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The Eight Hour Day.

The recent action of the local carpenters' unions in voluntarily reducing the working hours from ten to nine per day in the attempt to provide work for the unemployed is deserving of the highest commendation.

Even although the object of the men be not accomplished, and the movement does not succeed in providing work for a greater number of men, which latter contingency has been so freely predicted by those opposed to the shorter workday, who maintain that there is very little work to do, and that consequently the employers are in no hurry to complete the work, there is no gainsaying the fact that the intention and spirit of the men is good, that it is the truest exemplification of unionism to be had, and is one that will command general respect.

The upholders of the open-shop principle and the opponents of labor unions are never tired of stating that the real and only object of the union is the boosting up of the wage scale. Probably the action of the carpenters of the city will disabuse their minds of some part of that nightmare which they have so assiduously cherished. Some other motive than selfishness will have to be attributed to men who voluntarily give up one hour of their earning capacity each day so that their less fortunate fellow workers may have a chance to secure employment.

The securing of a living wage for all its members is of course one of the objects of unionism, but it is not by any means the most important one.

The great outstanding principle of the trade union movement is to secure the greatest good for the greatest number for the greatest length of time, and this brings us back to a discussion of the desirability of adopting the eight-hour day on all classes of work.

The history of the past has shown us that short hours and high wages go hand in hand. In many instances a corresponding reduction in wages has accompanied the shortening of the work day, but this has not been obtained for any length of time as the reduction of hours is the main consideration, the wages attaining the usual level as the conditions of work improve.

The two chief reasons which warrant the eight-hour day are as follows:

1.—Because of the vastly increased productiveness of perfected labor saving machinery, which has resulted in the great problem of the unemployed, and

2.—In order to enable the masses to attain that intellectual level which is compatible with democracy, and is in keeping with the evolutionary upward trend of the human race.

The greatest menace to the social and therefore moral welfare and progress of a nation is the number of unemployed who exist in the land. The unemployed are non-producers; not only in the apparent fact of their being unemployed, but also because they are unable to live as they should, and are therefore unable to purchase those articles which are requisite and necessary for the maintenance of life, let alone for the development of the higher attributes of manhood. Every man is an employer to the extent of the capital he has to spend. In other words the more men there are engaged in active work and the less the number of the unemployed, the greater will become the purchasing capacity of the nation.

Moreover, it has become a recognised fact that the greatest national development and the greatest social advancement is made in countries where the purchasing power of the great mass of the people is greatest, or in other words, where the wages are highest, and since it is a well known fact that the wages of the employed are regulated by the number of unemployed in any particular business or industry, it is safe to assume that the wages of those employed will increase in ratio as the number of unemployed decrease.

Again, the political greatness of a country, that is, the position the nation holds amongst the nations of the world, is regulated by the social standing of the masses, who are, when all is said and done, the bulwark of a nation's strength. No country is greater than the social and moral greatness of the masses of her people, and it follows therefore, that social degradation and democracy are incompatible.

Either the social character of the nation must be raised to the level of the political institutions, under which they live, or no power on earth can save the latter from falling to the level of the former. This is an irrevocable social law against which there is and can be, no appeal.

It can be seen from this, therefore, that the question of the unemployed is the most important with which we have to deal. Work for all means wages for all, and consequently bread for all. If such a state is ever brought to pass when the nation will no longer know the cry of the hungry children of the unemployed, then the dawn of a brighter era will begin to break, social progress will be accelerated, poorhouses, except for those reduced through old age, adversity, or careless living, will no longer loom large in the eyes of the ratepayers, and the darkest blot in the history of our national life will be removed.

Supposing there are three million men working in the Dominion of Canada ten hours per day, and the eight-hour day was inaugurated and became universal, this would mean that 6,000,000 hours of labor would be withdrawn from the labor market without discharging a single laborer. The result would be in order to fill the vacuum employment would be afforded to 6,000,000 more men, and this without increasing our home or foreign market, but simply to provide for the present normal consumption.

From an economical standpoint, then, it is safe to say that the eight-hour day is warranted, since it will furnish legitimate employment for many more men, and will consequently remove poverty and distress which is a burden to the ratepayers of the cities, and is the greatest obstacle to industrial peace and progress, and prepare the way for a more lasting and permanent prosperity.

The only objection that has ever been raised to this is made, naturally enough, by the ruling or employing class. They contend, and their contention is justified by their prejudices, that no man is entitled to ten hours pay for eight hours work. Well, that sounds logical enough. It is the theory of political economy which talks of the iron law of wages, but like all other so-called laws of political economy it will cease to be a law when the granting of charters to the privileged class to exploit the weak also cease.

No man is entitled to ten hours pay for eight hours work. Neither is any man entitled to 7 days' pay for 6 days' work, and yet the weekly computation of wages is on a 7 day basis instead of 6, for although a man only works 6 days, he must live 7 to the week, and as a rule the working man lives better on the seventh day than on any other day.

And yet, whom would you find foolish enough to ask if it were just that he should be required to pay 7 days' wages for 6 days' work. Not one; custom and ancient usage has smoothed away the prejudices on that score, and in years to come when the children of the generations yet to be are enjoying the eight-hour day as a legitimate right, they will look back on this transitory stage through which we are passing, and marvel at the blindness of the opponents of the eight-hour movement, and will at last be forced to the conclusion that the bitterest opponents of the present-day movement are blinded to their own interests by a misconceived notion that their own self-interests are assailed.

The cry of the age is for efficiency and still greater efficiency, and how can we hope to attain that efficiency if the laborer has no opportunity to develop his faculties owing to the continuous daily round of long hours employment.

Many accidents which occur on the railway are the result of excessive fatigue, and such accidents will entirely disappear when the damage allowed for railway accidents is risen to such a height as to make it too expensive for railway companies to have accidents. The sufferings of laborers and the loss of human lives do not appeal to us with such a potent force as the loss of money.

Has the reduction of hours in the past from 16 per day to 10 interfered in any way with the world's prosperity? Ask history. And there you will find for an answer that such men as J. A. Roebuck, Sir James Graham, and John Bright, lived to recant their dismal forebodings, and were forced to admit that not only had the nation prospered, but that the shorter work-day had made possible the development of the higher faculties of man, and had made refinement and culture possible.

Militancy, whether in Church or State or shop, rests upon coercion, institutions and vested privileges. Industrialism craves peaceful evolution, co-operation, equal opportunities. The first for this reason seeks stability in deep-rooted systems which in time become barriers to progress, the latter looks forward to liberties, greater opportunities, more cordial co-operation.

To encourage the immigration of a class of labourers imbruted by centuries of oppression and servility is a deadly blow at the foundation of our civilization.

The Bomb in India

The telegraphic address of Reuter's new agency in India is, we understand, Ananias, and our readers will do well to disbelieve all they read from that source until it is corroborated. Everyone will regret that three innocent persons have lost their lives at the hands of a misguided anarchist; but remembering what the Indian police force is like, and how during recent months they have been convicted of concocting charges and fabricating evidence to bolster them up, it is just as likely as anything else that the whole anarchist plot, with all its details, is a creation of what Mr. Keir Hardie described as the "most corrupt force in the world." Men who forge documents are quite capable of going one better and getting foolish youths to entangle themselves in the folly of bomb-throwing.

Mr. Kingsford, for whom the bomb which killed the two ladies and their syce was probably intended, was the presiding magistrate in Calcutta during the recent disturbances, and won for himself an unenviable reputation by his decisions. His conduct on the bench reminded those on the spot of the Scotch J.P. who, when told that an accused person was a collier, sentenced him to three months' imprisonment before enquiring what was the charge against him. Oppression, it was said of old, maketh a wise man mad; and when peaceful meetings are first broken up by police armed with bludgeons and then altogether suppressed; when the Press is continually being prosecuted; when students are penalised for belonging to the reform party, and inquiry into the riotous conduct of the police is burked, it is not to be wondered at that some unwary youths listen to the voice of the tempter and enter upon courses which can only retard the reform movement.

We shall keep our readers posted up on the actual facts as these come to hand, and meanwhile ask them to remember that the information at present given by the Press comes through Reuter, and is therefore suspect. Labor Leader.



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