

At present there is a congressional committee sitting at Washington considering the practicability of the six-hour day on the railroads of the United States. We are all agreed as to the influence of mass production in industry and the problems arising therefrom, and one of the first things the government should do at the next session of parliament is to appoint a special committee to investigate the possibility of introducing the six-hour day in this country.

Mr. BENNETT: Make it four.

Mr. MITCHELL: I think the day will come when it will be four, and there are only too many in this country who would be glad indeed to work four hours a day if they had the opportunity. I appreciate the gravity of the situation, and I have known ever since I first entered a trade an apprentice boy, the problems that are involved. I have watched the development of industry and the influence of mass production on the lives of men and women engaged in industry, and in my judgment, whether we like it or not the time is not very far distant, when the parliament of this country, in the face of absolute necessity, will have not only to recognize the convention agreed to by our delegates to the international labour office convention at Washington in 1919, but by legislation to reduce further the hours of labour in industry. I make that suggestion in view of what I think is a practical and a pressing problem, and I would like the government to take it seriously into consideration during the recess. At least a study should be made of the problem with the resources which the government have for undertaking a study of that kind. Some leadership might be given to the government of the day by the recommendations of such an investigating body. At all events it would give this country some idea as to the practicability of the introduction of such legislation.

Mr. BENNETT: Mr. Chairman, the government has not any present intention of appointing a commission for that purpose, nor can I see that there is any reason in anything that has been stated here to-night or at any other time that would warrant the government in taking any such action. It has been stated so frequently in this house on the other side, and very strongly by those with whom the hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat (Mr. Mitchell) is associated, that Canada's export business is the great matter for consideration, and that the retention of our place as an export country is of primary importance to the development of

[Mr. Mitchell.]

this dominion. If the hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat will explain just how a country working six hours a day is to compete in the markets of the world, on the basis suggested by himself and his friends, with a country whose workmen work eight or ten or twelve hours a day, and sometimes longer in soviet Russia, he would be doing something which no one else has yet been able to do. The question is very simple: Is Canada desirous of engaging in export business or not? If so, must she meet the competition to which I have referred? If so, can she lessen her hours of labour to six and expect to pay the same wages for a six-hour day, and compete with a country whose workmen work for half that wage and toil for ten hours a day? Notwithstanding all that has been said with respect to the willingness of men to work, my observation has been that recently in Vancouver men who were employed, led on by agitators, left their work and joined in a procession of people not desiring to work any time at all, but rather desiring to be free from work and be supported by the state. There is a tendency abroad in the world to see how little work can be done, not how much, and to see how few hours can be worked, not how many. The purpose of regulating hours of labour by the state originally was that there might be hours of leisure and opportunity for self-improvement, and that men should not be mere machines nor labour a commodity, but when the end that has thus far been reached was attained it was amazing the willingness with which some people began to contend that eight hours a day was too long and that six would be a better number of hours to labour. Some put it on the ground of mass production, some on the ground that after all, eighteen hours for sleep and enjoyment was preferable to twelve hours, and doubtless they were right; but I think it will be a long time before the parliament of Canada passes a statute fixing the six-hour day.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: The Prime Minister did not state in what countries men were working eight, or ten or twelve hours a day. As the Prime Minister I think knows, in most of the European countries the number of hours of work is rather less than the hours that are worked in some of the industries in Canada. I do not know just which the countries are to which the Prime Minister referred with which we would be in competition. Further, I regret exceedingly that the Prime Minister would seek to imply that there is any large number of men who do not want to work. I am quite