

MOST FOOLISH FALLACY THAT SHOE WORKERS WILL ACCEPT WAGE REDUCTIONS

Boot and Shoe Workers' Wages in Canada and the United States Have Advanced on an Average of 55 Per Cent. Since 1914 as Against Cost of Living Which Has Increased 101 Per Cent. in the United States and 117 Per Cent. in Canada in Same Period.

By C. L. Baine, General Secretary
Boot and Shoe Workers' Union.
To hear some employing interests talk, one would think they believe that the only thing needed to set all the wheels of industry in full motion would be a reduction of wages all around. We regret to say that some shoe manufacturers seem to share this view, although we must in fairness record the fact that a far larger number of them are opposed to wage reduction policies at this time.

There are some employers who realize that it is in the wages of labor that consume the product of industries. When wages are low, consumption is low. Lack of wages, or low wages, destroy the market for ordinary or staple commodities. For example, the prolonged depression in industry has reduced the movement of both freight and passengers on railroads. Next comes a general laying off of railroad workers. It is the same thing as idleness of shoe-workers when there are no shoes to make.

When railroad men are idle they purchase less and so help to reduce the volume of business for railroads to handle. Likewise when shoe workers are idle, they consume less of the products of other industries, and so the idle workers in these other industries are able to buy less shoes.

Just how this lack of consumption is to be remedied by still further reducing the purchasing power of the masses of the people by wholesale reductions of wages, the advocates of such a policy do not explain. They begin and end with the bold declaration that wages must be reduced. The few shoe manufacturers who declare for that policy are no better at explaining it than are similar minded employers in other trades.

Since 1914 the wages of shoe workers in the United States and in Canada have advanced not more than an average of 55 per cent. During that same period of time the cost of living has advanced 101 per cent. in the United States and 117 per cent. in Canada. Now that extortionate prices have begun to decline in wholesale markets and are just beginning to be reflected in some retail stores, a few shortsighted employers want to reduce the wages of shoeworkers about 25 per cent.

In Massachusetts there is a commission on the necessities of life. That commission says that in September, 1929, the cost of living actually increased 2 per cent. For the month of October, 1929, it reports a decrease of 2 per cent. The workers of Massachusetts then would be at the same cost of living November 1, 1929, as they were on September 1, 1929, or at the very peak of the high cost of living, or just turning the peak. Just as one prefers to view it.

There are many things in which there is no reduction in price. We have heard of no reductions in home rents. Milk remains at the highest price. Eggs are higher than ever before. Reductions are reported in the wholesale price of flour, but they have not reached the consumer. The worker pays more to get from his home to his work and there are no signs of reducing this cost.

We hear of markdown sales of clothing but even the reduced prices look twice as high as the same grades were priced six years ago. If any of us are ill, we find that

doctors' fees are increased and we have not heard of any movement to reduce the wages of doctors, nor of undertakers. It costs more to live, to be sick, and to be buried when any of us die.

And still some embrace the fallacy that a reduction in wages of shoe-workers is now in order. Having in mind that certain fundamental expenses in the cost of living are higher than ever before known and bid fair not to be reduced, such as high transportation costs of persons and products, house rents, fuel, professional services, etc., the fact remains that if wages are reduced, the amount left for purchase of ordinary commodities will be less than it was before the war. If not actually less in dollars it will be far less in purchasing power because no one can imagine that general commodity prices will be anything but considerably higher than the pre-war level. Increased transportation charges will alone insure that condition.

The most foolish of the fallacies as to wage reduction is the idea that the shoe workers will accept such, or that employers are in any position to speak of these matters in calmness and in fairness, without any bitterness or misunderstanding. We understand that many concerns have suffered large losses through cancellations and returns, and through shrinkage in inventories. Application has been made for readjustment of income tax to the Federal Government on the ground that to complete the payment of last year's income tax would mean to impair present capital.

It is even said that these losses and shrinkages are in some cases so great as to wipe out all profits in the years of 1918 and 1919, on which income and excess profits taxes were computed and paid. Banks are said to be heavy holders of shoe trade names and are anxiously waiting for business to start up so their customers can recover through business activity while they have lost in cancellations and shrinkages in inventories.

On labor's side, we do not wish to boast of our strength. We are not stronger than we could wish, but we are stronger than we ever were before. We have more members and greater financial resources. If a fight should come over attempted reductions in wages, we are probably strong enough to make some business for bankruptcy courts before the battle is over.

We confess that we do not know why shoemakers should accept reductions in wages under present conditions, nor how employers can compel acceptance of such reductions if the shoemakers are opposed to them. Neither do we understand how banks

can afford to lend money for wage reduction fights at a time when loans for legitimate business are being curtailed, or when a revival of normal business activity is needed to save the commercial lives of perhaps hundreds of concerns.

It has not been the policy of the Boot and Shoeworkers' Union, either during or since the war, to try to take any undue advantage of the unusual conditions that have existed. Every advance we have secured has been obtained either by mutual agreement or by arbitration. We have adhered to our arbitration contracts and policy, and we now expect a similar spirit of fair play from the employers. The decision rests with them. If they decide that they prefer to play the "catch-as-catch-can" game, we will be compelled to play that game with them.

With all this modesty we may say that we are better equipped for "catch-as-catch-can" methods than we were twenty years ago. During the years of rational relations, through arbitration, we have accumulated experience, some knowledge, members, and money. Manufacturers who have dealt with us have also prepared to meet us in a fight if either one so decides. We know that if we quarrel we both lose, therefore, the decision must rest with the manufacturers.

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Trade Unionists Watch Mooney Case.

A committee appointed by the San Francisco labor council has investigated the new developments in the Mooney case, caused by statements by Detective Hand, and has made this report:

"We have interviewed the mayor, chief of police, and district attorney, and each of them gave us without hesitation all of the information they possess."

"We find that Officer Dropper Hand has eliminated many sections of his confession as printed in the daily newspapers."

"We also find that he has made no statement or evidence there taken under oath."

"Again we find that his statements as corrected by himself is contradicted by Captain Matheson, Lieutenant Goff, and Lieutenant Hunter."

"We believe that the question of a new trial is not the paramount issue at this moment, but that rather the obtaining of definite additional evidence of unfairness in the former trial is the most necessary element in the present status of the case."

"To obtain additional evidence of this nature it would be necessary to take the testimony of witnesses under oath. The only method by which this can be done is to our knowledge is for the district attorney to have the witnesses in question summoned before the grand jury and the evidence taken under oath."

"In our interview with the district attorney we found that it is his intention to take this matter up with the grand jury and have the witnesses summoned and the testimony taken under oath before that body."

"If sworn testimony be obtained that will be of distinct benefit to the defendants, the district attorney then will place the same before the

NEW REGULATIONS FOR ONTARIO CIVIL SERVANTS.

The new regulations for the Ontario Civil Service have been finally approved by the Government and were issued last week. The hours of attendance are fixed at from 9 a.m. till 5 p.m. with noon as the closing hour on Saturdays. No mention is made of four o'clock closing during summer months, so what hitherto obtained in this connection has apparently been abolished. No Government servants employed in a full time capacity shall accept other employment or engage in commerce or industry of any kind while in the public service. There is a ban on smoking in the buildings or offices during office hours.

As regards the attendance of the employees, from and after the first day of January, 1931, Deputy Ministers will be required to report to their Ministers, noting irregularities will be required to report to branches to co-operate in securing such information. Copies of all such reports shall be furnished to the Minister and to the Civil Service Commission, who will be required to report monthly to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on attendance in departments.

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