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The longest working day.

You may have seen a reference in the fine news-print that President Hugo Chavez and his Venezuelan cabinet are bringing down legislation which will reduce the Venezuelan working day to 6 hours. If the Western press has commented on this at all, it was to say that this will mean a reduction of the hourly wage which will bring misery to Venezuelan workers. Such an assumption is based on the acceptance of the presumption that, in order to reduce the working week you have to also reduce the hourly wage by a proportionate amount. If you don't accept this dogma then the capitalist system places you firmly beyond the pale. After all, at the beginning of the 19th century there was already a respected economist by name of Senior who proved conclusively that if the then common working day was reduced from 11 ½ hours to 10 ½ hours, the entire profit of industry would disappear. This "proof" was based on the notion that the labourer spent the first 10 ½ hours of the day reproducing the costs of running the factory, and only the last hour in producing its profit, then obviously if that last hour were eliminated, there would be no profit, and the sky would fall in. Clearly, if the working day were now reduced to 6 hours by a Venezuelan rabble-rouser, the economy would go up in a puff of smoke. You don't need to be a mathematical genius to show up the fallacy of such arguments; there are quite a few Australian jobs such as slaughtermen, some miners and some teachers whose current working day is around 6 hours, with no obvious damage to the sky, or even the bosses' profits.