


# Four-day working week for all is a realistic goal this century, unions say

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Advances in technology mean that a four-day week working week is a realistic goal for most people by the end of this century, the leader of the UK's trade union movement has said.

Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), used her speech to the organisation's 150th annual gathering to insist that evolving technology and communications should cut the number hours spent at work.

Speaking in Manchester on Monday, O'Grady said: "In the 19th century, unions campaigned for an eight-hour day. In the 20th century, we won the right to a two-day weekend and paid holidays.

"So, for the 21st century, let's lift our ambition again. I believe that in this century we can win a four-day working week, with decent pay for everyone. It's time to share the wealth from new technology, not allow those at the top to grab it for themselves."

A report by the organisation says postwar economists promised employees would be working a 15-hour week by now and that polls showed a four-day week would be most people's preference.

"Instead, new technology is threatening to intensify working lives. For some, the on-demand economy has meant packaging work into ever-smaller pieces of time," the report reads. "This is a return to the days of piece-work, creating a culture where workers are required to be constantly available to work."

More than 1.4 million people work seven days a week, with 3.3 million working more than 45 hours a week, according to the report.

TUC polling has also identified stress and long hours as workers' biggest concerns, after pay.

Unions have pointed to companies such as Amazon as being part of the problem, where warehouse workers are allegedly "treated like robots" and have been treated by paramedics for health issues at work.

O'Grady is expected to tell delegates: "Jeff Bezos owns Amazon, now a trillion-dollar company. He's racking up the billions while his workers are collapsing on the job exhausted. We need strong unions with the right to go into every workplace; starting with Amazon's warehouses here in the UK."

In her speech, O'Grady also accused former foreign secretary Boris Johnson of “dog whistle racism” over his recent controversial comments about burqas. She won loud applause from delegates when she said: “A woman who wears a niqab or a burqa is still our sister. We defend the right of Muslim women, and all women, to wear whatever they want.”

O'Grady also called on prime minister, Theresa May, to stand down if she cannot deliver a Brexit deal that protects jobs and rights, and properly fund public services.

“If you won't give us the new deal that working people demand, Mrs May, stand down and take your do-nothing government with you. Give us a general election and we'll do everything in our power to elect a new prime minister who will.”

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