

IS THE CONDITION OF LABOR IMPROVING?

A Comparison of Labor's Condition To-day With What it was Fifty Years Ago.

This is a question which must be answered and answered quickly, and the whole future policy of labor depends upon how this question is answered. If, after fifty years of unionism and the stupendous achievements in invention bringing into the world masses of wealth undreamed of before, labor is no better off than it was before, it is time to pause and reconsider a policy which may be fraught with appalling results. In considering the question it is not enough to determine whether labor has a fuller stomach or a better clothed back; labor's comparative power in society, labor's comparative share in wealth, and labor's position as to security and economic safety are facts of greater importance.

We do not need statistics to prove that labor is sinking slowly, inevitably sinking in the comparative social scale, deluded and blinded and betrayed by the cry from pulpit, platform and school that it is rising year after year to better conditions; we need only the cold appalling facts culled from conditions of fifty years ago, and of the present set along side of each other.

Facts We All Know.

We are told that fifty years ago the laborer got less dollars and cents a day, ate less beef, lived in poorer houses, owned fewer pianos, wore less broadcloth, dressed his wife and daughter less fashionably, gave his son less education and attended fewer amusements than now. There is a rank deception in this statement which has a tendency to make labor more contented and less troublesome to the business interests of the country and therefore the doctrine is inculcated without stint. The laboring man has been led to believe that if he will keep plodding on without change of methods, to meet the new conditions and powers, that in fifty more years his children will have beef, broadcloth, pianos, education, amusements and style. But we all know that the ponderous system of industry has divided the workmen into higher and lower classes, beginning at the top with the skilled mechanics and running down to the sweatshop and the man in the gutter, and if we will stop to think we should know that the improvements in labor conditions applies only to the men at the top, who are comparatively few in number.

Fifty Years Ago and Now.

Fifty years ago labor was not divided to any great degree into classes. Fifty years ago a dollar would buy twice as much as it will buy now.

Fifty years ago the most poorly-paid laborer lived far better than the most poorly paid laborer to-day, and commanded more respect.

To-day the best paid laborer receives far more than the best paid laborer of fifty years ago, but he is employed only part of the time and he is not nearly so sure of his job.

Fifty years ago we had an open frontier, plenty of land and untaken opportunities and an unlimited demand for labor; driven from the factory, labor

would set up on the farm; it was absolutely outside the power of capital to starve labor, labor was far more independent then than now and secured a far larger share of the product; to-day we have no open frontier; the lid is closed, the land is taken; driven from the factory, the laborers must come back to the factory again, the spirit of independence has given away to a demoralizing timidity, and the increasing labor population makes the holding of a job extremely difficult against the large numbers seeking employment.

Fifty years ago there were 110 jobs for every hundred men; to-day, there are 150 men for every hundred jobs.

Fifty years ago there were no tramps; to-day there are practically 2,000,000.

Fifty years ago few women were worked in factories; to-day, the majority of factory operatives in many textile industries are women who work for from \$3 to \$5 per week.

Fifty years ago there were no New Yorks, Chicagos, Philadelphias, as we know them now, with their fearful slum districts where capitalism gathered together its last wrecks of exploitation—the worker who refuses to work, the tramp who refuses to tramp—and strangles them to death in its terrible pest holes of crime and squalor.

Fifty years ago there were no Coeur d'Alenes, Cripple Creeks, Packing towns, Homesteads; no militia bills, injunctions, blacklists, deportations and the herding of vast dependent bodies of serfs to the voting shambles.

Insecurity.

If the whole beef and piano argument of those who desire labor to remain submissive and content were admitted, there yet remains a fact of such overshadowing importance that it cannot be gainsaid. The monopolization of land and opportunity, the increase of the labor population, the invention of labor-saving machinery, have engendered such keen competition between the

employed and the unemployed, the union man and the scab, that the position of the working class is one of unnering insecurity. The liability to be thrown out of employment at any time by the merciless fluctuations of capital and the horrors of unemployment constitute a fact which is dragging labor down to the lowest stratum of degradation. We are confronted in America to-day by a fact never observed before; we have an increasingly vast floating population which drifts from place to place for jobs. Without homes, without families, without responsibility, deprived of citizenship by their constant change of locality; these men rapidly become mere hobos.

Punished for Poverty.

The most stringent and cruel vagrancy laws are made everywhere against these unfortunates, who are hounded, fined, persecuted, imprisoned and driven from place to place by the officers of the law. It is appalling to think that there are millions of these men in our country and that these numbers are increasing each year. Even the cruel methods by which capitalism draws the surplus population into the large cities and kills it off with rum, filth, disease and starvation is not sufficient to keep down this ever-increasing army of the unemployed.

As much as labor has lost through the encroachments of a bloated capitalism, the future is fraught with more danger than the past has ever contained. Think of the tremendous work during the last fifty years that, aided by the millions who have swarmed over from Europe has dotted the country with vast cities and constructed the great lines of communication. Think of the wildernesses of fifty years ago, and Chicago, the St. Louis and San Francisco of to-day. Think of the Herculean task of building these miles and miles of brick and machinery.

But the ocean is reached, the frontier is closed, new opportunities are shut off, less and less capital may be

employed; the lid is down, and the pot is boiling. The old cities may be added to, the railway lines may be improved, but there are few places to put new cities, and few places to put new railroads.

We have completed a cyclone of construction, and face a cycle of unemployment.

If during the period of construction the status of labor has declined, what will be its condition during the period of unemployment?

The recent decision of the American Federation of Labor to admit economic and political discussion in the union meetings is timely and there never before was such a crying necessity for union men to take a careful study of the problems of the hour for their own safety.

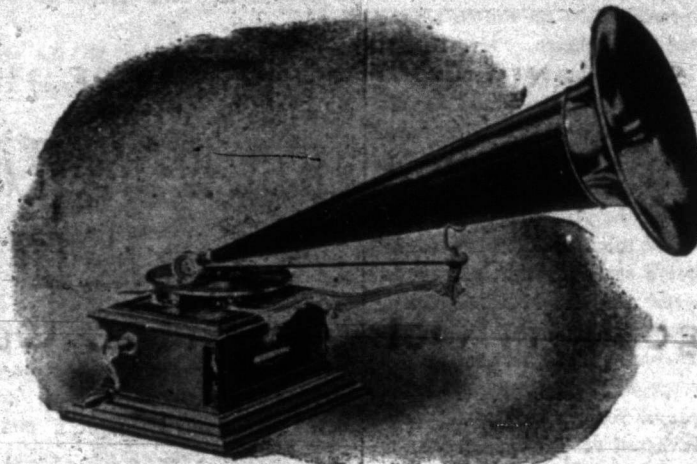
WHY THEY WORK LONG HOURS.
(London, Ont., Industrial Banner).

Wherever there is a lack of trade union organization long hours of labor is the unvarying rule. No craft has ever secured a shorter workday without efficient organization at its back. The employing class has always resisted every demand for improved conditions, whether a desire for better wages or shorter hours. There are thousands of little children under twelve years of age toiling fourteen long hours per day in the cotton mills of the South. They are forced to work these excessive hours because there is no organization in these mills. What the capitalists of the South are doing the capitalists of Canada would do if they dared. But for the trade union the hours of labor in Canada would be as long and laborious as they are in the South. The trade union stands for better conditions, a higher standard of living and a shorter workday. Non-unionism has always meant the degradation of the workers.

Call for the Label.

Just what you Need in your Home

Read What It Does.



Drop in and hear all the music and fun you can get for **A Little Down and a Little Each Week.** We have gladdened many a dull home. Let us make yours joyful too. We are confident we can do it for we have the finest instruments in the world, not poor scratching, squaking imitations, but real music and the true living voices. And our prices can't be beaten. Outfits as Low as \$10. As High as \$70.

JOHNSTON'S

191 YONGE STREET

— OPEN EVENINGS —

It tells funny stories:—the equal of the best monologues of the vaudeville stage. If you can't tell a laughable story well, get the Phonograph to do it for you.

It sings songs:—any kind and style, soprano, contralto, tenor, bass, male or mixed quartettes, duets, or sextettes; popular, operatic, or sacred music.

It renders instrumental music:—so perfectly that you can imagine the original instrument or band is being played in the room.

It provides music for dancing:—The records are made especially for this purpose, under the direction of a noted dance master. Learn to dance in private or teach your children at home, with the Phonograph as accompanist.

It entertains children as well as adults:—A boon to busy mothers. No matter how fretful the children may be, they will listen to the Phonograph with rapt attention for hours.

Entertains visitors or sick people:—Unexpected visitors can be delightfully entertained by the Phonograph, and it cheers the invalid and relieves the tedium of convalescence like nothing else.