

Mr. G. A. TURCOTTE (Nicolet). In rising to speak on this question, I do not intend to detain the House at any great length, but simply to add a few observations to the elaborate and brilliant speech of my hon. friend (Mr. Verville). The speech which has been delivered by the labour member in this House is of such ability as to fully demonstrate what education may perform in the working portion, or labour classes of the community, and to what a high grade of development that class may attain in favourable circumstances. I sincerely congratulate the hon. member for the remarkable way with which he has treated the subject interesting us presently.

I am happy and proud in addressing the House to-day, that it should be on a question of such importance and that I should be called to support the eight hours' movement, a labour problem which is stirring all socially to improve the welfare of thousands of people, the labourers, who are the fulcrum of democracy. I have drawn, in my youth, from the source of paternal education, the knowledge and love of sound democracy, and I am happy, I again say, to do perhaps something in its favour. The eight hours' movement directly results from the growing prosperity and intelligence of manual workers throughout the civilized world; it is no new fad of a few agitators, it is rather a recurrence to a state of things which prevailed in early ages and as far back as the 13th and 14th centuries. England, more advanced in her industrial development, has done a great deal to meet the new problems of modern times, and presently the eight hours' movement is agitating alike England, the western part of the continent of Europe, and the United States. The whole current of thought that led to the great French Revolution was one of hatred and bitter hostility to the tyranny of the past. Everywhere men saw the possibility of a new and wider field opening before them; everybody had in his heart that profound hope which awakes courage and burned with eagerness to break the inherited chains of despotism. This great social commotion was morally felt through the whole world, and its consequence was that more freedom and large concessions were bestowed on humanity in general and on the labouring classes in particular. From that day democracy felt in its bosom a sense of vigour, and the great voice of the people was heard over all others, claiming redress for long standing evils and asking for more protection and welfare.

England has done a great deal in favour of workmen, and a complete, minute and voluminous code for the protection of labour now exists in that country.

The eight hours' labour question, Mr.

Speaker, has been dealt with from a statistical and economical standpoint, and I will only say a few words in this direction, my intention being to view the theory of shorter hours in another aspect, just as important, in my way of thinking, that of upholding or raising the workmen by way of education and by giving them a larger share of rest, comfort and liberty.

The question before the House is an economic experiment in this country, as it demands only that this reform be applied to the government's servants, and I am of opinion that the Liberal party would give an instance of great interest in the labouring classes in adopting it, and would raise a general cry of satisfaction among thousands forming the grand army of toilers. But of course there is another side to the present debate, a counterpoise, and this brings the question to its real point. The action of the government in favour of shorter hours would, there is no doubt, widely open the door to a demand for legislation in favour of generalizing the system, and then would appear the formidable forces of manufacturers and industrialists. Capital and labour would be then in presence and would fight a great battle.

The hon. member from Maisonneuve (Mr. Verville) has proved satisfactorily that capital had nothing to lose by the reduction of labour hours. Numerous experiments have shown that production did not diminish at all, nor cost of production increase; that prices had in no case been affected, or the volume of trade reduced by the adoption of shorter hours of labour. In some cases a reduction of profits had taken place, but this must be attributed to the fact that business rivals were left free to work longer hours. In no case does the adoption of the eight-hour day appear to have been followed by any economic disaster.

The fact is asserted by the highest authorities in economy, that successive reductions of the hours of labour, which this country has witnessed, have been attended, after a very short interval, by a positive general increase in individual productivity, and in many cases it has been found that the workers did more in ten hours than their predecessors in twelve. The possibility of maintaining the total amount of the product, notwithstanding a reduction of working hours, may seem most incredible to many, but it is nevertheless proved by too much evidence to allow of doubt. In the face of experience and probant testimony from all parts of the world, it seems no longer possible to infer, on purely theoretic grounds, that the product must necessarily be diminished by a further shortening of the working day. Mr. John Ray, an eminent writer, who is very