

Modern times

1. Put the photographs in the correct order to retell the story.



2) Which of the following themes are referred to in the film?

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a) mass unemployment | f) laziness |
| b) Great Depression | g) strikes and strike breakers |
| c) consumerism | h) political intolerance |
| d) industrial automation | i) economic inequalities |
| e) poverty | j) the tyranny of the machine |

Trivia

Chaplin at first planned a sad ending for the film. While the Tramp was in hospital, recovering from nervous break-down, the Gamine was to become a Nun and so be parted from him forever.

This ending was filmed, but was finally abandoned in favour of a more cheerful finale.

3) Read the following statements about work. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

“Work, work, work! It would be glorious to see humankind at leisure for once!”

Henry David Thoreau, writer

“Leisure is the only fit life for man.”

Aristotle

“It is the working man who is the happy man. It is the idle man who is the miserable man.”

Benjamin Franklin

4) Now read the following text about an alternative working scheme.

21 hours – less work, more life

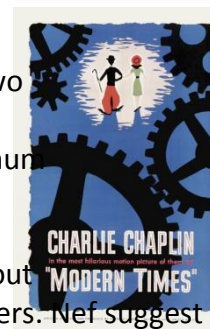
Working less is a cause close to my heart, and not just because I’m lazy – I think there are lots of things wrong with our work culture. I think it’s crazy that some of my friends work far too hard, while others can’t find work at all. Other friends are paid big salaries for jobs that add nothing to society, while others don’t get paid at all for vital things like raising children or caring for the homeless. Why do we all start and finish at the same time, when it would be so much more comfortable for everyone if we all came in and went home when it suited us?

Recently, I came across the latest report from the New Economic Foundation – 21 Hours: Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century. “A 21-hour paid working week” say the authors, “could help address a range of problems: overwork, unemployment, overconsumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, inequalities and the lack of time to care for each other and enjoy life.”

The idea of cutting the work week is actually not new. Keynes believed everyone would be working a 15 hour week by now. Instead, we work harder than people before us, trying to maximise our income, and then buying our happiness through consumption. It’s a pattern of life that is never satisfying. Perhaps it’s time we rediscovered that old dream of a leisure society.

The shortened work week has been tried before. There was a three-day week in 1974, for two months. Economists found that there had only been a 6% drop in industrial production. People came into work more, and worked harder when they did. France introduced a maximum 35 hour week in 2000, and 58% of people said it had a positive impact.

Introducing a shortened work week wouldn’t be an easy thing to do. It should be done without compromising low income households, and it could face resistance from unions and employers. We suggest bringing it in gradually, by reducing work hours in a decade. We could all be working less, consuming fewer of the world’s resources, and enjoying much more time for family, friends and community. But of course you don’t have to wait for it – you can help pioneer that social change any time you like.



Reading comprehension

- 1) Read paragraph 1 again. Find three things that, according to the writer, are wrong with our work culture.

- 1)
2)
3)

- 2) Now, read paragraphs 3 and 4 and mark the sentences True or False.

- a) Working less than forty hours a week has never been done before.
b) An average worker in France works less than an average worker in Greece.
c) When working hours are reduced, people become lazier.
d) Employers and employees will not easily agree on reduced working hours.

- 3) Work in your group to choose the correct item.

- a) What does the writer suggest? 1) reducing working hours 2) increasing work pay
- b) What would be the benefits of such a change?
- 1) more free time and more consumption 2) less consumption and more quality of life
3) more free time, less unemployment and more inequalities
- c) What should be paid attention to?
- 1) not reducing salaries 2) not enforcing it too quickly

- 4) What is your stand on this idea? Use the following prompts to support your view.

Supporter

- ✓ Less unemployment
- ✓ Leisure time increase
- ✓ More time to spend with family/ on individual pastimes

Opponent

- ✓ Less production
- ✓ Increased inequalities
- ✓ More poverty
- ✓ Worst quality of life (reduced ability to buy products, boredom etc)

