

THE LAND OF THE LONG WEEKEND

Subject Areas: History, Australian Studies and contemporary Society who are studying themes and concepts including work and unemployment, leisure, social change, the trade union movement in Australia, Australian identity and Australia's growing economic position in the world will find Film Australia's *Land of the Long Weekend* provides thought-provoking material for discussion and further investigation.

Levels: Year 10 – 12 students of SOSE

Synopsis

Land of the Long Weekend looks at the changing nature of work in Australian society. This will affect each of you greatly, as it will have an impact on what work is available, what the conditions of the work will be like, and on what will be required of you to be able to work successfully.

Land of the Long Weekend explores the demise of the belief that "Eight hours to work, eight hours to play, Eight hours to sleep and eight bob a day" was every Australian's right. It investigates the history of the 'worker's paradise', and its future.

Australia was the first country in the world to institute a 40-hour working week, and the first to say there is such a thing as a fair and reasonable wage.

Today, it seems that the 5-day week, 8-hour day certainties have vanished forever. For those who have work, over-time has increased and penalty rates are disappearing. So is the idea of full employment in what has become for many a land of endless, jobless time. The nation's population is increasingly divided between the overworked and the under-employed.

Executive Producer: Sharon Connolly

Producer: Susan Ardill

Director: Sue Brooks

Duration: 55 minutes

Year of Production: 1994

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

Think about some of the following questions before watching the film. Discuss them again after viewing the film. Decide if any of your opinions have changed, or have been influenced by the film.

'THE LAND OF THE LONG WEEKEND'

- What does this phrase mean?
- What are the advantages in such an attitude?
- What might the disadvantages be?

WORK

- What do you see as work?
- Do you believe you will be employed in the area you choose?
- Will the unions have a role in your working life?
- What is the future of your work?
- Is technology a threat or an advantage?
- Draw up a list of activities which you do and which you regard as work.
- Are they all: compulsory? painful? difficult? challenging? rewarding?
- Compare your list with someone else's. What are the similarities and differences?

LEISURE

- What is leisure: a period of time?, an activity?, a state of mind?
- If someone is unemployed, can their non-working time be regarded as leisure time?
- Is a professional surfer experiencing leisure or work?
- How important is it to balance work and leisure in your life?
- Do you think your priorities may change in the future? Why?

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

Look at the following ideas which are raised in the film. Explain what each means. Then try to decide what implications each might have for you in the future. An example is given to help you get started.

The filmmaker contrasts the old way of life in Australia, characterised by the 'long weekend' and the 'fair and reasonable' wage, with the new world of the economic rationalists – that everything has to pay its way.

- What, according to the filmmaker, is Australia losing as a result of these changes?

'The Land of the Long Weekend is finished; it is now the Land of the Level Playing Field.'

- What does the filmmaker mean by this statement?

CHANGING WORK AND LEISURE PATTERNS

- What explanations are given in the film for why Australia's work practices have changed over time?
- Consider the film footage of Australians at play shown throughout the film. What image of Australians is projected in this footage?
- How do the images of Australian people change from those in the early footage to those seen at the end of the film?
- How can you account for these changes?

"Australians do love their long weekend" (Kieren Perkins). However, the film suggests that the long weekend is 'long over'.

- To what is Perkins referring?
- What evidence is there in the film that the 'long weekend' has disappeared?

MEN'S WORK; WOMEN'S WORK

The Harvester judgement of 1907 suggested that society and the state might have a view of what was acceptable for wages, in its introduction of penalty rates for weekend work. Sue Castrique suggests in the film that while this judgement created the best working conditions in the post-war world, it also enshrined the principle of inequality into the legislation, implying that men's work was more important than women's work.

- Do you think society still believes this to be the case today? Provide examples to support your answer.
- What is the impact on family life and society where both parents work?

UNEMPLOYMENT

Consider the following quotes from the film:

'If you don't have money you don't have choices.'

'Any job is better than no job.'

'[there is] no such thing as a job for life.'

'We're certainly the clever country, but we're not an employed country.'

'Those who have work are the relatively privileged.'

'People who think unemployment is a holiday are wrong, because a holiday implies work.'

'The biggest change in the last decade is the difference between those who are over-employed and those under-employed.'

- Working in small discussion groups, record the group's responses to these opinions about unemployment. You should discuss whether you agree with each opinion, and whether this has affected the way you see your own future employment prospects.

- Share each group's responses with others in the class.

THE NEW ORDER

Julian Disney, a social policy analyst, observes that Australia is among the most socially cohesive and politically stable countries in the world. However, Phillip Gude, the Victorian Minister for Industry and Employment, believes that there has been a 'polarisation' of society in the last decade. He notes that there are more (obviously) rich people, and a 'pool' of people who are finding life very difficult.

- Which of these observations is the more accurate, in your opinion? Support your response with evidence from the film and from your own experience.
- How can decentralising resources in a workplace make people 'more responsible' for their immediate working environment?
Working longer hours is described as 'bonding' with the company or workplace.
- Do you think the culture of belonging to a company is taking precedence over the 'eight hours work, eight hours play, eight hours sleep' pattern of life? Explain your answer.
- In small groups, discuss the benefits and drawbacks of 24-hour trading for traders, workers, consumers and families. Draw up a table in which you outline the arguments for and against this restructured approach to work and consumption.
- Display the tables, and as a class, discuss the views contained in them.

A SURVEY

All these ideas are, of course, the opinion of the filmmaker. Are they accurate statements of what is happening, or just assertions which may be true for some people, but not others?

Select a range of the ideas above, and prepare a questionnaire or survey. Go to people who are working, and ask them whether they agree that the ideas expressed in the film are accurate in reality. Try to make sure you cover a wide range of occupations and ages in the people you survey.

Then use your findings to decide how accurate the film's image of work in the future is. Discuss your findings in class.

Key idea raised in the film	What it means	What it might mean for me in the future
Australians are no longer worried about a fair and equal society, only about economic competitiveness.	*	*
There is no such thing as a job for life any more	*	* This means that I will have to be able to learn new skills to keep up with changes to jobs.
People must now expect to work unsociable hours.	*Family life is disrupted	*
The old eight hours work, eight hours rest and 8 hours recreation are gone. People must now expect to work flexible hours.	*	*
The pressure is there for a person to work 100% all the time	*	*
Australia has opened its doors to a flood of imports from countries which have lower costs.	*	*
Australia is becoming a land of 24 hour service.	*	*
Increasingly, jobs will be casual and/or unskilled	*	*
There will be no such thing as the 38 hour week, rosters will become sophisticated and organised around a 152 hour month	*	*

A Film Australia National Interest Program

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