

# **The Future of Work**

## **Working Hours and Work Intensification**

### **Background Paper**

### ***ACTU CONGRESS 2003***

#### ***Quick Fact:***

*Almost one third of full-time employees work more than 48 hours per week; more than half of these are non-managerial, and a third of these work more than 60 hours per week. Australia has the largest proportion of employees working long hours in the OECD. Australia is now the second longest working time country in the developed world.*

#### **CONGRESS 2000**

1. Congress 2000 resolved to encourage affiliates to bargain for:
  - a reduction in standard hours of work,
  - increased leave entitlements with portability between employers,
  - caps on overall hours of work,
  - rosters which take into account workers' family responsibilities and health as well as the staffing needs of the workplace, and
  - increased rights in relation to rostering and performance monitoring.
2. Congress 2000 also resolved to seek award variations to establish a reasonable maximum working hours standard appropriate to the industry and/or enterprise.

#### **DEVELOPMENTS SINCE CONGRESS 2000**

3. The 1998 meeting of the ACTU Council adopted a comprehensive resolution dealing with the issues relating to working hours and work intensification.
4. The Council determined to develop a national campaign, comprising award changes, bargaining and organising campaigns, and heightened community awareness of the issues. The resolution recognised that different issues would be the priority for each union, depending on the arrangements applying in the industries in which their members work.
5. Since Congress 2000 the issues associated with working hours and work pressure, particularly in relation to their effects on employees' ability to combine work and family, have received considerable media and public attention.
6. This public campaign has been greatly assisted by the ACTU's running of the *Working Hours Case*. This case determined that an employee can refuse to work overtime if it results in unreasonable hours of work, with the employee's family responsibilities and health and safety relevant in determining the reasonableness of those hours of work. More significantly, the findings in the decision highlighted the appalling state of working time in Australia and the urgent need for Australian unions to improve working time regimes in this country.
7. Unions have also campaigned in a range of industries over issues including staffing levels, overtime caps and limitations on casual employment, with many achieving significant improvements to working time regimes through certified agreements.

## ISSUES FOR POLICY AT CONGRESS 2003

8. The broad issue of working hours has been central to the historic work of Australian unions and is central to an understanding of the contemporary workplace.
9. Through the Eight Hour Day, the 44 Hour Week and 40 Hour Week campaigns Australia led the world in civilising hours of work. From 1856 until 1947 Australia consistently had among the best hours of work regimes in the world. In the late 1970's a successful campaign which culminated in a national standard being achieved in the 1983 National Wage Case reduced ordinary hours to 38 per week.
10. However, since 1983 average hours of work have steadily grown.
11. While the length of the standard working week has always been a central concern of unions, workforce changes in the past 20 years have required a union response which takes account of the large and growing variation in employees' working time experiences.

12. Work intensification, through reduced staffing levels and increased workloads has not only driven long hours of work among full time workers; it has also meant that workers are under constant stress in attempting to meet targets and demands, particularly in jobs which involve dealing with the public. This intensification of work gives rise to unsustainable work practices, which harm both the enterprises and workers concerned. Lack of staffing means there is no time for ongoing training of workers which allows them to keep up with the changing demands of their work. The increased pressure at work gives rise to unsafe workplaces. And, the inability of workers to participate in a full non-work life ultimately makes work an unsustainable part of their lives.
13. The standard working week is currently worked by only one third of the full-time workforce: fewer than half of all employees only work Monday to Friday, a quarter work weekends, and one in eight have variable hours.
14. The explosion in insecure part-time, casual and contract work, with one in four employees employed on a casual or temporary basis, has resulted in greatly expanded employer-driven flexibility, with consequent irregular and unpredictable hours for many workers.
15. One in seven workers is underemployed: that is, they are working fewer hours than they want, with one quarter of these working part-time because they cannot find full-time work. These employees, on average, want to work 37 hours per week, but are actually employed for under 20 hours. Indeed, Australia has one of the highest rates of underemployment and precarious employment in the OECD as well as a significant number of long term unemployed.
16. Almost one third of full-time employees work more than 48 hours per week; more than half of these are non-managerial, and a third of these work more than 60 hours per week. Australia has the largest proportion of employees working long hours in the OECD. Australia is now the second longest working time country in the developed world.
17. 49% of men and 61% of women working more than 45 hours per week say they want to work fewer hours. Fatigue and lack of time for non-work activities, including family, is a huge issue for these workers.
18. At the same time there has been a growth in the evidence, which now makes it unambiguously clear, that working in excess of an average of 48 hours per week represents probably the largest occupational health and safety risk faced by Australian workers today.
19. The variance in the amount of hours being worked gives rise to an unstable and inequitable distribution of work. The unpredictability and instability of hours of work further compounds the risks to the health and safety of workers.

20. Another great inequity is that 60% of overtime is unpaid.
21. Much of the growth in long hours of work and unpaid overtime is due to work intensification, caused by reduced staffing levels and increased expectations in many industries, as well as increased employer control through various forms of performance monitoring.
22. For a worker to decide to work less hours, base wage rates must be at a level which provide a fair standard of living without a reliance on overtime. Often this is not the case.