

THE FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK AS A POLICY OPTION FOR AUSTRALIA

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The image of a world in which people are freed from compulsory toil and drudgery has long captured the imaginations of philosophers, visionaries, and ordinary men and women. From medieval folk fantasies to technosocialist utopias, people have dreamed of the abolition of work and its replacement by expanded leisure and freely chosen activity. There are, of course, other traditions that emphasise the central importance of work to human life on an individual and social level. The impulse to achieve ‘freedom from work’ and the principle of the ‘right to meaningful work’ may well pull in different directions in relation to attempts to renegotiate our relationship to work. However, regardless of which of these goals is accorded the higher priority, it is clear that neither the radical democratisation of leisure nor universal access to meaningful work has been achieved.

It is in this broader context that we can usefully consider the potential for a Four-Day Workweek (4DW) to serve as a compromise between utopian and pragmatic goals in relation to the future of work.

The article is divided into three parts, according to its theoretical, historical, and institutional levels of analysis. The first part analyses the case for change in the nature and extent of work and outlines the basic arguments for a 4DW in Australia. The second part focuses on the US experience in the 1970s and during the Great Recession, leading to a brief assessment of the implications of this experience for a 4DW in Australia. The third part includes a short case study of an Australian workplace that provides the option of a 4DW to its staff as part of its commitment to alternative work schedules (AWS) and flexible work practices. Drawing on these findings, the article concludes by arguing that the goal of 4DW based on reduced working hours without reduced

pay could form part of a *new politics of shorter hours and chosen time* that is developed by a *progressive political coalition*.

The Case for Change in the Nature and Extent of Work

Utopian and Pragmatic Arguments

Work is one of life's main experiences and, as such, it is no surprise that its nature and extent have featured prominently in utopian visions of the future. As Skidelsky and Skidelsky (2012: 44) put it: 'Men and women have always dreamt of a world without suffering, injustice and above all, without work' (Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2012: 44). The dream manifest in folk utopias, such as the medieval fantasy Land of Cockaigne, is one of a spontaneous deliverance from work by means of divine providence, or some other form of magic (Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2012). For Oscar Wilde (1891), and other advocates of techno-socialist utopias, the dream is also of deliverance from work, but by technology, and to the end of the full development of individuality. This vision of freedom from compulsory work is also clear in Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology* (1932) and in André Gorz's sketch of a future based on a 'society of chosen time and multi-activity' (Gorz, 1999: 65). In Gorz's vision: 'Social time and space will have to be organised to indicate the general expectation that everybody will engage in a range of different activities and modes of membership of society' from 'a self-providing cooperative, a service exchange network, a scientific research and experiment group, an orchestra or a choir, a drama, dance or painting workshop, a sports club, a yoga or judo group' (Gorz, 1999: 78).

The implications of these, among other, utopian visions for the future of work are clear: work as drudgery should be progressively reduced and/or eliminated, while work as one element of freely-chosen activity should be progressively expanded and democratised.

The pragmatic case for reduced working hours and expanded leisure within the limits of capitalism draws on both philosophical arguments and cultural preferences regarding the desirability of leisure and political economic analysis of the potential for evolutionary change to working hours. Particular focus is placed on the possibilities for taking the benefits of cumulative productivity gains generated by continuous technological change in the form of greater leisure. The political

economic analysis of Keynes (1963), and others, suggests that cumulative productivity gains provide the material basis for the reduction of wage work and the expansion of leisure. In his 1930 essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, Keynes (1963: 368) calculated that rich countries should be able to provide a high material standard of living on the basis of 15-hour average workweeks by 2030. According to Beggs (2012), 'Keynes turns out to have been on track in his numerical guesses' regarding productivity increases in rich countries, with Angus Maddison's data showing UK real *per capita* incomes on track for a 6.6 fold increase between 1930 and 2030, with corresponding projections of a 7.9 fold increase for the US, and between a 5.5 and 9 fold increase for Western Europe and Anglo ex-colonies.

In addition, recent research provides evidence of a mismatch between desired hours and actual hours of work for a significant proportion of US, European and Australian workers today, suggesting there may be some social support for a shift towards greater leisure and a more equal distribution of paid work (Reynolds, 2013; Reynolds and Aletraris, 2010; Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner, 2002; Fear, Rogers and Denniss, 2010; Pocock, Skinner and Pisanello, 2010; Skinner, Hutchinson and Pocock, 2012). According to Reynolds (2003: 12), 'On average, American men and women would like to shorten their weekly work schedule by about five hours.' In Europe, Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner (2002) identified a similar pattern, finding that self-employed workers would like to see a reduction in average weekly hours from 48.2 to 38.4, while dependent workers favoured a reduction from 37.7 to 34 hours (Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner, 2002: 32-33). In Australia, Breunig, Gong and Leslie (2013: 14-15) found that: 'Across all workers, nearly twice as many individuals report a preference to work less hours than report a preference to work more hours', including 33.1% of men and 41.1% of women in full-time employment.

However, despite this evidence on desired working hours, and the impressive cumulative productivity gains of recent decades, average weekly working hours in industrial countries have only fallen from around 50 to 40 hours between 1930 and today. On current trends, they might reach an average of 35 hours by 2030, but nowhere near Keynes' posited 15-hour workweeks (Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2012: 21).

These considerations and evidence necessarily lead us to the question of what stands in the way of shorter working times and more leisure.

Obstacles to Change in the Nature and Extent of Work Within Capitalism

The peculiar character of wage labour, the cultural force exerted by the work and consumerist ethics, the process of structural economic change, and the structural function of unemployment are part of the internal dynamics of capitalism. Together, these factors militate against a move to shorter hours and chosen time.

First, it is necessary to recognise that capitalism is inherently geared towards capital accumulation. Marxist political economists have always stressed the need to see the labour process and the wage relation in this context. As Braverman (1988: 35) puts it, capitalism's '*differentia specifica* is the purchase and sale of labour power.' From the capitalist's perspective, the purpose of production is to increase the size of an individual unit of capital by appropriating the value created by social labour and realising it in monetary form. As a consequence, the nature and objects of work are secondary to the overriding priority of capital accumulation. The capitalist encounters the worker as both the means to the creation of value and as a cost of production and, therefore, conflicts over wages and working conditions are a permanent source of tension.

Furthermore, because it is 'not a constant, but a variable quantity' (Marx, 1976: 341), and therefore affects the amount of surplus value created, the working day is a site of ongoing conflict over the distribution of time. 'Capital', Marx writes (1976: 342), 'is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.' Therefore, from the perspective of capital, 'If the labourer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist' (Marx, 1976: 342). It is the capitalists' 'were-wolf hunger for surplus-labour' (Marx, 1976: 353) that drives them to colonise more and more social time. In 19th century Europe and the US, technology provided the heavy artillery in this conquest of time, from mechanical looms and steam power, to the clock which 'became a weapon used by employers to eliminate the gaps in the traditional day of work' (Cross, 1989: 6). Later technologies, including the conveyor belt, TV and credit cards, have also been important in the increasing commodification of social time. Today, new media technologies and social media platforms 'allow work to invade spaces and times that were once less susceptible to its presence' (Gregg, 2011: 3).

Secondly, the antagonisms these structural power relations generate mean that capitalism relies on a system of social legitimation centred on the reproduction of a strong work ethic. Wages are a powerful driver, of course, but ‘wage incentives do not necessarily function as a stimulus to work longer hours at a more demanding pace’ (Weeks, 2011: 44). Something is necessary to ensure that the work ethic does not diminish as incomes rise. Consumerism enters the story here. The work ethic is reinforced by a consumerist ethic that relies on a ‘gigantic marketing effort’ to sustain commitment to both work and consumption (Beggs, 2012). Consumerism functions as a ‘new opiate of the masses’ (Beder, 2004: 4) that supports capitalism’s ‘extremely strong bias to redeploying productivity gains towards output expansion’ (Beggs, 2012).

Thirdly, technological change destroys some types of work and creates others. The interaction of this change with capitalist competition and trade affects the local, regional, national and global distribution of work and incomes over time. Scholars disagree over the implications of technological change in the current period for the future of work. For some, the trajectory of capitalist development, including continuous technological change, poses a threat to the quantity of available work in absolute terms (Gorz, 1999, Rifkin, 2011). Others caution against excessive pessimism regarding the job-destroying power of new technologies and argue that the recurring theme of ‘automation anxiety’ (Akst, 2013) in debates about work is not justified by the evidence. As economist David Autor makes the case, while technological innovations are leading to changes in the types of jobs that are available, ‘that is very different from saying technology is affecting the total number of jobs’ (Autor in Rotman, 2013). While the precise nature of the relationship between work and technology is contested, the proposition that some have benefitted more than others from the process of structural economic change is less controversial. In advanced capitalist countries, the trend has been towards rising wealth and income inequality and a fall in manufacturing’s share of total employment (Piketty, 2014; Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014; Reich, 1992; Greenstone and Looney in Akst, 2013).

A fourth feature of capitalism that presents an obstacle to reform is the role of unemployment and precarious work. From a Marxian perspective, unemployment in the form of the reserve army of labour plays the structural function in a capitalist economy of ‘check[ing] any tendency toward a too rapid rise in real wages which would bring accumulation to a halt’ (Bellamy Foster, McChesney and Jonna, 2011: 6). The trend

towards increasingly insecure forms of work, identified by Gorz (1999), Standing (2011) Howe *et al* (2012), and others, would also tend to enhance the disciplinary threat of unemployment and reinforce the work ethic. This trend has been exacerbated and accelerated by the processes of structural economic change outlined above, and by the political project variously referred to as 'neo-liberalism', 'economic rationalism' or 'economic fundamentalism'. This project has been led, in part, by 'new right' lobby groups and think tanks that promote discourses on work emphasising 'flexibility', the work ethic and the managerial prerogative (Stilwell, 2000: ch. 4; Langmore and Quiggin, 1994: ch. 4; Donaldson, 1996: 58-93).

Towards a New Politics of Shorter Hours and Chosen Time

In the face of these obstacles, any attempt to redistribute time among competing uses and to change the nature of work must necessarily be deeply political. This is evident in the course of capitalism's historical development and the counter-movement it stimulated in the form of class struggle. Indeed, the evolution of the labour movement itself can be interpreted as expressing the ambition to resist capital's encroachment on people's time (Cross, 1989, Hunnicutt, 2010, Donaldson, 1996). The history of what Donaldson (1996: 107) calls the 'time wars' of the late-19th and early-20th centuries makes it clear that, while change in working times is possible, reversals are common and conflict is unavoidable. According to Cross (1989: 14, 20), as a consequence of 'intense industrial and political conflict' the 'industrial workyear in Europe' fell 'from 3,000 to 3,600 hours per year to the contemporary standard of 1,650 to 2,000' between 1840 and 1940 (Cross, 1989: 14, 20). Hunnicutt (2010: 1, 17) cites similar evidence for the US and, according to Donaldson, 'Australian workers were undoubtedly leading the world' in a 'protracted war over time' during this period (Donaldson, 1996: 18).

However, these struggles of resistance, as far as they relate to average working hours in rich countries, have stalled in recent decades due to the combination of factors discussed in the previous section.

In this context, this article argues that a renewed push for reduced working hours and expanded leisure requires a *new politics of shorter hours and chosen time* that directly challenges the dominant discourses on work and accepts the inevitability of political and social conflict as

part of the process of effecting change in this area. As Gorz (1999: 73-74) states: 'Rights over time, over periods of time for diversified activity, are the stakes in a cultural conflict which inevitably spills over into a political conflict.' This new politics must be explicitly feminist in its orientation to ensure, as Weeks (2011: 162) argues, that 'any movement for reduced working time...include[s] a challenge to [the] present organisation and distribution' of 'socially necessary unwaged labour.'

The goal of a 4DW could form part of this *new politics of shorter hours and chosen time*, but it should not be considered as a 'stand-alone' measure. Any shift towards a more equitable distribution of work, incomes and leisure within capitalism would require a combination of fiscal, monetary, industry, public sector, infrastructure, incomes, training and social policies designed to support the achievement of these ends. The details of these policies, including the relationship between demand deficiency and persistent unemployment, are beyond the scope of this article but are well dealt with elsewhere (see Langmore and Quiggin, 1994: chs. 7-15; Stilwell, 2000, chs. 14-22; Carlson and Mitchell (eds.), 2002). However, while the 4DW should not be considered in isolation, it may have the potential to serve as a focal point for a *new politics of shorter hours and chosen time*.

Given the obstacles to change in the nature and extent of work, the development of this *new politics* – and the achievement of a 4DW – would ultimately depend on these projects attracting the support of – and being driven forward by – a progressive political coalition. Such a coalition might include workers, trade unions, social welfare organisations, feminist groups, environmentalists, progressive political parties, among others.

The Case for a Four-Day Workweek in Australia

The 4DW has never attracted significant public attention or political support in Australia. This may suggest it is not a priority for Australian workers, that other factors are more important, that obstacles to such a change are pervasive, or that no compelling and sustained case for a 4DW has yet been mounted.

In recent decades, Australia has exhibited many of the same trends in terms of structural economic change, wealth and income distribution and working time arrangements as other advanced capitalist countries. These

include: strong average productivity gains coupled with a falling labour share of national income, a decline in manufacturing's share of national employment, a precipitous decline in union density, rising average levels of overwork, underemployment and unemployment, growth in insecure forms of work and increasing wealth and income inequality (Cowgill, 2013: 6; Lowe, 2012: 1; ABS, 2012; Rafferty and Yu, 2010: 45-4; Howe *et al*, 2012; Leigh, 2013). Average weekly hours worked by Australians only decreased from 35.5 to 33 hours between 1978 and 2010 (ABS, 2010: 11). Since 1985, average weekly full-time hours have actually increased from 36.4 to 38.6 for women and from 39.5 hours to 42.3 hours for men. The slight fall in average hours is wholly explained by a significant increase in part-time work (Cassells *et al*, 2011: 11; ABS, 2010: 13).

According to Wooden (2011), Australians work less, on average, than Koreans and Japanese, around the same as workers in the UK, US and New Zealand, and more than workers in northern Europe. In 2012, there were 6.6 million full-time workers in Australia (excluding owner managers of incorporated enterprises) and 2.6 million part-time workers. Of the 9.5 million Australians who were single jobholders in 2012, '66% usually worked 5 days a week' and '70% worked on weekdays only'. In addition, 3.4 million Australian workers had their 'hours varied weekly or...were usually required to be on call or standby in their main job' and there were 1.5 million shift workers (ABS, 2012). According to Howe *et al* (2012: 15), 40% of Australians were in some form of insecure work, including around 2.2 million casual workers, over 1 million independent contractors, and more than 1 million business operators.

These trends can be viewed as both obstacles and opportunities as regards the potential for developing a *new politics of shorter hours and chosen time* in Australia that includes the specific goal of a 4DW. Together, they describe a context in which proposals for a 4DW might be expected to garner significant public support, while also highlighting the barriers to any progressive redistribution of work, incomes and leisure.

In relation to a 4DW, the task of circumventing these barriers may be made easier if the potential benefits of this reform are clearly enumerated and the 4DW model most likely to deliver these benefits is specified. The potential benefits include:

- Reduced levels of overwork and underemployment.
- Reduced levels of economic and social inequality.

- Increased leisure (on average).
- Increased time available for – and flexibility in relation to – care work (*i.e.* child care, caring for older parents, people with disabilities etc).
- Reduced pressure on transport infrastructure in peak periods and a corresponding reduction in average commuting times.

There are six basic options in terms of a model for a 4DW in Australia. These are:

- Universal compressed workweek (*i.e.* 4 days/38 hours, Monday-Thursday, 7am-7pm)
- Flexible compressed workweek (*i.e.* 4 days/38 hours, Monday-Sunday, 6am-10pm).
- Universal reduced workweek with reduced pay (*i.e.* 4 days/32 hours, reduced pay, Monday-Thursday, 7am-7pm).
- Flexible reduced workweek with reduced pay (*i.e.* 4 days/32 hours, reduced pay, Monday-Sunday, 6am-10pm).
- Universal reduced workweek without reduced pay (*i.e.* 4 days/32 hours, no pay reduction, Monday-Thursday, 7am-7pm).
- Flexible reduced workweek without reduced pay (*i.e.* 4 days/32 hours, no pay reduction, Monday-Sunday, 6am-10pm).

While each model has its merits, a *flexible reduced workweek without reduced pay* (including no reduction in overtime pay and penalty rates) may be most likely to generate the range of potential benefits enumerated above, especially if combined with complementary policies. In addition, phasing in the reduced workweek over a number of years could be expected to ease the process of transition and lessen associated costs.

Clearly, the structure of the labour market means that Australian workers would not benefit to the same extent, or within the same timeframe, from a 4DW based on a flexible reduced workweek without loss of pay. However, Australian workers do not benefit equally from current working time arrangements, and if a shift to a 4DW along these lines offers the potential for significant net benefits then it warrants further investigation.

While the foregoing discussion suggests that a 4DW may be desirable, a careful consideration of its practicality requires further steps. We need to move from broad philosophical arguments and political economic analysis to the historical level of analysis, seeking to learn from experience.

The 4DW in Historical Perspective: the US Experience in the 1970s and During the Great Recession

The US is chosen as the focus for this historical analysis for two reasons. First, as the largest and richest capitalist country in the postwar era, both the enabling characteristics for working time reform (*i.e.* advanced technology, strong productivity growth) and obstacles to it (*i.e.* the strength of the work ethic and consumer culture) have been strong relative to other capitalist countries. Therefore, what has been tried in the US is of particular relevance. Secondly, while a 35-hour week has been achieved in France, and other innovative work-related policies have been pursued by countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, the US is the only major capitalist country where the 4DW, in particular, has become an explicit goal of a minority of private and public sector employers. As a result, the US experience provides the richest source of evidence regarding the impacts of a 4DW on workers and employers.

The 4DW in the US 1970-1975

During the first half of the 1970s in the US – sandwiched between the 1969-70 and 1974-75 recessions – the 4DW was identified by some observers as an emerging trend that could improve productivity for firms, while increasing the leisure time available to workers. The 4DW received considerable media and academic attention during this period. This was due, in no small part, to the 1970 publication of management consultant Riva Poor's book *4 Days, 40 Hours: reporting a revolution in work and leisure* (hereafter *4/10*), as well as an increasing number of academic studies throughout the 1970s (Hung, 1996).

This upsurge in academic and media interest did not, however, reflect a 'revolution in work and leisure' in practice. Wadsworth *et al* found that,

by 1972, 2,000 companies in the US were offering compressed workweeks and, in 1974, 853,000 workers were doing compressed 4-day/40-hour weeks (Wadsworth, Facer, Arbon, 2010: 328). Levitan and Belous (1977: 69) cite another estimate of a peak of ‘approximately 10,000 firms and about 1 million employees...on a four-day workweek.’ These figures need to be placed in the context of a total US labour force of 82 million in 1970 and 107 million by 1980 (Toossi, 2002: 24). According to Bird (2010: 1079), ‘interest in compressed work weeks peaked in 1973’ and ‘By 1975, interest in the four-day week had substantially cooled.’

These facts notwithstanding, the arguments put forward in favour of the 4DW, the specific effects of 4DWs on workers and firms where they were implemented, and the various weaknesses of the 4/40 model are all relevant to a consideration of any contemporary proposal for a 4DW. Part of the appeal of the 4DW in the early 1970s may have been due to its putative potential to reconcile competing interests, while simultaneously advancing several broad social goals. Mainstream economist Paul Samuelson described the 4DW as a ‘social invention’ that ‘offers new variety of choice in an area where modern man has had the fewest personal options’ and situated it as part of ‘the steady sweep toward greater leisure and less life time toil in a society growing more affluent’ (Samuelson in Poor and Richmond (eds), 1972: ix, x). In the *Workweek Revolution: a guide to the changing workweek* (1975), Fleuter characterised the 4DW as both a practical response to specific problems such as ‘unemployment, commuter jams, overcrowded service and recreational facilities, and depletion of natural resources’, and, like Samuelson, as part of ‘an inevitable sociological change’ towards ‘a shorter workweek’ (Fleuter, 1975: 7-8). Hodge and Tellier (1975: 25) captured both the diverse claims made regarding the impact of the 4DW and its potential for reconciling competing interests:

The four-day work week has been one of the more widely debated topics in business in recent years. On the one hand, it has been heralded as a momentous social innovation that provides the employee with a choice in the manner in which he earns his ‘daily bread.’ On the other hand, it has been decried as just another management tactic to undermine the advances that have been achieved by labour in the areas of hours of work per day and per week. Most likely, the truth lies somewhere between these extremes.

The most common form of 4DW during this period was the 4/40 compressed schedule and the main way of assessing its impact on workers and firms was the evidence provided by surveys (Bird, 2012: 1066). According to Fottler (1977: 657), various surveys in this period 'found overall employee acceptance of 4/40 to range from a high of 92 per cent...to a low of 55 per cent.' Fottler (1977: 657) found that 'while no single factor adequately explains favourable employee response to 4/40, the opportunity to 'bunch' leisure time activities and to conduct personal business without taking time out from work' is a commonly cited factor. While the evidence regarding positive worker experiences of the 4/40 workweek is abundant and reasonably strong (Hung in Bird, 2010: 1071), the data on the productivity effects is scarce and, where it exists, suggests negligible effects (Macut, 1974; Kopelman, 1986; Ronen and Primps, 1981).

There are at least four interrelated factors that together constitute a plausible explanation for the failure of the 4DW in 1970-1975 to become a larger and more sustained trend. First, the implementation of 4DWs in this period was overwhelmingly a management initiative: a privilege bestowed by bosses on their workers. Secondly, the mid-1970s marked a turning point in the trajectory of twentieth-century capitalist economies and societies in which the balance of power shifted away from labour and towards capital, so there was progressively less pressure on employers to concede. Thirdly, the firms most likely to introduce 4DW schedules were small, non-union businesses (Neipert Hedges, 1971: 33). Fourthly, while some major labour unions, including the United Auto Workers, flirted seriously with the idea of a 4DW with reduced hours, there was a general, though not universal, opposition to the compressed 4DW from organised labour. Levitan and Belous (1977: 36) cited a US Department of Labour study of collective agreements that could not find a single example of a 4-Day/40-Hour workweek for all full-time workers. The two key – and related – issues that explain the opposition of organised labour to a 4/40 workweek are the departure it represented from the 8-hour day and the threat of the loss of overtime payments (Fleuter, 1975: 5; Levitan and Belous, 1977: 36). For these reasons, unions did not campaign to defend – nor expand – the experiment with 4DWs. Lacking this institutional backing, the 4DW failed to achieve critical mass and, in most cases, these 4DW initiatives were discontinued.

The 4DW in the US 2008-2011

If the 4DW failed to deliver a ‘revolution in work and leisure’ in the 1970s, it has amounted to no more than a ripple during the ‘Great Recession’ of 2008-2011. The difficult economic conditions following the onset of the GFC provided the context for a modest resurgence of interest in the 4DW among some policymakers, journalists, academics and workers in the US. Where it has been implemented – and advocated – the 4DW has been framed as both a specific response to exigencies of the recession and, as was also the case in the 1970s, as a more general reform that could serve to mitigate the negative effects of a range of economic, social and environmental problems. In the US, while there are various examples of individual firms that have introduced some form of 4DW, by far the most significant instance – both in terms of the numbers involved and the attention garnered – was Utah’s introduction of a mandatory 4-Day/40-Hour workweek for the majority of state employees in 2008 (Walsh, 2009; Peeples, 2009; Johnson, 2011).

In August 2008, Utah’s Republican Governor Jon Huntsman introduced a one-year pilot program of the Working 4 Utah Initiative (W4UI): a mandatory compressed 4/10 workweek for 18,000 of the state’s 25,000 workers (13,000 of 17,000 full-time workers). The aims of the initiative were to reduce energy costs, lower air pollution, enhance service delivery, and improve staff recruitment and retention. Public buildings were open 7.30am-6.00pm Monday through Thursday, and closed on Fridays – excluding essential services (Facer and Wadsworth, 2010: 1042). Three staff surveys, a statewide poll and a performance report found generally positive impacts. These included: 10.5% reduction in energy usage, saving US\$502,000 (substantially less than the US\$3 million projected); 30% reduction in paid overtime, equivalent to a US\$4.1 million saving; 82% of workers favoured continuation of W4UI after pilot period; 60.1% of survey respondents reported a positive overall impact on family and personal life (11.9% reported negative impact); and 66% of Utah residents supported continuation of W4UI (Facer and Wadsworth, 2010: 1043-1046, Osterstock, Behunin and Lehman, 2010, Hansen, Harrington, Herring and Sowards, 2009).

Governor Huntsman announced that the 4DW would be made permanent in December 2009. However, a performance audit of W4UI conducted by the Office of the Legislative Auditor General and published in July 2010 disputed the connection between the 4DW and some of the positive

findings documented in the earlier research. It recommended that ‘each agency be given the flexibility to identify the work schedule that allows employees to be as effective as possible’ (Osterstock, Behunin and Lehman, 2010: i). Despite the strong support for W4UI from Utah’s public sector workers, the backing of the Utah Public Employees’ Association, and the absence of any major negative organisational impacts, the Utah state legislature voted to abandon the mandatory 4DW after two-and-a-half years in operation, and to re-open state buildings and services on Fridays from September 2011 (Jamieson, 2011). It is difficult to identify with any degree of certainty the precise reasons for the discontinuation of W4UI, but it is worth noting the opposition to the 4DW coming from senior Republican state congressmen and business lobby groups (Jamieson, 2011). The end of the mandatory 4DW for Utah state workers did not mean the end of all 4DW schedules across the US but, viewed retrospectively, it may come to be seen as the high-water mark for the 4DW in the period of the Great Recession.

Implications of the US Experience for the 4DW as a Policy Option for Australia

For both periods in the US in which the 4DW became more widespread, it took an economic downturn for it to be implemented by employers. Recessions provided the context in which management in some private and public organisations were willing to ‘concede’ and/or ‘impose’ a 4DW on management’s terms. The common denominator in the 1970s and during the Great Recession is that the managerial prerogative was reinforced, rather than challenged. In retrospect, the 4DW can perhaps be viewed as a short-term response by capital to deteriorating economic circumstances. US workers did not generally ‘win’ the 4DW and, as a consequence, when economic and/or political circumstances changed, management faced less opposition to revoking a ‘privilege bestowed on workers’ than may otherwise have been the case. This suggests that any future proposals for 4DWs may have more chance of lasting success if they are developed by workers themselves based on a long-term goal – rather than a kneejerk response to a recession – and if the reform is achieved through a collective political process.

While there were some differences in terms of the position taken by organised labour towards the 4DW in these periods, it would seem

reasonable to conclude that, without the support of workers' organisations, the 4DW has very limited prospects of constituting a widespread and permanent reform. Furthermore, because of ongoing concerns over increasing the length of the working day and the effect of compressed schedules on penalty rates, any future 4DW proposal, if it is to win the support of organised labour, would need to be based on reduced working hours without loss of pay (including overtime and penalty rates). That would mean a positive redistribution of national income towards labour bringing the class nature of the change to the fore.

The most consistent finding related to 4DWs in the 1970s and during the Great Recession was that the majority of workers preferred them to five-day workweeks. The permanent three-day weekend seemed adequate compensation for the lengthening of the working day that occurred under 4/40 schedules, suggesting some base of social support for this reform. In addition, there was some evidence that giving workers the *choice* over whether to move to a 4/10 (or other compressed schedule) could improve outcomes for them (Fottler, 1977, Tucker, 2006). While the goal of a 4DW may be more likely to be achieved in Australia if pursued as a *universal right*, the principle of *worker-centred choice* might usefully serve as a *subsidiary right* that challenges the managerial prerogative to determine working schedules, while at the same time providing some scope for workers to express non-uniform preferences in relation to working hours and schedules.

Alternative Work Schedules (AWS) and Flexible Work Practices at the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF): a Case Study

Further insights into the pros and cons of a shorter workweek and alternative work schedules, together with the practical aspects of their implementation, can be garnered from a case study. Taking this approach, this section shifts from the historical to the institutional level of analysis and focuses on the organisation as the site of implementation for such reforms. Accepting insights from Weberian sociology (Hass, 2007), institutional economics (Galbraith, 2001) and Marxist organisation studies (Adler, 2009), this section acknowledges the 'Janus face' nature of large-scale organisations, pointing to their 'simultaneously productive and exploitative' character (Adler, 2009: 74). This dual-character makes

organisations sites of rational cooperation in pursuit of collective goals, on the one hand, and of intense domination and alienation, on the other, and is of clear relevance to any consideration of the future of work. Studying the organisation also provides a way for researchers to juxtapose utopian and pragmatic arguments for change in the nature and extent of work with the practical problems and everyday experiences that occur in a specific organisational context.

While there are examples of small private firms, such as Canberra digital design company Icelab, operating on a 4DW in Australia, these are few and far between. The case study selected here for the purpose of highlighting some of the impacts of offering AWS and flexible work practices, including a 4DW, is the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF), at the University of Technology, Sydney. ISF, a mainly self-funded research institute and sustainability consultancy, is a medium-sized organisation with income of \$5 million and 78 full-time and part-time staff in 2012. ISF operates on a 35-hour workweek, and hours can be worked between 7am and 7pm Monday to Friday. Its formal policy framework includes the *Policy on Temporary Variation of Working Hours*. The policy ‘covers ISF staff members wishing to apply for a temporary variation in working hours or mode of employment’ and ‘includes staff members that wish to compress their normal working hours into a shorter period of time, such as a four-day week or a nine-day fortnight’ (ISF, 2005). With the cooperation of ISF management, I was able to access basic information contained in its annual reports and other documents, and to conduct semi-structured interviews with 10 case study participants. 7 of the 10 case study participants worked – or had worked – a 4DW during their time at ISF. The full results are reported in Henderson (2014) and the section below briefly summarises the key findings.

Personal and Organisational Impacts of AWS and Flexible Work Practices at ISF

The main positive impacts experienced by case study participants in shifting to AWS included: increased happiness at (and outside of) work, increased opportunity for rest and unstructured time, and the achievement of personal goals, such as having more time for study. For some participants who moved from a five-day workweek to a 4DW, the

shift seemed to mean more than just a quantitative reduction in working hours, as the extra day off felt qualitatively different to the weekend. Not all study participants viewed the AWS arrangements in a wholly positive light as it was felt they were not equally available to all staff (Henderson, 2014).

Study participants fell into two broad categories in terms of their subjective assessment of the impact of AWS and flexible work practices on their own productivity. The majority who took up the option to work part-time, compress their hours, and/or work from home tended to report either negligible or positive effects on their own productivity. On the other hand, those with responsibility for administering this flexible work regime experienced an increased work burden (Henderson, 2014).

Other organisational impacts cited by case study participants included problems with coordination of meetings, the impact on full-time staff, the fact that meetings take up a higher proportion of part-time staff's working hours, and additional infrastructure costs. While most interviewees raised the issue of the difficulty of organising meetings with staff working such varied schedules, it was only those in managerial roles who pointed to challenges related to the productivity of part-time staff and the increased demand for office infrastructure. As one manager stated, 'we still have to provide a computer for everyone, whether they're one day a week or five days a week. We have to provide them with desks. Now we try desk sharing, but when you've got a lot of people who are working 3 or 4 days a week, desk sharing doesn't work.' These issues notwithstanding, a strong majority of case study participants viewed the AWS and flexible work practices regime as a key positive attribute of the organisation and a reason for working at ISF (Henderson, 2014).

Implications of the ISF Case Study for the 4DW as a Policy Option for Australia

Clearly no generalisations can be made in relation to the 4DW on the basis of a small case study like this. However, there are several factors worth highlighting that may be relevant to future research in this area. First, while ISF is clearly not a 'typical' or 'representative' organisation, there could be a case for viewing it as a 'model' or 'ideal-type' of organisation as regards both its external goals and values (sustainable futures) and its internal policies and culture (AWS and flexibility). To

some extent ISF demonstrates what is ‘possible’ within the structure of Australian capitalism today, admittedly on a very limited scale and in a niche field. Secondly, it should be emphasised that ISF does not operate on a fixed 4DW for all staff. Clearly, ISF’s workplace regime is quite different to the compulsory 4/10 schedules that were implemented by some US organisations in the 1970s and during the Great Recession. Thirdly, the ISF case study highlights another approach to the principle of *worker-centred choice* in which a formal policy framework and supportive institutional culture affords workers a formal ‘right’ to move between different schedules. Fourthly, the case study draws attention to the potential for physical (office space), financial (budgets) and labour-related constraints to limit the extent to which an organisation can support AWS and flexibility for its workers. This finding has general implications for the case developed in this article to the extent that implementing a 4DW – especially on the basis of a shorter workweek – has the potential to increase administration and infrastructure costs as a proportion of total costs for some organisations and also to exacerbate skill shortages in some industries.

Finally, while ISF’s formal policies and institutional culture provide the environment in which 4DWs, and other progressive policies, are possible, it is the above average level of incomes that make these arrangements both feasible and sustainable. For the 4DW (or an AWS model like ISF’s) to be an option for *all* Australian workers, incomes would need to be sufficient to make a shorter workweek feasible for school cleaners, childcare workers and other low-paid workers, and not just for lawyers, bankers and sustainability consultants.

Conclusion: Four Days Work, and Three Days for What We Will?

A broad theoretical, historical and institutional political economic framework is helpful for considering the case for change in the nature and extent of work. This juxtaposes utopian and pragmatic variations on that theme with analysis of the obstacles to reform presented by the nature of work under capitalism. These considerations suggest that a *new politics of shorter hours and chosen time* could play a significant role in future efforts to renegotiate the nature and extent of work in Australia. The goal of a 4DW could provide a focal point for this *new politics*. A

flexible 4DW based on reduced hours with no reduction in pay, if combined with complementary policies, has the potential to reduce levels of overwork, underemployment and inequality, increase average available leisure time, expand opportunities for care work, and reduce pressure on transport infrastructure during peak periods. The achievement of a 4DW on this basis would depend on this goal being championed by a progressive political coalition.

The US experience with the 4DW during the periods 1970-1975 and 2008-2011 highlights some of the pitfalls and possibilities associated with this type of reform, even in its most conservative compressed workweek (4/40) form. While the 4DW was a minor trend in the 1970s and during the Great Recession, it was popular with workers who experienced it and, contrary to more conservative warnings, it had a negligible impact on productivity. Its dominant character has been as a short-term, management-driven response by a minority of private and public organisations to deteriorating economic circumstances. Together with the lack of consistent trade union support due to concerns over the lengthening of the working day and reduced overtime pay, this explains the failure of the 4DW to become a more widespread and sustained phenomenon. Any future proposal for a 4DW is more likely to achieve success if the following conditions are met:

- the proposal is developed by workers in the first place;
- the campaign is based on a long-term goal rather than being a kneejerk response to a recession;
- the reform is won through a collective political process;
- a shorter workweek becomes a political and organising goal of the trade union movement as a whole;
- the goal is pursued as a *universal right* for all workers, with the principle of *worker-centred choice* operating as a subsidiary right that provides some scope for workers to express non-uniform preferences via a democratic process (*i.e.* some workers may prefer to spread their hours over 5 days).

The case study presented in this article suggests that the following aspects could usefully be explored by future research in this area:

- focus on the institutional level analysis to identify specific challenges and impacts in cases where these types of reforms have been implemented;

- the merit of analysing institutions, such as ISF, as ‘model organisations’ in relation to possible work futures;
- the potential merit of the principle of *worker-centred choice* in articulating and implementing progressive work-related policies in a way that challenges the managerial prerogative to dictate working times;
- highlighting the real constraints faced by organisations (office space and equipment, budget pressures, supply of labour) that cannot be ignored in relation to work-related reforms;
- the prospect that the 4DW based on a shorter workweek can only become a universal right in Australia if incomes are sufficient in all industries to make this change financially viable and sustainable for all workers.

A pragmatic approach to these issues offers a firmer basis on which to mount a case for a 4DW in Australia than do utopian arguments. This is not to dismiss the utopian aspects of changing the nature and extent of work as an element in personal liberation and social progress. Indeed, within an ideological context still dominated by neoliberal discourses on work, a proposal for a 4DW can serve as a ‘utopian demand’ (Weeks, 2011: 222) that challenges the ‘natural’ and seemingly ‘permanent’ status of the five-day workweek. The question of whether striving for a 4DW is preferable to other options (*e.g.* increased paid leave) can only be decided by a collective political process and practical experimentation. An advantage of the 4DW is that it would quarantine an additional day from the world of paid work: that clarity of purpose has the potential to increase its attractiveness *vis-à-vis* alternatives.

In the end it is a matter of strategic political decisions and the level of public support for particular social goals. Without an organised political project, developing the arguments for a 4DW has little chance of producing reform on a widespread and sustained basis. Such a political project to change the nature and extent of work in this manner would require workers and their organisations, among others, being willing to challenge the economic prerogative of capital accumulation, the managerial prerogative to determine working times and the broader socio-economic culture of consumerism. It would entail acceptance of the fact that there is no conflict-free path to a more cooperative, equal and freer society. The prospects for a 4DW depend, as with other significant reforms, on a combination of economic conditions, social

priorities, strategic political choices, organisational capacities and struggle.

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