

The Problem of the Working Class

"But this much at least ought to appear clear if the line of argument indicated above is accepted, namely, that there is no great hope for universal betterment of society by the mere advance of technical industrial progress and by the unaided play of the motive of every man for himself.

"The enormous increase in the productivity of industrial effort would never of itself have elevated by one inch the lot of the working class. The rise of wages in the nineteenth century and the shortening of hours that went with it was due neither to the advance in mechanical power, nor to the advance in diligence and industriousness, nor to the advance, if there was any, in general kindness. It was due to the organization of labor. Mechanical progress makes higher wages possible. It does not, of itself, advance them by a single farthing. Labor-saving machinery does not, of itself, save the working world a single hour of toil; it only shifts it from one task to another.

"Against a system of unrestrained individualism, energy, industriousness and honesty might shatter itself in vain. The thing is merely a race in which only one can be first no matter how great the speed of all; a struggle in which one, and not all, can stand upon the shoulders of the others. It is the restriction of individualism by the force of organization and by legislation that has brought to the world whatever social advance has been achieved by the great mass of the people. . . ."

The above is from Professor Leacock's article in the Vancouver Daily Province, Sept. 20 issue. His statement that an increase of productivity does not of itself elevate the lot of the wage-working class is correct. As a factor it merely provides an increased social fund out of which labor may, providing the labor market conditions are favorable secure an advance in its standard of living. The working class is divorced from both the ownership of the means of production and the products. These belong to the capitalist class. The struggle on the labor market decides the amount the wage-working class shall receive of the social product. With regard to what he says about the organization of labor being solely responsible for the shortening of hours, the raising of wages and the improvement of the conditions of the laboring masses during the nineteenth century this must be taken with some reservation. The rush and strain of modern mechanical processes of production in themselves demanded that those laboring in those processes receive a higher standard of living than their forefathers of the more leisurely occupations of pre-machine industry days. The new industry also demanded a better educated working class. Whatever gains have accrued to the workers on account of these factors, they have, however, not been gained without tremendous and continuous struggle. The "Industrial Revolution" took the world by surprise as it were. The advent of the machine and its rapid development put new and drastic powers into the hands of the manufacturing capitalists while, on the other hand, with the workers, it shattered for generations all their powers of resistance. Handicraft processes were killed in the competitive struggle with the new machine and the handicraftsmen lost their independence and were driven onto the wage-labor market. Women and children were now for the first time, on a large scale, also to be found to still further add to the rigors of the competition on that market. Individual resistance was put up against this last new factor but without avail. It was a new intervention into the habits and customs of the working class and they were repugnant to sending their women and children into the

factories. But competition for a living became keener and wages continued to fall until it was no longer possible for the head of the household to support the family. For information on this particular period we recommend Gibbin's "Industrial History of England," advertised among our literature. He records that it was not until the wages of the work men had been reduced to a starvation level that they consented to their children and wives being employed in the mills. There is no record of man's inhumanity to man more terrible than those years succeeding the introduction of the factory and machine processes. What makes it the more terrible is that the effect was not manifested in isolated instances or in one generation, but was general to the new order. To such an extent had the resistance of the workers been broken down that, as many others besides Gibbins record, "their children were often working sixteen hours a day, the hours of their labor were only limited by exhaustion after many modes of torture had been unavailingly applied to force continued work." Samuel Kydd, the author of "The History of the Factory Movement," writes: "In stench, in heated rooms, amid the constant whirling of a thousand wheels, little fingers and little feet were kept in ceaseless action, forced into unnatural activity by blows from heavy hands and feet of the merciless overlooker, and the infliction of bodily pain by instruments of punishment invented by the sharpened ingenuity of insatiable selfishness." The above may appear incredible to those brought up under happier circumstances, but the writer of the present article can remember himself as a small child, in a Yorkshire mill, knocked sprawling into a whirling spinning frame by one of these overlookers. And that was no solitary instance even in that day of considerable improvement. In my case, as in others, such treatment was not for childish pranks—we had no time nor energy for that—but because I could not keep the pace of the machine as a "bobbin ligger." Speaking of the practice of procuring children for the factories from the workhouses of dear old England, Gibbins says, "they were fed upon the cheapest and coarsest food, often the same as that served out to the pigs of their master. They slept by turns and in relays, in filthy beds which were never cool; for one set of children were sent to sleep in them as soon as the others had gone off to their daily or nightly toil. . . . Some tried to run away. Those suspected of this tendency had irons riveted to their ankles with long links reaching to the hips. . . . Many died, and committed suicide, from this brutal treatment "and were buried secretly at night. . . ." In a speech delivered in the British House of Lords many years after the agitation for factory legislation first started, Lord Shaftesbury said: "In the earlier periods of the factory movement, I waited at the factory gates to see the children come out, and a set of sad, dejected, cadaverous creatures they were. In Bradford especially the proofs of long and cruel toil were most remarkable. The cripples and distorted forms might be numbered by hundreds, perhaps by thousands. A friend of mine collected a vast number together for me, the sight was most piteous, the deformities incredible. They seemed to me, such were their crooked shapes, like a mass of crooked alphabets."

Such was the state which the working class of England, agricultural as well as industrial, had been reduced to, generation by generation, in the forties of the nineteenth century. But the inevitable happened, the destruction of life and degeneration entailed by such a process began to alarm sections of the community other than those directly interested in the dreadful exploitation, and the resistance offered by the enfeebled and demoralized workers to the impositions of the manufacturing capitalists and the legal prohibitions (it

LEON TROTSKY ON MILITARY SITUATION.

(From "Christian Science Monitor," Sept. 4.)

LONDON, England, (Wednesday).—A Moscow wireless message states that at an extraordinary meeting of the Petrograd Soviet on Sept. 1, Leon Trotsky reported on the military situation, dwelling fully on the situation on the Western Front which hitherto, he said, had been of secondary importance.

"After crushing Koltchak and dealing with Denikin, whose army already shows signs of dissolution, we shall concentrate our forces and deal with our enemies in turn," Mr. Trotsky continued, adding that in the West there was one sector where they could not retreat an inch, that being on the Petrograd front.

He concluded with the threat of an overwhelming Bolshevik advance into Finland if that country persisted in making constant raids into Russia or in collecting hostile forces on its territory. "We cannot," he said, "permit Finland to remain a permanent threat to us."

The wireless message further states that, after hearing Mr. Trotsky's report, the Petrograd Soviet passed a resolution approving of the Moscow Government's peace offer to Estonia and declaring its readiness to advance against Reval and Helsingfors, should the Estonian and Finnish bourgeoisie "obey the directions of the Anglo-French Imperialists" and advance against Petrograd.

SOCIALIST BULGARIA.

Militarists' Election Defeat.

(From the "Daily Herald.")

PARIS, August 24.—The Bulgarian elections just over show a greater gain for Socialism than in any European country save Russia.

The Communists have increased their seats from 10 to 47, and the Moderate Socialists—divided between two leaders representing the small farmers and the middle classes, in the towns—have increased theirs from 59 to 124.

Of the 200 seats in the Bulgarian Parliament, nearly half were occupied by the military party until this election. That party retains only one seat.

Complete Socialism is probable in Bulgaria at an early date, according to prophecies that are being made in Paris.

is significant to us in Canada that they were called "Conspiracy Laws") against combinations of workers, began to receive support. Combined with this factor of outside help to the workers' movement for improved conditions, the movement also received indirect impetus through a new condition of great expansion of trade and commerce by the increased use of steam power in production, and also in transportation over land and sea. This increased the demand for labor, and in conjunction with the emigration movement, improved the conditions somewhat on the labor market. Various factors, therefore, assisted in the successes of the organized labor movement in Great Britain, such as they have been.

The position is different today, however. Any further progress the working class may make is conditioned alone on their own efforts, on their own understanding of the social problem and the energy with which they work towards its solution. They must realize that no expansion of trade and commerce can be conceived of that will allow a general improvement in the conditions of the labor market. We are too productive for that. Curtailment of the productive powers of society is now the normal mode of capitalist production for profit. The bourgeoisie are all thrown into one camp by that fact. By that fact, the workers will also be driven into another opposing camp by taking up the revolutionary position, that industry, production in general, must be carried on for livelihood, i.e., production for use.