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Time for Play

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~ Time for Play ~

Recreation and Moral Issues in Colonial South Australia

DENIS MOLYNEUX



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Press

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Foreword

Australian scholarship dealing with the history of sport, recreation and leisure is overshadowed, rightly or wrongly, by academics who tend to write in an insular manner about developments in the major capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne. This has the propensity to create a rather skewed history of the nation, based on perspectives that are often inattentive to advances in other towns, cities and districts. The result is broad generalisations that fail to take account of regional nuances. However, the forensic work of dedicated local writers has the potential to be a corrective to such errors, and their efforts will, in time, lead to a reassessment of how the national history of sport, recreation and leisure should be documented.

It is in this historiographical context that Denis Molyneux has written *Time for Play: Recreation and Moral Issues in Colonial South Australia*, where a deft appreciation of a wide range of social, political, religious and educational developments, both in Australia and Great Britain, is on display. In short, this is an outstanding book, original in its research and argument, and breath-taking in the breadth of its subject matter. The text is skilfully and lovingly crafted, logical in its design and structure, intelligent in its use of multifarious sources, and, most of all, a pleasure to read.

I extend my personal congratulations to the author and the publisher for bringing this important project to fruition. *Time for Play* is undoubtedly a landmark work which adds considerably to knowledge and understanding of life in colonial South Australia.

Associate Professor Rob Hess, Victoria University
Managing Editor, *International Journal of the History of Sport*

Preface

At the height of the summer of 1862, C.B.L., a self-styled working man, wrote to the *South Australian Register* commenting on an earlier report in that newspaper that expressed surprise that the various evening classes offered by the South Australian Institute had not been better attended. Mechanics were alive to the advantages presented by the Institute, C.B.L. contended, but:

after working 10 hours, and in many cases away from their homes 12–13 hours, is it to be expected that in such cases men can leave their homes to improve their minds upon any of these branches of instruction ... the climate so enervates their physical constitutions as to render further exertion, even of a mental nature, irksome, being so exhausted through the many hours they have to labour.¹

The letter provoked a response by way of a leading article a few days later which, among other points, directed the working man to the writings of Samuel Smiles and his philosophy of self help. ‘He must work and not dream ... whether he work with his hands or his brain, or with both, some measure of success is certain. Then the relations between labour and recreation will harmonise.’

Some two decades later, the nineteenth century Australian journal, the *Victorian Review*, included an article by John Wisker entitled *Scientific Aspects of Recreation*. Wisker argued that there ought to be a science of recreation:

Its importance grows with civilisation. As man advances in knowledge ... He deems it expedient to devote an ever increasing proportion of his time to the pursuit of recreation. The class for which pleasure is the business of life is constantly enlarging and existence is ceasing to be a monotonous grind for any class. That man was not born to make himself miserable, whatever his station in life, and that each individual has a right to all the legitimate enjoyment he can command, are propositions which have passed the speculative stage.²

While Wisker appears to have been writing predominantly from a middle-class viewpoint, in the colony of South Australia by 1881 substantial sections of the male workforce were enjoying new recreational experiences, both formal and

informal, made possible by recently won hours of leisure.³ However, some forces in the community, drawn mainly from the middle classes and the Nonconformist churches, were greatly concerned about aspects of this recreational activity. They particularly feared that the working classes would resort to using their newly won hours of leisure in disruptive and immoral activities and determined on the need to discipline their impact.

This book examines the arrival and the pattern of the new hours of leisure won during the period by substantial sections of the South Australian community, especially by working class men. It goes on to cover the emergence of a widening range of formal and informal recreational activities many of which were essentially working class based. The growth was assisted by a confluence of factors – all of which came into existence for reasons other than recreation, but which were to be employed to good effect by the new recreation seekers, whether as visitors to open spaces or emerging tourist venues, participants in an activity or spectators at an event. Commerce, agriculture and industry drove the case for railways and for better roads, and individuals and community groups were quick to make use of trains, steamships and a variety of horse-drawn vehicles for their activities. Similarly recreation was quick to use the improved communication of the period brought about by the growth of local newspapers and the spread of the network of electric telegraph stations. A third factor in the confluence was the development of mass production techniques, for example in the construction, sales and marketing of items such as upright pianos or, late in the period, safety bicycles. Demand in this area soon extended into systems of hire purchase and second-hand marketing.

Some of these activities gave rise to concerns from influential sections of the community. In some cases, the counter-measures contained elements that were class-based; in general terms, they amounted to three broad strategies. The first was the constraints imposed by statutes and by-laws banning or limiting certain activities. Next there were controls reflected in the programs and activities designed to attract persons into acceptable and ‘rational recreation’, and directed particularly at the working classes. Finally, there were conventions – silent sanctions which reflect society’s expectations of its members in such matters as dress, conduct and public behaviour. By the end of the Victorian era, while the forces seeking to constrain and limit certain recreational activities remained strongly entrenched, a pattern of working class recreation accepted by the community at large had emerged, at times openly defiant of the constraining measures enacted by the moralists.

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The starting point for these developments in the colony were the local successes of working class men in the 1860s and 1870s in achieving a significant decrease in their working hours. The campaigns at this time, waged locally, had as their general objective to achieve 'the eight hours day'; but there were many variations and partial positions negotiated in working towards that general goal. For some it included the winning of a shorter working day and working week; for others achieving a block of new leisure provided by a Saturday half-holiday was paramount. There were no colony-wide campaigns. Where initial successes were achieved they were won by local loose groupings of tradesmen, negotiating with local organisations; organised labour activity came later in the period. For some workers, even at the end of the century, little progress had been made and a working week of fifty hours or more spread evenly over six days remained. Nevertheless, during the last four decades of the century, many skilled and semi-skilled male workers won significant new hours free from work.

The new hours of leisure soon resulted in the growth in the colony of a wide range of recreational activity, the most striking being the popularity of outdoor team activities, notably cricket and the newly codified Victorian Rules version of 'football'. Clubs for rowing, lawn tennis, lacrosse, baseball and athletics evolved, particularly in the late 1870s and through the 1880s, soon extending to regional and inter-colonial competition. Indoor facilities came into being through halls built by churches, benevolent societies, local councils and Institutes for other purposes. Some began to be used for recreational activities and entertainments. Informal outdoor recreation activities developed – in the countryside, at coastal resorts and locally in the growing number of parks and recreation grounds developed by local communities.

Overriding all these developments was the revolution in personal transport – by rail, omnibus, steamship, tramways – all established initially to assist government, industry and commerce for purposes other than recreation, but happily grasped by sportsmen, excursionists and other recreation seekers to access an increasing range of recreation opportunities. Finally, in the closing decade of the century there arrived the ubiquitous 'safety' bicycle offering new opportunities for increasing numbers of men and women to tour or to travel to events in order to participate or to watch others perform.

However, some community leaders, many drawn from Nonconformist churches, were fearful of this recreation explosion. Fighting, wagering and drunkenness accompanied some events where crowds gathered. Gambling and intemperance were condemned in themselves; both came to be associated with

some of the new activities, particularly those of a sporting kind. The revolution in personal transport led to increased opportunities to journey away from the immediate community on what was the one free day of the week for most families. It affected church attendance and other breaches of a strict Nonconformist code of Sunday observance. Sections of the Nonconformist churches, in particular, came to regard these developments, associated predominantly with the working classes, as 'social evils', which could and should be severely restrained or eliminated, if necessary, by legislation.

Those who were critical and fearful of the ability of the working classes to utilise their new hours of leisure appropriately (as judged by the newly empowered middle classes) adopted several strategies to discipline their recreation. Initially, they drew heavily on the experience and policies of the Mother country. The first was to create and sustain an effective lobby in the parliament, to pass statutes constraining, or strictly confining, certain recreational activities, most notably, intemperance and gambling. Already, the colony of South Australia had inherited enactments of the British parliament of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century governing cruelty to animals, prize fighting and Sunday observance. A strong lobby had emerged in the British parliament by the 1860s to limit licences for the making and sale of liquor. It had an energetic and effective South Australian equivalent.

A second discernible strategy was to develop control mechanisms to divert the leisure hours of the working classes into activities that reflected acceptable and respectable (middle class) values. One such approach was the promotion of classes, lectures and other forms of adult education, particularly through local Institutes. Another was to support or promote certain clubs and societies that held values acceptable to the moralists, whether the local cricket club (preferably led by a reputable, temperate middle class member of the community), or a 'mutual improvement society', developed and presided over by a minister of a local Nonconformist church. By such means the recreation of the working classes would be controlled and directed into acceptable and respectable activities. A common element of all these approaches was to provide a counter to the publicans and the brewers.

A third area of limitation to recreation activity involved the more silent discipline of contemporary conventions – practices, generally related to fashion, behaviour and social conduct that, by general consent, provide standards that come to be accepted by the community at large. Conventions evolve and change imperceptibly over a period of time. In Britain and its colony, conventional

Preface

propriety was a major obstacle to women's participation in the burgeoning recreation scene that became available to an increasing number of males during the later decades of the Victorian era. Few South Australian women shared in the new hours of leisure; for those who did, drawn predominantly from the middle classes, and who had the wherewithal to participate, there were strong social conventions to overcome. These were especially severe on women taking exercise, and covered such matters as restrictive dress, exercising in public, and a perceived danger of women competing or exercising strenuously.

On a much smaller scale, there were other conventions that inhibited participation by working class men in some of the team activities that became more accessible in the second half of Victoria's reign. Some team activities came to assume a special educational significance in British public schools from the 1860s on.⁴ Claims were made that qualities of discipline, courage and above all, leadership, were developed through these team activities and carried over into community life. With the spread of participation, former students laid claim to the leadership of the new organisations that came into being to govern, develop and administer the various team sports, since only *they* had experienced and could interpret the true code of 'manliness' conveyed by the activities. On occasions, this exclusive style of leadership limited participation by working class men; in one sport – rowing – they were excluded completely from competitive and representative events.

The starting point for this analysis of attitudes towards the growth of recreation activities in the later decades of the nineteenth century in South Australia was the reduction in working hours for substantial numbers of the colony's male workforce. The increase of leisure – waking time free from the obligations of employment, travel to and from work, and from domestic obligations – was a necessary pre-condition for the growth of recreation activities.

Chapter 1

Eight Hours for What We Will¹

Introduction

The title of this chapter is taken from the slogan on the banner carried by the carpenters' union in the city of Worcester in the USA on the occasion of the unions' campaign march for the Eight Hours Day in 1889. It serves to remind us that, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, there was industrial agitation for a decrease in working hours in other countries as well as the Australian colonies.² New hours of leisure were central to the growth of recreational activity in the colony of South Australia in the last four decades of the nineteenth century for substantial numbers of working-class men. Other factors assisted this trend, including an easing of the physical demands of work itself, a gradual increase in personal disposable income and improved means of personal travel; but the key influence was the fall in working hours, and the major beneficiaries were mechanics, clerks and artisans. Female workers, particularly those in domestic service and in some factories – the greatest employers of women – had fewer successes. The gains for men were achieved over several decades, trade by trade and region by region. Even at the end of the colonial period there were large sections of society who were still working sixty hours a week or more.

The gains won by many in the workforce included the shortening of the working day, or the creation of the Saturday half-holiday, or a combination of both. Local groups campaigned under the general plea for the 'Eight Hours Day'. Later than in most other spheres of employment, retail shop assistants finally began to achieve successes, winning a mid-week half-holiday in lieu of the late hours worked on Saturday. A small minority of workers secured a yearly holiday in the form of a clear break from work lasting several days. Most workers benefited from the gradual increase in public holidays, which grew in number in the later decades of the colonial period.

There were small but significant changes in the arguments put forward for decreasing the weekly hours of work. The emphasis in the 1860s was on

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shortening the hours of work to lighten the physical stress, particularly in the heat of the Australian summer; a secondary argument was that the shorter working day would allow the opportunity for working men to improve themselves, for example, by attending classes at local mechanics' institutes. In later years additional arguments began to be advanced to justify the shortening of the working day and the introduction of the Saturday or Wednesday half-holiday. They included the opportunity to share in the growing range of recreational activities, in particular but not only in team sports which by the 1880s were appearing in many local communities. Evening community activities including music-making – choirs and brass bands especially – and horticultural groups began to be mentioned in local news reports. By the 1880s, the eight hours movement had become a major objective of trade unions and of their composite body, the United Trades and Labour Council. There were increasing successes by a number of trades. Those seeking the reduction in the hours of work began to argue the need for renewal and recreation, and by century's end the movement had considerable support in the colony, including the colonial government.

Early beginnings

It would appear that that one organisation in the colony operated an eight hours day as early as 1845. In that year the Burra Burra mine opened, with a predominantly Cornish workforce, all recently migrated from the Mother country. The methods of mining, rules and regulations, welfare arrangements and procedures at the new mine were all based on Cornish practice and included a five-and-a-half day week of some forty-four hours.³

The Burra Burra experience was an isolated case. Elsewhere in the colony the efforts by working men to reduce their hours of work began to surface in the early 1860s. Late in 1862 the ironmongers' assistants in Adelaide lobbied their employers to close at lunch time on Saturdays. At the same time, retail assistants in Port Adelaide were meeting to prepare a memorial 'respectfully praying their employers to consent to close their establishments at 7 o'clock every evening except Saturdays, when the time should be extended to 10 o'clock.'

In February of the following year (1863), a meeting in Port Adelaide, convened by workmen of various trades and originated by shipwrights, resolved to join with tradesmen in Adelaide with a view to meeting with employers to promote 'the eight hours system', and to advertise such a meeting through the press.⁴ A meeting took place – on a Saturday evening in mid April – chaired by the Mayor of Adelaide. The arguments put forward by the protagonists were based

on moral, physical and social grounds; the hours of physical exertion, particularly in the heat of summer, were excessive and damaging; those working at a desk and indoors had a much shorter working day; working men needed the opportunity to ‘cultivate their mental faculties’; working men should be allowed to spend more time with their families and exercising parental direction over their children; the system had been introduced satisfactorily in Melbourne and Sydney, in Queensland and New Zealand and was working well. (The system had been won by the building trades in Melbourne in 1856).⁵ Against this, while there was some sympathy for the views put forward by the workers, it was argued that a reduction to eight hours in the working day with no adjustment to wages would impose an impossible burden on employers. There was also a strongly expressed view that while some workers would use the new hours free from work in improving themselves, others would use the time drinking and gambling.⁶ At the conclusion of the meeting a resolution was passed unanimously:

that a conference should take place between the employers of labour and the working classes to enter into a mutual agreement as to the most reasonable time to be fixed for the commencement of the limitation of the present hours of labour.⁷

The report of the meeting provoked further correspondence in the *Register*. The paper’s leader on the meeting expressed sympathy with its objective, approved of the workers’ decision not to strike on the issue, and counselled prudence and caution. It concluded however, that the eight hours question was simply one of business, and that ‘the law which regulates and must determine it is not one of morals, but one of supply and demand’.⁸ Nothing appears to have transpired from these developments, nor is there evidence that a conference was ever held.

By 1865 there were signs that working men in some trades were making gains as a result of improved contact and organisation. Carpenters, joiners and cabinetmakers in Adelaide secured an adjustment of hours to create a free Saturday afternoon – a move that operatives in the Kapunda area were also able to negotiate with their local employers in September of that year.⁹ With the downturn in the colony’s economy in the later 1860s, it was to be several years before new initiatives were mounted.

A major breakthrough

The three months between June and August in 1873 proved to be a period of

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great activity and considerable achievement for the eight hours movement in South Australia. Against the background of a stronger economy, shortages of labour and a degree of empathy among employers for the central issue, successful campaigns were undertaken to reduce the hours of work in some trades, not only in Adelaide and Port Adelaide, but also in a number of regional centres in the colony. The major concern of the employers was that if some of their number did not respond equitably in any one region, established markets would be lost; it was therefore important that all employers in a particular trade in any one region should agree to any new schedule of working hours.

There were some small but significant differences in the new surge to reduce working hours. In the first place employees began to join forces across the various trades in order to be more effective in their negotiations with employers. Negotiations with the employers in Adelaide and Port Adelaide were conducted by the 'Adelaide League' of trades' organisations. As negotiations progressed the regional groupings of tradesmen in Gawler, Mount Gambier and Kapunda were shown to be endeavouring to link up with the Adelaide League to strengthen their negotiating muscle with employers. Second, by the 1870s, the term 'recreation' was more widely used in the campaign. The eight hours' movement was transcribed into the slogan: 'Eight hours labour, eight hours recreation and eight hours rest'. Finally, the distribution of the 48 hours working week (from the previous 54–60 hours) remained flexible for local negotiation, and for many the ending of work on a Saturday at 1 or 2 pm became an option. The Saturday afternoon provided a block of hours free from work in which activities could be undertaken. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers at one foundry in Adelaide and at an engineering works in Port Adelaide negotiated working hours from 8 am to 5 pm from Monday to Friday, with an hour's break for dinner; but for Saturdays, work concluded at 2 pm. It was no coincidence that from the mid-1870s on, there was an upsurge in the playing of team games in the colony on Saturday afternoons.

In the townships of Kapunda and Gawler, discussions and negotiations progressed through June and July and led to a successful outcome for the mechanics and machine operatives. The *Kapunda Herald* reported that:

Employees celebrated yesterday evening the funeral obsequies of the ten hours system in a manner much more noisy than agreeable to those who live in the vicinity, by discharging anvil shots and firearms. The saluting was kept up for about half an hour.¹⁰

Other agreements were negotiated for coachmakers and saddlers in Adelaide and for smiths, wheelwrights and machinists in Mount Gambier; within many of the trade agreements the Saturday half-holiday was also established where no such arrangement existed previously.¹¹ In September there were reports of celebratory functions. Workers at Gawler staged a procession and demonstration. Dinners were promoted to which politicians as well as employers were invited. One such occasion was attended by Sir Henry Ayers, who had been Premier for much of the preceding decade. He congratulated both sides for reaching a peaceful outcome and noted how technology was improving output and that working men should benefit from these advances. He went on to observe: 'improvements in steam and water power ought to benefit the working classes and shorten the hours of toil'.¹² Many of these agreements came into operation on 1 September 1873; beginning in 1874, a public holiday was declared each year on a weekday in the first week of September to celebrate the breakthrough of 1873.

Once won, the new schedules had to be defended. Employers, at times of economic downturn, sometimes determined that they could no longer sustain the previous working hours agreement. In 1879, the proprietors of J. Martin & Co, the agricultural manufacturing works at Gawler, attempted to return their workforce to the nine hours day and despite the industrial action of the 300 workers at the foundry over a period of several weeks, the outcome largely favoured the employer. For a time, the workers also lost the Saturday half-holiday.¹³ In 1880, it was reported that the eight hours system in Mount Gambier had collapsed and that the men, who had gone on strike when the masters had insisted on a nine hours day, had given in and gone back to work on the masters' terms – nine hours per day, with an allowance of one hour on Saturday.

In February 1888 unions in the colony formed an 8 hours Protective Association. Its objectives were to keep the eight hours system for those who had already achieved it, to assist those who were endeavouring to secure it, to obtain recognition of the eight hours day by law, and to win extra rates of pay for overtime. This latter point had become a bone of contention between the opposing parties. Some workers were exploiting the new eight hours system to secure overtime payments for time previously worked as part of a nine or ten hours working day. This issue featured large in the dispute leading to a lock-out at Fulton's Foundry at Kilkenny in Adelaide in October of that year.

The device of exploiting the eight hours system to increase overtime payments was prevalent in many government departmental workforces, which were among the colony's largest employers of labour. By 1880 the government railways

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employed a labour force of over 1700 and a large staff operated the colony's 519 post offices and 173 telegraph offices. The workforces covered a wide range of skilled and unskilled workers and a variety of work practices among government departments, often differing between city and country. The early reports of the colony's Civil Service Commission, established in 1888, confirmed that though the eight hours system was slowly being expanded, there was widespread exploitation of the system to secure overtime payments. Some Heads of Department were resisting directives to implement the eight hours system knowing that it would lead to pressures on recurrent budgets through overtime payments.

Proposals for an Eight Hours Bill

There were attempts in the late 1880s by some of the colony's parliamentarians to pass legislation to make the eight hours system obligatory. In October 1888, recently elected Legislative Councillor Dr Sylvanus Magarey introduced a motion into the Legislative Council:

That, in the opinion of this Council, it is desirable, in the public interest, that eight hours should constitute a day's work for employes [*sic*] engaged for daily wages; and that an Act should be passed enabling all such employes to demand payment of wages at the rate of time and a quarter for all overtime required of them by their employers

Magarey argued that eight hours was long enough for a man to work on any one day 'with due regard to the needs of his physical, social, and moral nature'; that people should not be overworked, and that the adoption of the eight hours movement would largely improve the health and mental and moral vigour of the people; and that eight hours to work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for sleep could not be surpassed as a division of time for the advantage of an individual. Among the arguments lodged by those who opposed such a measure were that the colony was becoming over-regulated; that categories of employment were so diverse that the proposal would be impossible to implement; and that the quality of life of workers was improving without state interference and would continue to improve if workers and employers negotiated and did not resort to industrial disputation whenever disagreements arose. The motion was lost by ten votes to five.

A private member's Bill, introduced a year later in the House of Assembly by William Mattinson, Member for Port Adelaide, sought to establish the eight hours day by statute. Among new arguments put forward in support of his Bill,

Mattinson argued that government ‘must be prepared to enforce by legislative action a progressive reduction of the hours of labour in order to keep pace with the progressive development of labour-saving machinery.’ The Bill was withdrawn at the time of its second reading without a debate.

The principle of the eight hours day was again brought into focus in the following year when, in July 1890, the Hon C.C. Kingston moved a motion in the House of Assembly :

That in the opinion of this House an eight-hours system should be adopted in all branches of the Public Service, and that a clause should be inserted in all contracts for the construction of public works providing that the same should be performed under the eight hours system.

Kingston argued that in South Australia eight hours per day was long enough for any man to be engaged in manual employment. The climate was trying and if a man did his duty for eight hours he was entitled to the remainder of the day and night for rest and recreation. He was pleased that in some public departments, where the system had not existed previously, it had been lately introduced. He did not wish to see the proposition interpreted rigidly; it was not that eight hours work should be done every day, but an average of forty-eight hours per week. The Chief Secretary, responding on behalf of the government, noted the general agreement among members that there had been a shift in public opinion on the issue over recent years and that there was now broad acceptance of the system. The government could not legislate to enforce the principle because the range of positions and responsibilities within departments was so complex; but it could set a good example in this direction. He revealed there were 2666 workmen in Government employment who worked more than eight hours per day and 1584 who worked eight hours or under. The motion would have the cordial support of the Government and the majority of members. The motion was carried without a division.

As if to illustrate the Government’s goodwill towards its employees, in August 1892, it was announced that the employees on the Glenelg railway were to receive one week’s leave of absence on full pay annually in recognition of the work undertaken on Sundays and public holidays.

The retail assistants

The eight hours day and the Saturday half-holiday were particularly difficult to negotiate for one group of workers – the retail assistants. Shops were kept open

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for long hours six days per week, and until very late on Saturdays. Closing on Saturdays at 10 pm was common practice for many retailers. It was brought about as much as anything by the shopping habits of other workers, many of whom were paid their wages on the Saturday; among them were many who enjoyed the experience of walking around the well-lit shopping malls well after their shopping needs had been met. Females formed a significant minority of retail assistants and were required to make their way home by foot after a long working day; their welfare was a matter of considerable concern, though they themselves do not appear to have been active in the campaigns.

Initially, retail assistants in the colony, like their fellow workers, campaigned to lower the number of hours worked each week across six days. They, more than most, were able to communicate their case both in writing and at public meetings designed to gain support for their case. They won over public figures to support their case. However, they tended to remain aloof and to operate apart from other groups of workers. They were able to secure the support of Mayors and political figures at their campaign meetings; but, until quite late in the century, they had few successes to show.

Mid-century, the draper's assistants in Adelaide formed themselves into the Linen Drapers Early Closing Association with the intention of securing conditions which closed shops at 6 pm from Monday to Friday and 5 pm on Saturdays. The Chairman of the new association wrote to all drapers in Adelaide with this request; however, no relief appears to have been negotiated. Many other efforts followed to seek the earlier closing of shops, especially on Saturday evenings, but there were few successes.

Shopkeepers had to be persuaded that sales would not be severely affected and that other retailers in their area would also be adhering to any changes of opening hours. Late in 1862 the ironmonger's assistants in Adelaide lobbied their employers to close at lunch time on Saturdays. The employers indicated that they were sympathetic to the assistants' proposal, providing all ironmongers in the town agreed to the change. It transpired that only eleven of the houses were in favour with eight opposing. The assistants resolved that as there appeared to be no prospect of a unanimous concurrence in the trade to the proposal, the idea must be abandoned for the present. In 1867 the draper's assistants were still encountering the same problem. The *Register* reported on negotiations between the assistants and the shopkeepers for a change to closing hours of 8 pm on Saturdays and 6 pm on all other days. A deputation of the assistants had met with the five or six drapers who had declined to agree. The group of drapers

continued their opposition to the proposed changes and the move fell through ‘for the want of unanimity’. Employees of the service industry to retailers – the banks – were more successful. In December 1872, the *Register* reported that, after a date to be agreed upon in the following January, all the Adelaide Banks would close at noon every Saturday. ‘This arrangement has long been desired by the employees in these institutions, but unanimity has not been earlier secured among the ruling powers upon the subject’.

The mid week half-holiday

It was during the 1870s that the notion of an alternative mid week half-holiday, in lieu of the Saturday half-day, began to take hold among retail assistants and, indeed, some retailers. The campaign of the retail assistants in the township of Kapunda, as reported in the *Kapunda Herald* over a considerable period of years, was not untypical of the struggles in South Australian regional communities as a whole. In 1877, the local newspaper noted that the local banks in the town – and one storekeeper – were now closing at one o’clock on Wednesday. The same report referred to efforts being made in Mount Gambier and Naracoorte to secure a mid week half-holiday for retail assistants in the two townships to compensate for the late evening shopping on Saturdays. Four years later, in 1881, a leader in the same newspaper entitled ‘Shopkeepers’ Assistants’ came out strongly in favour of the assistants. Among several arguments the leader asserted that though the hours of work for retail assistants in country towns were generally less severe than in Adelaide, they were unnecessarily long; shopping could be undertaken within a shorter time span than custom, at the time, dictated. It was especially concerned about the welfare of female assistants whose health – and that of their future progeny – was endangered through the long hours of work, much of it whilst standing; when not engaged in serving customers, they should be allowed to sit. The leader concluded that:

In Adelaide and large establishments elsewhere it might meanwhile be practicable to give the assistants an occasional opportunity of a half-day’s recreation or outdoor exercise, such as would conduce alike to their physical and intellectual well-being, and which at present they can only get on Sundays.

The same themes were repeated in a further leader later in the year around which time it was revealed that the introduction of a Wednesday half-holiday for retail assistants in Kapunda was being forestalled by two retailers. Nothing appears to have changed, though in August 1883 an advertisement and report

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in the *Herald* gave public notice that the offices of twelve businesses in the town would close on Wednesday afternoons at 1 pm so that clerks could have a half-holiday.

The town suffered in the region's severe depression of the mid 1880s, though the assistants continued their efforts to overcome the opposition of the two retailers. In May 1888, two local church ministers joined with representatives of the retail assistants to meet with storekeepers in the town and request them to close their establishments at 1 pm on Wednesdays 'except when a holiday occurred in any one week'. The deputation was unsuccessful. One of the ministers, the Rev J.W. Platt of the Congregational Church, went on to preach a sermon on the theme of Wednesday Early Closing. He argued that man required respite of some kind from his toil:

he must needs not keep the bow full stretched for ever; hence excursions, trips by land and sea, set holidays, special holidays, amusements, games and sports, outdoor and indoor. In a word the whole round of activities in the interests of soothing and repairing. In this wider circle the weekly half-holiday in general and, in particular, this proposed Wednesday afternoon holiday for the shopkeepers and assistants of this town, find their place. The general principle of the need of such periods of cessation from toil no one who is not cynical and soured will ever dream of calling in question.

The sermon provoked a lively correspondence in the following weeks, including a call to the town to boycott the recalcitrant shopkeepers. But the impasse continued and was not broken until 1891, around which time there began a new momentum in Adelaide and elsewhere in the colony which brought the mid-week half-holiday to a growing number of retail assistants. Early in 1891, in Kapunda, the previous opposition by a minority of shopkeepers to early Wednesday closing was dropped. The moribund assistants' association was quickly resuscitated to negotiate the details and in April the half-holiday finally became a reality. The event was celebrated with a picnic attended by retailers and assistants alike – and the Kapunda Brass Band.

There were breakthroughs for other groups of retail assistants around this period. In January 1892, seventy retail traders and assistants from Hindmarsh feted the recent move to a Wednesday half-holiday by hiring four drays, decorated with streamers, and journeying out to Norton Summit for a celebration at the Summit Hotel. In the same month, the Eastern Suburban group were planning the commemoration of a similar success with a picnic at Henley Beach, at

which they would be joined by the North Adelaide Assistants who had achieved the half-holiday some time earlier. In May it was reported that the Glenelg assistants had secured the same concession. Within weeks, the various groups in the Adelaide area were arranging mid-week cricket matches and other social activities with each other. The momentum of the period may well have been responsible for the determination of the assistants in the Port Adelaide area to form themselves into an association to secure the Wednesday half-holiday.

Public and other holidays

This picture of new leisure hours acquired by substantial numbers of South Australians in the closing decades of the nineteenth century would be incomplete without mention of public holidays and other occasional one-off days free from work. In the early years of the colony, the religious significance of Christmas Day, Good Friday and Easter Monday were commemorated work free. By mid-century, New Year's Day, which previously had been named a 'Holiday of the Banks' became designated a public holiday by government decree, together with the Queen's Birthday (14 May) and the Accession of the Queen (20 June). For a brief period in the early 1880s, the birthday of the Queen's son, the Duke of Edinburgh (9 November) was also added to the list of public holidays. However, in the mid 1880s this occasion appears to have lapsed, while, as has been mentioned earlier, a new public holiday, celebrating the Eight Hours Day, held in late August or early September made its appearance. Finally, by the end of the century, Proclamation Day and Adelaide Cup Day had been declared public holidays – making ten in all in any one calendar year. While Christmas Day and Good Friday retained their religious significance, all the other days carried potential for both formal and informal recreation. Picnics, small and large scale, the latter linked with informal sports and dancing, were particularly popular. So too, were the opportunities for sportsmen to take advantage of long weekends to undertake tours whether as cricketers, footballers or cyclists.

Summing up

The last four decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant growth in new leisure for substantial sections of the male workforce in the colony, in particular for clerks and for skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen. These gains were achieved incrementally, region by region, trade by trade, under the general title of 'The Eight Hours Day'. There were variations among the agreements in the actual hours worked and how they were distributed over a new working

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week; but for most, a key outcome was the creation of a Saturday half-holiday.

Among the several reasons for the success of the movement during this period was an increasingly organised workforce; individual unions of skilled tradesmen finally began to work together to work to achieve common ends. This was first seen in the endeavours of the Labour League of South Australia, established in 1874, and developed further through its successor, the United Trades and Labour Council created in 1884. The United Labour Party, the parliamentary wing of the labour movement in South Australia, came into being in 1891. All three organisations were strongly supportive of strategies designed to secure the eight hours day. The community increasingly was accepting of a basic forty-eight hours week, regarding it as a reasonable objective for society as a whole; there was also a recognition that the nature of some employment in the colony created difficulties in bringing such a regime into being.

Yet, at the turn of the century, there were many in the colony who were still working long hours and who were without effective representation to press their case. They included categories of female employment – nurses, domestic servants and factory workers – large sections of the pastoral industry and labouring workers generally. Such groups had no representation in the Labour League and, seemingly, little in the UTLC, the body which succeeded the League. In 1892, the Adelaide Hospital Board was reported as being unable to accede to a request for the eight hours principle to be adopted for nurses, on grounds of cost and the extra work involved. The report on the matter also commented that some of the nurses' time was 'occupied in reading, sewing or other occupations on their own account'. In mid-1883, a memorial signed by a number of labourers was presented to the Midland Road Board praying that their working week might be shortened by two hours on a Saturday, thereby creating a half-holiday similar to other workers. The request was summarily dismissed on the grounds that no other Road Board allowed the concession. The labourers had pointed out that they had long distances to walk after the day's work was finished. Blainey estimates that at the end of the Victorian era as many as 'half the paid workforce in the land worked at least sixty hours a week, often in shifts of ten hours a day, six days a week'. This was the reverse side of the employment picture in the colony.

Returning to the title of this chapter, there were two senses in which the slogan of the carpenters' banner in the march of the Worcester campaign was relevant to South Australia. The first was a cry from the workers in the colony to have time to join in activities of their choice in their newly won hours of leisure – in a word to indulge in recreation. The second meaning is less obvious. The

workers were determined to use their new leisure in ways which *they willed*, and not necessarily in a manner which others in authority and influence would wish them to choose. In the colony of South Australia, there were social and religious forces that strove to influence the use of working class leisure and which were quick to prescribe some activities as acceptable and others as not. This struggle for social control is the subject of Chapter 4.

Finally, there were discernible changes in the arguments put forward by the working classes as reasons for reducing their hours of work. In the 1860s and 70s the emphasis was on the need for respite from physical toil, often carried out in extremes of weather, and after walking considerable distances to and from the place of employment; occasionally, and almost as a sop to their middle class masters, reference was made by workers to a desire to improve themselves intellectually, for example, by using any new hours of leisure attending classes offered at local Institute classes. In the 1880s and 1890s, as the range of recreation opportunities opened up in most localities and as local travel and personal disposable income continued to improve, the arguments included a desire to participate in those activities which they enjoyed – and where they felt most comfortable.