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★ HEDY'S CORNER

DO THE SWISS WORK TOO MUCH?

To even query this question seems ridiculous and quite "out of touch" in New Zealand.

The Swiss worker seems to be rational and level-headed enough to consider this question; the 40 hour week is under debate. The "Progressive Organisation of Switzerland" has launched a people's initiative for no more than 40 work hours per week, and have started collecting signatures.

At this time barely less than 13% of industrial workers work less than a 44 hour week; 39% work 44 hours and factory employees (52%) work even longer hours. Employees in factories, offices and businesses have been questioned about the subject of 40 hour week. The subject is so "hot" that none of those interrogated would consent to have their names or photos published.

A number of typical, although anonymous answers have been made public.—

"If we Swiss work fewer hours then more foreign labour will be engaged and I will not stand for that."

"What should I do with all my free time? I am most happy when at work."

"I would much prefer that late evening shopping hours were abolished and other suchlike things, rather than introduce the 40 hour week. If we had to do overtime all the time, our work hours would become quite unbearable."

"I would be in favour of the 40 hour week, but my wages would have to remain the same, otherwise it would be no use."

"In my firm it would not work. With the 40 hour week, delivery deadline pressure would rise intolerably and overtime hours would do the same."

"To work less is always a good thing, one should have more free time for oneself."

The above reading gives one quite a jolt, accustomed as we are to local conditions. The secretary of the above-mentioned organisation has the following to say (abbreviated): "Enormous numbers of foreign labour were imported during the 1960's, but work hours were not reduced. Reducing work hours is urgent. Between 1958-1967, 4895 workers were killed at work. The reason is because the Swiss work 10% longer hours than other European countries, on an average."

Dr Ernest Weber, Union of Swiss Employers: "Forty work hours are not necessary. The weekly average per year works out at between 37-39 work hours, after deducting holidays, sick leave, etc. Thus it is superfluous to lower work hours to 40 per week. Industries are already short of 250,000 workers. Reducing labour hours would certainly cause inflation. Overtime also would not be a solution."

—Documentation: Stefan Thomi, Schweizer Illustrierte.