Work Without End?

The American labor movement was built on the struggle for shorter hours. The fledgling American Federation of Labor called for a general strike for the 8-hour day on May 1, 1886. Hundreds of thousands of workers downed tools in cities across the country, and joined massive parades demanding “8 hours for work, 8 hours for sleep, 8 hours for what we will.”

The 8-hour day gradually became the norm. Timber workers organized into the Industrial Workers of the World won the 8-hour day by delegating a member to blow a whistle and walking off the job once they had put in their hours. If the boss fired the crew, they walked down the road to the next job – where they replaced a crew which had just done the same.

Auto manufacturers instituted the 8-hour day in an attempt to block unionization of their plans. Rubber workers won first the 8-hour and then, in the 1930s, the 8-hour day through sit-downs and strikes.

If you look back at the songs and pamphlets generated during this long campaign, it is clear that workers were fighting not to raise our wages through overtime premiums, but rather to take control of a greater portion of our lives – our time – and also to help our unemployed fellow workers.

Today’s business unions have lost sight of both goals. While they mounted a half-hearted, tepid response to attacks on the 8-hour day, it has been decades since we have seen any effort to win shorter hours. While workers in the rest of the industrialized world have been fighting for and winning longer vacations and shorter work weeks, work hours in the United States have been growing steadily longer – to the point where we now work the longest hours in the world. This is not inevitable. South Korean workers used to put in much longer hours, but they won longer vacations and shorter work weeks through a series of militant strikes and plant occupations (and they’re still fighting to win back more of their time).

The last legislative victory for shorter hours in the United States came in May 2000, when Maine passed a bill prohibiting employers from forcing workers to put in more than 80 hours of mandatory overtime in any two-week period (agricultural and utility workers are excluded). Maine is the only state with a legal limit on overtime.

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While it may be legal to require workers to put in as much as 120 hours of work in a continued on next page

October 24 is Take Back Your Time Day

Less Time for Work, More Time for Life!

We Lead the World

According to a recent report by the International Labor Organization, U.S. workers lead the industrialized world in the number of hours worked each year – adding 36 hours to our work year in the 1990s.

While American workers are piling on overtime (much of it mandatory) and taking on two or three jobs in order to cope with low wages, workers around the world have been fighting for and winning, short work weeks and longer vacations. As a result, U.S. workers now put in 499 hours (about 12 1/2 weeks) more a year on the job than German workers.

Working Ourselves Out of Our Jobs

The ILO report also ranked the U.S. #1 in productivity. That means we’re working harder, and producing more per hour, than workers anywhere else in the world. And because we’re working so long and so hard, we’re working ourselves right out of our jobs.

Industrial productivity (the amount of goods or services we produce each hour) doubles every 25 years or so. But are we living better lives? Our pay (adjusted for inflation) doesn’t go up (indeed, it’s been drifting downward for decades), our work doesn’t get easier, and our hours don’t go down. So where does all our productivity go? It makes it possible for the boss to throw the worker next to us onto the streets, as each of us now does the work it used to take two workers to do.

Winning Shorter Hours Around the World

Over a hundred years ago, U.S. workers fought for (and eventually won) the 8-hour day. Today, many of us find ourselves putting in 10- and 12-hour work days – working longer, and harder, than we did 100 years ago. All this overtime leads to increased stress and on-the-job accidents, and keeps us from our families. Meanwhile, millions of workers are jobless, and millions more working dead-end part-time jobs.

In France, Germany, South Korea – all over the world – workers are demanding shorter work weeks and longer vacations. Rather than join the employers’ race to the bottom, it’s time for us to link up with our fellow workers around the world to reduce working hours and increase employment.

Create Jobs with Good Pay & Benefits

A shorter work week with no cut in pay (and no speed-up) would force the employers to hire more workers, reducing unemployment and reversing the downward pressure on our wages. It would make it possible for millions of workers to escape the trap of piling up low-paid, no-benefit part-time jobs in order merely to survive. It would enable the jobless to escape poverty, and give our youth a future to look forward to – not to dread.

Our Time is Our Lives

Every hour we spend on the job doing the bosses’ bidding is an hour we can not spend doing the things that make life worth living – raising our children, hanging out with our friends, gardening, bowling, fishing, relaxing...

Shorter hours are possible – and necessary. But in order to win them, we will need to build a broad-based movement. We need to organize, to educate within our communities, to ensure that the issue can not be ignored. We invite you to join us in this effort.
Top Ten Signs That You’re Working Too Much

1. God comes down from heaven to remind you that even he took the seventh day off.
2. You catch yourself saying, “I only worked a half-day today, twelve hours!”
3. Everyone from day, swing, and graveyard thinks you work their shift.
4. Domino’s has limited you to 40 pizzas a month because they are genuinely concerned about your health.
5. Your spouse stops in to update the photos of your kids.
6. Your doctor reminds you to get 8 hours sleep every day. You want to know if that includes time spent napping on the freeway.
7. You catch yourself dialing “9” before making calls on your home phone.
8. Your kids start calling you “Auntie Mommy.”
10. The bags under your eyes have bags under their eyes.

Week Without End? Continued from front page

Work Without End?

For thirty years, Johnson had arrived at work at 9A.M. on the dot. He had never missed a day and was never late. Consequently, when on one particular day 9 A.M. passed without Johnson’s arrival, it caused a sensation. All work ceased, and the boss himself, looking at his watch and muttering, came out into the corridor. Finally, precisely at ten, Johnson showed up, clothes dusty and torn, his face scratched and bruised, his glasses bent. He limped painfully to the time clock, punched in, and said, aware that all eyes were upon him, “I tripped and rolled down two flights of stairs in the subway. I nearly killed myself.” And the boss said, “And to roll down two flights of stairs took you a whole hour?”

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Take Back Your Time day

October 24 marks the day when U.S. workers have put in as many hours on the job as the average European. But instead of lacking back to take a well-deserved rest, we'll put in another nine weeks on the job — enriching our bosses at the expense of our bodies, our minds, our families, and our communities.

Our time is our life, and it’s time to take it back. A diverse coalition is organizing events around the country to mark the day, in hopes of putting shorter hours back on the public agenda. There will be teach-ins, festivals, workplace speak-outs, demonstrations, and many other events.

The IWW has endorsed Take Back Your Time day as an opportunity to raise the need to cut working hours with our fellow workers on the job and in our communities.

Information on local Take Back Your Time day events can be found at www.timeday.org, there’s still time to organize your own event in your workplace or neighborhood.

Time off

The average U.S. worker gets just 10 days a year of vacation time after three years on the job, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics — and growing numbers report that their work load is so overwhelming that they are unable to take more than a day or two of vacation at a time. Even then, many workers are forced to check in by email or cell phone.

These are among the shortest vacations in the world. Chinese workers average 15 days of paid vacation a year, and European workers get 25 to 30 days (up to 35 in Sweden).

As a result, we don’t get the time we need to decompress, and recover from the stress of wage slavery.

Drop dead

For millions of workers, their jobs have become too much to bear. A recent study found that people’s jobs are the single biggest cause of stress, straining hearts and minds to the breaking point.

Japan and China each now have a word for death by overwork — karoshi and guaosi — and victims’ families are eligible for workers compensation payouts. Other countries don’t recognize the problem, but that hardly means workers aren’t dying.

Long working hours lead to dangerous fatigue, resulting in industrial and traffic accidents. High stress can lead to heart trouble, high blood pressure, depression, and suicide. And British research indicates that workers who put in long hours doing meaningless work are more likely to die young.

Overtime: It’s not just a bad idea; it could kill you. www.hazards.org/overworkdead

PREAMBLE to the CONSTITUTION of the THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions founded a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, “A fair day’s work for a fair day’s work,” we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, “Abolition of the wage system.”

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

IF YOU WANT TO KILL TIME, TRY WORKING IT TO DEATH.

RESOURCES

www.iww.org/4-Hours
The IWW’s shorter hours website

www.timeday.org
Site for Take Back Your Time day, October 24, including local contacts, a developing schedule of events around the country, and dozens of downloadable posters and other images.

www.hazards.org/overworkdead/
From England, a special issue of Hazards magazine explores the growing danger of overwork.

Selected Titles from the IWW’s Literature Dept.

Order from IWW Literature Department, PO Box 42777, Philadelphia, PA 19101.
Please include $2 for postage or order online: www.iww.org/store

Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork & Time Poverty in America, edited by John de Graaf. $15.00
Short essays document the ever-lengthening work week and explore nearly every facet of overwork, from the impact on family and community life to the damage to our environment and our health.

Arguments for a 4-Hour Day, by Jon Bekken. $2.50
Seventy years ago, a 4-hour work day seemed inevitable; today millions of workers again put in 10- and 12-hour days on the job. This pamphlet shows that the 4-hour day is both practical and necessary.

Whatever Happened to the 8-Hour Day? by Arthur J. Miller. $2.50
For growing numbers of workers, the 8-hour day is but a faint memory. Miller’s pamphlet decrees the soul-crushing fatigue of overwork, drawing on his experience working 14 hours a day, seven days a week, in a shipyard, and eloquently calls for resuming the fight for shorter hours.

Time Out! The Case for a Shorter Work Week, by Kim Moody and Simone Sagovac. $5.00
Ties lousy jobs and unemployment to the growth of overtime, subcontracting and contingent work.

4-Hour Day Button $1.00
Full color version of classic IWW graphic.

Drop dead

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Overtime: It’s not just a bad idea; it could kill you.
Useful & Meaningful Work

Once we get clear that economic life should be about making a living for everyone rather than making a killing for lucky winners, we begin to see how much of the world’s labor, energy, and material resources are being expropriated by the suicide economy for uses that are profitable for corporations, but harmful to life.

This suggests a startling possibility: We could, if we chose, redirect the life energy reclaimed from harmful work to beneficial work. At the same time, everyone’s working hours could be reduced to share both leisure and paid employment equitably. It’s all a question of how we choose, individually and collectively, to allocate our life energies.

We could all have more time for recreation, quiet solitude, community service, political involvement, family life, and the disciplines and hobbies that keep us physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually healthy. Our paid work would be more fulfilling. Our lives, communities, and natural environment would be healthier.

A world no longer divided between the obscenely rich and desperately poor would know more peace and less violence, more love and less hate, more hope and less fear.

The earth could heal and provide a home for more people. It would be distributing its bounty more evenly. And human beings would learn to love each other.

Excerpted from “What’s an Economy For?” by David Korten

Timely Quotes from T-Bone Slim, IWW Columnist

“Don’t watch the clock - it’s three minutes fast mornings and seven minutes slow evenings.”

“The shorter workday requires no extended remarks. Just go out later and come in earlier - no labor board or other lumber is required.”

“Time comes in every man’s life when he feels he has been skinned enough. So what this country really needs is an unemployment office where he can put in an application for unemployment, or skinproof idleness.”

FOR EVERY DOLLAR THE BOSS HAS AND DIDN’T WORK FOR, ONE OF US WORKED FOR A DOLLAR AND DIDN’T GET IT.