



EIGHT HOUR DAY

Celebrate 150 years
of work, rest & play

Winning the Eight Hour Day

A resource for Middle Years teachers and students to accompany 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

Contents

Teacher Notes - <u>Introduction</u>	Page 2
<u>The eight hour day - then and now</u>	Page 4
<u>Useful web-links</u>	Page 12
VELS Unit Level 4	Pdf 208kb
Student Resources	Pdf 95kb
Teacher Resources	Pdf 71kb

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Introduction

The exhibitions *Trade Union Banners: a proud tradition* and *It's About Time!* 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 unit at Level 4 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:

<http://www.8hourday.org.au/events.asp>

The Eight Hour Day – then and now

Winning 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 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 in Melbourne.

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

Role of the Chartists

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.

"Masons were in the vanguard for a variety of reasons; they were skilled craftsmen, proud of their skills and trade, they were organised, doing a job that could not be done by the untrained and unskilled, and realised they were needed by employers and planners intent on erecting fine stone buildings. 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.' [Rowan Cahill, *Worker Online 2005* http://workers.labor.net.au/features/200502/b_tradeunion_hours.html]

Industrial Revolution

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. It was underpinned by the expansion of the British Empire which enabled cheap raw materials (such as cotton from India) to be imported in enormous quantities.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the British economy had been dominated by manual labour, in the form of agricultural work and cottage industries. The majority of people did not live in large cities but on farms or in villages where there were strong ties to communities and to extended families. The Industrial Revolution changed all of this in a very short time. The development of new machinery and new tools meant that the economy was now based on mechanised manufacturing and industry. The Agricultural Revolution had made food production more efficient, but had also reduced the number of jobs and the income available to families in rural areas, forcing the many people into the cities to seek work in the new factories.

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 While some at the time were extremely enthusiastic about the new opportunities, others were concerned about the often drastic negative effects of rapid industrialisation.

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

Working conditions in the Industrial Revolution

At the start of the Industrial Revolution there were no laws regulating working hours, conditions, or rates of pay. As a consequence, 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.

The Industrial Revolution forced significant changes to family and economic life, especially among poorer families. Previously, there had been a less obvious divide between public and private activity.

Now however, larger gaps began to appear between work and home, and between the work of men and women. In mills and factories, women working for wages were paid less than men, and often segregated into particular kinds of jobs. In addition, large numbers of women were employed in domestic service and as seamstresses in piece workshops. They also worked in the coal mines, often assisting husbands or fathers. For most, it was a life of heavy toil and ill-health, with terrible consequences for their well-being.

Child labour in the Industrial Revolution

Child labour was common long before the Industrial Revolution, but in the new mills and factories, and in the coal mines on which they depended, its use reached new heights of exploitation and abuse.

Children as young as five worked in mines, factories and textile mills, often in deplorable conditions.

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 had been first settled only twenty years earlier, and in 1839 had a non-Indigenous population of less than 200. In the 1850s however the population was swelled by a huge influx of people drawn by the gold rush; by 1852, more British migrants came to Melbourne than anywhere else in the world, and 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,² male workers, especially skilled tradesmen who were in demand, began to feel that they were able to demand an improvement in their conditions.

Women's work in 19th century Australia

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.

Women in Victoria were outnumbered by men until late in the 19th century. 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. Sarah Harrison, an immigrant servant writing home in 1884, described her working day:

*I rise at half past five and they have breakfast by half past six and some at seven. ...
I generally finish about eight o'clock except when the boy's clothes want mending.*

² <http://www.newtradeshall.com/history.asp>

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.

Outwork also proliferated in the clothing trades, fitting the domestic circumstances of some workers while allowing employers to offer piece work at low rates.

Many women found factory work more attractive than domestic labour. The pay was better, and young women had greater independence. Nevertheless, hours and conditions were often so awful that, in 1873, the Victorian government passed regulations to improve working conditions. The legislation gave female factory workers the eight-hour day and was intended for 'the benefit of those who cannot defend or protect themselves'.

In the late 19th century, as today, many women, mainly in the clothing industry, worked from home, paid by the number of pieces they completed. 'Sweating' or 'outwork' became an important public issue, because of the harsh conditions under which these women worked. The Victorian Anti-Sweating League, made up of trade unionists, churchmen and liberal politicians, campaigned to have the practice abolished.

While women's work in factories was regulated from 1873, sweating remained a common way for employers to get around the restrictions, especially in the clothing and footwear industries.

See *Factory Girls and Sweaters*: http://www.8hourday.org.au/factory_girls.asp

And of course women's unpaid work in the home was arduous. A cartoon of the period illustrates the pride that the men of the Eight Hour Movement felt as pioneers of industrial reform, but also highlights the plight of those workers left behind by the reforms.

See the cartoon *Where Do I Come in?* (*Melbourne Punch*, 1 May 1890) : <http://www.8hourday.org.au/wives.asp>

Child labour in 19th century Australia

Despite the 1873 Victorian 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 as did those in the clothing and other industries. They were paid a pittance, and often nothing for the first few months. Their health suffered from cramped, unsanitary, and poorly ventilated conditions. In 1882 Dr Beaney described how

A little girl was brought to me three days ago by her mother, a little worn-out looking thing. She had been in a factory twelve or eighteen months already, and she is only thirteen now. She is like a little old woman, pale and shrivelled, and suffers from palpitation of the heart.

Hours of sitting led to a number of health problems including curvature of the spine.

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

New technologies and the changing face of work

In Australia in 1974, unemployment began to rise sharply, due to an exceptionally severe recession. In its wake, a structural shift occurred in the labour market. By the beginning of the new century, it was evident in significant changes in the composition of the labour force, and forms and conditions of employment.

Changes included:

- relative decline in employment in production industries, and corresponding growth in service industries;
- growth of female employment, including women with children and women in older age-groups, and relative decline of male employment, especially, but not only, in older age-groups;
- growth of part-time employment, especially of females but also of males;
- unprecedented growth in proportions of adolescents and young adults of both sexes, but especially females, in full-time education; and
- substantial and economically significant participation of full-time students in part-time employment.³

The impact of technological change was most evident in how work was performed, for example in retailing, financial services and office work generally where the impact of computerisation was plain to see.

The speed and extent of change made many uneasy. Many commentators talked of another industrial revolution. Alan Greenspan claimed that 'Technological innovation, and in particular the spread of information technology, has revolutionised the conduct of business over the past decade.'

In Australia in 1996, the Economic Planning Advisory Commission (EPAC) said that:

*The advance of information technology will change almost every job. The scale of change is at least as great as with other technological advances such as the steam engine or car. It has increased the pace of innovation and structural change and will further increase globalisation and competition. It will both create and destroy many jobs, and change the balance of skill requirements. [Because of] new technology and changed social attitudes... the old style of work organisation... large-scale mass-production, with rigid job delimitation and hierarchical management... is being replaced by organisational styles that emphasise innovation, small teams, autonomy...*⁴

³ <http://www.facs.gov.au/research/prp15>

⁴ *Ibid*

Child labour and outworking in 21st century Australia

Outworking is defined as the production of goods, or the provision of services, for an employer or contractor under an arrangement where the work is carried out at a place of the worker's own choosing, usually the worker's home. Outwork is not always a bad thing. It can assist parents to combine family life and work, for example; but often it is highly exploitative. Work is often organised through an intermediary, and agreements between contractors and workers are often verbal. For many workers, outwork may be the only means of earning an income because they do not have access to traditional job opportunities, because of a shortage of jobs, lack of skills, or family responsibilities.

Outworking has been a part of the clothing industry in Australia for over a century, but has increased dramatically in recent years. In 1996 the Senate Economics References Committee found that 'Outwork is now so prevalent [in the fashion clothing sector] that is not just a characteristic of the industry, the entire industry is structured around it.'⁵

It is estimated that around 75% of Australian clothing companies have the majority of their products made by outworkers because it keeps costs low. In addition to poor rates of pay, outworkers aren't paid overtime, sick leave, maternity leave, holidays or redundancy pay, and there are no overheads in terms of rent, heating and electricity; nor do outworkers receive any training or supervision.

Estimates of the number of outworkers in Australia vary from the very conservative Australian Tax Office figures of 50,000 to the figure of over 300,000 (with approximately 144,000 outworkers in Victoria) cited by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) in their submission to the Senate in 2002.⁶

Outworkers are mainly migrant women of non-English speaking background who have few employment opportunities in the regular labour force. Outwork often involves many family members, including children, as workers struggle to meet deadlines. There is a negative impact on family life and children's well-being.

Working conditions are often very poor.

*We have seen people with machines in their laundry, their bathroom, their kitchen, their lounge room, their dining room and their garage. One woman has two machines in her bedroom - an overlocker and a sewing machine. They are often very dark and confined spaces with not much air and there is a lot of dust in the air from the cloth they are using.'*⁷

The TCFUA claims that conditions have declined in recent years with outworkers now typically working '12-18 hours per day, 7 days a week for about a third of the award rate of pay, and with no access to even the minimum conditions enjoyed by factory workers.'

A recent study has estimated that the average hourly pay rate for the outworkers involved in the study was \$3.60 per hour and that although the highest rate reported was \$10, several outworkers earned below \$1.00 per hour. There is also a high incidence of work-related injury.⁸

Industry groups, the TCFUA and employers are working together to ensure the Homeworkers' Code of Practice will help outworkers. It is designed to regulate the contracting chain from the retailer to the outworker, and enable home-based outworkers to receive an agreed wages rate, including loading for holidays.

Manufacturers and retailers who become accredited under the Code can display the 'No Sweat Shop' label in their clothes.

⁵ Senate Economics References Committee p.xi

⁶ The Hidden Cost of Fashion: Report on the National Outwork Information Campaign, 1995, TCFUA, p. 5.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parliament/publications.nsf/0/A327D9892FC6867FCA256ECF0007340E>

Useful 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://www.uoquelph.ca/englit/victorian/INTRO/inchart.html>

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

Industrial Revolution

<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Industrial-Revolution>

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

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

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook14.html>

<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>

New technologies and the changing face of work

<http://www.facs.gov.au/research/prp15/exec.htm>

http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/research/TLMs_background_paper.pdf

Outworkers and child labour in Australia

Child labour and injury <http://unionsafe.labor.net.au/news/108754318620604.html>

Child labour and child slavery internationally

<http://www.unicef.org.au/mediaCentre-Detail.asp?ReleaseID=368>

Senate Economics Committee Report *Outworkers in the Garment Industry*

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eet_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/vic_work02/submissions/sub03.doc

NSW Parliamentary Report

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlament/publications.nsf/0/A327D9892FC6867FCA256ECF0007340E>

No Sweat Shop Label: <http://www.nosweatshoplabel.com/questions.htm>

Fairwear: <http://www.fairwear.org.au/engine.php>