THE SHORTER WORK WEEK*

I. TRENDS IN HOURS OF WORK


This statistical study consists of two main parts. The first examines the trend in average weekly hours worked by major industry groups from 1947 to 1955. The second part of the report examines the hours pattern in 1955 or the differentials in hours of work among American workers related to various factors such as occupation and industry, age, marital status, sex, and color.


A recent statistical analysis of scheduled work weeks in 17 major labor market areas. A summary table shows the percent of women office workers and of male plant workers in various industry divisions (manufacturing, wholesale trade, etc.) by scheduled weekly hours of work.

II. GENERAL ANALYSES


This special report is skeptical of the feasibility of a 4-day week in the near future for the reason that there just aren’t enough workers available today to turn out all the goods people demand. The probable cost of the shorter work week and scheduling difficulties which would result are also discussed. Includes comments from numerous “key” management and union officials such as Cola Parker and George Meany on the subject of the 4-day week.


*Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.
In a survey of 100 firms, Fortune found that not a single firm was willing to say that a four-day week is either feasible or desirable in the fairly near future. Fortune then estimates how long it will be before a four-day week will be feasible assuming workers continue to take the same percentage of their real income in the form of leisure. An analysis of the special problems which a four-day week or a change in the standard work-day will cause in some industries is also included.


A popularly written pamphlet dealing with all aspects of the hours of work subject. The author presents an introductory discussion of such topics as the movement for shorter hours, the effect of shorter hours on output and absenteeism, government regulation of hours of work, and collective bargaining provisions relating to hours of work.


A report prepared by the International Labor Office tracing the probable impact of shorter hours of work on output, costs, prices, wages, profits, and employment. The analysis is general and designed to apply to many countries. The report includes a helpful discussion of circumstances which are particularly favorable or unfavorable for a reduction in hours.


A technical analysis of the trend toward the shorter work week in terms of the traditional economic theory of consumer demand. The author treats leisure time as a consumer good and explains the increased desire for this "good" in terms of changes in the worker's real income, his property income, and his tastes. This theory is used to explain the long-run trend toward the shorter work week and the importance of the Fair Labor Standards Act and unionization in bringing about this trend.


This report is divided into two main parts. Part I contains a discussion of the historical background of the shorter work week movement and of state and federal government hours legislation. Part II contains a well-documented summary of the arguments that have been advanced for shorter hours as well as an evaluation of the prospects for future reductions.

A careful analysis of the wisdom of reducing the work week. The author argues that unions are wise in pushing for shorter hours only if their members are willing to sacrifice potential gains in weekly earnings for more leisure. A shorter week is alleged to be a costly method of creating new jobs or saving old ones. There are much better solutions to the problem of unemployment available to society.


Mr. Stewart attempts to quantify the implications of a 30-hour week for the structure of output and expenditures in the United States for the next fifteen years. Several of the discussants are critical of Stewart's projections and also consider other possible effects of a reduction in the work week such as a change in worker productivity, a more stable level of employment, and changing consumption patterns.

III. Union Attitudes


This volume includes a series of five research papers prepared by union research directors. These papers deal with recent progress toward reducing hours of work, proposals for reducing the work week, workers' attitudes toward shorter hours, the history of union efforts to reduce hours, and economic aspects of shorter hours of work. Also included in this volume are the comments made by participants in the discussion and Mr. Meany's introductory remarks.


The author, who is President of the Communications Workers of America, states that the primary argument in the United States for the shorter work week stems from a desire to spread employment. He explains the conditions in his own industry which make the attainment of the shorter work week particularly important, and then concludes by asserting that it would be a major mistake for every American industry to go from 40 to 35 hours. Transition should be made slowly from industry to industry as the need arises.

States that the present campaign of organized labor for the shorter work week is based on economic rather than social considerations and then lists in summary fashion the usual economic arguments put forth by unions in support of their position. Emphasizes the need for an industry-by-industry approach to this problem and asserts that "reduced working hours is not a cure-all solution."

*Oil, Chemical and Atomic Union News* (Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, 1840 California St., Denver 2, Colo.), February 18, 1957, "Straw vote shows members prefer fewer work days," pp. 1, 4; March 11, 1957, "More members favor fewer days per week if hours are shortened," p. 6. $2.00 per year.

The results of a straw vote conducted by the *Union News* in which workers were asked in what way they would like to have their working hours reduced. The members of this union strongly prefer fewer work days per week. Longer vacations was the second choice, an occasional three-day weekend was third, and shorter daily hours was fourth choice. The article also contains letters written by members explaining the reasons for their choices.

*The Shoe Workers’ Journal* (246 Summer St., Boston 10), November-December, 1956. "The shoe worker and the shorter work week." p. 3. 50 cents per year.

Does not favor a shorter work week. Argues that tests and surveys have shown that the great majority of workers are interested in earning the higher wages rather than the shorter work week. "This also applies to shoe workers. They’d prefer a full 40-hour work week rather than 36 hours because of the higher weekly earnings resulting from their piece-work rates."

*The United Automobile Worker* (2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis 7), April, 1957. "Shorter workweek." pp. 3-4, 12-13. 5 cents.

In his annual report to the 1957 UAW convention, President Reuther says that the shorter work week with increased take-home pay will be the next major collective bargaining demand of the union. The form which the reduction in hours will take will be decided by the rank-and-file, according to Reuther who also stressed the need for careful timing of the hours reduction in each industry. A pictorial feature explaining why the Auto Workers want a shorter work week is also included.


In sharp contrast to most unions, the Rubber Workers are attempting to lengthen rather than shorten the number of hours in a standard work-day. The objective of the union is to bring the standard work-day in plants presently working a six-hour day up to eight hours. President Buckmaster says that he "cannot see much logic in the argument that the six-hour day is a work-sharing program."