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Oh Slaves of these laborious years,
Oh Freemen of the years to be:
Shake off your blind and foolish fears,
And hail the Truth that makes you free.

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of
of
of

WHAT A COMPULSORY
8 Hour Working Day
MEANS TO THE WORKERS.



By **TOM MANN,**
(Amalgamated Engineers).

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EIGHT HOURS A DAY.

THE appalling amount of distress that exists in every town in Britain must arrest the attention of all duty loving men and women. No one who sees the effects of want and the fear of want can passively behold the dire poverty of a large section of the workers. Rather will he probe and probe until he finds the cause of the disease. Socialists *have* probed and they find the disease of WANT to be spread by the profit-making system upon which all industry and Society itself is based. They know that five or six centuries ago, without machinery, Englishmen obtained for their work sufficient to keep them in vigorous health and that they were not subject to periodical trade depressions; and when they further reflect upon the fact that the working day then consisted of no more than eight* hours, no wonder that Socialists are discontented with the present state of affairs, and that they resolve to use every means in their power to replace the present discord, misery, and anarchy, with harmony, happiness, and order.

The effect of our so-called labour-saving machinery (used really by its owners to save *wages* and not *labour*) is to cause continual distress amongst the workers by mercilessly throwing them out of employment without any compensation. It may then take a man often

* See "Work and Wages" by Thorold Rogers, M.P.

months, sometimes years, to find an occupation of any kind and when found it is at a price much below that he was in receipt of before the machine disturbed him. Yet the machine has increased the ease and rapidity of wealth-production. This increase of wealth is of course enriching *some one*—a class of which many perform but little really useful work while the bulk of them serve no function useful in any way to the community. Look, again, at the effect of increased Scientific Knowledge. By a better knowledge of Chemistry and Metallurgy tons of metal are now extracted from the ore with the labour of fewer men than must formerly have been employed to produce one hundredweight. What I am concerned about is, that in spite of our advanced methods of producing wealth, the workers as a class get only a subsistence wage, whilst an increasing number of them cannot get the barest necessaries of life.

Optimist Politicians are unwilling to admit that this is so. Anxious to make out a good case for the present basis of Society, they ignore the plainest of facts, so in confirmation of my contention I will quote from one or two non-Socialists. Professor Thorold Rogers, the present M.P. for Bermondsey, says on pages 185-6 of "Six Centuries of Work and Wages," written in 1884.

It may be well the case, and there is every reason to fear it is the case, that there is collected a population in our great towns which equals in extent the whole of those who lived in England and Wales six centuries ago; but whose condition is more destitute, whose homes are more squalid, whose means are more uncertain, whose prospects are more hopeless than those of the poorest serfs of the Middle Ages and the meanest drudges of the mediæval cities. The arm of the law is strong enough to keep them under, and Society has no reason to fear their despair; but I refuse to accept the superficial answer that a man is an admirer of the good old times because he insists that the vaunts of civilisation should be examined along with, and not apart from its failures. It is not possible to give the solution of one problem, the growth of opulence, and to refuse all attention to the other problem, the growth of penury.

Joseph Cowen M.P. speaking at a Mechanics' Institute at Newcastle, alluded to the labouring section as "a hybrid class doomed to eat the bread of penury and drink the cup of misery. Precarious labour provided them with subsistence for the day, but the slightest

interruption threw them destitute. A week of broken weather brought thousands of these industrial nomads to the brink of starvation. An inscrutable influence seemed to sink them as it elevated those around and above them. Society, ashamed and despairing, swept them, like refuse, into dismal receptacles, where seething in their wretchedness, they constituted at once our weakness and reproach. How to sweeten these receptacles and help their forlorn occupants to help themselves was the problem of the hour. *If Society did not settle it, it would in time settle Society.*"

To this Socialists answer that there is no permanent way of sweetening the lives of the class referred to except by the complete annihilation of the profit-mongers as a class, by forcing them all into the ranks of the *useful* workers. This will be apparent when it is realised that under the present system we are working to supply profits to profit-mongers instead of working to supply the legitimate requirements of the entire community, and when it is borne in mind that Shareholders and Employers are contented with nothing less than the HIGHEST possible profits, it will also be seen that on the other hand we (the workers) can have nothing more than the *lowest* possible wages. To establish Society on a proper basis is therefore the work of every right-minded man or woman.

Demagogues have been at work—with good intentions perhaps—but they have misled the workers from the true cause of their troubles. Among the blind leaders of the blind may be mentioned the Malthusians, the Teetotallers, the Financial Reformers, and well-intentioned Radicals. The first mentioned have taught that there are too many people in the country, and that the only way of bettering our condition is by curtailing the population, and this in face of the fact that every year wealth in this country is increasing much faster than population. The Temperance advocates hammer away at the blessings of sobriety as though drunkenness was the cause of poverty, when the fact is the other way about. Well nigh as fast as they surround an old toper with influences that prevent his drinking tastes

being gratified, another fills up the hole out of which he was lifted. It is a useless expenditure of energy to be continually preaching temperance and thrift. Let all be blest with leisure, food, and healthy enjoyments, as they might be if the economic basis of Society was as it should be, and then these matters will all right themselves. The only reason people spend time upon these panaceas is because they fail to understand the law of wages, which is that all above a bare subsistence wage shall go to profit mongers as profit. The only way out is to *destroy the profit mongers*.

The same argument applies to the financial reformer. All sensible persons are of course agreed that the country should be governed as economically as is consistent with efficiency, as also all are agreed that we should live soberly. But the reformer fails to see that if we curtail taxation to its lowest possible minimum, reduce it if you will 90 per cent., not one farthing of it would be saved to the workers. The Iron Law would still be in force which says, "So much as will keep life in you *and no more* shall go to you, O ye workers, so long as the profit making system remains."

These economic questions cannot be understood in a sufficiently clear manner by the mass of the workers while they are absorbed twelve, fourteen, sixteen, and even more hours a day while in work, and when out of work are walking about with the pangs of hunger eating out their vitals, and the blackness of despair staring them in the face at every turn. Now suppose those of us who can see these things in something like their grim reality, decide that come what may, we at least will do our part towards obtaining remunerative employment for all, and at the same time sufficient leisure that all may have a little breathing time after their work, what course can we take? To this I reply, there is one way by which it can be done, viz., by at once concentrating our efforts towards the establishing of an eight hours working day.

Let us examine a few figures in order to see clearly how this would affect us. We have something like 7,000,000 adult workers in the British Isles, working

nominally under the nine hours system, leaving overtime out of consideration for the moment. Let us see how many more hands would be put in employment if we struck off one hour per day from those in work. It is roughly estimated that of the above mentioned workers there are about 900,000 now out of work, representing a total population of $3\frac{1}{2}$ or 4 millions of men, women, and children who cannot get the barest necessaries of life. Now strike off one hour per day from the 6,000,000 in work. The result would be an immediate demand for 750,000 additional workers to keep up production at its present rate, and remembering that these 750,000 would immediately begin to buy more food, clothing, and general comforts, this of course would give an impetus to trade, and so add greatly to the comfort of the entire community for a year or two. These advantages, however, would soon be swallowed up by fresh displacements of labour due to more efficient machinery and advancing scientific knowledge; but, during the year or two that it gave relief, see how immensely it would add to the leisure and therefore to the general intelligence of the workers. And increased intelligence means more active discontent with our conditions of life, and in due course a hastening of the overthrow of the present capitalistic domination.

I am fully aware that there are some who claim to have a knowledge of the workers who contend that the very success of an Eight Hours Movement would simply mean a perpetuation of the present wretched system, as the people would become more contented if the conditions of life were made more tolerable. This I hold to be the very reverse of truth. As a workman who has worked from early boyhood on the farm, down the mine, and in the engineer's shop, I repudiate such a slanderous statement. What means the continually increasing restlessness of late years of those workmen who are now, *relatively* to their former position, in a passable state of comfort? I contend that it is in large part due to the additional leisure obtained under the nine hours system, though most of its advantages have now been swallowed up by more rapid machinery

and the cursed system of overtime we still tolerate. I ask myself what has been my guide in the formation of my opinions on social and political subjects, and, risking being charged with egotism, I reply that I have ever endeavoured to get correct views upon these and other subjects by fashioning my ideas upon the best models I could find, and the more leisure I had the better my opportunity for finding good models. I can understand a middle-class man holding this—to me—absurd theory. I can also understand some workmen reflecting the opinions of these theory-loving, poverty-accentuating blockheads merely because they are middle-class. But I cannot understand a workman who through youth and early manhood has been battling against long hours in order that he might attend the institute, listen to the lectures, and read the works of able men, and by these means has succeeded in having a mind worth owning—I say I cannot understand such an one hindering rather than helping in a shorter hours movement. He practically says by such conduct that the leisure he used so well as to become a man thereby, others will use so ill that they will continue fools. But men generally love what is best for all, and are prepared to do their part towards carrying it out so soon as they understand clearly what course they should take. Let those of us who see (or think we see) further than the average man, do all in our power towards enabling him to see as clearly as we do, and then, unless I am incapable of reading aright the lesson of life, he too will become in his turn an earnest and an energetic worker for the elevation of his class. I must apologise to some readers who may think that none of this reasoning is necessary. I emphasize it because I know there exist philosophers who strain at gnats and swallow camels, who talk of ameliorating human suffering, but hang back instead of assisting a movement the success of which must for a dead certainty largely ameliorate the pangs of the hungry men, women, and children who are now in the throes of despair.

Another section raise the objection that however desirable it may be to curtail the hours of labour,

remembering the severe competition of other countries it is simply impossible either to raise wages or shorten hours unless a similar movement takes place on the Continent. I will endeavour to answer this first by showing that the English workers produce more per man than any of the Continental Nations, and second, by showing that with regard to our staple industries Foreign Competition is a bogie used by the Employer to frighten the workers into accepting harder terms in order that their master may make a greater profit. It may be of some service to point out the relative wealth per annum produced by the useful workers of this and other countries. I am assuming that the reader is clear concerning the source of wealth, that there is no other source than useful Labour, so that, having sufficient Raw Material for Workers to exercise their ingenuity upon, it will be seen that the more workers, the more the aggregate wealth, as in all ages men have been able to produce by their labour more than they and their families required for ordinary consumption. Quoting from Mulhall's "Statistics," we find that Britain with a Population of 36 millions produces wealth to the amount of £1,247,000,000 per annum; France with 37½ millions of people produces annually £965,000,000 (or with a million and a half more people about three-quarters the amount the English make; Germany, population 45 millions, wealth per annum, £850,000,000; (or two thirds only of our amount); Russia with 80 millions of people, creates per annum only £760,000,000, Austria, 38 millions population, only £602,000,000 per annum; and similarly with the smaller nations. These figures will serve to show that our method of producing wealth is a more effective one than that in vogue on the Continent, as although they generally work longer hours per day than the English yet the result of their year's work compares unfavourably with ours. The important lesson to be learnt here is this, that it is not the amount paid as wages that decides whether or not one country can compete successfully with another; or rather, it is not the countries where wages are low that compete most successfully with this country. This will be seen

when it is realised that the severest competitor we have to-day is America, a country that pays at least 25 per cent higher wages than are paid in this country.

This of itself should be sufficient to encourage those timorous mortals who are always attributing our exhausting toil to the competition of the long hours of the Continent. The time may arrive when, with an equally advanced method of production, low paid labour will produce wealth as effectively as better paid labour, but that time has not yet come. By way of proving this let me here instance the Iron Shipbuilding industry. Many have been the disputes between employers and employed in this industry during the past two or three years, the employers continually urging that the Continental shipbuilders are getting all the trade, or at any rate will do so, unless our workmen submit to reductions in wages and longer hours. This argument was advanced repeatedly during the year 1885, so in order to thoroughly test the matter a delegation of workers was despatched to the Continent to bring back precise information upon the subject. They found that Germany was our chief competitor in Iron Shipbuilding, and that during the year 1885 that country produced 22,326 tons of shipping. But in this country one firm on the Clyde during the same period turned out 40,000 tons. France produced 10,000 tons, and Russia 7,867 tons—total for the two countries 17,867 tons. But the river Tyne alone launched no less than 102,998 tons. The Belgium output was 5,312 tons, that of Holland 2,651 tons, of Denmark 3,515 tons. To sum up, the whole of the Continental output was a little over 50,000 tons, while that of the English shipyards was 540,282 tons, or nearly eleven times as great as that of all the yards on the Continent put together. With facts like these before us is it not high time we demanded that our hours were curtailed so as to give a chance to those who now walk about in enforced idleness, without waiting for the Continent to take simultaneous action. The Americans, who pay their mechanics better wages, have had to concede the demands of their workmen for the eight hour working day—not universally, it is true,

because a universal demand was not made. Just as their success stimulates us, so our success will stimulate the Continental workers, and we shall find that they are as well prepared as we are to deal vigorously with the exploiting classes.

To Trade Unionists I desire to make a special appeal. How long, *how long* will you be content with the present half-hearted policy of your Unions? I readily grant that good work has been done in the past by the Unions, but, in Heaven's name, what good purpose are they serving now? All of them have large numbers out of employment even when their particular trade is busy. None of the important Societies have any policy other than that of endeavouring to keep wages from falling. The true Unionist policy of *aggression* seems entirely lost sight of; in fact the Unionist of to-day should be of all men the last to be hopelessly apathetic, or supporting a policy that plays directly into the hands of the capitalist exploiter. Do not think I am a non-Unionist myself, and therefore denounce Unionists. I take my share of the work in the Trade Union to which I belong, but I candidly confess that unless it shows more vigour in the future than it is showing at the present time (June, 1886) I shall be compelled to take the view—against my will—that to continue to spend time over the ordinary squabble-investigating, do-nothing policy will be an unjustifiable waste of one's energies. I am quite sure there are thousands of others in my state of mind—*e.g.*, all those who concurred with T. R. Threlfall, the president of the Trades Union Congress, when, in his Presidential Address, he told the delegates assembled at Southport that a critical time had arrived in the history of Trades Unions, and that in the future they must *lead or follow*, and that they could not hope to retain advanced men with their present policy. In his magnificent address Mr. Threlfall did all a man could do to stir the Unionists up to take action in regard to the Eight Hour working day, but one looks in vain at each and all of our important Trade Societies to find any action being taken in the matter. It is not enough

to say their funds are low. Their funds are not too low to get up an agitation upon this subject. All over the country they have excellent organisations which might be used in the first place as the means for instructing their own members up to the required standard, and then spreading information amongst the non-Unionists, skilled and unskilled alike. When the bulk of these understood the pros and cons of the case the combined forces could make a demand for the immediate passing of an Eight Hours Bill, the details of which could be settled by a duly qualified committee.

While this is being done attention should also be made to another important item alluded to by Mr. Threlfall *viz.*, the payment of election expenses out of the local or Imperial rates and the support of Members of Parliament in a similar manner. When this is done we shall be able to command the services of those whom we believe in because of their merits, irrespective of what the depth of their pocket may be.

Let me now invite attention to the effects of an Eight Hour Bill upon some of our monopolies. Let us take the Railways as a representative concern, using round figures such as will convey a correct idea to the ordinary reader without confusing him. The Blue Books bear out the following statements:—At the present time the Annual Income of the British Railways may be put at £70,000,000, of this vast sum one half goes to the Shareholders, who do no useful work whatever; one fourth to keep up rolling stock, permanent way &c.; and the remaining fourth to the workers, (including managers' and superintendents' salaries).

The man who has not paid attention to Railway Income and Expenditure will denounce this as trash or probably by a stronger term. He will probably say that the figures must be wrong, as Railway Shareholders get only some 5 per cent on their capital. Exactly, but where nearly all make the mistake is in not making the distinction between percentage on money invested and percentage of Income. There are nominally more than £920,000,000 invested in Railways in the British Isles, and 5 per cent on this means about five-eighths of the

total income, the entire income of 70 millions amounting only to 8 per cent on the investments. Consequently a Railway Company paying $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to Shareholders actually pays more than half of the total income to these utterly useless individuals, leaving the remainder to go in about equal proportions to rolling stock and permanent way and as wages and salaries to Employées. This gives about 18s. per week to the 350,000 persons engaged on Railways in the British Isles. When we remember that superintendents and managers get very large salaries, we see that those who do the hard work and have the longest hours get much less than 18s.

Now that we realise the enormous amount the idle shareholders take, let us see how generously they behave to those in their employ. At Nine Elms are situated the cleaning sheds of the South Western Railway. Until recently the "dirty cleaners" at this yard received £1 os. 6d. per week. Instructions have been issued from Waterloo to curtail their wages from 20s. 6d. to 15s. at one stroke. On the same line, at Waterloo terminus, the parcels porters commence work at 5.20 in the morning and keep on till 9.45 in the evening with one Sunday off per fortnight, their wages being from 18s. to 22s. per week.

Now assuming the average day on Railways to be 12 hours, what loss would it inflict on the Shareholders if a Bill were passed enforcing an Eight Hours' Working Day? We have seen that the Employees get about a quarter of the total income or about £17,000,000. To curtail the hours by one third means of course putting one half more men in work than are at present employed. To pay these at a similar rate to those already working would require £8,500,000 or less than one per cent on the nominal value of the shares, so that a Company paying $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent now, would, if one half more men were employed still pay $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to the Fleecing Shareholders. What arrant nonsense then it is to urge that the Company cannot afford to curtail hours.

Let us look now at the condition of our Colliers. Here we have men devoting themselves to underground toil from boyhood to old age, the majority never having

the opportunity of paying a visit to the Capital or any other large town, practically kennelled in the earth, tied down with capitalistic chains,

Spending a Sunless life in the unwholesome mines.

for the wretched pittance of about 18s. per week. Surely an Eight Hours Bill requires no urging from me on behalf of those who work in and about the mines; when we remember that of the value of coal raised annually in this country (about £66,000,000) one third only goes to the colliers who raise it.

An item worth mentioning also was pointed out by Sir Lyon Playfair in his address before the British Association at Aberdeen in 1885, whilst deploring the fact that the exhaustion of the British coalfields made the coal increasingly difficult to get. It was proved that not only has man's ingenuity conquered these obstacles, but owing to the increased power of steam engines and hand-labour-saving appliances, two men now produce as much as three men did twenty years ago. Yet coal is *dearer* now than it was then!

Thirty years ago eight sailors were required for the management of every 100 tons of shipping. Now, owing to improved machinery, less than half that number suffice. In twenty years the consumption of fuel on our ocean-going steamers has been reduced by one half, chiefly owing to the use of compound engines in place of single ones as formerly. Thus on every hand a greater result is being shown with less labour. And it must be so or else there is no meaning in material progress. But "less labour" means under our existing system, and must mean so as long as industry is controlled by the idle classes, not "more leisure" or shorter hours all round, but *less wages*, more unemployed, poverty, famine, and physical and moral degradation.

What then can be more rational than to ease the burden of those in work and the starving stomachs of those who are out, by shortening the working day?

See what is going on in the watch-making industry, a fine example of the effects of machinery. Among the exhibits at last year's Inventions Exhibition was that of the Waltham Watch Co. Some machines were there

at work making screws for watches, of which it took 250,000 to make up a pound in weight. These machines were so perfectly made, that at the Company's Factory in Massachusetts, one boy keeps seven of them going. The best wire to make one pound weight of screws costs ten shillings, but after this wire has been converted into screws by passing through this automatic machine, the screws are worth £350, or seven hundred times the cost of the material. Imagine the number of men here thrown out of employment; the watches in large part being made by girls, and the enormous profits going to the owners of the machinery.

Take another case, that of Bryant and May's Match Factory in East London. Two years ago this firm was formed into a Limited Liability Company. Their work girls are most miserably paid, getting only some 8s. per week, and the Company refused to increase their pay when they made a demand a short time since. And yet that Company, during the first *six* months of its existence, after paying all working expenses, actually paid over £33,000 to shareholders, who had not done a single stroke of work towards producing it. These girls are working ordinary factory hours, 10½ per day. They cannot live in comfort on such a miserable pittance as they are receiving. How many girls are compelled by this sort of thing, to take to the streets?

The above is only typical of what all our large firms are doing. Armstrong, Mitchell and Co., the great engineering firm at Newcastle-on-Tyne, for instance, last year after deducting for working expenses and depreciation of stock, paid to shareholders £162,000.

Whatever improvement may come through more efficient machinery etc., its effect, while owned by, and used for the profit of, the employing class, will be to throw men out of work and swell the already too full pockets of the capitalists. If we do not decide to curtail the hours of labour, what then can we do? Allow things to go from bad to worse? That is what most assuredly will happen, unless we absorb the Unemployed into the ranks of the employed by rigidly suppressing overtime, and curtailing the nominal nine hours per day to something less.

The question will be asked by some, "What about wages if we work an hour a day less, are we to have an hour's less pay?" Most certainly not. Even when the curtailing principle was only partially applied 15 years ago by the Trade Unionists this did not happen. On the contrary in many instances the workmen were soon able to get a rise in actual wages in addition to the curtailing of hours. The reason we cannot command a better wage now is because the Employer can say, "If you don't like it you may go, others will be glad to take your place," but, as I think I have shown, if we make Eight Hours the labour day then the Unemployed will be absorbed and the workers will be able in their turn to dictate terms to the Employer.

In conclusion I appeal to the workers of Great Britain to join hands over this business and let us make it a success. In a measure of this kind Liberal and Tory, Christian and Freethinker, Unionist and Non-Unionist, Mechanic and Labourer, Radical and Social-Democrat, Teetotaller or Vegetarian, whatsoever be your creed or sex, unite on common ground and let us fight this battle of the workers with vigour, with energy and determination. Be no longer apathetic. Take pleasure in the performance of your duty as an honest citizen and the result will be a hastening of that glorious time when the domination of a class shall be a matter of History, and when all shall have enough work and none shall have too much.



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