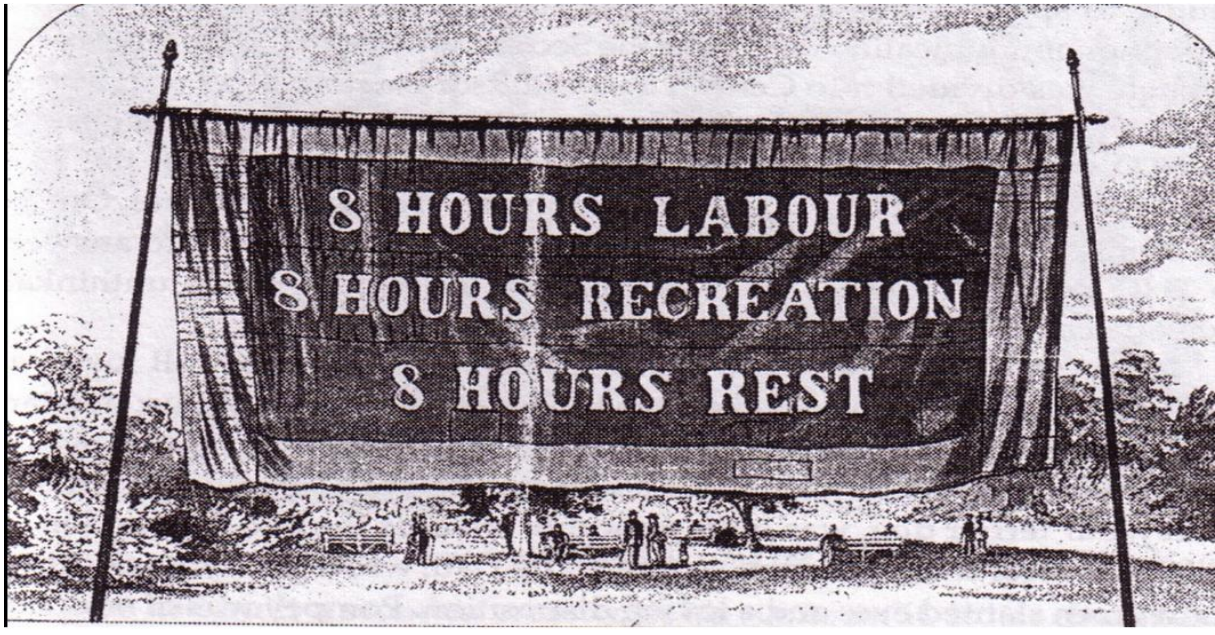


## The Industrial Revolution : Australia and ideas



One of the features of the Industrial Revolution was the development of certain new ideas and attitudes. These came in response to the changes brought about in people's lives by the new technology and ways of organising work.

There was development in ideas about **democracy**, the role of people in the way they are governed, and in **social welfare** (the role of the state in helping disadvantaged people in society).

On 21 April 1856 stonemasons in Melbourne **downed tools and walked off the job in protest over their employers'** refusal to accept **their demands for reduced working hours.**

**This brought the employers to the negotiating table and led to an agreement whereby stonemasons worked no more than an eight-hour day.**

**It was the first of a long, hard-fought series of victories that led to Australia having one of the most progressive labour environments in the world by the early 20th century.**

### **A 19th-century workers ditty:**

**Eight hours to work,  
Eight hours to play,  
Eight hours to sleep,  
Eight bob a day.  
A fair day's work,  
For a fair day's pay.**



An eight-hour day parade in Bourke Street, Melbourne, 1907

On 26 March 1856 workers called a public meeting at the Queen's Theatre to make a stand on improving working conditions. At the meeting it was announced that 'the time has arrived when the system of 8 hours should be introduced into the building trades and that after the 21st of this month we promise to work 8 hours and no longer'.

Negotiations between the union and the building companies broke down and on 21 April 1856 stonemasons, led by Stephens, downed tools at the construction site of the law faculty buildings at Melbourne University and walked off the job.

As Stephens said, 'It was a burning hot day and I thought the occasion a good one, so I called upon the men to follow me, to which they immediately consented, when I marched them ... to Parliament House.'

Stonemasons from other construction sites along the way joined the march until they eventually reached the Belvedere Hotel where a banquet was organised to mark the event.

In the months to come, negotiations with employers and the government continued until an agreement was reached whereby stonemasons would work an eight-hour day but collect the same wage they had previously been paid for 10 hours.

## **Eight-hour day**

Initially only a minority of workers, mainly in the building trades, won the eight-hour day. Most workers, including women and children, generally worked longer hours for less pay.

The fight for working conditions continued throughout the 19th century. It was not until 1916 that the Eight Hours Act was passed in Victoria and New South Wales.

It would not be until January 1948 that the Commonwealth Arbitration Court approved a 40-hour, five-day working week for all Australians.

Source : <https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/>

*Instructions:*

In red, underline the workers' demands.

In green, underline their modes of action.

In black, with whom they must negotiate.

In blue, the new social rights they could obtain.