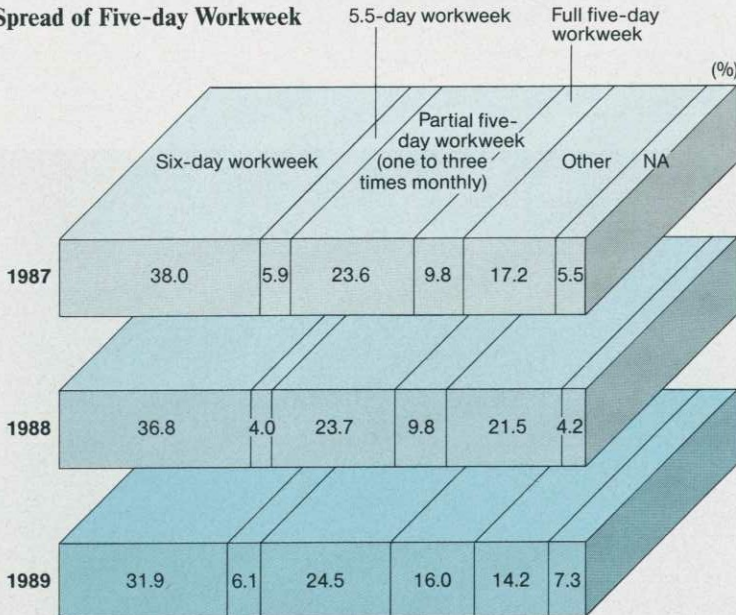


Cutting the Workweek

Fig. 1 Spread of Five-day Workweek



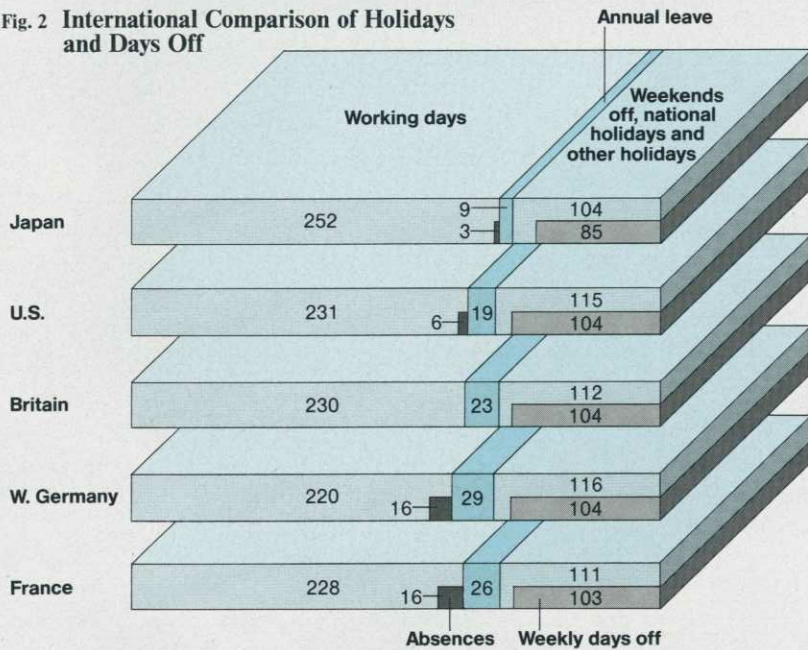
Note: Based on inquiries made to workers nationwide aged 15 or more. Respondents totaled 1,810 in 1987 survey, 2,172 in 1988 and 1,974 in 1989. Source: Leisure Development Center survey

Ever since the celebrated Maekawa Report of 1986 recommended a major shift in Japan's economic policy, tremendous effort has gone into reorienting the Japanese economy from exports to domestic demand. Named after its author, former Bank of Japan Governor Haruo Maekawa, the report called, among other things, for introducing a five-day workweek and reducing working hours in Japan to the levels found in other industrialized countries. "More holidays for greater pleasure" has become a national catchphrase.

The five-day workweek has been spreading rapidly through the private sector since government offices introduced two five-day weeks a month at the beginning of 1989, followed quickly by a complete switch to the five-day week by all of Japan's financial institutions (Fig. 1). However, there is still a wide gap between large metropolitan areas like Tokyo and regional cities, as well as between big businesses and smaller firms. How to narrow the gap remains an unresolved problem.

A vibrant economy and a tight labor market kept total working hours little changed up until 1989, when the five-day workweek finally began to have an effect. But even today, there has been little change in overtime hours (Table 1), while an international comparison shows that Japanese workers enjoy far fewer annual holidays or days off than their counterparts in the West (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 International Comparison of Holidays and Days Off



Notes: 1. Assumes a full five-day workweek has been implemented in the U.S., Britain and West Germany. 2. Paid annual leave in the U.S. and Europe are days granted by management. 3. Figures for absenteeism in Britain not available. Sources: EC and national statistics; Estimates by the Working Hours Division of the Labor Ministry

Table 1 Change in Average Monthly Working Hours per Worker

	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Total working hours	183.8	182.0	175.5	172.0	174.5	174.7	175.2	176.2	175.7	175.1	174.7	174.8	176.3	175.8	175.2	175.9	175.9	174.0
Regular working hours	14.6	15.4	12.6	10.6	11.6	12.0	12.3	13.2	13.5	13.4	13.1	13.4	14.2	14.8	14.4	14.8	15.7	15.8
Overtime hours	169.2	166.6	162.9	161.4	162.9	162.7	162.9	163.0	162.2	161.7	161.6	161.4	162.1	161.0	160.8	161.1	160.2	158.2

Source: Monthly labor statistics survey, Labor Ministry