



*Marcel Rödiger, the Inventor of New Time*  
*or*  
*How the Authorities Did Not Like It At All*  
*When the Day Became Twenty Hours*  
*and the Hour Fifty Minutes*

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**M**arcel Rödiger, the firstborn who came into the world on August 25, 1833, in Saint-Imier, Canton of Jura, did not take over his parents' farm. Instead, from a very young age he was drawn to the village horologues. In 1851, he was designated a trained watchmaker's apprentice and, after two years' wandering through various workshops and with a master's certificate in his pocket, he went on to establish his own independent workshop in Saint-Imier. In the Canton of Jura many small workshops produced fine precision watches that still form the reputation of Swiss analog watches today.

In the nineteenth century, the entire Jura, on the right as well as on the left side of the ridge, on the Swiss side as well as on the French side, was considered a stronghold of European anarchists. Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Victor Hugo, Charles Fourier, and Gustav Courbet were born there; Piotr Kropotkin and Bakunin visited the area several times. As watchmakers were considered just as well-educated and well-read as cigar rollers, they naturally came to the special attention of the police. They organized themselves into cultural groups and debate clubs, became engaged readers, and ran into conflict with the authorities again and again. When followed, they simply moved across the border and found shelter with their comrades.

It was in this intellectual and technically highly skilled milieu that the watchmaker Marcel Rödiger grew up. Even as a teenager he discussed models of society and, like many watchmakers, believed that social life should be organized just like a clock, one part merging with the other, each playing an important role, and no one wheel dominating any other. No man would be called useless, for there could be no superfluous, emptily spinning wheel. Every individual would be productive and equally involved in the community. Society would be structured in a clear and concise manner, and recognize neither masters nor servants.

With this in mind, he developed a new way of keeping time. In 1858, he presented a clock which worked according to the principles of the "New-Time" (as he called it). The day had only twenty hours, an hour fifty minute, a minute fifty seconds. He justified his New-Time by saying that it was easier to calculate as it fit in the groundbreaking new decimal system. Another important reason for his New-Time, he stated, was his concern that any shortening of time would only lead to its acceleration. Confining oneself to less time units, on the other hand, would actually result in one's getting more time, which could in turn flow more meaningfully into collaborative tasks.

Rödiger's New-Time fell on extremely fertile soil. It was talked about everywhere, eagerly discussed, and more and more people began to adapt and live according to it. His watches became so popular that, even though he had ten assistants, he could not produce enough of them in his available hours. He therefore quickly granted licenses to satisfy the demand. Soon this time bore the name of its inventor, and though it did not quite sit right with him there was nothing he could do to oppose the power of the masses. "Rödiger-Time" had been born.

Within a year almost the entire valley of St. Imier had adapted Rödiger Time, and even in that important center of traditional watchmaking, La Chaux-de-Fonds, many began to follow the ideas of New-Time as well.

In 1860 the army marched into the valley of St. Imier in order to confiscate and destroy all the clocks of New-Time. It was the sovereign's right to determine how to keep time and this whole idea of New-Time, this so-called Rödiger-Time, was an anarchist campaign that had to be eradicated. Marcel Rödiger himself was an anarchist who only wanted to cause confusion in order to sell his new watches. Naturally, the authorities used these raids as a means to settle accounts with other unpleasant anarchists too.

Marcel Rödiger was arrested and imprisoned in Neuchâtel (Neuenburg). The possession of Rödiger watches became strictly forbidden as did mention of New-Time itself. Today, two beautifully preserved copies of Rödiger watches can be seen in the Clock Museum of Neuchâtel. Marcel Rödiger was charged with Time

Rebellion: he had no right to proclaim his own time just in order to have more of it. The division of time was sovereign law, and thus any attempt to re-articulate it was paramount to the crime of printing one's own money and disturbing the flow of currency.

After a very unfair show trial, Marcel Rödiger was sentenced to five years in prison.

One year later he was liberated by a so-called "Rödiger-Bunch," which consisted of like-minded people who had become political during the time of the time-ban and worshiped him as their leader.

After liberating Rödiger, the group hid in French region of Pontarlier and later in Besançon. In 1864 together they traveled to America and founded a Rödiger-community in Tennessee that still exists today and lives according to Marcel Rödiger's New-Time. Its network spans many countries.

In the former socialist countries Rödiger-Time became strictly forbidden beginning in 1972. All existing watches had to be corrected and reset to normal, standard time.

The piece on display at *The Museum of Unheard (of) Things* is a retroactively built Polish Rödiger-clock, which was acquired in Poland in 1982.

Literature:

R. Tiemeyer, *Time and Consequences*, Zurich, 1975.

T. Tihmer, *Rödiger: A Visionary?* Berlin-Neukölln, 1978. Trans., "Time as a Lever," in: *Under the Cobblestones Lies the Beach*, Vol 21, Berlin-Neukölln, 1982.

W. Müller-Funk, *The Clock as a Narrative Element*, Vienna, 1999.



*"The Beguine and the Monk" :  
A Painting by Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem  
(1562-1638)*