SHORTER WORKING HOURS: POSSIBILITIES FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Paul Lundall
Working Paper No.79

Cape Town September 1990
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is less the product of individual effort and more that of an institutional setting. In this respect the silence to read and the facilities at my disposal at SALDRU cannot be over-emphasised. Colleagues and friends have also been extremely supportive and although too numerous to mention, I should like to thank:

- the participants of a SALDRU workshop who were engaged in a discussion of selected parts of this paper;

- my colleagues in the Labour Research Programme who showed exemplary patience to a work that had long superceded its deadline and who gave typing and computer expertise when it was needed most;

- Ian Macun and Francis Wilson who compelled me to recast or jettison some of my initial arguments for which I am most grateful;

- Dudley Horner who supervised the project was my sternest critic, guiding me past many pit-falls, and in addition unselfishly gave of his editorial expertise during the final stages.

My deepest hope is that this paper will be useful to working people who almost without choice are the ones exposed to the blunt edge of long working hours.
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Chapter 1

The struggle to reduce working hours

1.1 Introduction

All work embodies a sacrifice of leisure time for the performance of tasks necessary to secure the reproduction of our social relations. Work implies the application of human activity to productive, service and administrative functions. The allocation of working time for productive purposes is a crucial aspect of human survival and is a feature of societies which have simple as well as complex forms of social organisation. The time devoted to economically productive endeavour is regulated and sanctioned by social need and depending on the nature of the dominant social relations, may give rise to harmony or generate a fair degree of turbulence.

In general, individual employees working full-time have very little choice in determining the structure of the segment of the day allotted to the performance of work or the duration of their working time. It is only through some form of mobilised negotiation such as collective bargaining that an impact can be made on prevailing practices of hours of work. Where the different parties involved in production find difficulty in reaching an acceptable compromise, the marshalling of law in favour of the aggrieved party could serve as a temporary though tenuous measure in changing prevailing work hours should these be considered unfair and unacceptable by the majority of employees subjected to them. This however, should not preclude the adoption of a consistent but strenuous bargaining policy by the different constituencies within the enterprise around hours of work or wages. The negotiation of working time has to be considered as a continuous process since there are no constants...
or immutable laws dictating the regimes of work or working time under which employees have to labour.

This paper explores legitimate reasons for reduction of hours of work for employees working longer than is socially desirable. A number of reasons are advanced for the best possible means of implementing a policy of working hours reduction and different measures to this effect are considered. Such a programmatic initiative however, is subject to final ratification by the affected parties though it could give the more organised or powerful party a distinct advantage. A strategy aimed at reducing working hours raises issues with broader implications than a mere increase in leisure time and it also has a bearing on trade union politics and the way a more coherent economic strategy can be formulated that could bind the union movement into united action.

This paper is structured in the following way: Chapter one gives a broad survey of the struggle to reduce the length of the working day in Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century; chapter two provides an international overview of hours reduction in leading industrialised countries in the 20th century; chapter three discusses the importance of hours of work and hours reduction and the most appropriate ways of reducing them; chapter four challenges notions that reduction in hours of work will undermine productivity and prove uneconomic; chapter five addresses the struggle for shorter working hours from a South African perspective.

### 1.2 SHORTER WORKING HOURS IN BRITAIN

Attempts to control the length of the working day in England reach back to the reign of Edward III. In 1349 the 'statute of labourers' was promulgated to control the length of the working day. The plague that decimated the population and created a temporary shortage of 'men on reasonable terms' was used as a pretext for its introduction. This quest for a standard working day, a quest dominated by economic
calculation led to the gradual and systematic erosion of free or non-working time for the labouring classes. It was reinforced by a statute of 1496 under Henry VII and a statute of 1562 in the reign of Elizabeth I.

Hours of work became a fundamental issue once factory production emerged. During the development of industrial capitalism in Western Europe and North America, from the latter part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, a sacrifice by the workers of these regions was made to ensure that laissez faire capitalism experienced boundless expression and enjoyed an untrammelled and successful expansion. The price of this sacrifice could not readily be computed but was experienced in the degradation of living conditions and the pain caused by the exceptionally long hours of labour which the industrial proletariat had to render under extremely atrocious conditions. It was not uncommon for labourers to work fifteen hours or more a day in the following branches of industry which gained notoriety for exceptionally harsh conditions of employment and the extremely long working hours: the lace trade, the pottery industry, the match industry, the baking industry and the millinery trade, trades which also employed children (many under the age of 10 years) extensively. In fact it was only the Factory Act of 1833 which prohibited the employment of labour 18 years and younger for more than twelve hours on any day. Only in exceptional cases could this prohibition be offset. Legal protection was also given to child labour. The passage of this legislation was hastened by the struggle to obtain a 10 hour working day. The first Factory Acts however excluded adult labour from protection in so far as hours of work were concerned.

When Acts prohibiting the employment of child labour were promulgated arguments developed among the representatives of capital on the re-definition of the age of childhood and the onset of adulthood. Because of the difficulty in policing these laws they did not

1. See Marx, 1977: 383
2. ibid.: 354-358
3. ibid.: 392
automatically end the abuse of child labour. These first Acts legislated protection for women and children but excluded men from their ambit.

'To understand what follows, we must remember that all three Factory Acts, those of 1833, 1844 and 1847, were in force, in so far as the one did not amend the others; that not one of these limited the working day of the male worker over 18; and that since 1833 the 15 hours from 5.30 am until 8.30 pm had remained the legal "day", within the limits of which the 12 hours, and later the 10 hours of labour by young persons and women had to be performed under prescribed conditions.'

In whatever abominable extremes industrial capitalism emerged, it gave rise to an incessant struggle from below, at times weak, at times vigorous, to change these conditions. At times these struggles were characterised by machine smashing but as the reality and resilience of industrial capitalism came to be accepted, different types of challenges were needed and offered to try and overcome the harshness of these contradictions. Struggles to reduce the length of the working day under capitalism to physiologically more endurable proportions have featured as prominently in labour history as struggles for a living wage.

The agitation by the Lancashire Cotton Operatives for the 'Ten Hour' day spread to the builders, engineers, tailors, and other craftsmen, and resulted, between 1830 and 1840 according to the Webbs 'in the very general adoption of Ten Hours as the Normal Day in the larger towns.' In consequence of this 'by 1834, at any rate, the London building trades had secured a ten hours' day and in 1836, the London engineers obtained the same reduction. Within ten years this became general in most of the large towns, and was adopted for the textile factories in the celebrated Ten Hours' Bill of 1847. The Nine Hours' Movement begins with

4. ibid.: 398
5. Webb, 1911: 351-352
the Liverpool Stonemasons in 1864, but does not become
general until 1859 - 61, nor fully successful until
1871. It appears correct to conclude, and this is
supported by Blyton, that the most significant
reductions in hours were concentrated between 1872 and
1874. This did not rule out the large amount of
overtime worked. Because of the structural nature of
particular industries and the marketing traits that
were adopted by British businesses this did not rule
out the large scale performance of overtime which
workers in particular branches of the economy were
compelled to work. The Webbs provided us with stark
evidence of this phenomenon in the engineering
industry:

"In the engineering and shipbuilding trades in
particular, the desire for prompt delivery, in
years of good trade, appears to be so great, and
the competition for orders is at all times so
keen, that each employer thinks it to his
advantage to promise to complete the machine, or
launch the vessel, at the earliest possible
date. The result is that the long hours become
customary, and subject to alteration at the will
of the employer."

It could well be said that other industries subject to
the vagaries of strong seasonal demand such as
clothing may have exhibited similar tendencies. A
shorter legal working day could still be lengthened
through the adoption of systematic overtime. Workers
earned marginally higher rates during overtime and
this with some coercion was an incentive despite the
longer hours worked.

By the late 1880s pressure had already begun to mount
for the adoption of an eight-hour working day to
ensure that workers had more protection from overwork
and more time for pursuits outside working hours.
Especially significant in this campaign was the

6. ibid.: 352
8. Webb, op. cit: 345

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International Association of Working Men which in 1886 adopted the slogan:

"8 hours for work, 8 hours for our own instruction and 8 hours for repose", or, in its more popular form "8 hours' work, 8 hours' leisure, 8 hours' sleep".  

This demand became an important rallying call for the newly emerging mass-based union movement. Even though this movement did not achieve the eight-hour day until the following century it sought to galvanise forces around a common working class objective which was the hours question.

Harris contends that the 'eight hours movement' had a variety of origins and covered a multiplicity of policies and motives.  

Firstly, it signified the outcome of trade union pressure for shorter hours and higher wages. Secondly, the prevalence of long hours for employed workers on the one hand against the backdrop of high levels of unemployment on the other gave added stimulus to the belief that a drastic reduction in working hours would automatically lead to the absorption of the unemployment.

Within the Trade Union Congress debate on the methods of achieving an eight-hour day revolved around two distinct positions - whether to support legislation promoting an Eight-Hours' Bill or whether to obtain an eight-hour day through combination and industrial strike action. Strong sentiment within the union movement favoured the former view.

Though workers in most industries were overwhelmingly in favour of an eight-hour day many still opposed legislation to bring it about. The Lancashire cotton-spinners whose hours and conditions were already regulated by law and the miners of Northumberland and Durham who already worked seven-

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9. Evans, 1975:3  
10. Harris, 1972:58  
11. ibid.:59
hour shifts reared that the adoption and imposition of an Eight Hours' Act might lead to an increase in working hours and extend the working day rather than decrease it. Most miners however supported legislation and in 1888 the Militant Miners' Federation of Great Britain representing the majority of coalfields was formed to promote legislation for minimum wages and an eight-hour day. They were fully supported by the delegates at a conference of the London Trade Societies. Similar ground support also emerged in Newcastle and Birmingham. Finally in 1890 after intense deliberation the TUC came out overwhelmingly in favour of legislation.

Opposition to any eight-hour legislation within parliament and by employers was formidable. To forestall the potency of employers' arguments that shorter hours would ruin industry in the face of international competition, labour leaders in Britain, France, Germany and America formulated an international campaign for an eight-hour working day. In this period mass demonstrations of working men for an eight-hour working day in Britain occurred periodically. On 4 May 1890 three separate eight-hour demonstrations met in Hyde Park, forming one of the largest gatherings of working men that London had ever seen.12

The main intellectual proponent of the eight-hour day in Britain was Tom Mann the first secretary of both the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Independent Labour Party. Mann was also instrumental in the founding of the Eight-Hours' League in 1886 giving the eight-hour movement a formal organisation committed to the limitation of the working day. The argument he advanced concerned the employment creating potential of shorter working hours. This was motivated from his experience as an apprentice in a Birmingham tool-making company in the 1870s which had moved from a 10 to 9 hour day /54 hour week during his time there.13 Reminiscing about his experience Mann wrote:

12. ibid.:65
13. Blyton, op.cit.: 20

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'The reduction of working hours to nine a day coupled with the stoppage of overtime, had a very important bearing on my life. The firm having agreed to pay extra for overtime, very astutely gave orders immediately for a considerable extension of the factory, sufficient to accommodate an additional hundred men and boys. This was exactly what the men had aimed for.'

It was experiences such as these that captured the imagination of the trade union movement and gave it added ammunition to press ahead with its campaign for a reduction in working hours.

Mann also intended establishing closer co-operation between socialist and trade union proponents of the eight-hour day. He believed there was a direct relationship between the reduction of the working day and the creation of additional jobs. If more unemployed workers had jobs, Mann reasoned they:

'would immediately begin to buy more food and clothing and general comforts, this would give an impetus to trade, and so add greatly to the comfort of the entire community.'

The employment-creating potential of working hours' reduction was stridently supported by Sidney Webb in a book published with Harold Cox in 1891 where they invoked a similar argument:

'The first effect of a reduction in hours in many industries would be an increase in the number of workers... some of those now working excessive hours would do less; and some now working irregularly or not at all might find an opportunity to do more.'

14. Mann cited in Blyton, op.cit.:20
15. Mann quoted in Harris, op.cit.:61
16. Webb and Cox cited in Blyton, op.cit.: 20-21
They maintained that a limitation of working hours would lead to increased employment and neither wages nor per capita output need necessarily fall. As evidence to promote their cause they published testimonials from liberal businessmen who had already introduced an eight-hour day in their factories without having to reduce wages nor experience any loss of output. But the success of these experiments tended to undermine the cogency of the argument advanced that hours' reduction would inevitably lead to unemployment reduction, since no additional workmen had been employed in these instances.

The success of these experiments generally elicited a favourable response from the state and encouraged the War Ministry to introduce an eight hour day at the Woolwich Arsenal in 1893 which found that 'as much is turned out as under the longer hours system.' It eventually led to the eight-hour day being introduced in all War Office factories in 1894. Shortly thereafter the eight-hour day was extended to the Admiralty and in 1895 to certain branches of the General Post Office.

Industrialists were quick to marshall evidence to dispel the trade union movement's contention that shorter working hours created an opportunity to hire more labour and hence serve as an employment-creating mechanism. Their findings showed that the shorter working day would not necessarily create increased employment because the same output could be achieved in less time if better capital goods technology were utilised and would lead to increases in productivity. This tended to negate the gist of the argument advanced by advocates of shorter working hours who believed in the employment-creating potential of hours' reduction. To counter this dimension of the debate both Sidney Webb and Tom Mann began to shift the focus of their arguments. Webb, for instance, moved his defence of the eight-hour day from its employment-creating potential to its ability for promoting health, efficiency, combination and self

17. cited in Harris, op.cit.:70
help among workers. Mann shifted his argument from the unemployment reduction potential of shorter hours to one that would give rise to a long-term increase in working class standards of living where public ownership and public work programmes were seen to be more effective as a prescription for unemployment than the regulation of hours of work in private industry. The reduction of unemployment via a limitation of working hours which had earlier formed the pivot of their arguments, they now virtually ignored.

Towards the end of the century faced with much more pressing concerns, hours of work received a lower priority from the union movement as an issue of struggle and mobilisation than wages and conditions of employment. This scenario prevailed until well after the First World War when hours reduction came to the fore once more.

1.3 SHORTER WORKING HOURS IN THE USA

In the USA between 1810 and 1840 the length of the working day ranged from 12 to 15 hours and the working week from 75 to 78 hours. The long hours generated a substantial number of disputes over hours' reduction. In 1825 the carpenters of Boston went on strike in demand for a reduction in daily hours from twelve to ten.

'In 1833 the carpenters of Washington were protesting against "a custom that bound them to stand at their benches from fifteen to seventeen hours for the paltry sum of one dollar and thirty-seven-and-a-half cents".'

18. Blyton, op cit.:21; Harris, op cit.:71
19. This may be a severe indictment of the progressive British unions emerging at the time because wage struggles and hours struggles were not effectively linked to form part of a single intervention.
20. Patten, 1986:150
21. Fitch, 1924:15
22. ibid :18
Sometimes these strikes were successful, sometimes they were not. A successful strike to secure reduced hours of work took place in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1835 when cotton-mill operatives went on strike to secure reduction in hours from thirteen-and-a-half to eleven. The strike ended after one month when employers offered employment at twelve hours a day for five days and nine hours on Saturday.\(^\text{23}\) By the end of 1835 according to Fitch workers in the building trades in Eastern cities had been successful in securing the ten-hour day although factory workers were not as successful. By 1840 the average working week of factory operatives numbered 68.4 hours declining very slowly over the following 50 years until it eventually reached 60 hours in 1890. During this period the working week was composed of six days of ten hours each.\(^\text{24}\)

According to Patten the eight hour movement arose in America during the 1850s but was curtailed in the 1860s by the Civil War. Fitch maintains it:

\begin{quote}
'did not get under way before the 'seventies and did not amount to a great deal until the 'eighties. One of the first important steps in this movement came in 1872, when 60 000 workers in various trades in New York struck for eight hours. Apparently the strike was successful for the most part. The achieving of the eight hour day became an important part of the programme of the American Federation of Labour in 1886, the carpenters leading off. The whole building industry followed and now the eight-hour day prevails in that industry.'\(^\text{25}\)
\end{quote}

Alexander Keyssar's (1986) research drew attention to the way programmes were initiated in the state of Massachusetts to alleviate unemployment. Because the severity of unemployment in the state was particularly serious during the latter half of the 19th century,

\begin{tabular}{l}
\text{23. ibid.} \\
\text{24. Patten, op.cit.: 148, table 1} \\
\text{25. op.cit.: 19} \\
\end{tabular}
the idea of shorter working hours was formulated almost synonymously with the attention given towards challenging unemployment:

'The link between unemployment and the length of the working day stemmed from a straightforward and obvious perception: some workers were compelled to labour more hours than they wanted to, while others were involuntarily idle.' ²⁶

Shorter working hours were seen as a mechanism to distribute the available number of jobs among a larger number of workers, thereby creating jobs for the unemployed. Indeed, unionists at the time developed a host of arguments advertising the attractiveness of shorter working hours and did not depend entirely on one explanation.

According to Keyssar, belief in an eight-hour day

'inspired a massive wave of organising actively between 1885 and the turn of the century...Trade unions sponsored bills that would make the eight-hour (or nine-hour) day mandatory for state municipal employees; they also supported legislation that would declare eight hours to be the length of the "legal workday".' ²⁷

In its concrete implementation, the programme to alleviate involuntary idleness in the state failed dismally. In Massachusetts, shorter working hours did not lead to a reduction in levels of unemployment.

In 1901 the United States Industrial Commission published evidence of the effect the recent introduction of shorter working hours had on output and economic efficiency. Their conclusion showed:

'One advantage to the employer in fewer hours is the smaller number of breakages and injuries to machinery, owing to the more alert attention on

²⁶ Keyssar, 1986:19
²⁷ ibid.: 197
the part of the workmen. For the same reason it is often true that the quality of work is better.28

In a very specific case:

'A representative of the Chicago Bridge and Structural Iron Workers' Union holds that the eight-hour day has so increased the efficiency of labour that there is actually more work done in eight hours than was formerly done in ten.'29

The Commission also showed that in the case of the bituminous coal mining industry the introduction of machinery 'has for some time been advancing, the greatest advances have occurred in the past four years, following the time when the eight hour day was introduced.'30

Ever aware of the lessons of history, the Industrial Commission boldly suggested that:

'In the absence of legislation the only effective means of securing a reduction of hours is through labour organisation. This is, of course, the method by which in recent years the most significant and important reductions in the United States have been secured.'31

However, the Commission warned that because the vast majority of non-unionised workers, women workers and child labour were generally excluded from the ambit of shorter working hours, such a benefit therefore had to be supported by legislative enactment.

After its formation in 1881 the American Federation of Labour (AFL) raised the demand among organised labour for working hour reductions. By means of collective

29. ibid.: 458
30. ibid.:462
31. ibid.: 467

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bargaining successful gains were being registered in securing hours reduction. Social outlook and public opinion were also beginning to favour hours reduction.\textsuperscript{32}

'The greatest force for reduction in hours between 1890 and 1930 took place during the First World War. A high demand for labour and the growth of the AFL were largely responsible for this success.'\textsuperscript{33}

More recently, the question of shorter working hours and increased leisure time has been addressed by John Kenneth Galbraith who is generally regarded within the economic profession as a maverick political economist. He argues that the emergence of highly consumerist orientated societies in the wealthier parts of the planet has made the elimination of toil not merely a utopian vision but a real possibility.

To the following questions:

'why should men struggle to maximize income when the price is many dull and dark hours of labour? Why especially should they do so as goods become more plentiful and less urgent? Why should they not seek instead to maximise the rewards of all their hours of their days? And since this is the plain and obvious aspiration of a great and growing number of the most perceptive people, why should it not be the central goal of the society?'\textsuperscript{34}

Galbraith answers affirmatively that the design for progress is by means of education or 'more broadly, investment in human as distinct from material capital'.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} See Patten, op.cit.:151
\textsuperscript{33} ibid.:151
\textsuperscript{34} Galbraith, 1970: 277.
\textsuperscript{35} ibid.: 277.
Important however, among the spectrum of intellectuals concerned with leisure time is the way the problem of a shorter working day has been posed over the past one hundred years, where despite the progress of history, similar motivations keep recurring. These theorists appear to be searching to give our experience a meaning and our existence a purpose - a void modern industrial societies have been unable to fill. A re-organisation of working time is seen to contribute in some way to bridging this void.

1.4 SUMMARY

The most important lesson that can be gleaned from these historically constituted experiences is that hours' reduction is a product of collective bargaining within particular enterprises and within particular industries. It can only be successfully negotiated if these industries are successfully organised. It is imperative to recognise, however, that it is not the only criterion for this process to generate a realistic possibility of success. Legislation that could serve to anchor these advances is a crucial component in the campaign to reduce working hours. I will discuss this issue in greater depth in chapter five.

It is improbable that shorter working hours will lead to the eradication of unemployment because unemployment is a product of deeper and more complex structural forces in our national economy. Shorter working hours might have some effect in absorbing a degree of unemployment, marginally alleviating it in some instances. But to uphold shorter working hours as the panacea equipped to eradicate unemployment is a devious miscalculation bound to yield negative effects. Neither will shorter working hours lead to a fundamental reduction in the level of output generated in particular enterprises, industries or the economy as a whole as I will demonstrate in chapter four.
INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN HOURS REDUCTION

It was during the 20th century that the most significant reductions in working hours and working time were won. Two factors made the primary contribution to this. The first was the adverse economic situation prevailing in the capitalist hemisphere after the First World War with war reparations and spiralling inflation in Germany and Austria, the revolution in Russia, the emergence of insurrectionary movements in large parts of war-devastated Europe and the need for post-war reconstruction. This crisis reached its pinnacle with the 1929 Wall Street Stock Exchange collapse and drastically precipitated the decline in production and rapid increases in unemployment in most capitalist countries. To cope with these altered circumstances, government sponsored initiatives gave rise to the large scale adoption of short-time working in Western Europe and the USA and a substantial though temporary reduction in hours of work for the industrial working classes. The second factor was the role played by the International Labour Organisation which since its emergence in 1919 has actively campaigned for hours' reduction on an international scale.

2.1 SHORTER WORKING HOURS: INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Immediately after the First World War the first convention adopted in 1919 by the recently formed International Labour Conference was the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention that established the eight-hour-day and the 48 hour week for industrial undertakings. This limit was gradually applied to

36. Evans, 1975:9
37. ILO, 1976, Ch.3
industrial and non-industrial sectors of the economy. This also gained widespread acceptance in Canada and the United States. These limitations on working time were however still associated with the six day week, then still regarded as a norm. When Henry Ford, the industrialist who had made an impact with assembly line production for motor cars first introduced the five-day week in his automobile plants in 1920 (and into the bargain pre-empted history!) it may be recalled that:

'At the time this was regarded as a scandalous innovation flouting every established tradition. Its opponents even cited the Bible in support of their argument that man must work six days and rest on the seventh.'

In the light of this odious response to the introduction of the five-day working week for manual workers in Henry Ford's employ, it may be concluded that the temporary reduction in hours of work by industrialists was not motivated by any real concern for improving the standard of living of employees but was a response to crises beyond their control necessitating a temporary restructuring of working hours. Because 'unemployment was severe there was widespread movement to reduce the working week as a remedy' and a tendency to move to the adoption of a 40-hour working week.

In the United States economic policy was tailored to meet the crisis of the Great Depression. To mitigate the resulting large scale redundancy, a reduction in working hours was used to preserve jobs. Work sharing was used extensively to create vacancies for those out of work - a situation that prevailed until the advent of the Second World War.

'In 1934 agreement was reached in Italy to cut down hours of work to 40 a week but with a proportionate reduction in wages. Introduced as

38. Maric, 1977:14n1
39. Evans, op cit.:10
a short term measure, this agreement remained in force for several years and was extended in 1937 to all manual workers. 40

The forty-hour week was also introduced in a number of undertakings in Austria, Czechoslovakia, France and the United States but was generally not legally enforceable and could be controverted as circumstances permitted. 41

Since 1932 the ILO has actively 'engaged in the study of the reduction of working time as one of the various ways of combatting unemployment. 42 In 1930 a convention (No 30) concerning the regulation of hours of work in commerce and offices was adopted. It specified a maximum working week of forty-eight hours and a working day of eight hours. It was followed in 1934 by the adoption of a convention (No 43) limiting the hours of work in automatic sheet-glass works to forty-two per week and eight per day. Convention No 46 limiting hours of work in coal mines was adopted in 1935. All three conventions addressed hours of work under distinct technical and organisational imperatives. In the case of underground coal mines a departure from conventional ways of calculating labour time was arrived at. The time spent in descent into and ascent from the mine constituted an element of working time in the provisions contained in the convention. 43 It also provided for a maximum normal working day of 7.75 hours and maximum overtime of 60 hours per annum.

The forty-hour-working-week Convention (No 47) was adopted by the ILO in 1935 when the normal working week was generally 48 hours. It signalled a radical shift from previous ILO conventions because arguments about shorter working hours for which the ILO became justly famed, in conventions and commissioned work 44 featured prominently for the first time. This was the

40. ibid.:11
41. ibid.:11
42. Cuvillier, 1984:27
43. ILO, 1982: 258.
44. more recent examples are the work of Evans, Cuvillier and White.
first convention where it was explicitly stated that world unemployment was causing hardship and privation which required effective remedial action:

'...unemployment has become so widespread and long continued that there are at the present time many millions of workers throughout the world suffering hardship and privation for which they are not themselves responsible and from which they are justly entitled to be relieved; ...it is desirable that workers should as far as practicable be enabled to share in the benefits of the rapid technical progress which is a characteristic of modern industry'.

These were the premises and conditions around which a more holistic argument could be shaped and constructed. The means to effect their implementation was equally drastic:

'...it is necessary that a continuous effort should be made to reduce hours of work in all forms of employment to such extent as is possible.'

Central to the argument was that unemployment had become a major problem and the benefits of technical progress was concentrated unevenly. In order to address these problems within the realms of possibility, working hours had to be shortened.

The adoption of the proposal by the ILO led to the emergence of an employer response that hinged around the costs involved and the effects this would have. Employers argued vociferously that a reduction in working hours would increase operating costs and therefore prices. The greater the proportion of wages in the cost bill, the greater the increase in prices. Implicitly it was not the increase in prices that was being questioned; the capitalist class was concerned about the possible effects hours' reduction would have.

45. ILO, op.cit.: 264.
46. ibid.
on profit rates and this is what was under consideration. Another sentiment articulated was that if the reductions were confined to certain industries only, it would encourage the use of substitute products. Employers also feared that in industries where working hours had not yet been reduced this would generate discontent among the workforce. These protestations though cementing a common class position appear tautologous because advocates of programmes designed to obtain working hour reductions, wished to achieve reductions for workers in all industries in an undiscriminating fashion. Should workers in some industries become discontent because they had been excluded from obtaining reductions in working hours, it was their right to do something about it - and they would be supported by those who advocated it in the first place.

One argument raised by employers which does appear to carry some degree of plausibility is that the increased labour costs caused by the systematic reduction in work time:

'would be an incentive to mechanisation and this would reduce the amount of labour required. Reduced working time would make the unemployment situation worse instead of better.'

If a deliberate and conscious attempt is made by capital to formulate a strategy whereby they can vindicate the failed objectives of the programme of working hours' reduction and assert with joy, 'the unemployment situation is worse instead of better,' then preventive measures have to be implemented to curtail this eventuality. Mechanisation is advantageous when it is used to raise living standards by increasing productivity levels leading to an increase in output and a cheapening of commodities. However a balance has to be found so that the unemployment situation does not worsen. Formulae have

47. ibid.: 28
48. ibid.: 28
to be devised to create opportunities for work for those unemployed to as great an extent as possible.

Between 1935 and 1939 four additional conventions were adopted by the ILO. These regulated the hours of work in glass-bottle works, public works, the textile industry and the road transportation industry.

The trend in working time reductions in the USSR diverges in a number of ways from the pattern one observes in the West. The 45-hour working week was introduced much earlier than in western countries. Prior to the revolution in 1917 working hours were comparatively long in Russia. In 1879 legislation was introduced reducing the working day to eleven-and-a-half-hours. By 1913 the average working day for industrial workers was still almost ten hours. After the revolution in 1917, the new Soviet Government decreed an eight-hour day for six days of the week. Over the period 1928 to 1932 the seven-hour-day was progressively implemented as an act of political and social policy resulting in a 41-hour week comprising five seven-hour days, plus six hours on Saturday.

During the Second World War hours of work in belligerent countries were subject to war measures and were extensively increased through over-time working. In fact every ILO convention on working hours passed since 1919 contained clauses providing for its suspension in any country observing it, during any emergency which endangered national security.

After the war, the war-time peaks of working hours were quickly reduced; hours of work then became a secondary issue as industrialised countries attempted to reconstruct their war damaged economies. Reduction rates in hours were also uneven between different countries. In several cases where 'requests for shorter hours were made, they were not strongly pressed, greater emphasis being placed on increasing wages.' In Britain where this was more pronounced,
unions placed greater emphasis on obtaining increased income rather than seeking reduced work time. It has been suggested that if both objectives are sought, especially in an inflationary economy:

'the income objective will usually take precedence since "the opposition of leisure prefers to an increase in income is likely to be much less strong than that of income prefers to an increase in leisure".'\(^{52}\)

By 1948 weekly hours in Britain had dropped below 45 hours. In other countries such as Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden this fall did not take place until a decade later; in the Netherlands not until the early 1960s. Yet again, in other countries the fall in hours of work was achieved as a result of a series of staged reductions.\(^{53}\)

During the post war years right until the early 1970s, western industrialized countries recorded higher rates of economic growth than before the war. Generally, this has been attributed to the successful demand management introduced as a clinical economic measure by various post-war governments to avert a recurrence of depression conditions. At the beginning of the 1950s however, workers began to argue the need of sharing the benefits of technical progress through a reduction in working time. One way in which they could do so was by working shorter hours.

Output had increased substantially; large increases in productivity were also recorded, 'which occurred concurrently with a substantial reduction in actual hours of work and an extension of holidays with pay.'\(^{54}\) It became increasingly clear that these benefits could be translated into shorter working hours - a shorter working week without any pay reductions and longer holidays. Attaining these benefits would only marginally slow down growth in

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52. Blyton, op cit.:22  
53. Blyton, op. cit.: 26  
54. Evans, op cit.:13

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real incomes. However, a major consideration dominating discussions in many countries was that a decline in total output had to be avoided if working time reductions were to be implemented, hence 'it was desirable that the rate at which hours of work and other benefits made available should remain well below the rate of growth of production'. This was the major motivation for reducing working hours in stages often spread over a number of years.

In 1962 the ILO reaffirmed its acceptance of the Forty-Hour Week Convention of 1935 (No 47) but recommended that the wages of workers should not be reduced when working hours were reduced especially if the original hours worked were inordinately long.

'Where the duration of the normal week exceeds forty-eight hours, immediate steps should be taken to bring it down to this level without any reduction in the wages of the workers as at the time hours of work are reduced'.

Over the past thirty years working hour differentials in industrialised countries have showed major declines for both weekly and annual hours worked. The only exception is Japan, where trends in working hours still lag behind the standards prevailing in industrialised countries, though they are shorter than those in developing countries.

Blyton notes that weekly hour reductions in Britain have been concentrated in four short periods: 1919-20, 1946-49, 1960-2/64-66 and 1979-82. It resulted in the adoption and introduction of the 48, 44, 40 and 39 hour working week respectively. It has been pointed out that these reductions mirrored periods of economic disequilibrium characterised by growing unemployment and declining levels of production. This proposition appears to be confirmed by Treu who says:

55. ibid.:13
56. ILO, op.cit.: 283.
57. Treu, 1986:3

SHORTER WORKING HOURS
'The trends in working time do show a significant, though partial correlation with economic cycles. The reduction in working time has proceeded unevenly in different periods. In most cases the change was more marked during the vigorous growth of the 1950s and the 1960s than it has been in recent years. From 1975 up to the early 1980s the pace of working hours reduction slowed down considerably in most countries.\textsuperscript{58}

Operating to hasten this process of changing working schedules in favour of the reduction and reorganisation of working time, are seemingly uncontrollable tendencies such as structural unemployment and changes in the sexual composition of the labour force. Unemployment has moved social policy to consider the possibility of redistributing the scarce jobs available by means of work-sharing. Expansion in the female component of the labour force has created conditions where factory based support can be directed towards adopting working time schedules that do not discriminate against female workers and therefore create flexibility for child rearing and domestic activities. This nonetheless has proved to be an experience located predominantly in industrialised countries.

Though the trend in most western industrialised countries is irrevocably towards working shorter hours, these patterns in working hours reduction are by no means even or predictable as exceptions to the prevailing tendencies are possible and often become manifest. Taking average actual hours worked by manufacturing workers in particular countries inadvertently hides differences stemming from the uneven nature of capitalist development in those particular countries. In some instances these differences may appear favourable in relation to average hours worked and in other instances they will appear excessive. Average international levels of working hours of numerous industrialised countries are

\textsuperscript{58} ibid.
well below the average working week for manufacturing employees in South Africa which remained at 46.7 hours in 1986. For comparative purposes this international data is reproduced in table 2.1

Table 2.1
International Trends in Hours of Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39 hours</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 hours</td>
<td>Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 42.5 hours</td>
<td>Iceland, Luxemborg, New Zealand, Norway, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden, United States, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hungary, Poland, USSR, Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In many countries variations in hours of work from the established norm exist within certain industries. In Japan the average working hours in non-agricultural activities during 1987 was 40.6, while the average in manufacturing was 41.3. As in all other countries levels of working hours follow an uneven pattern across industries. In 1987 average hours' worked in the chemical industry, the iron and steel industry and the food and beverage industry amounted to 38.8, 39.5 and 40.8 respectively. In contrast, average weekly hours' in the textile and furniture industries was 41.6 and 43.2 respectively.

In the mining industries some countries have set regulations limiting the number of hours that are worked for underground work or work which is considered dangerous or unsafe. Countries where this rule is enforced are listed in table two below. This can be compared with the normal hours of work prevailing in other industries in the respective countries.

### Table 2.2
Maximum Levels of Hours in Selected Industries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOURS</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>INDUSTRY</th>
<th>NRM HOURS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Coal Mines</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Coal Mines</td>
<td>42 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Coal Mines</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-37.5</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Coal Mines</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>Uranium Mines</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td></td>
<td>46 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USSR</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Other than Coal</td>
<td>42 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Evans, op cit.:34
* Conditions of Work: A Cumulative Digest. Vol.2

Given the significance of these achievements, it should be noted that they only apply to a limited number of underground workers in the mining of specific mineral products in the countries concerned.

### 2.2 INTENTIONS AND OUTCOMES

Legislation is sometimes circumvented and does not serve as an appropriate legal instrument either because it becomes obsolete soon after its promulgation or its enactment precedes its practical implementation by decades allowing it to exist as a mere statutory facade.

In Germany obsolete legislation still regulates the length of working hours currently in force. Furstenberg 61 observes that the Hours of Work Code of 30 April 1938 stipulating that working time shall not exceed 48 hours a week without authorisation was still valid in 1985 even though collective agreements between trade unions and employers' organisations has

61. Furstenberg, 1985:135

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brought into effect a gradual reduction in weekly hours of work. In the Steel Industry the 38 hour week came into effect on 1 October 1984 and more reductions are imminent in the future.\(^62\)

A number of major industries in Canada had adopted the 40 hour week by 1953, yet, Evans' research demonstrated that in certain provinces and territories legislation still based on a 48 hour working week remains in force.

'There are even a number of cases in which exemptions from the normal standards of provisional legislation have been granted, on the basis of which payment at overtime rates only become due after a number of hours in excess of 48 a week have been worked. Examples include: in Alberta for road and snow removal in rural municipalities (12 hours a day and 242 a month); in Ontario for road building and sewer and water-main construction (50 hours a week), the fruit and vegetable processing industry, the hotel and tourist industry (all 55 hours a week),and the highway transport industry (60 hours); and in Prince Edward Island, the food industry (60 hours).\(^63\)

Experiences in France highlight the fact that legislation introducing the 40-hour week and paid leave was enacted in 1936 but was never stringently observed. 'As recently as 1968, the effective working week was still a 45 hour week', and it was only after the "Grenelle" agreement of 1968 that a start was made to inaugurate, 'a rapid and steady process of reduction of effective working time for all wage earners. In effect, therefore, it took almost half a century for the spirit of the 1936 legislation to be translated into reality.'\(^64\)

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62. ibid.:136  
63. Evans, op.cit.: 22-23  
64. Jallade, 1985: 152
Working time differentials between manual workers and salaried employees in France have been steadily shrinking leading Jallade to conclude that it was not a result of legislative interventions or provisions. It 'is the culmination of a series of contractual agreements entered into by the social partners.'

Should the objective of the state be to accomplish a systematic reduction in hours of work in order to exert a downward influence on the level of unemployment then it has to be critically scrutinized to isolate its shortcomings. Employment creation requires a different set of strategies — strategies that are aimed at neutralizing a dynamic set of contradictory structural combinations than those ostensibly influencing working hours; these can take the form of business cycles and the structural limitations of industrial organisation. An employment creation programme framed around a policy of actively promoting successive reductions in working hours will hardly be successful as it has to depend almost exclusively on the decisions and calculations of employers to reach fruition. These decisions and calculations are necessarily dictated by profit maximising assumptions and therefore employment maximisation as a concern is absent. Changes in working time schedules cannot be accomplished without some degree of enterprise organisation as these policies impinge directly on the organisation of the enterprise. However, prerogatives in the enterprise would not necessarily be altered as a result of new working time schedules. But capital's obduracy could short-circuit these policy objectives.

Policy decisions framed by the state having a major impact on wage costs may discourage employers from creating the new jobs desired. This happened in France. In 1982 the French Government lowered the statutory duration of the working week from 40 hours to 39 hours. 'The authorities took the decision to award total compensation (the 39 hours were to be

65. ibid.

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renumerated as though they were 40!". At the time it was conceptualised as the first stage in an initiative that aimed to be working in the direction of the 35-hour week and a five-week annual vacation. Allow Jallade to elaborate what happened thereafter:

"Preferring persuasion to coercion for the purpose of implementing their policy of reducing working time, the authorities introduced solidarity contracts which provided for assistance - in the form of exemption from the payment of social contributions - to all enterprises, which reduce working time with the object of maintaining or increasing employment. The assistance is awarded in respect of every additional wage earner who is hired, and is spread, on a declining scale, over three years. This approach has not yet been very successful. In 1982, about 7 000 jobs were saved and 2000 were created as a consequence of these solidarity contracts".67

Strong reservations about the success of the programme were advanced in a study undertaken by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). Their findings showed only large enterprises which already operated a shift system were likely to expand employment. A predictable response to shorter working hours would introduce stricter time management by increasing the work pace and reducing slack time and seasonal fluctuations in working hours. It would also encourage employers to make greater use of sub-contractors. The study concluded that:

"Enterprises resorting to these practices rarely employed additional labour, but it is possible that increased sub-contracting leads to some employment creation in other enterprises".68

66. ibid.:156
67. ibid.:156
Unemployment in Australia rose dramatically during the late 1970s and early 1980s peaking at 10.3 percent in December 1983. One of the most popular policy options advanced to reduce this problem was that of reducing the working week of those already employed so that more jobs could be created.

As part of an unemployment reduction strategy, the Australian Trade Union movement has since 1976 campaigned vigorously to reduce the length of the standard working week to 35 hours. Estimates on the level of new jobs such a programme would create differ widely. According to Mangan and Steinke, the largest Australian union, the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights Union suggested that the implementation of a standard 35-hour week would create over 250,000 jobs. Estimates by the Ministry of Employment and Industrial Relations put forward a figure of 100,000 jobs and even the OECD saw reduced working hours as the only means of moving towards full employment. But as Mangan and Steinke point out:

'such estimates were, however ad-hoc and in most cases the assumptions and parameters of the estimates were not spelt out' .69

Table 2.3 contains the results of a survey conducted by the Bureau of Industry Economics (BIE) in Australia on the short-term response of firms who had reduced working hours.

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Table 2.3
Distribution of responses by Australian firms to a shorter working week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to Working Hours Reduction</th>
<th>Proportion of Firms making response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output per man hour</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Costs</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Whereas 28% of the firms increased employment, in only 12% of firms did employment actually decrease. But in the vast majority of firms (60%), employment remained unchanged. Productivity (output per man hour) increased in 32% of firms, was constant in 65% and declined in only 3%. Significantly, unit costs increased in 68% of firms, remained constant in 26% of the firms and declined in only 5% of the firms. Such a negative cost increase is unlikely to have a positive employment effect in the long-run. Mangan and Steinke tend to suggest that mythical expectations pervade the employment creating potential of shorter working hours which has not been confirmed by reality. They state:

'...whilst significant numbers of Australian workers achieved increased leisure time over this period, this did not translate into substantial job opportunities for others.'

2.3 SUMMARY

The problems that need to be overcome are numerous and severe. Legislative action is an almost indispensable precursor in the struggle to reduce working hours. It is only one method among several that needs to be

70. ibid.: 327.
investigated and utilised appropriately because if it is to exist as the sole policing mechanism it is likely to become a statutory illusion. Because of the strong institutional context in which collective bargaining takes place in the western democracies, industrial and in-house agreements between employers and employees have tended to over-ride the legislative intervention of the state insofar as the reduction of the level of working hours is concerned. This has given credence to the argument that state intervention in this arena leads to the failure of its planned objectives. However, the uneven nature of working hour reductions especially in the hotel and tourist trades and in industries where small enterprises predominate such as the building industry, still leaves room for statutory mechanisms to justify its presence. Furthermore, structural forces have also contributed to the gradual reduction in working hours during the 20th century. This requires consideration when coming to terms with South African evidence on the level of working hours. It may even require bold and new ways of responding to the challenge posed by the nature of working time. Of course the institutional context in South Africa is very different and the state's role of arbiter is greatly reduced if not compromised; it is generally perceived by labour as being antagonistically the proconsul of capital. This explains why a campaign to reduce the working hours of industrial workers cannot put too much emphasis on legislation that will be difficult to implement in any case. Therefore campaigns supported by strong factory based organisation would appear to be the most effective resort in reducing hours of work to levels which will sustain a more comfortable existence for workers socially.
THE NEED FOR WORKING TIME REDUCTIONS AND WAYS OF BRINGING THEM ABOUT

A number of arguments can be advanced on the necessity of reducing working hours in industrialised countries where they currently hover in the region of 40 hours. Some of these objectives are social in character and strive to improve conditions of employment and the quality of life outside working hours by giving workers more time to enjoy it. They also attempt to ensure that the fruits of technical and economic progress are equitably distributed; this is seen as one way of raising living standards. Other aims are more economic in character and as I have indicated in the previous chapters relate to ways of reducing unemployment by reducing working time. I will not repeat all these arguments; suffice it to say that the more important ones will be reviewed.

3.1 MOTIVATIONAL ARGUMENTS

The most basic social consideration for reducing working hours revolves around the physiological and social implications of such a stratagem. Limitations to human physiological capacities imply that when working hours are excessively long, there comes a point where productive activities become impossible to perform - the point where the physical capacity of the worker is sapped beyond endurance. This was a regular feature of the upsurge of modern capitalism during the 19th century and was one reason why laws were promulgated to protect the working class. This feature of excessive hours of work characterises sectors in a number of third world countries today.

Jobs requiring strenuous physical effort over an extended duration of time also impose physiological strains on the workforce which serves as a deterrent to economic efficiency. But even jobs where mental
alertness is required impose strain on workers, especially where high levels of work fatigue are evident.

"Fatigue and, more especially, mental strain may be reflected not only in reduced output but also increased errors or spoilt work, reduced concern for quality, higher accident rates, more unjustified absenteeism, increased absences on account of sickness and a great propensity to industrial disputes." 

A substantial body of evidence gathered by White (1987) suggests:

'that workers engaged in light repetitive work, which involves no significant muscle strain, develop erratic performance, both in terms of output and of errors, as duration of work becomes lengthy.'

If this is caused by fatigue, then it is only rational to believe that a reduction in working hours will lead to a marked reduction in fatigue. Extended rest periods are one palliative, but these have to be limited in number because they would affect the continuity and the rhythm of production within the enterprise. The reduction in working hours will 'ensure for the worker more protection and more time for life outside working hours.' Consequently, the most basic social consideration that can be advanced to motivate shorter working hours is that they contribute to the health and well-being of workers and more specifically to the quality of life they are able to enjoy.

In the western industrialised countries strong trade union support for an increase in leisure has been articulated on human and social grounds. It is considered absolutely necessary for workers to obtain

71. Evans, 1975:5
72. White, 1987:44
73. Evans, op cit: 3
greater physical and mental rest and relaxation that would lead to a reduction in nervous tension. It also enables them to participate more frequently in family life and devote more time to recreational, educational and cultural activities.

The most powerful argument that can be brought to bear on the adoption of shorter working hours revolves around the nature of productivity increases. This motivation is undoubtedly the crux of our current problematisation on hours of work. Proponents of a general reduction in working time ostensibly invoke evidence of increasing productivity to support their claims on the necessity of working less time. A reduction in working hours is closely connected to increases in productivity levels. It can be shown that increases in productivity mean that the same amount of output can be produced in less time or a greater amount can be produced in the same number of hours. Where these increases are significant, the workforce needs to be rewarded for this effort. The most appropriate way that this can be done is by sharing the benefits of technical and economic progress that increased productivity entails, thereby working shorter hours. 74

Three ways exist for this to be accomplished. First, by working shorter hours and enjoying increased leisure, second, by earning higher incomes and third, by a combination of the first and second. 75 When attention is drawn to improvements in standards of living, focus usually centres on improvements in real wages employees receive. Working conditions and condition of employment need not correspond closely to monetary compensation. Improved living standards are seldom evaluated against the systematic reduction of work time. Wage increases only lead to a temporal improvement in living standards and get eroded over time as a result of price increases. A reduction in

74. The benefits capital obtains as a result of productivity increases extends its economic ownership to include industrial, commercial and financial conglomerates that penetrate the lives of ordinary labouring people and shape their destinies as well. One should only ponder awhile at the power wielded by the major industrialists in South Africa.

75. Cuvillier, 1984: 20

Chapter 3, THE NEED FOR WORKING TIME REDUCTIONS AND WAYS OF BRINGING THEM ABOUT
working hours on the other hand would evidence a real improvement in living standards if real wages were pegged at their pre-existing levels and not allowed to fall in tandem as shorter working hours are introduced. Shorter working hours would represent a tangible improvement in living standards and would not be subject to depreciation over time. It is for this reason that a campaign for shorter working hours constitutes an important object of struggle. Wage struggles are important for labour to defend and improve living standards consistently. Struggles for shorter working hours are of equal significance for labour to benefit from and enjoy improved working conditions and standards of living. Neither struggle is exclusive and should preferably be closely linked to exert a lasting impact on the social existence of working people.

Past experience has shown that in real terms with shorter working hours workers were able to secure higher earnings and employers were still able to generate profit growth and substantially expand on investment holdings. That living standards and consumption levels have been rising rapidly with economic and technical progress in the developed western countries is indisputable. However, more leisure time (non-labour time) is needed to enjoy such an improved living standard and shorter working hours are a necessary accompaniment to this process.

Cuvillier(1984) suggests that a reduction in working time ought to contribute towards increasing the demand for labour. This could happen if the available amount of work is divided 'into a large number of jobs with less working hours.' Despite having demonstrated the unlikeliness of this happening, coupled with our distrust for inane probabilities, Cuvillier's reasoning could still be given some consideration. Accepting that working hours have to be shortened she says:

76. op.cit.: 21. It will be more difficult to enforce during a recession.
'It is believed that an extension of leisure time would provide a fresh stimulus to sectors of the economy serving needs deriving from the use of free time, such as sport, education, tourism, cultural activities and entertainment. New demand deriving from increased leisure time would create jobs.'

Whatever hopes we harbour, whatever possibilities we conceive, if we feel strongly about it, it could serve as a mobilising force that is capable of achieving social action. It will be successful if it is not clouded by irrational bursts of idealism but accompanied by rational economic calculations. Ultimately this is required to challenge opposing forces and resisting orthodoxies.

Manual workers work much longer hours than their counterparts in commerce and industry. Indeed, this is one good reason why the campaign for shorter working hours should be taken to its logical conclusion thereby facilitating the equalisation in the length of working hours differentiating blue-collar employees from white-collar employees and managerial personnel. This affects not only working hours but also a plethora of other service conditions. Comparisons of differentials separating manual workers and managerial and other white-collar employees, reveal that the benefits obtained by the latter group include longer holidays, less shift-working, improved sickness benefits, pension entitlement, better canteen facilities and of course better pay. Calculations by Blyton (1985) for Britain in 1984 show that the average full-time male manual worker worked over 44 hours per week (with overtime) whereas his white-collar counterpart only had to put in 38.5 hours. Over a working lifetime of 40 years, this means that the blue-collar worker is working the hours equivalent of more than five years longer than the white-collar worker, and in conditions which are generally far more unsafe, unhealthy and typically less personally

77. ibid: 21
78. Blyton, 1985: 6-7

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fulfilling and financially rewarding.' The General Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union severely criticised the logic of this onerous relation:

'The differential between manual and non-manual hours, although longstanding is hard to justify in any logical terms. Indeed there is something odd when those manual workers whose tasks are more physically onerous are expected to spend more of their working lives carrying those tasks out while less physically demanding jobs require less time.'

This differential status continues to be a major source of inequality between manual and non-manual employees and the only immediate feasible palliative is to reduce hours of manual workers significantly to levels enjoyed by their white-collar counterparts. These differences are much more severe if the status of women workers is taken into consideration. Equalising working time patterns between these different categories of employees means that the gap in working hours between manual and non-manual employees must be reduced without loss of earnings. It also means that the difference between male and female workers must also be terminated without loss of earnings to either.

Another point that should not go unmentioned is that the growth and expansion of commercial and industrial centres has added more nuances and complexities to the debates pervading the struggle for shorter working hours. The erection of residential suburbs away from central business districts (CBDs) and a considerable distance from industrial complexes means that workers now have to spend a greater proportion of their time on travel to and from work. The growth in the number and the increase in the size of firms has implied that sources of labour tend to be drawn from a wider and wider orbit. This puts an immense strain on the

79. ibid.
80. General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, 1983: 4

40 SHORTER WORKING HOURS
labour force in its efforts to get to work. One way for them to be compensated for this costly and time consuming effort is to remunerate them by reducing their hours at work. 81

Throughout this paper the need to reduce working hours has been considered. What does this mean in practice; what is the scope of the objective and by what mechanisms can they be accomplished? Let us proceed to address this aspect of the problem.

3.2 WAYS OF REDUCING WORKING HOURS

Despite the singularity of experience and reaction to long working hours there are no monolithic and uniform ways of reducing working time. Indeed the variety of ways by which shorter working hours can be achieved include: a higher compulsory school-leaving age; shorter normal working time; reduction and termination of overtime; long paid annual leave; more paid leave for educational, training and retraining and trade union activities and a lower normal retirement age without a reduction in pension. 82 These means are also directly related to the motivational arguments advanced above. In this section I only discuss the most important aspects of working time reduction and problems associated with particular features of the reduction sought.

3.2.1 AN ABSOLUTE REDUCTION IN WORKING HOURS

The most direct method of reducing working hours is by reducing in absolute terms the time a worker spends at work. Employers most often harbour a clear-cut hostility to the reduction of working hours. Historically an absolute reduction in the working day has been the most long sought after method of reducing working hours and has been symbolically encapsulated in the struggle to adopt an eight hour day. The aim of reducing working hours also embodies the strict

81. Evans, op cit.: 14
82. Cuvillier, op cit.: 1
principle that it also implies no reduction in earnings shall take place. 'The principle of non-reduction of wages means that when the normal weekly hours of work are reduced the weekly wage or, for hourly-paid workers, the previous normal weekly earnings, shall not be reduced.'

It is often very difficult for employers and managerial agents to accept the thesis of this proposition and yet even a child can understand the logic guiding the argument. The backdrop of the argument is that the accumulated benefits of productive and technological progress that has been stored in the fixity of working hours has now become available for distribution to employees. A technical benefit has accrued that is available for distribution. What should interest us here is the form in which the benefit should be distributed.

Why is it always perceived that remuneration must take a pecuniary form, especially where manual employees are concerned? There is nothing that prevents remuneration from taking a non-pecuniary form. Remuneration implies the benefit obtained for an obligation executed. It is the result of a mutual exchange. Nothing prevents remuneration taking the form of a non-monetary compensation. Working hours reduction is such an example of a non-monetary compensation. Here compensation is rendered by reducing the employee's working time, without reducing earnings. The worker is compensated in a non-monetary form, and can therefore not be taxed on his monetary compensation. His allowance should remain strictly the same. If this is the case, it is clear to us all that he has received an equivalent compensation despite rendering less labour time. It is equivalent to the monetary amount he received before; it also includes the amount by which his total working time has been reduced.

83. ibid.: 3
The principle of not reducing wages can be interpreted in a number of ways and could give rise to some ambiguity. If hourly paid workers working a 45-hour week and earning R4.00 per hour are suddenly confronted with a reduction in working time from 45 to 40 hours while their hourly rate is maintained at the original level, namely R4, it implies that their weekly wages have actually been reduced from R180 to R160. To maintain a wage of R180 with a reduction from 45 hours to 40 hours, means that the hourly wage rate must be increased from R4.00, the amount prevailing before the reduction in hours, to R4.50, the amount that is required to prevent weekly earnings from being reduced. The non-reduction in wages requires an increase in the hourly rates so that the remuneration of wage earners does not lead to any reductions whatsoever.

An absolute reduction in working time, and here overtime working is included, is the most direct and generally most preferred method of introducing shorter working hours. Where the principle of a non-reduction in wages is stringently adhered to, it will find strong favour among manual and industrial workers.

3.2.2 WORK-SHARING

Work-sharing as an hours' reduction strategy is aimed at using the opportunity of working shorter hours to distribute jobs among a larger constituency, specifically those classified as unemployed. This can only be done by reducing the hours of work of those who are employed and creating a shortfall in labour supply;

'as a result, employers, in order to maintain levels of output, would be required to take on additional labour. Hence, spreading the available work is seen as a response to a situation in which the total volume of work being offered is insufficient, or at least that
the volume of work is growing at an inadequate rate to maintain full employment.\textsuperscript{84}

Also known as job-sharing, Blyton refers to it as a situation 'where two people jointly share the responsibilities of one full-time job.'\textsuperscript{85} Similar in content to the strategies adopted during the Great Depression and reviewed above, the principle of work-sharing in Blyton's view can also be applied by reducing the levels of overtime worked simultaneously creating new employment opportunities. Work-sharing through over-time reduction or abolition is highly commendable and should be vigorously endorsed but the issue being addressed by work-sharing is job creation under shorter working hours.

Within the international trade union movement criticisms have been levelled against work-sharing because of its inability to guarantee income levels and job security for existing workforces. Naturally, during a recession work-sharing will imply slack-pay and a general loss of earnings as short-time working is introduced. Under such circumstances maintaining collective employee solidarity around shared objectives would be more difficult but not impossible. In North America for instance, unions have shown considerable ambivalence if not hostility to work-sharing because it tends to undermine universally accepted seniority principles relating to lay-offs (e.g. LIFO). In addition, work-sharing is thought to encourage moonlighting (i.e. where workers hold more than one job) and more over-time working - activities which tend to defeat the objectives of work-sharing. It appears to be a great irony that though work-sharing as articulated in the union movement is guided by an employment creation strategy the unions have been unable to organise unemployed workers systematically as a coherent interest group.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} Blyton, op.cit.: 35-36
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.: 101
\textsuperscript{86} ibid.:38-39
Aspects of work-sharing resemble part-time work in that workers on normal time are put on short time to accommodate unemployment. This is especially so if workers cease to be compensated for the paid hours foregone and experience a loss in earnings. The fact that work-sharing encompasses macro-economic calculations means that it is given stature as an instrument of employment policy. Vehement criticism has emerged from the Swedish Trade Union Movement (LO) emphatically rejecting the policy implications as well as the practical objectives of work-sharing as a means of reducing unemployment. Precisely because it is framed around an employment creation policy the motivation moves away from educational, family or socio-political motives to one of economic crisis management. It has opted to frame its rejection of this policy by defending the right to full employment with the slogan: 'work for all', and slates crisis management policies as defeatist. Quoting from its labour market policy adopted in 1979 it expresses its opposition to worksharing in the following way:

'In many countries today there is talk of rationing jobs and reducing working hours for employment reasons. We cannot accept such an approach. Hours of work must not be reduced as a means of combatting unemployment. If they were, such shorter hours represent concealed unemployment and not an improvement in standards. Workers would suffer decreases in earnings. In such an eventuality it would be the wage earners who would have to pay for the fact that both the public and private sectors lacked the ability to maintain full employment.'

The LO does however support hours' reduction if there are strong social, family or educational reasons for doing so.

87. Swedish Trade Union Federation, (nd) 198?: 6

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Evidently these are powerful arguments and definitely require serious consideration by forces on the ground intent on a counter programme. Job-sharing can be implemented as a method of reducing unemployment. The support it is able to generate from labour will depend very much on the extent to which labour is willing to manage capitalist crises and entertain ameliorist considerations.

Granted that this position is made from a macro-perspective, eloquent examples of countervailing tendencies that would radically contradict the assumptions of this position are found within particular areas of the manufacturing sector. In the metal industry\textsuperscript{88} for instance, the advent of micro-electronics has had a massive productivity but also labour-saving impact. Thus the industry faces a situation where capital investment has a negative effect on employment as insufficient jobs are being generated.

Rationalisation and automation of manufacturing production is closely associated with increasing productivity and reliability. Significantly, this tendency is no longer limited to mass production only; it has become economically feasible to introduce micro-electronics into batch production lines so that a variety of different components can be manufactured. This is known as computer assisted manufacturing (CAM) and ultimately causes employment shrinkage as more and more job functions become obsolete. A scenario accompanied by dwindling employment prospects therefore inevitably necessitates some form of accommodation such as job-sharing. 'Work sharing, through the reduction of working time and without loss in income is more and more necessary and possible along with the sustained efforts to regain meaningful growth.'\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{88} International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), 'Why we must reduce working time' from: Background to the discussion at the IMF Central Committee Special Session, November 18, 1983 - Geneva, Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{89} ibid.: 6
The acuteness of the debate around the appropriateness of work-sharing mirrors the uneveness of capitalist development as it is manifest in different sectors of the economy.

3.2.3 INCREASED HOLIDAYS AND LEAVE

Working time reductions can also take the form of longer annual holidays. In Australia for instance:

'State legislation and Commonwealth awards provide for it, usually on the basis of three months' holiday after fifteen years of continuous service and eight and two-thirds weeks after a further ten years. An extended holiday is also provided for in an agreement covering the steel industry in the United States. Workers with the required seniority in practice about half the workers, can obtain a 13 week holiday every 5 years.'\(^90\)

Leave is rewarded on the basis of seniority or length of service to an employer. Despite this, workers should nonetheless be entitled to an annual holiday after one year's working service. Industrial agreements often specify the amount and duration of this period. But the mere existence of an annual holiday period is simply not sufficient. Comparisons between manual and non-manual employees often highlight extreme disparities in the allocation of annual leave. The extension of leave is proposed as a means of improving living conditions. In enterprises where an absolute reduction in working hours are difficult to obtain arrangements could be negotiated so that these reductions are translated into longer annual leave benefits. It goes without saying, no exclusive hours' reduction method prevails. A number of different methods of reducing working hours can however be fashioned to suit the needs of both employees and the enterprise.

\(^{90}\) Evans, op cit.: 61.

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A trend whereby paid leave is set aside for education and training of employees is a development that is becoming more significant in developed countries.

'Paid educational leave can take many forms and include practices variously described as educational leave, study leave, examination leave, day-release, block release, extended leave, sabbatical leave, and so on.'

Award of such leave to employees could be on the basis of the length of service rendered to a company or employer. With this life long or recurrent education of workers would at least become a reality. It does however signify the multiplicity of mechanisms that can be deployed to reduce working hours.

3.2.4 EARLY RETIREMENT

Another way in which working hours can be shortened is by reducing the normal retirement age of employees giving recipients more time to enjoy life. The issue at stake concerns lowering the retirement age at which a worker is entitled to retire on a full pension. Effectively this means that the duration of the employee's working life is reduced. If the periods of reduction are measured in segments of years then it would appear extremely significant. Three distinct influences emerge to orientate policy objectives for the acceptance or rejection of early retirement as an hours reduction measure. These three influences are dictated by employee choice, enterprise convenience and government policy. The problem is perceived from different perspectives, with different intentions by the three actors concerned; namely, labour, capital and the state. Depending on the balance of power, one influence may over-ride the other.

Cuvillier (1984) indicates that early retirement on a full pension is important because relaxation has to be measured in relation to the entire working life of

91. 'Working Time' in J-M Clerc ed., 1985: 147
employees, not only in relation to daily or weekly working hours:

'workers may sometimes accumulate occupational stress over a period of years, only to die at the very moment when they have the opportunity to relax provided by retirement.'

Frequently work stress causing increased mental and nervous tension necessitates an earlier termination of working activities. It is essential that workers be allowed voluntary early retirement if they so desire.

It is true that premature retirement would imply a reduction in the living standards of workers because pensions would only constitute a proportion of current earnings. The motivation however is to give workers the opportunity to fulfil personal activities they did not have the time to do while working - the things that makes life worth remembering.

'(The) idea underlying many proposals in this regard is the same as the reduction in working time. It is proposed that the pension entitlement at full rate at a certain age should be acquired at a lower age, without decrease in the amount. This is not the same as early retirement, which implies an actuarial reduction in the pension.'

A retirement policy designed to benefit labour should be formulated in such a way that workers are free to exercise a choice in retiring. Workers should feel under no obligation to retire if they do not so wish. Forced or obligatory retirement represents a subtle form of redundancy. When autocratically and forcefully applied against older workers it is severely discriminatory and could constitute an unfair labour practice. Criteria and guide-lines would have to be rigorously specified and applied for a

93. ibid.:4
retirement policy to operate as a successful instrument in reducing hours of work.

While Cuvillier (1984) is highly supportive of the concept of early retirement without loss of pension, Blyton (1985) is severely critical of it. He emphasises that the interest shown in early retirement schemes by capital and the state are motivated with different objectives in mind - objectives directly converse to those of labour. Whereas,

'Governments in a growing number of countries have been looking to early retirement as a way to create job opportunities for younger unemployed,' 94

capital has used it as a pretext to embark upon redundancy under another name. This claim is supported with reference to a study undertaken in Britain in 1978/9 which found that almost one third of manufacturing companies surveyed subtly made use of early retirement schemes to reduce manpower. Of the firms in the study overtly engaged in manpower reduction, 'more than half reported using early retirement as a means of further reducing numbers.' 95 It appears terribly ironical that now that life expectancies are relatively high, attempts to reduce the age of retirement have been considerable.

Voluntary retirement schemes have been criticised for giving employers a 'soft' form of manpower reduction. This frequently confronts older workers in the enterprise as a fait accompli.

'In these circumstances, besides any differential financial arrangements, older workers may prefer to accept the "retired" status as one more desirable than that of "unemployed".' 96

94. Blyton, op cit.: 153
95. ibid.: 151-152
96. ibid.: 152
It is this dilemma that needs to be addressed when formulating early retirement policies and effectively neutralised because the interests of capital and labour only tend to converge antagonistically.

3.3 NEW PATTERNS IN WORKING TIME

Departures from conventional time schedules better adapted to modern conditions and more responsive to individual needs have evolved in industrialised countries. Compressed working time and flexible working time schedules fall into this category. These patterns do not necessarily encompass shorter working hours but engender flexibility tailored to suit individual needs and preferences.

3.3.1 FLEXIBLE WORKING SCHEDULES

Flexible work schedules have become increasingly popular among some employees and have been introduced in a number of western countries. The assumption is that if employees are given the same latitude and flexibility regarding working time to that frequently associated with management, the company can still depend on employee responsibility not to abuse it but to exercise it to the advantage of both the employee and the company. Consequently, flexible work schedules can be construed as a motivational influence at the workplace. Flexible work schedules attempt to redress rigid working time rules so that employees are given more scope and shown more tolerance by being able to make a greater number of choices in the preferred way they allocate and distribute working time.

A flexible working hours system would be designed so that it consists of:

'a fixed "core" period when all employees are present, and flexible hours before and after, for which the individual has a choice as to when he will start and end his work day. He must do
this in such a way as to average over each "settlement" period (normally a week or a month) a set number of hours as prescribed within the limits allowed by the law or collective agreements. There is a lunch break, which may be fixed, variable or included in the core time. The range over which individual starting and stopping times can vary is of course limited by the time during which the establishment is open. Hours worked in excess of the daily average (up to a permitted maximum) are set off against less than the average hours on the other days. A credit or debit balance at the end of one accounting or "settlement" period may, within specified limits, be carried forward to the next period. In some cases, credit hours within up to an authorised maximum may be used as a day's or half-day's leave in the next period."97

A number of variations could still exist depending on the particular flexible system implemented. Unfortunately a number of real constraints closely linked to the prevailing technical organisation of enterprises such as continuous, semi-continuous or assembly-line methods of production prevents the indiscriminate and unmitigated application of flexible working hours. With this difficulty manual workers and more especially those engaged in small and medium sized firms are generally less exposed to flexible work schedules than workers in large scale enterprises and those engaged in the service sector. Given these circumstances it would be correct to conclude that flexible work schedules have been more frequently applied to non-manual employees. Another reason for its relative absence among manual workers is because unions in several countries have seen it

'as potentially open to abuse by employers seeking to exert pressure on employees to work long hours when the workload is heavy without receiving repayment for overtime.'98

97. Marie, 1977: 25
98. Blyton, op cit.: 128

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But flexible employment schedules will also allow employees to attend available educational enrichment programmes. In South Africa a more obvious example of such programmes are the summer schools run at various white universities, which offer short but highly informative and well structured extra-curricula programmes. But such avenues of knowledge are virtually beyond the reach or grasp of the mass of South Africans and the mass of the country's working class in particular. Where working hours follow very inflexible and structured schedules, these inequalities will remain unaddressed.

3.3.2 COMPRESSED WORKING TIME

Compressed working schedules have been designed with the objective of giving workers greater opportunities to obtain non-labour time (leisure time). Attempts were made to compress the working week into a shorter number of days than existing under normal standards. One example of this is to convert a five day working week into a four or three day working week without shortening the weekly hours of work. This implies that the working day is made progressively longer. Apart from the social and psychological stress of long working hours, it should be realised that a working week which is inappropriately compressed into three of four days could inadvertently make trade union work less effective and more difficult. According to Maric(1977),

'various other objectives have been voiced. Some fear that a working week of three or four days will lead to double job-holding (moonlighting) ...Others feel that the striking novelty of the 4-day week may direct attention from the main issue - improving the status and quality of working life.'

99. Maric, op cit.: 18

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The compressed working week does not reduce the intensity of work - it only increases it; neither does it shorten the working week; it only restructures it so that workers have a semblance of increased leisure time at the cost of longer daily hours.

3.4 SUMMARY

Very broad criteria can be adopted within an hours reduction strategy that still leaves room for differentiation and variation; an example being to limit the working year to 2000 hours or alternatively to limit the working week to 40 hours. Some workers may opt to adhere to their current daily working schedule if it gives them the chance of moving from a six day working week to a five day working week. In the meantime other workers may choose to retain their current daily working schedules if they are given the opportunity of obtaining longer annual leave.

Progressive agencies could recommend the types of working hour schedules that need to be adopted, specifying the advantages and disadvantages each entails. Preference within one area does not imply preference in another - so prescriptive hours schedules should not be unilaterally foisted onto a consenting constituency. Respect has to be accorded to the choices emanating from factory based organisational structures which would correctly articulate the interests, needs and preferences of its constituency. The achievement of new working hour schedules is always predicated on the mediation of opposing forces objectified as capital and labour and the outcome in the resistance one exerts upon the other.
SHORTER WORKING HOURS AND PRODUCTIVITY

In the previous chapter I showed that the benefits of technological progress provides us with a powerful argument in the quest to reduce working hours. Pivotal to this argument is that the accumulated technical and economic progress achieved can be distributed as shorter working hours to society. New norms concerning working time will have to be socially accepted and juridically conceded for this to be realised.

4.1 PRODUCTIVITY

This mode of reasoning, however, implicitly or explicitly posits a relationship between hours of work and productivity. Whether it is a relationship of convergence or divergence it is important to illuminate its status explicitly because misconceptualisations could contribute to very real problems for the enterprise and the workforce. For the enterprise to concede undue changes in working hours without the necessary organisational adjustment could disorientate its viability as a feasible economic entity. This can be a liability if its competitors are not on the same par. It can be a liability to a specific national economy operating on shorter working hours should its principal competitors not be bound by similar requirements.

The strategy adopted to accomplish reduced working hour schedules would constitute a major item of importance for labour. A major obstacle to be confronted would be the virulent resistance the employer class would necessarily propagate should a very drastic demand for shorter working hours be advanced. Failure by organised workers to obtain the reductions sought would elicit an introspective
reaction which could seriously jeopardise working hours struggle. This would contribute to a high degree of disorganisation for the programme. Frankly, the stakes are too high to contemplate the possibility of failure.

Opposition to working time reductions will hinge around the question of productivity erosion, and affordability. Because studies in this area have been defined predominantly as a response to capital’s needs and the fact that it is constantly used, if not abused, to lambast labour’s poor productivity performance as a factor inhibiting the economic growth of the economy, has allowed a great deal of confusion to pervade it.  

Though related, output and productivity, are essentially dissimilar concepts. Ceteris paribus, productivity is not affected by the introduction of shorter working hours. The measure could however affect output.

Thorpe(1980), draws a distinction between production (what I prefer to call output) and productivity. Production or output, refers to the process where resources are transformed into finished products and services. Output, therefore refers to the finished commodities and services resulting from a particular production process - in short to what is produced. Productivity on the other hand, 'is simply a measure of the ratio between the output of a process and input of resources needed for it'.  

Productivity increases can be obtained where a given measure of inputs generate a larger output than before or the same amount of output can be generated from a reduced amount of inputs. Neither capital nor labour are solely responsible for productivity. Productivity refers to an holistic concept and measurements of productivity can be applied to capital, labour or

100. See the paper written by Charles Meth for FOSATU-entitled 'A Challenge from FOSATU on Productivity.', Occasional Publication No 6 -1983, for a brilliant and incisive critique of the assumptions, propositions and statistical absurdities guiding orthodox measurements of productivity analysis in South Africa.

101. Halse and Humphrey, 1986:4
entrepreneurial ability. Because productivity is dependent on so many variables, accurate, realistic and comparable measurements of it are extremely difficult to devise. In its totality:

'Productivity then, is closely associated with business planning and involves a planned approach to change and a planned response.' 102

4.2 PRODUCTIVITY AND SHORTER WORKING HOURS

As recorded in chapter one, the reduction in working hours from 60 to 48 per week (i.e. the transition from a ten-hour to an eight-hour working day) in the 1890s, did not reduce output as was generally anticipated. It also explains why a job creation programme linked to working hours reduction was such a failure. 'Productivity in fact rose so sharply that the job creation initiative was frustrated'. 103 This evidence is strongly supported by the British economic historian Bienefeld who has provided compelling evidence showing that 'major reductions of hours preceded, rather than followed, peaks of productivity growth'. 104 This inversion is not a travesty of history. An obvious conclusion to draw is that working hours reduction promotes conditions for accelerated productivity expansion and increases output progressively, thoroughly contradicting the common belief that it would severely constrict output.

An argument put forward by Cuvillier tends to suggest that a shorter working day would raise rather than inhibit productivity. By employing a concept of productivity similar to that outlined above, it is implied that the hourly rate of productivity under a shorter working day would generally be higher than had the length of the working day remained unchanged.

104. White, ibid.:11
Drawing from experiences in the United Kingdom she argues rather persuasively that:

'In the United Kingdom the Trade Union Research Unit of the Trades Union Congress considers that a reduction in working time can stimulate increased productivity. Lengthy working hours are often a symptom of inefficiency. By remediing this situation, it would be possible to reduce overtime, lower costs and improve competitiveness. Excessively long working hours sap workers’ morale and output and increase absenteeism; they may encourage the undertaking to go on using out-of-date machinery and thus put a brake on investment in new and more efficient processes. A reduction in working time would stimulate management to be imaginative and would promote better utilisation of resources; moreover, fixing positive objectives with regard to leisure and employment would contribute to the creation of a favourable atmosphere for technological change and reduce resistance to it.' 105

A large body of evidence can be brought to substantiate this claim. It should be remembered that optimum levels of working hours are not inexorable or static. They need to undergo changes to keep abreast of our changing civilization. 106 Levels of optimality also apply to the managerial (e.g. financial control) and technical organisation (e.g. plant sizes and plant location) within firms and business institutions of the economy. Historically, new regimes in working time led to the adoption of new management techniques tailored to cope with the rationalisation it implied. Discovering optimum managerial and technical requirements is not an automatic and linear process.

105. Cuvillier, 1984:79
106. Under capitalism a smaller proportion of the working population is engaged in the production and manufacture of food and clothing than ever existed under feudalism or any previous social formation. Under capitalism the base of consumer necessities expands over a larger population and also encompasses a wider range of commodities. Presently, a larger proportion of people are engaged in intellectual labour than during any period in human history.
but involves the challenge of attaining new horizons under altered conditions. History has vindicated the successes of this process.

From a slightly different angle, studies have been undertaken to show the effect shorter working hours had on enterprise organisation and output performance. These studies are well documented in Evans (1975) and we quote liberally from his work. A number of these studies whose key objective was to try and alter working hours with a view to maximising output emerged from experiments performed during the Second World War. Its results yielded some rather surprising conclusions.

'In one case considered in one of the investigations, nominal hours of work in a munitions factory were reduced from 74.5 to 55.3 hours a week. For various reasons the hours actually worked were well below the nominal work schedules and they dropped from 66 to 47.5 a week. Conditions other than working schedules remained unchanged and observations were made on the same number of workers performing the same task before and after the change. Hourly output rose by 56 percent, more than offsetting the large reduction in hours, and weekly output rose by 13 per cent. In another and similar case scheduled hours of work were reduced from 66.7 to 56.5; actual hours of work fell from 58.2 to 51.2; hourly output rose by 39 per cent and weekly output by 22 per cent'.

'In another investigation of war time experience a study of changes in hours of work in 34 manufacturing plants in the United States came to the conclusion that "for hours above 8 per day and 48 per week, it usually took 3 hours of work to produce two additional hours of output when work was light. When the work was heavy it took about two more hours of work to produce one hour of additional output." It was also shown

107. Evans, 1975:68-69
that, "after protracted periods of 7 days of work per week, workers actually produced as much, or even more, in 6 days as they formerly had in 7 days".\textsuperscript{108}

Other experiments undertaken at different periods elsewhere tended to confirm these results:

'In an experiment with no change in methods of production carried out in 1959 in a Swiss plant assembling and packing electrical apparatus, a reduction from 46 to 40 hours a week was accompanied by an increase in the labour productivity per hour of individual workers of between 3 and 9.8 per cent'.\textsuperscript{109}

'When factors other than individual effort are taken into account, compensatory effects are more marked. For instance, in the Federal Republic of Germany, a commercial establishment which introduced the 42 and a half hour week expected a 15 per cent increase in labour costs: in practice these were offset by higher productivity. Also in the Federal Republic of Germany an optical goods factory offered a 45 hour week on condition that output rose by 6.7 per cent; in fact it rose by 9.2 per cent for men and 8.2 per cent for women'.\textsuperscript{110}

These concrete examples prove to a large degree that shorter working hours contribute to a dramatic increase in rates of productivity. Where the short-term increases in output are unimpressive the long term output rate is an optimistic barometer of the economic benefits of shorter working hours.

\textsuperscript{108} ibid.:69
\textsuperscript{109} ibid.:71
\textsuperscript{110} ibid.:71
4.3 SUMMARY

Of course, counter-claims can be advanced disputing the arguments advanced here. Ideological conviction certainly influences the relationship one attaches to making such a programme successful. Proof by historical example is one method of showing that an hours' reduction programme is important. It evidentially rationalises theoretical postulates. An hours' reduction programme certainly becomes a greater possibility when both capital and labour are rationally convinced of its social and economic benefits and the immense encouragement it gives to the expansion of the society's latent potential.
There is a fundamental dearth of literature on working hours in South Africa. Even the influential *South African Labour Bulletin* contains only one article dealing specifically with shorter working hours which consists of a one page information brief highlighting the struggle to obtain a 35 hour working week by German metal unions.\(^{111}\) With the exception of two editorial features on hours of work and overtime appearing in the *Institute of Industrial Relations* Information Sheet, no other influential industrial relations journal published in the country since the Wiehahn Commission contains anything of a similar nature.\(^{112}\) This is tragic and inexcusable because long normal working hours, overtime\(^{113}\) and shiftwork\(^{114}\) though not specifically isolated as a priority of attack in national campaigns by the labour movement are the norm for a vast number of the South African workforce. These issues would however be substantively negotiated at plant level bargaining. The living wage campaign was meant to address these issues on a national scale.

Neither do two recent books, one from a management perspective\(^{115}\) and the other by the Community Resource and Information Centre (CRIC)\(^{116}\) aimed at a working class constituency shed any more light on working

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113. Estimates by the Labour Research Service indicate that in 1988 the average worker in the manufacturing sector was working 4.7 hours overtime per week, while the average construction worker worked 3.2 hours per week. See 'Economic Notes' in SALB 13 (7), Nov 1988, pp128-130. In issue no.129 of its information sheet, the IIR states that 'a dependency on overtime earnings can lead to considerable financial deprivation in the event of an economic downturn'. (p.5)  
114. see Taffy Adler's article 'Sleep for Sale: Shift Work in South Africa with Specific Reference to the tyre and rubber industry'.  
hours than already exists. This literary dearth may be due in no short measure to the low significance working hours as an issue of struggle has received from the progressive labour movement in South Africa.

The current industrial legislation appears to be purposefully inadequate to control excessively long hours of work although a recent ruling on the contentious issue of voluntary overtime by the Appeal Court involving the South African Breweries and the Food and Allied Workers Union found that an overtime ban does not constitute a strike. As long as there is no contractual obligation to work overtime, workers can refuse to do so. The court also indicated that this right not to work overtime was an important weapon workers possessed in the bargaining process.

5.1 HOURS OF WORK CAMPAIGNS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The history of campaigns for shorter working hours in South Africa still remains to be written. Research by Budlender (1979) reveals that shorter working hours only started to be addressed in South African labour legislation after the first world war. "The first Factories Act of 1918 instituted a 50 hour week." This exceeded the recommended 48 hour weekly limit contained in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles that had been ratified by the South African government. In 1931 the Factories Act reduced normal working hours to forty-eight, and in 1941 to forty-six. By comparison individual industrial councils and wage determinations often achieved more favourable results at a faster pace. In the more highly organised printing industry for instance, a 46-hour maximum week already existed in 1920 and it was further reduced to 44 hours by 1945. The building industry had a 44 hour week from

117. IIR Information Sheet, No.129, December 1989, p.4
118. Cape Times 27/09/89. This judgement is bound to have serious implications for the important role working hours and overtime will eventually play in the collective bargaining process.
1920 through to 1944. Hence, from a very early stage an uneveness in working hour schedules, a product of the uneveness of capitalist development in industry, came to be observed.

In the 1930s demands for a shorter working week among the representatives of organised white labour was articulated with increasing frequency. A demand for a 36-hour week was even put forward in parliament by a Labour Party M.P. In 1937 the Cape Federation of Labour Unions demanded a 40-hour week. According to Budlender:

"When the Factories Bill was debated in parliament in 1941 several MPs received telegrams from the (Transvaal) Garment Workers Union demanding a 44-hour week, and "there was talk here and there of a 40 hour week"." 123

But the war situation was the subterfuge for organised capital to marshall its forces and blunt efforts to reduce working hours. It was stated categorically:

"The problem is not of wages, it is a problem of maximum output from the minimum labour force. It is a problem of maximum hours, not of minimum wages and maximum profits". 124

Despite the fact that a Labour Party MP headed the Ministry of Labour and despite the desire from organised white labour for a shorter working week, the new Factories Bill 'only legislated for a 46-hour week, and set the overtime rate at one and a quarter times the hourly rate, rather than one and a third times demanded'. Yet even these provisions were ineffectively instituted as contraventions to the Act

120. ibid.: 144-146.
121. ibid.: 146.
122. ibid.
123. ibid.
124. Trade and Industry cited in ibid.: 147.
125. ibid.
in regard to working hours continued uninterruptedly.\textsuperscript{126}

With the emergence of scientific management in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s a reduction in working time encouraged an intensified and more efficient use of labour time in enterprises. It introduced techniques designed to measure and control the quantity and quality of work performed in an established time segment.\textsuperscript{127} This provided management with a systematic scheme to reduce unit costs and increase profits and in the larger enterprises eased the passage to shorter working time schedules contained in the recently introduced labour legislation.

Very different circumstances prevailed in the mining industry. At the turn of the century a twelve hour working day on the Rand and De Beers mines was a norm.\textsuperscript{128} An attempt in 1908 to institute an eight hour day 'was quashed by the mine owners as subverting the principle of free contract'.\textsuperscript{129} Two years later a church deputation on behalf of the workers met a similar fate. By 1918 however, the same year in which the first Factories Act was instituted, a forty-eight hour week for underground miners was instituted.\textsuperscript{130}

Horner and Kooy(1980) did not however report a significant improvement in mine conditions when they investigated conflict on South African mines during the 1970s. In fact their account shows that working hours on mines showed no real improvement. It was found that underground mine workers remained below for nine hours without a break for food and a substantial proportion for up to twelve hours. Concerning underground miners in particular it was observed that:

\textsuperscript{126} ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Lewis, 1984: 113.
\textsuperscript{128} Budlender, op.cit.: 172.
\textsuperscript{129} ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} ibid.
'At the end of the shift they are hoisted to the surface. It appears that there is less urgency about getting the men up at the end of the day than about getting them down at the beginning – in fact delays at the hoist are a perennial source of complaint by workers, as they mean not only extra time underground, but also cold food, less choice of food and cold showers in the hostels'.

Following the research of Charles Van Onslen and Ian Phimister on mine workers in Zimbabwe, Horner and Kooy regard such controls as characteristic of a labour repressive system reinforced by the imperatives of capital.

The Shops and Offices Act covered workers in shops and offices, workers in factories employing fewer than three workers and workers who were generally excluded from the ambit of the Factories Act. But only in 1939 after a long and turbulent passage and after a protracted campaign by the National Union of Distributive Workers was the Shops and Offices Act eventually passed giving shop workers a forty-six hour week. However, the minister was empowered to grant exemptions to clauses around any regulation as deemed advisable. This served to blunt the full implementation of the legislation.

A cursory analysis of strike statistics in the 1980s clearly reveals the low significance of hours of work in industrial relations disputes. Only in one instance between 1983 and 1987 did strikes related to working hours or overtime constitute more than 4% of the number of strikes as table 5.1 below shows.

Table 5.1
Disputes involving hours of work and overtime as a percentage of total strike activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours of Work</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of Work &amp; Overtime</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Breakdowns no longer provided.

Ironically, one of the first union federations to direct attention towards shorter working hours in South Africa in recent times was TUCSA. At its annual congress in 1982, it unanimously called on the government to provide for a maximum 40-hour working week because as one delegate said

'South Africa was lagging behind other countries such as West Germany and the United States where a 40 hour week had been long in operation.'

Another delegate

'called for a national approach by all trade unions to the issue and said no country's economy had ever collapsed because of a shorter working week.'

These brave words appear to have been one of the few progressive stands taken by the conservative union establishment before its final demise from trade union activity. Although not a priority on its agenda, the initiative insofar as the struggle for shorter working hours are concerned was to eventually pass into the hands of the emerging progressive trade union movement especially where overtime working prevailed.

133. Cape Times 22/09/82.

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In 1982 shorter working hours were instituted to some extent in the manufacturing sector. This initiative commonly referred to as 'short-time' was first introduced by capital as a tactic to avoid excessive retrenchments with the onset of the recession. In a few cases short-time, the elimination of overtime and similar measures were usually instituted by larger employer concerns after consultation and negotiation with unions.\(^{134}\) It did at least shelter a select group of employed workers from the effects of the recession. It is undoubtedly true that the emerging progressive unions tended to give shorter working hours a lower priority as they struggled to increase subsistence wages and ensure job security. As one unionist expressed it in 1984:

"Our primary goal is a minimum living wage and a reduction of the gap between skilled and unskilled workers".\(^{135}\)

In 1986, the South African metal unions began to employ the tactic of overtime bans as a lever to ensure that wage demands would be met. Although not specifically isolated as an object of struggle in itself, these unions had become conscious of a significantly close relationship between the struggle for improved wages and shorter working hours.\(^{136}\) This relationship acquired greater organisational clarity and determination with the launch of COSATU's living wage campaign in 1987.

The living wage campaign was an attempt to formulate national demands, vigorously supported by a militant membership in factories and locals and included all COSATU affiliated unions in the campaign. It also involved a large scale mobilisation and recruitment drive aimed at strengthening union organisation and educating its constituency. Among the demands advanced by COSATU relating to working hours were a 40-hour week without loss of pay. In its Second

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134. Natal Mercury 9/9/82; Daily Despatch 29/9/82; Daily Despatch 1/10/82.
135. Rand Daily Mail 30/07/84.
136. Sowetan 16/05/86; Argus 29/07/86.
National Congress Report of 1987 COSATU reiterated its commitment 'to an active campaign for a 40 hour week and a ban on overtime so that extra jobs can be created'.

Because there are extreme disparities in the minimum legal level of working hours specified in South African industrial legislation which separate for instance metal workers from hotel and catering workers, the demand for a forty hour week will mirror tactical differences in the way the campaign ought to be conducted. As these differences in tactics could exist, it may be useful to examine their consequences beforehand. Even if it is slightly speculative at this stage to talk about it, it may still be extremely insightful to do so and pose questions to facilitate constructive and collectively informative debate. The antithesis of this is to be put on the defensive and attempt to preempt adversity when the unforeseen occurs.

5.2 WORKING HOURS AND INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION

According to the ILO\textsuperscript{138}, the most recently available statistics show that the average hours worked per week by employees engaged in the manufacturing sector in South Africa in 1986 were 46.7.

Provisions contained in South African industrial legislation have created a number of instruments regulating conditions of employment for industrial workers. The most important of these provisions is contained in the Labour Relations Act which allows for the creation of negotiating forums known as industrial councils. Industrial councils are composed of registered trade unions and employers or employers' organisations in particular industries. These forums also referred to as self government in industry

\textsuperscript{137} COSATU, 1987:39.
facilitate industry-wide bargaining between the two parties. On industrial councils, conditions of employment binding on both parties are usually negotiated. Industrial councils also specify the extent of normal working hours in particular industries.

In 1987 an estimated 964,881 workers were covered by published industrial council agreements, of which 851,090 participated in pension and provident funds provided for by these agreements. Some 397,837 workers were members of funds providing medical benefits. In 1988, 95 industrial councils were regulating the conditions of service of approximately 988,000 workers.

In 1988 as the data reflected in table 5.2 shows, the largest cluster amounting to 68.3% of the subdivisions of industrial councils fix working hours between 40 and 45 hours. Almost a quarter or 24.7% stipulate between 46 and 48 hours while 7% stipulate between 50 and 54 hours. The working hours of 7.7% of the sub-divisions (i.e. 11 out of 142) are longer than the 46 maximum weekly hours stipulated in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1983. These long working hours occur in the Tearoom, Catering and Accommodation industries.


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Table 5.2
Hours of Work in Industrial Council Sub-Divisions in 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOURS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SUB-DIVISIONS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Since 1978 a slight attempt has been made to reduce the length of working hours under some industrial council agreements as table 5.3 shows. However only 35 industrial council sub-divisions out of 142 (24.6%) have been affected by this and in only six instances during the past ten years has a forty hour working week been achieved. Some industrial council sub-divisions such as those affecting Liquor and Catering Witwatersrand and Liquor and Catering South Western Cape have been reduced more than once but still prescribe notoriously long working hours. An explanation for this is because of the long initial hours worked and the gradual nature of the reduction obtained. Over this period thirteen sub-divisions were reduced by one hour, nine by two hours, eight by three hours and four by five hours. In the industrial council agreement for Passenger Transport Port Elizabeth, normal working hours were increased in 1987 from 44 to 46 hours!
Table 5.3
Industrial Councils Recording Shorter Working Hours for Labourers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL</th>
<th>AMOUNT HOURS REDUCED PER WEEK</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>NEW HOURS WORKED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering Wits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/78</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering SW</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/79</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering Wits</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/81</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Contracting Natal:A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/83</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Contracting Natal:B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/83</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Pietermaritzburg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/83</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Northern Natal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/83</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering Pretoria</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/84</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals Cape</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/84</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry Natal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/85</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Durban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/85</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Pietermaritzburg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/85</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering Wits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12/85</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Transport Transvaal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema: A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema: B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Body</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Manufacturing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Auto Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Reconditioning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Other: A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Other: B &amp; C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/86</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Eastern Cape</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/87</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Transvaal:A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7/87</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton Textile Boland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7/87</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton Textile CPT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5/87</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering CPT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/87</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering SW</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/87</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Natal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/87</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger Transport PE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/87</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet East London</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/88</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering Wits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/88</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry Natal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6/88</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tearooms Wits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/88</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Catering Pietermaritzburg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/88</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Where employees and employers are insufficiently organised to form an industrial council, the Wage Act makes provision for wage determinations and labour orders to regulate minimum working conditions. Paraphrasing the Central Statistical Services we learn that:

"Wage determinations are measures which prescribe minimum wages and other conditions of employment such as hours of work, annual leave, sick leave etc. and are made after investigation"
by and on recommendation of the Wage Board, by the Minister of Manpower. Each determination applies to a particular trade or industry and area and remains in force until it is superceded by a similar or other wage regulating measure. At present there are 51 determinations of which 48 are operative while three have been superceded by orders made in terms of section 51A of the Labour Relations Act, 1956. The Wage Act determines that such an order take precedence over a wage determination where both provide for the same matters.141

A larger number of workers are covered by wage determinations than by industrial councils. According to a recent SALDRU publication just over one million workers were covered by wage determinations142 at the end of 1987 compared with approximately 988 000 workers covered by industrial councils in 1988. Pillay, Budlender and Young argue that:

"The Wage Act involves direct State intervention in the economy in the form of a Wage Board and wage determinations. The Wage Board is composed of State-appointed functionaries who respond to the initiatives of the Minister of Manpower (formerly Labour). The Minister instructs the Board to investigate wages and other conditions of employment in "unorganised" industries or in industries where there is a refusal or failure of one organised body to collaborate with another. It then makes recommendations to the Minister, and these are invariably published as legally enforceable wage determinations."143

In 1988 as table 5.4 shows, 16.7% of the sub-divisions of wage determinations fix working hours between 40 and 45. The largest cluster of 76.4% stipulate between 46 and 48 hours, while 6.9% stipulate between 56 and 58 hours. Only 3 sub-divisions out of 216

143. Pillay, Budlender and Young, 1984:1.
stipulate a forty hour week. But the vast majority of wage determinations have made no real impact on a shorter working day. Altogether 83.3% of the sub-divisions prescribe a minimum working week longer than 45 hours. Determinations exemplifying excessively long working hours cover the Hotel and Liquor industry (56 hours) and the Private Hotel industry (58 hours). More depressing is the fact that hours of work under Hotel and Liquor industry and Private Hotel industry determinations have not been altered at all over the past decade.144

Table 5.4

Hours of Work in Wage Determination Sub-Divisions in 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOURS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SUB-DIVISIONS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>160</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>76.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SALDRU DATABASE, 1989

Only 20 sub-divisions out of 216 reduced working hours between 1978/88. In no single instance was the forty hour working week achieved as a result. Thus, hours of work for workers covered by wage determinations still remain painfully long. Despite these generally onerous conditions many determinations contain clauses

144. also see SALDRU's, Wage Determinations in South Africa second edition (1978-1988), October 1989:63-64.
exempting certain employers from the full impact of the instrument.145

Table 5.5
Wage Determinations Recording Shorter Working Hours for Labourers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAGE DETERMINATIONS</th>
<th>AMOUNT HOURS REDUCED PER WEEK</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>NEW HOURS WORKED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevedoring(4)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12/79</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Distr.(5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/81</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods Trans.(7)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11/86</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Water(4)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/87</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With the exception of farm workers and domestic workers who are not protected by industrial legislation in South Africa, a large number of workers not covered by the Labour Relations Act or the Wage Act or where none of these acts specify the particular employment condition, are covered by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act(1983). This Act also contains clauses regulating minimum working hours. It consolidates the provisions relating to conditions of employment which were formerly contained in the Factories, Machinery and Building Works Act 22 (1941) and the Shops and Offices Act 75 (1964) but covers a larger number of workers than the earlier Acts.

The law regulating working hours under the Basic Conditions of Employment Act prescribes that:

'No employee shall require or permit -

(1) A security guard or guard to work for more than - 60 hours per week;
any other employee to work more than - 46 hours per week.'

145. ibid.:70-73.
(2) In determining time worked the following must be disregarded - time worked on a Sunday (except in the case of employees in a 'continuous activity'); overtime not exceeding the prescribed maximum'.  

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act provides workers with the most basic and elementary of employment rights, yet many employers even find difficulty in observing it.

One example of concerted employer resistance to shorter working hours is expressed by operators in the road transportation industry in their repugnance to legislation intended to regulate the hours of work for drivers. In articulating these sentiments, the director of the Public Carriers Association has described such regulation as both impractical and difficult to enforce:

'The essence of this legislation is a restriction on driving hours, requiring a continuous rest period of nine hours within a period of 24 hours. We believe that this control is unnecessary. Firstly, there is no proof that accidents involving heavy commercial vehicles have been caused necessarily by driver fatigue. Secondly, there is no proof that heavy commercial vehicles have relatively more accidents than ordinary motorists. In fact the available statistics seem to indicate just the opposite. Our drivers are professionals and it follows that they should be responsible for fewer not more accidents'.

This is only one area where employer sentiments have been clearly articulated. Such a statement serves as an indictment of the Public Carriers Association, but it also gives individual operators a licence to ignore

and defeat the implementation of the impending legislation.

5.3 THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF LONG WORKING HOURS

Although industrial legislation in South Africa contains archaic statutory standards on working hours compared to similar industrial economies, statutory provisions are often violated by employers in some parts of the country with little fear of penalty or sanction from the relevant authorities. A study in 1985 of a small coastal community near Mossel Bay showed that observance of statutory minimum requirements was virtually absent and that no set hours of work for fishermen prevailed. Fishermen employed in small scale operations could be summoned to work at the most inappropriate hour and be required to continue uncomplainingly until a good catch was recorded. Scant attention was given to the time spent fishing and the fishermen had no option as a good catch boosted income. Employees engaged in small establishments in peripheral centres and in rural domains face similar obstacles with extremely limited scope for relief.

The issue of working hours in South Africa is further aggravated by the long time the majority of workers have to travel. State policies such as racist residential zoning, bantustans and de-centralisation have added significantly to the time employees spend away from home. For example, a Saldru study of Atlantis near Cape Town in 1986 showed 'nearly half (44.8%) of all those working outside of Atlantis spend more than 2 hours getting to and from work daily'.

The situation for most African workers is even worse. In 1983 the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) released a report on the time KwaNdebele workers spent travelling to Pretoria each day. The majority of

commuters who bussed the 110 to 130 km to work in Pretoria each day, left home before 5am and spent at least two to three hours travelling by bus each day. A quarter spent three hours or longer on a bus each day and more than half were away from home for more than 14 hours each day.150

Using official statistics, two Sunday Express journalists compiled the following profile of KwaNdebele residents who travelled to work by bus and largely confirmed the HSRC study:
13% left home between 2am and 3am;
* 24% between 2.30am and 4am;
* 21.4% between 4am and 4.30am;
* 32.7% between 4.30am and 5am;
* 8.4% between 5am and 5.30am. 151

These journalists were also able to interview commuters. Here are some of the responses that were obtained:

‘I see my wife and babies on weekends only, they are normally ready to go to sleep by the time I get home’. 152

Another said:

‘If I do overtime at work I miss the bus home and have to find a place to stay the night’. 153

A mother said:

‘My children get ready for school alone, eat supper alone, and if the bus is late go to bed without seeing me’. 154

150. Star, 27/01/83
151. Sunday Express 30/10/83
152. ibid.
153. ibid.
154. ibid.
The South African version of the sweat-shop starts long before dawn of the apartheid omnibus and only comes to a halt again long after nightfall.

Two major reports by the National Institute for Transport and Road Research (NITRR) in 1985 attributed the travel problem in South Africa to legislatively entrenched policies like the Group Areas Act.\textsuperscript{155} That by Nesta Morris and Liz Fourie estimated average daily travel times in dual directions between Pretoria and KwaNdebele and Pretoria and north-east Bophuthatswana at 6 2/3 hours and 7 1/3 hours respectively.\textsuperscript{156} In this way serious physical, emotional and familial violations are being perpetrated daily against a large segment of South African workers. The social costs would be very difficult to tabulate.

Ensenberg (1986), a researcher at the National Institute for Transport and Road Research drew a direct correlation between the long travelling times Black workers were and still are required to spend on their way to and from work with the low productivity of labour in South Africa.\textsuperscript{157} Moreover, Ensenberg sees the direct repercussions of long distance travel on commuters creating physiological and psychological pressure on the workforce which inhibits its efficiency and generally imposes a deleterious effect on productivity.\textsuperscript{158} Where a significant proportion of the labour force is affected by long commuting times, ripple-effects would eventually be transmitted throughout the economy. The fact that low labour productivity has been perceived as a hallmark in South Africa and vituperatively castigated at every opportunity by both capital and the state is an illustration of this ripple-effect.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{155} Business Day, 6/11/85.
\textsuperscript{156} ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Ensenberg, 1986: 1
\textsuperscript{158} ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} for examples see Lombard, 1984 and the publications of the National Productivity Institute.
Ensenberg indicates that a number of studies prove that commuting distances are generally much shorter in Europe than in South Africa, with 71% travelling less than 10 km and 75% travelling less than 30 minutes from home to work. Nonetheless, these studies still regard 'commuting as a stressful and disruptive factor which may affect the work situation'. In South Africa where long-distance commuting is more widespread, 52% of commuters travel 16-30 km, while 19% travel more than 30 km each way every day.

It can also be argued that where long distance commuting has emerged to accommodate the ideal principles of a racist ideology, it definitely signifies a fundamental squandering of scarce resources. Apart from the incredible time constraints it imposes on commuters, it is also a financial liability for lower income earners. More especially in South Africa:

'Many Black commuters almost certainly suffer the effects of chronic fatigue, which is the accumulation of recurring daily fatiguing experiences with insufficient opportunity for recuperation (through rest and sleep)'.

Consequently:

'Fatigue can manifest itself in a progressive deterioration of both physical and mental performance on the job. The tired worker will be slower, less well co-ordinated and more liable to errors and accidents'.

As can be seen, addressing the problems associated with long commuting times for public transport users has a direct bearing on employers. In the current context a shorter working day and a systematic termination of over-time still remains a more direct

160. Ensenberg op.cit.: 50.
161. ibid.
162. ibid.: 33
163. ibid.: 34
and more effective method of correcting long-term imbalances in the distribution of free or non-working time\textsuperscript{164} for a large segment of the South African workforce, especially long distance commuters.

5.4 DEVISING A STRATEGY FOR HOURS REDUCTION

The campaign to obtain a reduction in hours of work as enunciated by COSATU's demand for a forty-hour working week tends to mirror a conflict between agitating for a drastic reduction in working hours (the forty-hour working week) and a gradual reduction in working hours (e.g. a reduction of two hours per annum until the forty-hour working week is achieved). In fact, the way the demand has been articulated thus far tends to reinforce this dichotomy but it has not been addressed. A similar dilemma also confronted advocates in Europe but the reasons advanced were couched in different economic and technical terms.

European advocates of shorter working hours especially in the post World War 2 era advanced economic reasons as to why they supported a gradual reduction in working hours. They argued that at no stage should a reduction in working hours threaten output or the real earnings of workers. This implied

\textit{that the rate at which hours of work were reduced and other benefits made available should remain well below the rate of growth of production}.\textsuperscript{165}

It ensured

\textit{that any increased costs resulting from the shorter working week would absorb no more than a share of the anticipated increase in productivity, so that a reduction in hours of}

\textsuperscript{164} In conventional parlance this is referred to as leisure-time.

\textsuperscript{165} Evans, 1975: 13.
work and improvements in the material standard of living could go hand in hand. 166

This is nothing more than a cost-benefit analysis. The implications are that working hours reduction is supported if it is accompanied by an increase in productivity which does not reduce the level of output. Hence, the support given to a gradual reduction in working hours or a reduction by stages.

In South Africa too, a similar response is likely to come from management. By attempting to imitate European arguments and impose them on a different contextual terrain it is likely to be used as a tactic to oppose a reduction in working hours. In South Africa organised labour will have less difficulty in effectively countering and debunking the premises of this position because long working hours are unsustainable for a host of reasons as has been indicated from chapter three onwards.

The COSATU demand nonetheless implicitly raises the question of two different approaches which could be tactically adopted. However, it does not discuss them in any depth whatsoever. These two approaches are for a drastic reduction in working hours or a gradual reduction in working hours.

A drastic reduction in working hours can only be obtained through united action by worker organisations on the basis of strong shop-floor organisation. It will generally favour highly organised workers most likely to be found in medium and large scale enterprises. This will effectively exclude workers in unorganised or poorly organised sectors of the economy. Unorganised workers and workers employed in small enterprises or in industries characterised by a plethora of concerns which render effective worker organisation difficult if not impossible such as the hairdressing trade, commercial and distributive trade, service industries etc. will generally not benefit from these gains unless some form of centralised

166. ibid.:57.
bargaining is made mandatory in the industry concerned. Poorly organised workers may not achieve any gains whatsoever. Thus a large bulk of the working class would be marginalised from the struggle to obtain a forty-hour week. In reality at any given time the unionised work force only constitutes a proportion of the numerical composition of the working class and not the bulk. Those workers not unionised because of structural contradictions will not experience the impact of workers' power.

For working hours reduction to be applicable to a wider constituency and be immediately beneficial to a larger mass of workers, it requires the force of law to become operational and binding. The law however does not operate in leaps and bounds but it often specifies hard fought rights. If it is tactically deployed it will become an effective check against recalcitrant and unenlightened employers. Marx makes a similar point in Capital where it is argued:

'Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society...Free competition bring out the inherent laws of capitalist production, in the shape of external coercive laws having power over every individual capitalist'.

The force of law exerts a juridical command over the individual capitalist and can be used to demonstrate to unorganised workers the image of their power. If it is used effectively, unorganised workers would begin to be organically ejected into the slip-stream of nascent but real forms of organisation. By monitoring the law's implementation simultaneously serving as a check - these workers would timeously expose violations when they arise. Clearly, this will be a tremendous advance for unorganised and weakly organised workers in the country. Fashioning a demand according to the functions and capabilities of the law, allows the working hours issue to become a

167. Marx, 1970: 257. I have used the Lawrence and Wishart edition where the statement by Marx is more suggestive than that given on page 381 of the Penguin and Vintage editions.
successful struggle for a vast number of unorganised workers. Confronted by very concrete concerns, their baptism into working class organisational issues would be more permanent.

Confronted by such a contradiction, COSATU and other progressive unions need to adopt a two pronged strategy where emphasis is placed on securing a drastic reduction in working hours where the balance of forces favours this on the one hand and a gradual reduction of hours underwritten by law on the other so that a greater mass of workers can experience the effects of united working class power. It automatically compels workers to gravitate systematically towards the slip-stream of working class organisational issues where their interests would be paramount.

5.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The struggle to secure a reduction in working time is a working class issue. As a working class issue, an issue having an extremely significant bearing on the working class it needs to be far broader than an essentially trade union issue - or an issue localised in a specific industrial sector. And as a working class issue it needs to be imbued with a working class conception of political organisation. The struggle to reduce working time must be instilled with class politics, and will be an essential feature of a workers' charter.

If a larger segment of workers are to be included into working class politics, the issues of working class organisation would need to centre around mass based campaigns, like the living wage campaign. The shorter working hours demand and the over-time ban demand would constitute a fundamental component of such campaigns.
Shorter working hours are not an automatic concession for those aspiring to obtain them. In fact it is not a concession at all, but a right which often involves ordinary workers in vigorous struggle. Neither are working time regimes static and inexorable. Only the most unashamed apologist could like Nassau Senior oppose the shortening of the working day from eleven-and-a-half to ten hours because as he claimed, it cancelled the profit of capitalists who only obtained it during the last hour of the working day.\textsuperscript{168}

Henry Ford was able to shorten the working day in his factories on the basis of an intense rationalisation and re-organisation of the production process. Commonly referred to as a Fordist production strategy which became more generalised in Europe and America after the Second World War, it effectively involved the deployment of assembly line production methods and the organisation of work according to product and equipment specialisation. Factories were designed on a functional basis and mass specialisation of labour was a norm.\textsuperscript{169}

International trends in the level of working hours have declined substantially over the past fifty years. In South Africa, legislative enactment has had only slight effect on the level of working hours.

Shorter working hours in South Africa are likely to contribute to a fundamental increase in productivity as was argued in chapter four. In fact it has been grudgingly conceded that 'a fixed 45-hour week with no overtime,'\textsuperscript{170} is a key factor in efforts to raise productivity in South Africa.

A further point that needs to be considered in instances where differential rates in working hours exist internationally, particularly between countries whose economies are at similar levels of capital intensity, is the unequal competitive advantage one

\textsuperscript{168} Marx, 1977: 334. 
\textsuperscript{169} Kaplinsky, R. 'Is, and What is Post-Fordism', University of Sussex, IDS mimeo, January 1990. 
country is able to enjoy over another. Furthermore, the extent to which longer working hours in South Africa has facilitated its competitive ability in international commodity markets remains an issue for more thorough-going research.
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