

The Eight Hour Day

By Prof. W. W. SWANSON.

The Canadian Government has recently made an inquiry into the conditions under which workmen are being employed in munition plants, with special reference to hours of work and wages. The questions now raised are bound to present themselves with even greater insistence after the war, and demand, therefore, the most careful examination and consideration. In the United Kingdom Lloyd George has found his greatest difficulty, in the way of securing an increased output of munitions, in the labor problem, and this not so much in the absence of a sufficient number of skilled mechanics—although his difficulties there have been formidable enough—as in the apparent obstinacy with which the workers declined, without adequate safeguards, to consider any proposals to alter the working day and week. The question of wages is comparatively simple as compared with hours of labor; as the former is one largely determined by market conditions while the latter depends upon custom and practice. And, as everyone knows, it is one of the most difficult of tasks to change habit, tradition and custom, especially where self-interest comes powerfully to their support. It is only in very recent years that the tradition of long hours for the working classes has been broken down, and the labor element is fearful of its being re-established. When it is realized how hard has been the struggle to shorten the working day, and how precious has been the victory to the workers, it may be possible to sympathize the more readily with their demand that, at all costs, the future position of the laboring classes shall, in this respect, be adequately protected. It will not be possible, in this article, to consider all the phases of this problem, but the chief points will be touched upon in a rapid view of the events that have led up to the present situation.

Regulation of Hours of work in Past Century.

It must be admitted that the past century has seen a steady diminution of the number of hours in the working day, and that, in this regard, factory operatives have greatly improved their position. In the United States, where war conditions have improved the position of the workers in many directions, there has been a decided advance in this direction. For example, in September, 1915, 25,000 employees of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey were given an eight-hour day. With respect to this change a representative of the company said: "This reduction in hours, from ten to eight, is not the result of recent troubles, but is adopted as part of the welfare work that the company has always been interested in. 'This is significant of a change in workmen's conditions that is making rapid headway in the United States, and holds more of promise, even, than a general increase of wages, as experience has abundantly proved; for an increase in wages may be more than offset by an advance in the cost of living. On the other hand, a decrease in the working day provides leisure to the laborer for a life outside of, and beyond, his humdrum daily work."

Workmen do not forget, although others may, that at the beginning of the nineteenth century men worked from sun to sun; and when the factory system had been firmly established in England, and factories were equipped with costly machinery and artificial lighting was introduced, the hours of labor were extended far into the night. Since that time, however, the ten-hour day has become general, and in some instances the eight-hour day has been adopted. Nevertheless, the twelve-hour day has not become extinct; and although the hours have been greatly reduced in many trades yet, taking the field of labor in general, it may be said that, during the last twenty-five years, the average reduction in the hours of work has not been more than one hour.

It is disheartening to observe that employers as a class have always opposed, and still oppose, the shortening of the hours of work, even although it has been clearly established that they have gained as much as the workers, through the increased efficiency of labor. It should be noted, moreover, that the sixteen hour day, or even the fourteen or twelve, was not an ancient custom of the race from which it escaped, but a product of the factory system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Employers imagined that expensive machine equipment had to be run to its utmost capacity to take up the yearly depreciation; and hence men and women were required to yield up the last ounce of energy in long and exhausting days of work. In Manchester, during

the year 1830-40, the textile mills ran from five in the morning to nine in the evening, with only an hour's rest in the middle of the day for dinner. This, he it noted, took place fifteen years after Robert Owen proved by his experiments in the cotton mills at New Lanark, that the sixteen-hour day could be reduced to ten to the immense benefit of both the employer and employee. Nevertheless, the majority of the masters continued to oppose a reduction of the hours of labor, perhaps through instinct, and certainly—in the face of the facts—through prejudice. At the same time there have been many employers who, through self-interest as well as the dictates of conscience, have shortened for their workers the hours of labor, and have gained enormously through the added zest and efficiency with which their employees set to work. They, like Owen, have advocated an eight-hour day not only because no loss in industrial results would obtain but because "it is to the real interest of every human being that every other human being should be healthy, intelligent, contented and wealthy"—not an impossible ideal if we substitute for "wealthy" the words "relieved from the menace of want." And if all workers cannot hope to be brilliantly endowed they at least have the right to demand leisure for training and cultural improvement.

It unfortunately remains true that enlightened and philanthropic employers are still too few; and recourse must yet be had to wasteful strikes and unsettling agitations to achieve the desired results. Here and there a Henry Ford may appear, who recognizes that his business is not entirely his own since the well-being, the interest and the very existence of thousands of thinking and feeling men may depend upon it. But for the most part, labor will have to depend on its own efforts, and upon State action, to usher in a reasonable and adequate working day for the mass of the nation's toilers.

Action by the State.

In the past, however, the State has done comparatively little to shorten the work day. It is true that the State has set limits to the hours of work of women and children in industry, with the result that, notably in the textile industries, there has come about also an almost automatic reduction in the working day for men as well; but on the whole the reduction has come about rather because of union organization and the employers' recognition of the wastefulness of the twelve-hour day. In certain dangerous or exhausting occupations, however, as in mines and smelters, the State has restricted the hours of labor to eight or nine. Where Governments have been direct employers of labor—as the British and the French—the hours of work have been reduced to an average of eight for each day of the week. And both for religious and humanitarian reasons the State has restricted within narrow limits Sunday labor, especially in Canada. On the whole, however, as already pointed out, labor has had to depend largely upon its own efforts to obtain a reasonable working day.

What of the Future?

In the light of what has been said it will be realized why the trade unions of the United Kingdom have so jealously guarded the position they have won with respect to the ten-hour, and in some instances, the eight-hour day. For this they have been bitterly assailed for class and political purposes. They are charged with having taken advantage of the war to gain illegitimate and party ends. Notwithstanding the slackers—who, unfortunately, are always present in every country, war or no war—the working classes of the United Kingdom have risen nobly to the occasion, and are courageously and willingly subjecting themselves to a terrific physical and mental strain. The men in the trenches are scarcely more patriotic. History cannot show the equal of this voluntary response, whether for duty on the field of battle or in the factory, in the case of any other great nation. The factories of the Motherland are working day and night, and British men and women intend to keep them going until the enemy is crushed. At the same time they want it distinctly understood, and rightly so, that the present long hours and overtime work are to last during the war, and during the war only.

There are not wanting pessimists in England who maintain that the world will be a harder one to live in after the war and because of the war. They argue that hours of labor will be longer and wages smaller

in Germany; and that English workmen will, therefore, be compelled to share with their masters the burden of increased competition. Germany will, without doubt, be a poorer Germany and a chastened Germany; but not a more efficient Germany. War taxes will crush her industries; frightful losses of men will lessen her labor power. England, no doubt, will have suffered; but capital will be ample for her needs and her labor power will not be sensibly diminished. Relatively, Britain's place in the markets of the world will be higher and more secure than before the war. Finally—and for the purpose of our argument it will suffice—it can be proved that the United Kingdom will best meet German competition by raising wages and shortening the working day, rather than by following the reverse methods. The United States, the world's greatest manufacturing nation, has already demonstrated the soundness of this contention. In that country wages are higher than elsewhere, and the hours of work per day fewer; and yet—with the possible exception of England the United States is the most formidable of competitors in the neutral markets of the world. Surely the pauper labor argument at this late day needs no refutation. Once more, let us emphasize the fact that long hours and low wages for workers in Germany will not make them more effective in the competitive struggle, but will diminish their country's industrial power. Germany will not willingly adopt these conditions for her laboring population; rather, they will be thrust upon her as a vanquished nation.

The Position of Women Workers.

A brief reference in closing may be made to the future position of women workers in the field of industry in the United Kingdom, with respect to their probable attitude to this particular problem. A few extreme feminists—Miss Sylvia Pankhurst among others—have objected to State regulation of the hours of work for women. They have obviously, however, in this regard, been more intent on securing formal rather than real rights when they have demanded absolute equality with men and protested against special State regulations for the protection of those of their own sex. The common-sense of the world, however, proves that hard facts whether of nature or limited experience, must be considered in dealing with the position of women in industry. For these reasons, women are forbidden to work in the mines, in Great Britain; and night work is also either forbidden or greatly curtailed. In the same way they are protected they are given special protection with respect to hours of work—nine or ten per day being the maximum usually allowed, a maximum which also generally becomes the minimum.

Most enlightened men will welcome women to a broader field of industry; as the work of the world will provide scope for the energies of all. Here again the old "lump of labor" theory is being gradually abandoned. It is no longer felt that work is limited in amount, and that it must not be shared by too many. It is recognized that only by setting a limit to human desires and needs can the world's work be curtailed. However, that is another story. The point we wish to make here is that men will be glad to admit women to the ranks of the workers provided that they will not thereby be subjected to "sweated" conditions. That means, again, the acceptance of equal conditions for both men and women with respect to hours of work and wages. Here the advanced feminists are on safe ground. Women in industry should neither ask for, nor accept, favors. Neither should men be compelled longer to subsidize them while they go out and cut wages by means of that subsidy. The war may, and probably has, done more towards advancing the cause of both women and men in industry than all the agitation of the past fifty years has accomplished. We may hope, therefore, not without reason, that women workers will stand firm with the men in demanding that, in the Anglo-Saxon world, labor shall not only get the means of life, but the opportunity to learn how to live nobly.

THE BRIQUET INDUSTRY.

Over a million dollars worth of briquets were made in the United States out of waste coal dust in 1915, the exact production being 221,537 short tons, valued at \$1,035,716. This was the largest output in the United States for any year with the exception of 1914. The manufacture of this type of fuel is, however, still in its infancy, and according to C. E. Losher, of the United States Geological Survey, a good many years will probably elapse before the briquet industry assumes very large proportions.

There were fifteen briquetting plants in operation in the United States in 1915, one less than in 1914.