries, labor unions were especially strong this year in showing up in large numbers and fighting for better conditions (Bronfenbrenner). Among these conditions, the majority were fighting for higher wages, better benefits, and assured protections from AI's rapid advancement into different job sectors.

In order to understand the United States' "year of the strike" (Bronfenbrenner) and why it took so long to get to that point, we must look at what has been stopping workers in the past. The reasons provided as to why strike culture in the past have to do with the lack of faith in seeing a real change being made. As mentioned before, the United States' two party system causes more difficulty for politician support as these protests are occurring. Eddy Fougier and Gerd-Rainer explain that politicians are not willing to risk their seats in office by giving support to a strike and possibly losing votes due to either their party's views or how the strikers may behave (e.g. inciting violence) (Nugent). Considering that these politicians are the ones who have an impact on policy changes, it becomes discouraging when there are hardly any that are publicly showing their support for any legislative action to help empower workers. Whether an employee is part of a union or not, they still have the right to strike under the law in a general sense, but there are aspects to be considered as to whether a strike is lawful or not such as the purpose and timing of it (National Labor Relations Board). Nonetheless, companies have found ways to go around their

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employees' right to strike. The Fear at Work report conducted by the Economic Policy Institute goes further into the intimidation that goes behind efforts to prevent employees from unionizing, as well as the sense of dictatorship that is involved in creating such an atmosphere (Lafer and Loustaunau). By instilling fear as far as the possibility of termination for voting to unionize, employers add an overwhelming sense of power over their employees, leaving them without a voice to speak for themselves. Employees who do belong to a union, which is only 11.3% of workers in the United States (Bureau of Labor), have a voice who speaks for them. Union leaders are tasked with negotiating contracts with employers to ensure fair conditions for workers. The employers are often not willing to agree to most of the demands. At this point, depending on factors such as current political climate or economic situations, the union leaders will either settle for much less than they were hoping to get or will go on strike (Shonk). This year, we saw a lot more of the action of going to strike or simply threatening to do so, putting the power back in the hands of the unions.

This wave of strikes began to truly pick up in the summer, when the Writer's Guild of America, Hollywood's writers union, was already a few weeks into their strike and Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), Hollywood's actors union, joined as well, with more unions soon to follow (WSJ Staff). Among these strikes were union employees from General Motors, Ford Motor, and Chrysler parent Stellantis under the United Auto Workers, the two above-mentioned Hollywood unions (WSJ Staff), and Starbucks employees part of Starbucks Workers United (Isidore and Wiener-Bronner). There were also unions who did not strike, but by threatening one were able to negotiate a better contract. These unions included pilots working for Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and American Airlines under the Air Line Pilots Association unions and the Allied Pilots

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Association, UPS workers from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters union, and casino workers in Las Vegas part of the The Culinary and Bartenders unions (WSJ Staff). In addition to these larger strikes, smaller yet still significant strikes were happening across the nation, including hospitality employees, healthcare workers and teachers at every educational level. With over 20 major workday stoppages, 2023 saw 492,000 strikers in the streets as of the end of October (Bronfenbrenner). Most protests saw good results by having salary increases and protections in their new contracts. Unfortunately, some of the strikes were unsuccessful “because they didn’t have enough density in the firm or leverage against the company” (Bronfenbrenner). Still, the extreme numbers of strikes and positive contract changes restore faith in American employees by displaying the possibility to protest and see results, as well as leaving employers feeling pressured to follow suit in the contract changes had by the companies that experienced strikes (Bronfenbrenner).

Conclusion

The concept of work culture is one that holds many different parts. One cannot simply look at an office space and say that that is work culture. Going back to the definition I developed for this essay, work culture happens both in and out of the workplace. It has influences from all around the workplace, the organizational structure of it, cultural values, economic makeup, legislation and policies, and much more. Though the work cultures between France and the United States are different, they did not appear out of thin air. These work cultures are a product of the country’s history and culture. Work culture is not something that an employee needs to constantly have on their mind, but it is important to understand why it is how it is and how it came to be, especially as it is an ever changing thing.

As technology continues to advance, we see the rising threat of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workforce (Talmage). This can have negative effects on work culture as many employees fear for their jobs, as we see through the recent strikes of the unions in the United States where one of their demands for certain unions were protections for their jobs from AI (WSJ Staff). As AI becomes a growing concern, it becomes difficult for employers to guarantee employees that their jobs will not be affected by AI. It has already started to seep its way into some industries and companies, with over 77% of companies having already implemented it or have strongly considered it for the future (Cardillo). This drastic increase in the use of AI means less of a need for employees, making many employees globally worried about the future of their employment status, with only 1/4 of employees not being worried about AI (Lerner). By enacting plans to introduce AI into companies, the work cultures will inevitably change as this is a new component being introduced into the mix. It's hard to tell how the addition of AI will influence workers rights, and if we will see more policies regarding protections from AI as we saw with the Hollywood strikes (WSJ Staff) or if governments will choose to leave it up to the company's own volitions.

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