



EIGHT HOUR DAY

Celebrate 150 years
of work, rest & play

Losing the Eight Hour Day?

A resource for teachers and Later Years students to accompany central components of the 2006 program celebrating the 150th anniversary of winning the eight hour day in Victoria.

This resource:

Commemorates the 150th anniversary of the struggle by Australian workers which secured the eight hour day.

Recognises the social and cultural relevance of commemorating the events of the past in promoting informed and responsible citizenship for the future.

Provides interactive learning opportunities in:

- Humanities
- English
- The Arts
- Interpersonal development
- Civics and Citizenship
- Thinking
- Communication.

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Introduction

The *Trade Union Banners: a proud tradition* and *It's About Time!* exhibitions are central components of the 2006 program to celebrate the 150th anniversary of winning the eight hour day in Victoria.

Trade Union Banners: a proud tradition showcases the banner carried in the first Eight Hour Day procession and a range of historical as well as more contemporary banners carried in Labour Day marches over the last 150 years.

It's About Time! explores the historical achievements of the Victorian labour movement and relates that history to the emergence of working time as a key contemporary issue.

The **key questions** addressed in the exhibitions and the accompanying events concern:

- Why winning the Eight Hour Day was such an important victory (exploring working conditions 150 years ago, how the 888 campaign was organised, the 19th century flow-on to other industries, the implications for women, and for child labour).
- Workers get a life - the consequences of winning the eight hour day (exploring the effect of the 8 Hour Day on the Victorian community; the establishment of workers' education institutes and the Trades Hall literary institute; and the development of sporting activities and cultural life).
- Working issues today (including contemporary issues of work/life balance; an exploration of what went wrong and why we are now working longer hours; casualisation).
- The future of work including changes to the industrial relations landscape.

A visit to the *Banners of Pride* exhibition and/or to the *It's About Time* exhibition will be much more meaningful to students if they have the opportunity to explore some of the critical issues in class.

This package provides support to do that by offering:

- background information assist you to interpret the issues explored in the exhibitions for your students;
- some questions you may like to explore with students;
- a range of activities you may like to engage students in back at school;
- sample VELS units at Level 6 focussing on key issues raised by the eight hour day anniversary celebrations;
- links to useful resources contained in the Eight Hour Day website; and
- links to external sites which explore key issues.

Program of events

Visit the Eight Hour Day website for an up-to-date listing: www.8hourday.org.au/events.asp

Losing the Eight Hour Day?

Moomba and the eight hour day

- On 21 April 1856 an eight hour day was introduced into the building trades in Melbourne.
- Building unions celebrated their Eight Hour Day victory on the 12 May 1856, with a procession from the Carlton Gardens to the Cremorne Gardens in Richmond.
- Eight Hour Day processions were held annually on April 21, and in 1879 the Victorian government declared it a public holiday.
- In 1934 the Eight Hour Day was renamed Labour Day.
- The 1930s Depression and Second World War brought about the decline of the marches, the final occurring in Melbourne in 1951.
- In 1955, Moomba was introduced to replace what had begun a century earlier as a celebration of the Eight Hour Day.

The anniversary

2006 marks the 150th anniversary of the Eight Hour Day in Victoria. Action taken by stonemasons on 21 April 1856 led to the establishment and maintenance of the Eight Hour Day, recognised internationally as a world first.

Reproduction of Eight Hour Day banner: www.8hourday.org.au/first_procession.asp

The Eight Hour Day became a symbol of the right of workers to organise to achieve their rights not only as workers, but as citizens in a democratic society.

Further information is available at: www.museum.vic.gov.au/windows/8hrs/index.asp.

The timing of this anniversary could not be more appropriate, given the emerging debate about contemporary work issues such as working hours and work/life balance.

The eight hour day campaign

On 21 April 1856, following negotiations between building tradesmen and contractors, and with the approval of the colonial government, an eight hour day was introduced into the building trades in Melbourne. The movement was led by the stonemasons who argued that eight hours a day was appropriate in the Australian heat. It would also give them time to improve their 'social and moral condition'.

Two employers, with substantial contracts for public buildings at the Western Market and Parliament House, resisted the new working-hours agreement. In response, the stonemasons led a protest march from the University of Melbourne to Parliament House, calling out workers at building sites on the way. Within a fortnight the contractors had given way. Melbourne's building workers, generally without loss of pay or other conditions, had gained an unprecedented widespread and sustainable victory. It was widely celebrated as a world first and formed the basis of Australia's reputation as a 'workingman's paradise'.

However, only a minority of workers initially won the Eight Hour Day. Most workers, including women and children, generally worked longer hours for less pay. It was common to work twelve to sixteen hours a day.

The Grocers Banner '888 The Unity of Labour is the Hope of the World':
www.8hourday.org.au/history.asp

The Industrial Revolution and the Chartists

The eight-hour day movement developed in response to the immense changes in the lives of working people caused by the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

The Industrial Revolution is the name given to the period between about 1760 and 1850 when Britain's economic and social life was transformed by extraordinary advances in science and technology. The development of steam power and powered machinery paved the way for a transformation of work, family relationships, and ways of life, not only in Britain, but eventually around the world.

Old production methods were transformed, and new industries emerged. "In a little over a century, Britain went from a largely rural, agrarian population to a country of industrialized towns, factories, mines and workshops."¹ In the beginning there was no regulation of working hours, conditions, or rates of pay. Working conditions in many factories, mills and coal mines were appalling, and children as well as adults worked long hours; the working day could last from ten to sixteen hours, six days a week. For many, it was a life of heavy toil and ill-health, with terrible consequences for their well-being.

The call for a shorter working day had begun in Britain with Robert Owen, a Welsh social reformer and factory owner, who began to demand a ten hour working day in 1810. By 1817 he was calling for 'Eight hours labour, Eight hours recreation, Eight hours rest' (which was taken up by the early Chartist movement) along with demands for improved working conditions, and other social, political and economic reforms. In England, a ten hour working day was legislated for women and children in 1847. In France, a twelve-hour working day was established following the 1848 revolution.

Chartists and Chartist sympathisers had come to Australia, some as immigrants, some to escape prosecution and some as convicts transported as a consequence of their political views; and they were active in the campaign for the eight hour day. In 1855, Chartists had been involved in the Eureka Stockade.

The following year, it was two former Chartist activists, James Galloway and James Stephens, who were in the vanguard of the agitation for shorter working hours and who led the stonemasons off the job at the University of Melbourne.

'In the building boom of the 1850s associated with the discovery of gold in Australia, masons were in a strategic position with an essential role in the building industry that gave them considerable power should they decide to utilise it.

The climate also contributed; working 10 hours a day exposed to the extremes and vicissitudes of the Australian climate, as masons did, sharpened the desire for a shorter working day. (As) Galloway explained, he and others had come to the colony "to better our condition, not to act as the mere part of machinery.'²

¹ <http://www.saburchill.com/history/chapters/IR/001.html>

² Rowan Cahill http://workers.labor.net.au/features/200502/b_tradeunion_hours.html

Working conditions in 19th century Australia

The industrial scene in Australia in the 1850s was somewhat different from that in England. The colony had been in existence for little more than half a century. Melbourne in 1839 had a non-Indigenous population of less than 200, but in the 1850s the population swelled because of the huge influx of people drawn by the gold rush. By 1861 Melbourne alone had a population of 125,000.

While it was still usual for people to work a twelve hour day, six days a week,³ male workers, especially skilled tradesmen who were in demand, began to feel that they were able to demand an improvement in their conditions.

Men employed in skilled trades were the main group to gain from the Eight Hours Movement. Women's working hours remained much longer than men's and their wages were one-third to one-half of men's. Almost half of all women workers were domestic servants. The remainder worked on farms, in the garment and boot trades, in shops, and later as nurses and as teachers.

Domestic service was especially despised - servants were poorly paid and worked long hours. Even by the 1890s most servants were still working around 14 hours a day. Young women preferred to avoid domestic service with its constraints on personal freedom and potential for abuse. In fact, their search for even the worst factory work showed how much they disliked the hardships, long hours and isolation of domestic service.

Despite 1873 legislation limiting working hours to eight for women and children, enforcement was slack. In 1883, inspectors at James Miller's South Melbourne ropeworks found ten year olds working sixty hours a week. Young children, employed extensively in the tobacco industry, worked similar hours to child workers in the clothing and other industries. They were paid a pittance, and often nothing for the first few months. Their health suffered in cramped, unsanitary, and poorly ventilated conditions.

Compulsory education laws, introduced in Victoria in 1872, were frequently ignored as truant officers failed to inspect factories. One truant officer testified that 'there were fully twenty children ... between ten and eleven years of age' working at Swallow and Ariell.

See '*Messrs. Swallow and Ariell's Biscuit Works*': www.8hourday.org.au/children.asp.

³ <http://www.newtradeshall.com/history.asp>

The flow-on from the Eight Hour Day victory

Trade Unions

In the immediate aftermath of the Eight Hour Day victory, the Victorian trade union movement began to plan for the future by organising a permanent location. They were granted land on the corner of Lygon and Victoria Streets in 1858 and, after occupying a temporary structure, started work in 1874 on the Trades' Hall and Literary Institute of Melbourne, which still occupies this site. It was the world's first Trades Hall building.

Over the past 150 years trade unions have continued to fight for workers' rights. Wage increases; reduction and control over hours of work; working conditions; occupational health and safety laws; equal pay; paid public holidays and paid annual, parental, and long service leave; penalty rates and pay loadings; compensation for injury and the right to be given notice and consulted about changes at work are among the achievements of the trade union movement.

Many of today's working conditions, such as access to different kinds of leave, were only won relatively recently. It may be surprising to learn, for example, that the right to paid recreation leave was not won until 1936—and even then, it was only one week!

They are part of the history of struggle and negotiation for fair working conditions that acknowledge that all citizens have a right to lives beyond the workplace, have responsibilities to people other than employers, and therefore must be able to strike a balance between paid work and other aspects of life.

Working conditions

Not all workers won the eight hour day immediately; and it needs to be remembered that while stonemasons might have won an eight hour day, they also worked six days a week—a 48-hour week. It was not until 1873 that the Victorian government granted the eight hour day to female factory workers, and 1874 before Victorian Government contracts made eight hours the legal working day.

Hours of work

Another 46 years were to pass before a further significant reduction in hours for all workers occurred. In 1930, the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation & Arbitration established the standard working week at 44 hours, following precedents set by gains in a variety of industries over the previous decade.

The five-day forty hour week did not become standard until after World War 2 (1948).

In 1982 the metal trades gained the 38-hour week which then became the national standard.

Recreation and long service leave

Not until 1936, was one week of annual leave on full pay included in an award for the first time. By 1941, one week's paid leave had become standard in all awards, and by 1945 it had increased to two weeks. It was almost twenty years (1963) before annual paid leave increased again, this time to three weeks, and to four weeks in 1974.

In 1951, New South Wales enacted the first legislation in the world to provide for long-service leave, and other states followed suit. In 1964, thirteen weeks' long service leave was granted to Commonwealth workers. Today's standard is thirteen weeks for fifteen years, although some workers have access to two or even three months of leave, after ten years of service.

Sick leave

Sick leave was first introduced into some awards in 1922, but it wasn't until 1941 that two and half days become sick leave became standard. Under the award system, the general standard at the time of writing was 40 hours of paid sick leave in the first year of service and up to 64 hours in each subsequent year.⁴

Family leave

Compassionate leave to care for family members or to attend to urgent family business, such as attending funerals, was first introduced into federal awards in the early 1960s.

The issue of family leave was first addressed in 1990 following the Federal Government's ratification of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 156, Workers With Family Responsibilities. In 1994 the Industrial Relations Commission handed down its Family Leave Test Case decision, which established a minimum entitlement to family leave for all permanent full-time and part-time employees. Casuals do not have family leave entitlements.

Standard family leave, or personal carers' leave, provides workers with up to 5 days' paid leave per year to care for family or household members who are ill. It can include leave to attend to domestic responsibilities or emergencies. It was designed to help employees avoid conflict between work and family responsibilities and to do so without fear of discrimination. Family Leave provisions do not increase an employee's overall leave entitlements as leave is taken from aggregated sick and bereavement leave entitlements.

In 2005, entitlements vary, but up to ten days leave a year is available in some industries to care for family members or for family emergencies.

Maternity and parental leave

Since the 1960s there has been a continuous rise in the participation of married women and/or women with small children in the paid labour force. The battle for maternity leave has however been a long and contentious one. The existence of a maternity leave entitlement enables a working woman to have and care for her baby for a limited period without resigning from her job. The first maternity and paternity leave was made available to Commonwealth employees in 1973 but it wasn't until 1989 that the Industrial Relations Commission made maternity leave a standard award provision.

In 1990, parental leave was extended to men, and, in 1994, changes to the Industrial Relations Act provided access to parental leave (including maternity leave) for all workers, including those not covered by federal awards. Depending on the employing industry, the exact conditions may vary; one of the most contentious has been, and remains, access to *paid* maternity leave.

⁴ <http://www.actu.asn.au/public/library/sick.html>

Workers get a life – working conditions and citizenship

As working hours reduced, workers, no longer totally exhausted, were able to engage in community, educational and leisure activities.

Education

Those opposed to shorter working hours had argued that it would lead to deterioration in the behaviour and morals of workers, who would have more time on their hands to drink to excess and engage in other unseemly activities. The outcomes, however, were quite different. Shorter hours enabled workers to pursue a range of other interests and ambitions.

The original Victorian Trades Hall, financed by worker contributions and built by their own labour, was opened in 1859. The establishment of the Trades Hall and Literary Institute of Melbourne was a direct result of the Eight Hour Day 'boon'. Classes started there in 1859.

...Long before any higher educational establishment had been provided, hundreds of the youth of the young metropolis could be seen in its class rooms receiving instruction.⁵

Literary Institutes, Mechanics' Institutes and Working Men's Institutes sprang up around Victoria, modelled on British prototypes, dedicated to advancing the social and educational standing of working men (and later women), as well as to supporting the work of trade unions. They were the forerunners of mining schools, agricultural colleges, working men's colleges, and eventually technical colleges.

The first Mechanics' Institute was established in Melbourne in 1839. It was renamed The Melbourne Athenaeum in 1873; it still operates as a library and theatre. Following the eight-hour-day victory, nearly a thousand Mechanics' Institutes sprang up around Victoria. They were important centres for adult education, social and cultural activities. RMIT University began as the Working Men's College in 1887; its motto was 'perita manus mens exulta' (a skilled hand, a cultivated mind).⁶

Community

The Eight Hour Day pioneers took seriously their claim that with more leisure time they were free to engage in moral and social self-improvement.

'(S)addlers, stevedores, brewers, bootmakers... were appointed by the 8 Hour Anniversary Committee to Melbourne's public institutions (to) serve as governors, on anything from the Children's Hospital to the philanthropic societies... because it was important to them to be part of civic life...

It's important to remember those events in an industrial sense—that workers need to be thought of as more than just workers. In 1856, that was a core element in the argument.⁷

Successive members of the Eight Hour Day Committee established a magnificent tradition of charity work after the first Eight Hour Day procession fete raised £248 for Melbourne Hospital and Benevolent Asylum.

⁵ W.E. Murphy 1900

⁶ <http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/asaw/biogs/A000151b.htm>

⁷ http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions_in_time/Transcripts/s496299.htm

Sport and Leisure

Sporting events were a feature of the Eight Hour Day celebrations. Limits on hours of work, which freed up time for sport, enabled such central aspects of Victorian life as football to develop.

Foot races were popular as were cycling events from the 1880s. Shorter working hours in the 1870s—for those who won a half day holiday from 1pm on Saturdays—saw a rapid growth of football with thousands of spectators thronging to sports grounds.

A pattern of weekend leisure activities evolved that included sporting competitions, often associated with betting; outdoor activities like fishing; shopping; and going to hotels, theatres and dance venues. See <http://www.8hourday.org.au/sport.asp>

Culture

Having won eight hours of leisure, the trade union movement became involved with organising 'self improvement' and recreational activities. Songs and music accompanied the opening of the first Trades Hall in 1859 and were typical of social evenings where workers could display their literary, musical and dancing skills.

Over the decades trade unions have promoted the establishment of national cultural institutions; unionised musicians and actors; encouraged work-based groups such as camera clubs and provided access to cultural events as well as participating in activities with cultural workers.

In the 1980s trade unions were involved in numerous, wide-ranging projects through the Australia Council's Art and Working Life program.

The work life balance: one step forward, two steps back?

Despite dramatic changes in working life since 1856, the Eight Hour Day movement has contemporary significance because control over working time remains a source of conflict and tension, both in terms of the quality of life of individual families, and the sustainability of communities. Over-employment, underemployment, unemployment, casualisation, flexible shift and roster arrangements, and unpaid work are all components contributing to an increasingly complex and fragmented workforce.

The Eight Hour Day ensured workers could have what we call work/life balance. Today, many in the workforce are in the position of wishing to either reduce or increase their hours. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that average full-time hours are increasing with one in four working 45 hours or more a week. On the other hand, just over one in four are engaged in casual employment which is often precarious and lowly paid, and casual employees usually have little control over the hours they work. Over 70% of those in part-time work want full-time employment: in 2002, over half a million part-time Australian workers wanted extra hours.

Stress, fatigue and related health issues are of increasing concern as overtime hours increase. Family relationships and community involvement also suffer.

In 1954, 29% of women worked. Now the figure is around 68%. In many families women still do all or a large proportion of the domestic work. This 'double shift' means that after a full day's work, women begin a second job when they leave to go home at five.

In 2002, 30% of Australian full-time workers were working 50 hours or more a week.

The future of work

What will be the future of work in Australia? Many of the certainties about work which were commonly held by earlier generations no longer apply, and the industrial landscape that young people, still at school, will meet in the future is changing rapidly.

A paper considering some of the major changes that have already occurred in workplaces, and considering implications for the future (*The Future of Work* by Ian Watson, John Buchanan, Iain Campbell and Chris Briggs, an abridged version of chapters 2-10 of *Fragmented Futures: New Challenges in Working Life*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2003) is available at <http://actu.asn.au/public/news/files/fowexsum.pdf>.

Some of the key points raised include:

Income inequality in Australia is widening.

- Gap between professional workers on high incomes and casual/part-time low income workers growing.
- Almost 90% of all new jobs created in the 1990s paid less than \$26,000 a year.
- The number of working poor is increasing (now between 10% and 18% of all workers).

Casual and part-time work

- Casual and part-time work is growing; fulltime and permanent working is declining.
- 2.5 million new jobs created in Australia in the 1990s; the vast majority were part-time and casual, in low skilled and low paid areas.
- 68% of casuals would prefer more predictable patterns of work.

Workloads and work intensification

- Workloads have increased and work is more intense in all occupations and industries.
- During 1982-2002 the proportion of employees working a standard 35 to 40 hour week fell from 50% to 33%.
- Only 37% of permanent employees who work over 41 hours a week are paid for the extra hours.

Balancing work and life

- Work intensification and the lack of quality, secure, part time jobs increase the difficulty of balancing work and family life, especially for low income households.
- Most women with children who want to return to work part time have little choice but casual employment. Two-thirds of part time jobs are casual.
- 57% of working women with children work part-time, compared to 25% of women without children.

Unemployment and underemployment

- Long-term unemployment and underemployment become more entrenched problems during the 1990s.
- 22% of unemployed people have been out of work for more than 12 months
- It is no longer meaningful to talk about unemployment rates; when the numbers of discouraged job seekers and those who are underemployed are added to the official unemployment figures, the rate doubles.⁸
- The proportion of unemployed men aged in their mid-50s who were 'discouraged' job seekers and who gave up looking for work altogether increased from 10% in the early 1980s to 30% in 2001.

⁸ *The Bare Necessities: Poverty and Deprivation in Australia Today*. Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship. Australian Council of Social Service. Paper 127. June 2003. p.5 http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/paper%20127_povinquiry.pdf

Useful web-links

The Eight Hour Day

<http://www.newtradeshall.com/mayday/?id=2&page=2>

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/ddunits/downloads/pdf/up4_hand6.pdf

http://workers.labor.net.au/features/200502/b_tradeunion_hours.html

Chartism

<http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/whatchar.htm>

<http://www.cottontimes.co.uk/charto.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartism>

Industrial Revolution

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/society_culture/industrialisation/

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REVhistoryIR2.htm>

<http://www.saburchill.com/history/chapters/IR/001.html>

Child Labour in the Industrial Revolution

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/children.htm>

<http://www.cmhrc.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/citm.htm>

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRchild.htm>

History of Trade Unions in Australia

<http://www.actu.asn.au/about/history.html>

http://workers.labor.net.au/4/c_historicalfeature_patmore.html

Leave and Conditions

<http://www.actu.asn.au/faqs/pay.html>

Workers Education

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~mivic/index.htm>

http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/solly_clubs_ch1.htm

<http://www.tradeshallarts.com.au/history/building.html>

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~mivic/history.htm>

Work-Life Balance

<http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/debate/history.htm>

<http://www.actu.asn.au/public/futurework/familychoices.html>

http://www.labor.net.au/news/1083285372_2698.html

http://www.eric.sa.gov.au/uploaded_files/wf_booklet.pdf

The Future of Work

<http://www.actu.asn.au/public/futurework/>

http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions_future/Transcripts/s616084.htm

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bigidea/stories/s1097588.htm>