

A Eight Hours Day. How to Get it and How to Keep it.

First published by James Leatham in 1890

PREFACE.

THE following essay forms an attempt to recommend the adoption of an eight hours day by showing the necessity for it and the advantages of it, and by meeting the main objections urged against its adoption. The matter contained in these pages appeared originally in the columns of the *People's Journal* about a year ago, and was subsequently reprinted in the now defunct Labour Elector. Having been amplified, and the most note-worthy recent objections met, it is now published in collected form in the hope that it may serve to assist politicians and social reformers in making up their minds that the statutory limitation of the hours of labour is not only needful, but possible and desirable.

Those who read to the close will see that I regard the Eight Hours Day more as a means to an end than as anything like a permanently satisfactory adjustment of economic relationships. While as a Socialist I hold that this world will never be a tolerable place for the mass of mankind to live in so long as they allow the landlord and capitalist to monopolise the means of production, yet the Conservative forces in society are so strong- the working class is itself so strong a Conservative force-that the shortening of the working day seems the most beneficial instalment of social progress at all possible of more or less immediate realisation. Some of our friends tell us that in advocating State interference with the hours of labour we are "off the scent." The Land Nationalizer says you must destroy private property in the soil; the Co-operator says working men must become their own capitalists; the uncompromising Socialist contends that no good can come out of the Individualistic System-that the only way to amend it is to end it. This is all so true that it seems a pity they should speak to a public which has neither the knowledge and penetration to see that they are right, nor the courage, confidence and public-spiritedness to follow their advice. While the unemployed clamour for work and food and the employed for more rest and better pay, it seems like trying to fill their bellies with the east wind to tell them they must nationalise land or communise capital. It is indeed high time that we had made up our minds what good thing it is we want first.

The shortening of the working day is important (1) Because it will find work for the unemployed, with all the added comfort and happiness which that involves; (2) Because it will give the masses more leisure to read and think, and, by abating the tendency which their labour has to absorb their energy, both mental and physical, it will leave them the mental alertness necessary to an understanding of their position,

and the courage, hope, and initiative - largely a matter of health-to set about improving it.

From a Socialist point of view the short-hours movement is specially important because of the effect which it would exercise on profits in all industries subject to foreign competition. Inasmuch as to pay the same rates of wages for the shorter hours would trench on the already vanishing margin, it would tend to hasten the end of the system of production for profit. Were the whole industrial world to simultaneously introduce the eight hours system, the capitalist could simply raise his prices, and Capital and Labour would still stand on the same relative footing. But although some continental countries are anxious for the shortening of the working day, it would be too much to expect that the whole world will introduce the eight hours system within measurable distance; and with even one or two countries working long hours at low wages the British, French, and German bourgeoisie will not be able to command the higher prices which would be necessary to recoup them for the increase in cost of production. The consequence will be that trade will go more and more to the countries where the cheapest goods can be produced, until the bourgeoisie, working for low profits, and occasionally for none at all, will get as tired of the individualistic system of production and distribution as the workers are already; and they will make haste to clear out in favour of the community in its organised capacity. What will happen then is too long a story to tell here: I reserve it for another early occasion.

I ought to say, however, that the Eight Hours Day, as a positive amelioration of the lot of the worker, and quite apart from any ulterior effects which it would have, is a benefit to assist in obtaining which is worthy of the best powers ever devoted to the service of mankind. It is sometimes contended that to give the worker shorter hours or better wages is to make him contented. I contend, on the other hand, that the periods of prosperity are the periods of progress. "The outlook then takes the form of hope": and hope is a better working stimulus than despair. A down trodden people are a spiritless people, a more prosperous people are comparatively high-spirited, and are jealous of their rights and aggressive for still greater benefits than they have ever before enjoyed. The more we get the more we want.

J. L.

AN EIGHT HOURS DAY

The Necessity of it.

HEREIN lies the utility of mechanical inventions, of the improvements in machines already invented, and of the increase in productive power brought about by the subdivision of labour? Production has been enormously increased during the last half-century; but are our wages so very much higher, our hours so very much shorter, or our work so very much lighter while we are at it than the work, the hours, and the wages of the last generation of workers? We were told that the sewing-machine would very much lighten the toil of the over-worked seamstress; but were we to consult the sweater machinist, who lives in a slum, and on several days of the week works eighteen hours on a stretch, I am afraid he would not dilate with much exuberance on the blessings of machinery as applied to the making of slop pants; nor would the woman who makes a dozen shirts for 10d. be more lavish in her admiration.

In Professor Leone Levi's "*Work and Pay*" we read- "Seventy years ago, with the old-fashioned handloom, one weaver could produce six yards, narrow width, per day. With the steam power-loom today at Accrington a weaver attending to four looms can produce 160 yards every day-that is, the amount of human labour is 1-27th now of what it was 70 years ago." Yet the handloom weaver had better wages, his work was more pleasant because less mechanical, his working day was very little longer than that of the power-loom weaver today, while the cloth he turned out was greatly superior in quality and not much dearer in price.

A similar acceleration in the rate of production has, to a greater or less extent, been going on all round. In the various processes of agriculture, in the many departments of the iron industry, in shipbuilding and house-building, in the printing-office and the watch-factory- everywhere machinery lessens at least the necessity for labour.

Surely all this means that a very substantial reduction in the hours of labour is possible! Competition, machinery, and the greater subdivision of labour have given us cheap goods; the working day has been shortened; and amongst the aristocracy of labour wages have been increased. But few people pretend that wages yet bear a decent proportion to the value of the product; and most humane and sensible men are favourable to a further shortening of the working day, if, say they, it could only be done. There does not, however, appear to be any very definite general desire for an eight hours day. That the employing class should oppose a reduction of the hours of labour is perfectly natural. But that the working class should be so indifferent to the condition of a million of their fellow-countrymen, workless and starving, as to evince their present apathy with respect to the most feasible proposal that has been mooted

as a means of dealing with the unemployed, only shows how selfishly hard-hearted "the struggle for existence" tends to make us: while, at the same time, the absence of any very general anxiety for additional leisure to themselves shows how little of enlightened self-interest the workers possess.

If you are in employment, and find your spare time hang heavily upon your hands; if you speak of "pastimes," and have no better use for your evenings than to spend them in dangle about the gallery of a theatre or the bar of a public-house; or if you yawn during holidays, and wish you were back at your work, then I do not wonder that you are careless as to whether we are to have an eight hours day or not. But among the working class there is a large and growing minority who want more time for physical and mental recreation than our present industrial system allows. The main attraction which an eight hours day has for them is that it would add another hour or two to their own time on every working day. There are young men possessed with an ever-increasing desire to know more of the contents of the thousands of books that pour from the press every year. They want to read "the fairy tales of science"-to follow in their researches "the wise men seeking out marvels." They desire to enjoy the glowing fancies of "the poet's teeming head," to learn from the historian how society has come to be what it is, to gather from all the best sources some knowledge of what is going on in the world around them both near and remote. They long for additional opportunities of getting to the baths and the gymnasium, the cricket field in the summer time, the football field in the winter. They are sorry to have to miss an hour of social intercourse when they are required to be at evening classes or the Literary Society. In all these directions do the tastes of a mentally and physically healthy youth lead him; but with things as they are he dare not hope to do even moderate justice to them. And are there not many fathers who want to be able to spend more time at their own fireside without neglecting their social duties at the Oddfellows' Lodge, the political meeting, the church or the School Board, in the Trades Union, and where not? They would like to be able to take "the bairns" to the seaside oftener on Saturday afternoons; but they are always so tired by the end of the week! And it would be so fine to wheel baby out into the country in the perambulator, and see the older ones scamper along the breezy highway, up on the green banks by the wayside, or in and out among the trees in some wood or belting where they are not menaced by the notice-"Trespassers will be prosecuted!" Such a father remembers an occasional holiday when he was able to take his entire household for an outing, and with what appetites they all came back to tea; and as he looks up from his writing or reading into the wan, patient face of the overworked house mother, and recalls how the colour mounted in her cheeks that day, he sighs- "Oh, I wish I had more time!" I know of few complaints more commonly uttered than this cry of want of time; and, although it may now and again be the mere subterfuge of a lazy person, there is a very real reason for it as a rule.

The toilers have a right to enjoy all these social pleasures and opportunities. And considerations of health require that the working day should be shortened. Medical

men tell us (as has been pointed out before now) that eight hours' work take as much out of a man's system as he can return to it by eight hours' sleep and eight hours' recreation. If this be true -and there is no good reason to doubt it- then it follows that those who are compelled to work nine, ten, and twelve hours a-day must be wearing themselves out at a rapid rate. That such a devitalising process is going is made evident by the results of medical investigation as embodied in statistics. If we consult such a life-table as most actuaries keep on their book-shelves we shall find the average duration of life of the workers to be only 29 years, whilst that of the leisured classes reaches 56 years. This simply means that the worker is killed out 27 years before his time. The degenerative effects of our industrial system are rendered manifest by a comparison between the physique of the factory-worker and that of the field-worker; though the latter is overworked too. The workers in towns are never healthy in the third generation if the parents on both sides have been town-born and town-bred; and we can only wonder what would become of the stature and stamina of the urban working class were it not recuperated by a constant stream of immigrants from the country, bringing with them fresh bone and blood.

In the meantime we live to work, whereas, more properly, we ought to work to live. As a matter of fact the worker does not live: he merely vegetates. His existence is a dull round of up in the morning, and down at night: and if he were to start a diary, with the intention of recording in it the incidents of each passing day, he would find it such a dull, monotonous, uneventful affair, that he would in a short time throw it up in disgust. The lives of birds and beasts unless they have been domesticated, constitute one long holiday; the lives of the great mass of mankind are one long term of penal servitude, with hard labour, and the fare too often little better than bread and water.

That the progress of civilization has been largely one-sided in its ameliorative influence on the conditions of life is rendered glaringly apparent to us when we learn that, in regard to the main elements of happiness and wellbeing, our forefathers were better situated 400 years ago than we are today. In the works of reliable historians we read that in the fifteenth century the labourers only worked a normal day of Eight Hours! Their work, moreover, was, as we know, more pleasant than our work is today. The creative, artistic faculty of the craftsman entered more largely into it; more labour was expended upon it; better materials were embodied in it. In short, the product was made to use and enjoy rather than to sell: quality was more of a desideratum than cheapness. In spite of occasional periods of warfare and turmoil, the social atmosphere of medieval life was, on the whole, more leisurely, more rational, and less feverish than that of today.

Finally, there is abundant evidence that the remuneration was such as to justify Thorold Rogers in characterising this period as the Golden Age of Labour.

The time will come when the worker will laugh at the timidity which made him hesitate to believe an eight hours day possible, and to demand it from the employing class. If the vast amount of waste labour that goes on in every industrial community were put an end to, and if everyone did his fair share of the world's work, not eight, nor six, but three or four hours' work a-day would be adequate to supply all of us with more of the comforts and refinements of life than we enjoy at present.

The Objections to It.

Probably the best method of recommending an eight hours day as a practical instalment of reform is to meet the arguments that have been advanced against it. In the absence of a more definite statement of the case against the Governmental enforcement of an eight hours day, the following may be given as the categorical objections:-(1) That it is impossible from an industrial and commercial point of view-that is, the business of the country could not be conveniently transacted under the eight hours system; (2) That it is economically impossible -that is, the employing class cannot afford to pay ten hours' wages for eight hours' work; (3) That if the workers want it they can get it for themselves -that is, by refusing to work more than eight hours a-day.

That it is impossible from an industrial and commercial point of view has never been shown. Those who urge this objection have in view the difficulty of managing distributive businesses from shops and warehouses, of running trains, and of working concerns such as paper, gas, and chemical works, the Post Office and newspaper offices where the labour is more or less continuous, and requires shifts or relays of workers to do it.

In the case of shops there certainly is a disadvantage attending the limitation of the hours. Early closing always carries with it certain inconveniences to the public; though to the shop-keepers and their assistants it is a clear gain. In this, as in many another case, we must choose the lesser of two evils. If the eight hours day becomes law it will simply mean that people will have to do their shopping early in the day; and, as the factories and workshops would close earlier, it would be possible for them to do that. Under the eight hours system operatives would begin work some hours before the shops were open, and the shops would remain open a corresponding length of time after the works had closed. The chief reason why certain classes of shops are kept open so late in the meantime is, not because it furthers public convenience, but because one grasping dealer, by keeping open late, forces all the dealers in his neighbourhood into doing the same, so that they may not lose custom. However, an Eight Hours Bill need not necessarily enforce the closing of shops. Let the owner of the establishment stay in it as long as he pleases; only make it illegal for him to detain his assistants longer than eight hours per day in his service. To ensure strict observance of the Law, an increase of inspectors would doubtless be necessary; but in such a matter public opinion would form a tolerably effective deterrent to breaches of the law. If a tradesman be asked

whether he could manage all his sales during eight hours of the day, as a rule he will tell you that he could do so in half the time. As things are, shopkeepers and their assistants spend a large proportion of their time in mere waiting for custom, shifting about of the goods, gossiping with customers, and watching the people on the other side of the way. So far as shops are concerned the proposed limitation of the hours seems readily applicable. In the case of druggists' shops and public-houses the attendants would simply have to work in relays. This means that two persons would have to be employed where one serves at present, which would in turn necessitate an increase in the expense of management; but both druggists and publicans are credited with being able to afford that. Now, as to the railways. Of course trains are run during more than eight hours out of the twenty-four. But they could be run throughout the whole twenty-four, and yet the railway servants need not work more than eight hours a-piece per day. Indeed, the signalmen at very busy parts of a line do not work more than eight hours as it is. By working in "shifts" the carrying business of the country could be as efficiently managed as it is at present.

Nay, by shortening the hours of labour it could be conducted more efficiently than it is at present; for it has been found that not a few of the terrible railway disasters which occur from time to time have happened through fatigue and want of alertness on the part of the overworked signalmen and pointsmen. The hours worked by railway servants vary; but it is stated on good authority that on English railways it is not uncommon for a man to hand in a time-bill for the week of 112 hours, which, divided by seven, gives 16 hours a day! This, of course, includes overtime; but it is said that overtime is systematically worked. In answering a question as to whether he was prepared to support a measure enforcing an eight hours day on railways, Mr. John Morley has stated that such a regulation could not be put into operation all over, as there were many stationmasters at small country stations who had only to work for a few minutes now and again throughout the day. Well, whether these officials are constantly employed or not, if they are "on the spot" they deserve all the remuneration they get at present for eight hours' work. But in any case these sinecurists form the rare exceptions to a rule; and the Legislature can frame exceptional regulations to deal with exceptional cases. Another difficulty was raised by a writer in the *Newcastle Chronicle*. He argued that the proposed limitation of the hours was not applicable to railways, because a certain driver would have to do a twelve hours' journey regularly. Well, let him drive today, take a holiday tomorrow, and go on duty the next day again. Thus he could in each week put in four days' work of twelve hours each, which would be equal to six days' work of eight hours a-day. Such an arrangement would afford employment for three drivers where two now suffice to do the work, and would give more leisure to all three. It is for such purposes that an eight hours day is advocated. Or better still, dispense with twelve-hour journeys. There is a limit to the length of a journey as it is: why not reduce that limit - making the longest journey one of eight hours? Eight hours a day among engine-smoke and water, in all weathers, for weeks, months, years on end, seems enough to satisfy the veriest glutton for driving work.

As to paper works and chemical works, let them have three shifts instead of two. The labour in chemical works especially is notoriously unhealthy; and, as exceptionally good profits are made in this industry, the employers can afford to pay the same rate of wages as at present for a very much shorter day and to a greater number of men.

But other objections still remain to be considered.

Mr. Bradlaugh (and Mr. Bryce after him) has urged that the enforcement of an eight hours day would simply lead to the work being taken home. Admitting that there is some little force in this plea, it is worthwhile pointing out what is too generally overlooked by objectors-that the motive to work overtime would be greatly lessened under the eight hours system. Men may frequently work overtime from cupidity or from mere carelessness as to how they employ their time; but the chief motive, the *raison d'etre* of overtime will be found to be low pay. The causes of low pay, in turn, are an overstocked labour market and the want of combination among the workers. This latter source of helplessness, however, is steadily being overcome; and if the working day were shortened and the unemployed absorbed, the workers would be enabled to determine many things that they cannot touch so long as there are plenty of idle hands to take their place should they demur to the terms on which they are employed. They would, among other matters, be able to secure better pay, and, with better pay, the necessity for working at home in their own time would either disappear altogether or else be very much minimised. Be that as it may, in the great majority of industries to take home the work would be impossible, even if the operatives were willing to do it. Industrial pressure would have to become severe indeed before we should find the mason, blacksmith, rivetter, boilermaker, printer, &c., &c., doing a part of their day's work in the kitchen or the coal-cellar.

Another objection is that the eight hours limitation could not be generally applied because in some industries-tailoring, for example-there is a dull season and a busy season, when it is sometimes necessary that the work should be carried on "night and day." This seems somewhat of a difficulty so far as the tailors are concerned; but it would be rather a hardship if, because the tailors found it difficult to limit the working day to eight hours all the year round, other workers should be forced to work nine or ten hours a-day all the year round. This is an aspect of the eight hours question which will perhaps be made the subject of special legislative provision; although there is no strict necessity why it should be so. If an Eight Hours Act were extended so as to include tailors' workshops, it would simply have the effect of spreading the work over a greater length of time; and that, surely, is not in itself an undesirable thing. If we are asked whether the comfort and convenience of the tailor should be conserved, or Tom, Dick, and Hany should be able to get their summer suits whenever they choose to order them, few sober-minded persons will hesitate as to their answer. Here, indeed, the work might readily be taken home -if the workmen were sufficiently foolish or selfish to do it; but it is to be hoped that the tailors themselves, either through their Unions or as individuals, would have

something to say on that matter. In any case, there is no good reason why other trades should be denied a reduction in their hours of labour because the tailors cannot get it. If they wish to be exempted from the provisions of an Eight Hours Act, that, of course, can be managed without much difficulty; though any such exemption would be a thing to be regretted.

I come now to deal with the most important objection that has been advanced against the shortening of the hours. As stated before, it is (2) That an eight hours day is economically impossible -that is, the employing class cannot afford to pay ten hours' wages for eight hours' work.

Those who advocate a reduction of the hours of labour have for the most part contented themselves with showing that it was possible to adopt an eight hours day in Government and municipal employments and on the railways, whilst leaving the present rates of wages untouched. Although I propose to carry the discussion of this subject a good deal further than that, I will follow their example by dealing, in the first place at least, with the economic applicability of an eight hours day to Government and municipal works and the railways. Where the State is the direct employer of labour, as in the case of the Arsenal and Dockyards, and where the municipality is the direct employer, as in gas-works, water-works, and the various departments of police service, the limitation of the hours could be introduced without much trouble. But even where the State and municipalities are only the indirect employers of labour they can exercise a powerful influence on the conditions under which their work is performed. For example, they might, in giving out work to contractors, stipulate that the working day of the employees shall not exceed eight hours -the wages remaining as at present. Stipulations similar in principle to this have been inserted in the specialisation schedules issued by the London School Board; and there is no good reason why the same policy should not be adopted by all public bodies. Were this done it would obviously improve the position of a very considerable section of the working class; and, even if nothing more could be gained, this alone would be worth striving for. The community does not want anybody in its service to be either overworked or underpaid.

So far the reduction in the hours of labour could be instituted without Act of Parliament and without reduction in wages. But henceforth we have to deal with cases where an Act of Parliament and something more would be necessary in order to secure for the workers the present rate of wages for a normal working day of eight hours.

Let us begin with the railways-these being the most extensive private monopolies in the kingdom. Can the Railway Companies afford to pay the present rate of wages for eight hours' work a-day from each employee? I unhesitatingly say they can. These Companies have had it all their own way in Britain since they started; and yet when we speak of improving the position of the railway servants we are told that the profits of railway companies will not stand an increase in wages, as they do not average

more than 4 per cent. -no indication being given of what this very moderate-looking percentage actually means in the shape of gross profit. It is only by analysing an occasional balance-sheet that one realises "the meaning of railway dividends," and the extent to which railway labour is fleeced. Here are a few figures from balance-sheets of companies which are reputed to work their lines with a fair degree of liberality.

In the official return of the receipts and expenditure of the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway for the half-year ending June, 1888, we find that, whilst the income was £993,656 8s. 3d., the expenditure was only £491,935 15s. 11d., leaving a balance to the share and debenture holders of £501,720 12s. 4d. This means that the profit on the expenditure for the half-year was 102 per cent. That the half-year was not an exceptional one, and that this line is not an exceptionally profitable one, are amply shown by a comparison with the reports of other companies. The average profits on the North Eastern, the Midland, and the Sheffield, Lincolnshire, and District Railways are similar to those of the first-mentioned railway. As we saw, the directors of this Company paid to the share and debenture holders £501,720 12s. 4d., whereas I find by adding the various items of wages together that the entire working staff got only £227,000 as their share of the wealth they had created. Now, I do not know the amount of capital that may be invested in this concern, and therefore cannot say what dividend may be represented by £501,720 12s. 4d; but without reference to what the profit may mean in the shape of dividend, it is important to note the gross disparity between the return to labour and that to capital, If the meaning of these figures is fairly grasped, we may now pass on to the consideration of the alleged 4 per cent. dividend, how it arises, and what can be done with it.

The amount of capital invested in the railways of the United Kingdom is roundly stated at £800,000,000. The dividends annually paid on that sum amount to £33,000,000. This, indeed, gives a return of only 4 per cent. on the money invested. But no authority on railway statistics will contend that the actual capital sunk reaches anything like £800,000,000. Waring, Fleming, Keddel, Macdonell all agree in saying that the value put on rail-road systems is largely fictitious; though to indicate all the methods by which this fictitious value is run up would require more space than is at my disposal. Difficult as it is to determine the capital sunk and the dividends actually paid, the foregoing figures, showing how the incomes of Railway companies are divided, are sufficient to show that Edward Carpenter (himself a railway shareholder) is justified in saying that each railway servant carries a share or debenture holder on his back.

Taking the case on its last and lowest ground, and accepting the statement that 4 ½ per cent. represents the average dividend, I contend that even off that percentage of profit the Companies can afford to pay the present rate of wages for eight hours' work a day from each of their employees. This is how the matter stands:--There are something like 350,000 railway employees all told, and these are said to work an

average day of twelve hours. To work the railways on the eight hours plan would thus require one-third more "hands." By reducing the dividends somewhat less than 1 per cent. as much would be gained as would suffice to pay the present rate of wages on the average 9s. 3d. -to the necessary number of extra hands, which would be about 116,000. Are the workers (on the railways or elsewhere) to be killed outright by overwork half a lifetime before the age at which the leisured class die so that ½ per cent. may be saved to their masters? It will be for the workers themselves to say.

It is clear that public bodies and the railway companies can afford to pay the present rate of wages for an eight hours day. But that is not enough. We must carry our inquiry further, and endeavour to ascertain whether or not capitalists generally are able to do so. We are not likely to evoke general enthusiasm on behalf of this "measure" unless it can be shown to be capable of general application; although it must be confessed that general enthusiasm has been evoked by "measures " of much less importance than even this limited application of the eight hours day.

In attempting to show that the employing class can afford to pay nine or ten hours' wages for eight hours' work, I feel that I am in deep and troubled waters, and I can excuse the advocates of an eight hours day for having invariably steered clear of this aspect of the question. For those employers who at present work their employees nine hours a day to pay the present rate of wages for eight hours' work would mean an increase of wages to the extent of 12 ½ per cent., and, in the case of those who work their employees ten hours a day, an increase of 25 per cent.,. Such an advance would at any time have meant a good deal, but at the present juncture it means a very great deal indeed.

Everywhere we find that profits are on the down grade; now and again we hear of concerns being run at a loss; here and there factories are being shut down; sometimes the trade of a town is virtually paralysed-closed shops and vacant tenement's meeting the eye on every hand; whilst rings, corners, syndicates, trusts arise one after another as spasmodic efforts to stem the downward tendency of profits. It seems tolerably clear that all capitalists cannot afford to pay the necessary increase. Yet the burden of labour is so grievous to bear, the woes and wants of the unemployed are so crying, and the existence in our midst of these social outlaws threatens to become so dangerous to society, that whatever may be the difficulties attending a general application of the proposed temporary remedy, it is in the last degree imperative that we should ascertain what can be done.

One phenomenon which accompanies the downward movement of profits is the tendency for labour to get more and more socialised. Production and distribution are conducted on an ever- increasing scale. The manufacturer best able to stand his ground is the one who has a large capital invested, who runs many machines, and those powerful and efficient, who subdivides minutely the labour in his factory, and who, by virtue of his large overturn, can afford to sell on a comparatively low percentage of profit. Much of this holds good of the merchant -

the mere distributor of products - as well as of the manufacturer. The manufacturer and the shopkeeper in a small way find that they have to maintain an increasingly unequal contest with their big rivals. In trade, as in everything else, success is to the strong. It may be noted in passing that this aggregation of labour is paving the way for the community in its organised capacity to take over these big monopolies, and, its trustees, for the whole people, become itself the sole monopolist. In the meantime, however, a knowledge of the small percentage of profit gained under this consolidated system of trade acts as a deterrent to the worker when he feels disposed to strike for better terms with his employer. It frequently affords the latter an excuse for refusing to grant an increase in wages when it could be done, and it stays the denunciation of the labour agitator, who feels that he cannot make much of a "case" out of the capitalist whose dividends do not exceed 6 per cent. All are liable to forget that 6 per cent. may mean a larger gross profit in one instance than 20 per cent. means in another instance where the amount of capital and the yearly overturn are not so great. I have dealt at some length with this phase of the labour problem, because it is of paramount importance in any consideration of the ability of capitalists to pay higher wages.

It is well nigh impossible to ascertain what profits are being made in particular industries. We occasionally fall in with the balance-sheet of a manufacturing company, and at least learn how some concerns are paying. But every concern does not pay alike; and we have to consider whether the particular business whose profits we have ascertained may be taken as constituting an average, and if not, how much above or below the average those profits may be. In short, we have to guess at the relation which those particular profits bear to profits in general within the same industry. Let me analyse one of these representative cases. Some eighteen months ago a strike at an Aberdeen cotton mill was occupying public attention. The directors represented that they carried on their business at a disadvantage, being so far from the markets and the coalfields that the cost of transportation of raw material and manufactured goods handicapped them in competing with Lancashire firms in the cotton trade. In spite of these disabilities their profits for the half-year immediately preceding the strike were over 11 per cent., and since 1880 have never been less than 7 ½ per cent., although, by a "writing off" device, the dividend has been made to appear as if it did not exceed 3 ½ per cent. year by year.*

**A correspondent of The Labour Tribune supplies the following list of manufacturing companies, with their dividends, fully justifying the conclusions here arrived at:*

<i>Crawford Co, Rochdale - 10 per cent.</i>	<i>Star Co, Royton - 10 per cent</i>
<i>Arkwright Co, Rochdale 15 per cent</i>	<i>Shaw Co, Royton -8 ½ per cent</i>
<i>Thorham co, Royton 10 ½ per cent</i>	<i>United Co, Oldham 10 per cent</i>
<i>Central Mill, Oldham 10 per cent</i>	<i>Gladstone Co, Failsworth 16 per cent</i>

These figures were communicated to me by two members of the local Trades Council, who took part in the negotiations connected with the dispute. My informants further ascertained by an analysis of the profits made and wages paid that in order to pay the 5 per cent. increase in wages demanded by the strikers a deduction from the profits of the then last half-year of only 1 per cent. would have been required.

Now, here is a factory running at a disadvantage in an industry subject to keen home and foreign competition; yet we find that they can net a profit of 11 per cent., and that 1 per cent. of these profits would mean 5 per cent. of wages. If 1 per cent. profit is equal to 5 per cent. wages, it follows that 5 per cent. profit is equal to 25 per cent. wages.

The foregoing may be taken as a typical case, showing the profits made in the staple industries of the country, and affording likewise an example of the relation which wages bear to profits. If we take it as a representative case, and institute a comparison between it and other concerns, we must make allowances that are favourable to our view (that the average capitalist can afford to pay the present rate of wages for eight hours' work), as the capitalists here appear to stand on an unfavourable competitive footing. Textile industries and the iron trade are perhaps harder pressed by external competitive forces than any other department of production, and to take a cotton factory as a specimen case is to adopt a particularly safe average. I need only remind you that a little way back we found $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the railway dividend to be equal to as much as 50 per cent. of wages according to the present rates paid to railway servants.

Our analysis of these figures, then, shows that the employing class can afford to pay 25 per cent more wages, and still have something left. But even if less were left for employers than is the case here the increase should still be demanded. One of the main advantages of an eight hours day is that, with the retention of the present rates of wages, it would have the effect of forcing profits down to the lowest point. The friends of labour are too prone to forget that "The wit of man can devise no scheme by which the poor can become less poor without the rich becoming less rich," with the unemployed labour once absorbed, Capital will for a time be as much at the mercy of Labour as Labour has hitherto been at the mercy of Capital.

Those few capitalists who are not able to maintain the present rates of wages under the short hours system must simply go to the wall in the interests of the general good. Even with the existing labour day there are those who are unable to pay the current rates of wages and at the same time keep their heads long above water.

There have always been bankrupts, and the reduction of the hours may make rather more than ever. The greatest good of the greatest number cannot always be secured without sacrifice and suffering somewhere. It may seem remorseless to plan disaster to the capitalist in this cold-blooded way; but, in engaging in his enterprise, the capitalist knew, or ought to have known, that he ran certain risks; and he must now be prepared to accept the fortune of war. This

prospective immolation of capital on the altar of progress is neither so cruel nor so devastating as the cruelty and the devastation that are carried into the camp of Labour every day by the introduction of a new labour-starving machine. It is the turn of capital to suffer now. But it may be said that I am forgetting the bearing of foreign competition on all this. Well, it is not strictly necessary that we should consider this factor in trade, as it has been shown that in spite of foreign competition the average British capitalist is at present able to pay higher wages. However, I am willing to admit that there is great likelihood of an increase of foreign competition in coming years, and that as a consequence further encroachments will be made on the profits of British manufacturers. But there is good reason to believe that Continental peoples are as anxious to reduce the working day as we are. In Germany, from the throne downwards, the question is being actively discussed by politicians; the Swiss Government has made overtures to the other Powers with a view to some international regulation of labour being agreed upon; and the French Chamber of Deputies some time ago passed a Bill enacting a ten hours day, with a weekly holiday-thus making a greater reduction on the hours than we propose to make here, as the French have hitherto worked twelve hours a day on six days of the week.

The causes which create an unemployed class in Britain have similar effects abroad; though Continental Governments have a more humane method of dealing with their unemployed. When in France or Germany it is found that a number of men are out of employment a draft is made upon the public funds, and a grant is given to certain capitalists to be applied to increased production on condition that they will provide work for the idle hands, and that they will send the goods manufactured in this way out of the country. This is what is known as the bounty system, which is telling so severely on some of our own industries -foreign capitalists so subsidised being able to greatly undersell British manufacturers. It is reasonable to suppose that Continental politicians should be desirous of seeing the working day shortened, as a reduction of the hours would relieve them of the necessity of appropriating public funds for the carrying on of this bounty system.

It will thus be seen that the chief obstacle to the introduction of an eight hours day is neither an industrial nor an economic obstacle, but an intellectual one; that the main difficulty which advocates of this scheme of adjustment have to surmount is the difficulty of getting people to believe it possible and desirable of realisation.

I have endeavoured to answer the first and second categorical objections to the enforcement by Government of an eight hours day: with the third and last and least important objection I shall now deal. Re-stated it is: That if the workers want it they can get it for themselves -that is, by refusing to work more than eight hours a day.

It is worth noting that this statement, with the objection to State interference which it embodies, has been advanced, not so much by Trades Unionists themselves, as by

middle-class members of Parliament. Thirty years ago the capitalist class denounced Trades Unions because of their alleged tendency to sap the manly independence which had formerly characterised the British workman; and when today we find the same class extolling these combinations as the self-helpful perfection of this manly independence, we cannot help viewing with suspicion the change of front on the part of these gentlemen. This much may be depended on with certainty: that the capitalist class is not likely to manifest any great anxiety to acquaint the workers with the best method of improving their position at the expense of capitalism. Surely the wolf is the last creature we should expect to supply the sheep with good counsel as to the best manner of avoiding his clutches.

Through the influence which they have brought to bear on Parliament the Trade Unions have been able to accomplish much that would have been impossible of attainment by their ordinary tactics of strikes, intimidation, picketing, rattening, and so on. But it will be observed that the proposition we have to consider is one which asserts that they are capable of securing an eight hours day without legislative assistance.

Well, can the Trades Societies, by means of strikes, secure an eight hours day along with the present rates of wages? There is every reason to believe that they cannot. We find that in an increasing degree strikes are unsuccessful. There are always large bodies of unemployed workers so pressed by poverty that they are ready to step into the places vacated by the strikers. If these are not to be found near at hand, they can be, and frequently are, imported from a distance; though in most cases it is not necessary for the employer to put himself to that trouble, as he can afford to wait the short time requisite to starve his refractory hands into compliance with his terms. Many of our largest manufacturers have factories abroad; and, in the event of a strike occurring, the orders which cannot be completed at home can be sent there. Any concessions gained during the past fourteen or fifteen years have been gained because they did not think it worthwhile to make a determined stand, because there may have been a temporary inflation or "boom" in the particular industry where the successful strike occurred, or because in some way or another special circumstances favoured the strikers. The enthusiastic Trades Unionist who cannot see beyond his cult will say that Trades Unionism only fails because the workers do not more largely embrace its principles and practices, and he will comment with some little heat and a good deal of pardonable contempt, on the behaviour of the rats or scabs who refuse to join the union, and the many classes of unorganised workers who stand at the mercy of capitalism through their want of combination. I submit, however, that no matter how extensive and inclusive the combination may be, it is incapable of substantially improving the condition of its members without Government aid unless the circumstances are very exceptional.

The Trades Unions of Britain are more and more sinking into the position of mere benefit societies. The strongest of them cannot put a stop to overtime nor regulate

the number of apprentices—two of the leading objects for which they exist. Everywhere we find engineers working overtime more or less, and everywhere we find engineers in greater or less numbers helping to swell the army of unemployed; yet the Amalgamated Society of Engineers is the most powerful and inclusive trade combination in the kingdom. With the Scottish Typographical Association (also a strong and well-supported organisation) the apprentice question constitutes a standing difficulty, the rule fixing the proportion of apprentices to journeymen being in most branches of the Association more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The Executive has sent to the Aberdeen Branch (of which I am a member*) one admonitory remit after another, urging upon the Branch the necessity of taking action to bring the proportion of apprentices into conformity with the rule. Committees have been formed to deal with the matter, on one of which I have sat. The Committees have deliberated, reported, and suggested compromises, which have been rejected; circulars have been sent to the employers, soliciting, and latterly demanding, their co-operation in limiting the number of apprentices; but nothing has yet been accomplished, nor is the outlook at all hopeful. During the last six years hundreds of pounds have been paid out of the funds in out-of-work benefit and removal grants; yet the numbers signing the call-book as unemployed are this year substantially the same as ever. To make matters more desperate for the Unions, in the printing as in many other industries female labour is in some quarters largely employed.

**Since the above was written I have become an employer, and am thus ineligible for membership in the Union. I ought to add that some progress has been made with the apprentice question: the influx of boys to the trade has been at least considerably abated.*

What has been said of the Engineers' and Printers' Unions is in a greater or less degree true of all trade societies. In view of such facts as these, is it not a little preposterous for Members of Parliament to tell the workers that if they want an eight hours day they can get it by striking for it?

But even if the Trades Unions could secure an eight hours day by means of strikes, no sincere friend of the workers would advise them to make the attempt if their end could be gained by other means. A strike is a pitched battle which, however it may end, entails loss and suffering on all parties in the strife.

Probably the comparative powerlessness of Trades Unions is largely the result of a want of solidarity among the workers; but I ask my Trades Unionist friends: "Are you not likely to experience more difficulty in getting your fellows to combine and contribute towards your funds than in getting them to demand a fair day's work and a fair day's wage through the Legislature?"

And why should they be asked to abstain from seeking the aid of Parliament to better their position? Does Parliament belong only to the classes? Should it exist

simply for the purpose of extending privileges to private companies of capitalistic exploiters? for turning out the discontented and impoverished tenants of the Clanricardes and Gladstones? or for providing policemen to baton the rebellious spirit out of the workless proletarian? The workers are lectured about relying on the State as if the State were an outside agency which gave them charity. But in reality the working class is the State. As Frederic Harrison says, "The working class is the only class which is not a class. It is the nation. It represents, so to speak, the body as a whole, of which the other classes only represent special organs." In using the legislature to wring better terms from their masters, the workers will simply be using their own to get their own.

An eight hours day, then, would secure more leisure for those in employment, and employment for those who are idle. By providing the unemployed with work and wages it would make them consumers and purchasers, demand would proportionally increase, and production would consequently be stimulated. It would enable all workers to command better wages, and, by lessening the returns to capital, it would hasten the culmination of the economic and social revolution even now in process. The easiest and speediest way of obtaining any such reform is the best.

How to keep it.

As has been pointed out already, the mere shortening of the working day would, by absorbing that element of weakness, the margin of surplus labour, secure to the workers a large measure of control over the conditions on which they were to work. But it will doubtless occur to some that unless the advantage thus gained at the outset were steadily improved upon it could only be temporary in its duration. It must always be remembered that there is no finality in the reduction of the hours from ten to eight. With the further development of machinery, the increase of the working population, and the improvements and greater economies in methods of production, an unemployed class will again arise if the hours of labour be not reduced in conformity with the growth and progress in other respects; and if the Individualistic System lasts long enough, it is not difficult to foresee that a necessity may arise for reducing the hours to seven a day. Although the labour market would be temporarily cleared by the statutory limitation of the hours of labour, yet, if it were to become again overstocked, the capitalist could reduce wages, and justify his action by saying he could not afford to pay more. There are many specious pretexts for lowering wages; the workers in a concern have, as things are, very imperfect opportunities of definitely ascertaining the state of their employers' profits; and they will suffer much rather than come out on strike. But I am now to submit a scheme by means of which, if adopted, the workers might readily ascertain what wages their employers were able to pay, and at the same time secure the maximum reward of their labour under the eight hours system, without having recourse to strikes.

At given centres of industry let Labour Bureaux be established for the collecting of trade statistics. Render it compulsory for every employer of labour to make returns to these Bureaux of the profits made and the wages paid by him during each half-year. Should any employer refuse to furnish such periodical statements, or should he be detected supplying false information, let a fine or other penalty be imposed upon him, and grant powers to the Chief Labour Commissioner or his agents to demand inspection of the books of any concern at any reasonable time, so that assurance might be obtained that the statistics supplied to the Bureaux authorities represented the whole truth. Having in this way got your information, the next step would be to establish Labour Courts to work in concert with the Bureaux, fixing what the Chartists called a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, but what might more properly be described as the most that the employer could in the circumstances spare as wages. With properly organised Bureaux, with Labour Courts not wholly constituted of employers of labour, and with full publicity given to the work done by both classes of organisations, the maximum reward of labour could in most cases be secured.

But much more might be accomplished by these institutions. If they performed their work efficiently they would of necessity so harass the employing class, and profits would be so much cut down, that the game of capitalist production would not be worth the candle. Already there are economic forces at work which are steadily minimising the returns to capital, and otherwise worsening the position of the capitalist; and it ought to be our aim to hasten, by whatever fair means we can devise, the end of production for profit.

"What an intolerable interference with the liberty of the subject!" the unsympathetic capitalist will say. "What a cumbrous method of getting the earnings to the earner!" the uncompromising Socialist will justly exclaim. To the latter I regretfully reply, "You are right, comrade; but, you see, society will not have our simple, drastic, and abiding remedy—at least, not yet; and it must therefore take a remedy much more complicated in its workings and much less satisfactory in its results." To the capitalist impatient of interference with the liberty (to plunder) of the subject our reply simply is that all political action must be determined by the consideration of what is best calculated to promote "the greatest good of the greatest number," and that it is a less hardship that one man should have small profits than that a number of workers should have low wages.

There are clear precedents for the establishment of both the institutions we propose. In the American Republic there is a Labour Bureau for each separate State, and these Bureaux have collected much valuable information relative to the position of labour-information all too much neglected by certain writers on the American Commonwealth. It may be mentioned parenthetically that great difficulty has been experienced in getting employers to send in returns such as we have indicated - many having absolutely refused to give any information whatever. It is also interesting to learn that, with one solitary exception, the Commissioners in these Bureaux

invariably see good reason to take the side of the workers in any trade dispute—one of them, Col. Wright, of the Massachusetts Bureau, being a well-known friend of the workers. The drawback to the efficiency of these institutions is that they have no powers. For the proposed Labour Tribunals we have an undoubted precedent in the Land Courts which have been set up in Ireland to fix fair rents for agricultural holdings, and which have already done such good service.

We may be sure that after the general enforcement of an eight hours law; employers will use more cunning devices than any yet employed to recoup themselves for the loss which ten hours' pay for an eight hours day will entail upon them; and, to prevent the possibility of an encroachment on wages, the Courts and the Bureaux will pretty surely be found necessary. Of course, I hasten to add that these are not necessary to the getting of an eight hours day; but, in accordance with the title of this pamphlet, I am also concerned to show the method of keeping an eight hours day *with ten hours' pay*.

A P P E N D I X.

It may seem to some that I have not laid sufficient stress on the increase in consumption and demand which would ensue from the finding of work and wages for the million of unemployed workers, many of them having dependents. It appears to be contended that this increase in home demand would serve as an offset to a considerable loss of foreign trade. Although I admit that to give purchasing power to a million families means an important increase in home consumption, it must be borne in mind that we supply many million families abroad with the goods manufactured in our staple industries, and that it would by no means make up for the loss of our foreign markets to gain a million buyers at home. It will require something more revolutionary than an eight hours day to enable us to dispense with our foreign customers; though in the long-run we shall have to do so.

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