

services is greatly lessened. The 13.6 million workers employed in manufacturing in the U.S. in 1976 produced 2.5 times as much as the 13.3 million employed in manufacturing in 1955. That's a 240% increase in output per worker!

Shortening the workweek means simply that we take back some of this increased productivity in free time instead of allowing all of it to bolster the power and wealth of the employing class. For example, auto companies paid out 47% of their revenue in wages and benefits in 1947. By 1972 labor costs had declined to only 34% of revenue. If auto workers had won the 30-hour week in 1978, this would have increased the auto companies' labor costs to 45% of revenue, which still would have been less than the proportion of revenue going to labor in 1947.

A shortened workweek with no loss in pay for workers will obviously mean less in profits for individual companies in the short run. So what? "Well, don't we benefit by helping the employers to make profits?" That's what the "trickle down" theory says, anyway. But, in fact, what's good for the bosses' bank accounts is not necessarily what's best for working people.

Fatter profits mean employers can hire a larger cadre of loyal managers and give them fat salaries. It means they can build new plants in Taiwan or South Africa, or buy machines to replace us. It means they can buy up other companies, like U.S. Steel's purchase of Marathon Oil or Chevron's swallowing of Gulf Oil, which centralizes corporate power but adds nothing to social productivity. Cutting corners on workplace health

and safety is another avenue to fatter profits, but workers and communities suffer as a result.

In short, the bosses' profits will be used in *their* interests, not ours. We should set our sights on what will directly benefit us and our fellow workers...and let the bosses worry about their profits on their own.

It is no wonder that initiatives for shortening the workweek have always been fought by the employing class. The rights and benefits that we have today exist only because of previous workers' struggles. A shorter workweek is "unrealistic" only if people are unwilling to fight for it.

★ Shorter hours movements

There have been shorter hours movements for as long as the business class has tried to control how long people worked. With the construction of canals and steam-powered transportation in the early 1800s, factories producing for a wide market came to replace local artisans and cottage industry. By concentrating workers in a worksite controlled by the owner, factories enabled businessmen to control how long people worked each day. To have a job, people were forced to work 12 or more hours a day. The workweek could be as long as 90 hours.

In the 1840s workers began to press for a ten-hour day. And in the 1880s a movement for the eight-hour day burst on the scene with a national general strike in May, 1886, sponsored by the American Federation of Labor. Hundreds of thousands of workers were involved in that strike. The authorities were

bitterly hostile to the movement. Workers were shot by the state militia in Milwaukee. Strikers were shot by police outside the McCormack harvester plant in Chicago. After someone threw a bomb at police (to get revenge?), this was used as the pretext to round up leading strike activists. Eight were tried for murder, and three were hanged, though no evidence of complicity in the bombing was ever provided. But despite the repression directed at the national eight-hour strike movement, workers continued to fight for the shorter workweek.

The eight-hour movement placed little faith in politicians, and based itself on workers' own action. For one thing, an eight-hour law that had been passed for Federal employees had never been enforced. It was clear that only workers' own action could force a shorter workweek on a reluctant employing class.

As workers pressed for the shorter workweek, owners of businesses claimed they would be ruined if hours were cut without cutting workers' pay. Nonetheless, workers pressed their case through direct forms of struggle, such as strikes. Sometimes people would pursue their demand for an eight-hour day by simply leaving work together after eight hours.

Through persistent struggle, hours were shortened until the eight-hour day and five-day week had become the standard by the 1940s. Since then, however, the workweek has not changed. Isn't it time we renewed the struggle for more free time?

In fact, shortening the workweek is an idea that has begun to catch

on once again. The demand is now supported by labor movements in many countries. The 1984 strike of German metal and print workers for the 35-hour week is perhaps the most widely known recent struggle in this direction. Various individual unions have won cuts in the workweek, such as the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, which won a 2½ hour reduction in the workweek with no loss in pay in 1980. By 1980 Australia's oil refineries and docks were working a 35-hour week, and members of the Amalgamated Metal & Shipwrights Union were pressing their demand for the 35-hour week by not showing up for work in Australia's shipyards on alternate Fridays.

If the demand for a shorter workweek is isolated to a particular country or region, it is easier for the businesses in that locale to make the argument that they will be "ruined by foreign competition." This line of argument was employed by the German bosses during the 1984 35-hour strike. This ploy is all too familiar to American workers. The "need to be competitive" has been used repeatedly to demand "lower expectations" from American workers. Thus, the international spread of the shorter workweek demand is important for it to succeed. If employers can impose longer hours, lower wages or worse conditions in some regions of the globe, it undermines movements for better conditions elsewhere.

★ Congress — What's it good for?

The last initiative from within the U.S. labor movement to launch a