

Mr. GEO. TAYLOR. Next session.

Progress reported.

At one o'clock, House took recess.

The House resumed at 3 o'clock.

SUPPLY—HOURS OF LABOUR FOR WORKING MEN.

Mr. FIELDING moved that the House go into Committee of Supply.

Mr. ALPHONSE VERVILLE (Maison-neuve). Mr. Speaker, before you leave the Chair, I would like to bring before the House a question of vital importance which is now being discussed all over the civilized world, and which I think should be discussed in this parliament of Canada.

The question I want to refer to is the restriction of hours of labour. I will endeavour to prove during this discussion, in all its features, the intellectual, physical and moral effect of shorter hours of labour on our working people. I will also demonstrate its effect upon production, its effect on consumption, and its effect on the financial as well as on the labour market.

If we go back to ancient history we can see by Professor Thorold Rogers that restriction of hours was an acute question amongst the English artisans as far back as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But it is not necessary to go that far back, as we have enough examples in this century, which is called the labour and social century. The question of questions in connection with any proposed reduction of hours of labour, is the question of the probable efficiency of the working people. If short hours means short product they would mean short profit and short wages, too; and good wages are at present as essential to the improvement of most of the working classes as more leisure. But shorter hours may not in reality mean shorter product, for they may so better the quality of labour that as much is done in the short as was in the long day. The pith of the question of shortening hours is how far a further reduction of hours of labour may be reasonably expected to be attended with a like result. As there is different opinion on that point it will be useful to examine the recorded experience of previous reductions in the length of the working day, and mark the diversity of the sources from which the compensating improvements in the labourers' personal efficiency that accrued. If these resources remain largely unexhausted, and if shorter-hour experiments already prove that they may be successfully utilized to balance lost time, then there would seem no reason why history should not repeat itself on the present occasion. The first experience of a reduction of hours has been very varied. Some manufacturers found it advantageous from the introduction, and

some reported a decrease in production for the first few months of the first year, but eventually the favourable experience became general, either because the shorter hours had time to tell on the vital and mental energies of the workman, or because employers had one after another discovered the secret which some of them had discovered at the outset of making up for the diminution of working hours by improved facilities in their work. In the case of shortening the very long hours the result was often a surprisingly large immediate increase, as an effect of the mere relief from physical exhaustion. Let us see what the managing partner of a large Massachusetts cotton mill told the Labour Commission in 1883:

When he reduced the factory hours fifteen years before from thirteen to eleven he found that with the same machinery the production of print rose from 90,000 to 120,000 yards a week, and the Middlesex Company, of Lowell, Massachusetts, on making a still greater reduction from thirteen hours to ten hours twenty-five minutes in 1872 found that by increasing the speed of their machinery so as to make as many revolutions in a day as before, and replacing female labour by male to a very slight degree, $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, their product increased by 290·117 pieces, or about £135,000 worth in the year, and the earnings of their work people by 57 per cent.

But, instances of such great increase are rarely met with. What is very common on all occasions of hour shortening is the obtaining of a slight increase either immediately, or after six or twelve months' trial.

On the whole the general impression left on the sufferers by such a change has not been felt to any degree in comparison to the increase above mentioned. The world possesses very abundant experience of shorter hours and its experience has been entirely the same in England, in America, in France, in Holland, in Switzerland and in Austria.

The first great reduction of hours was the reduction in the English textile trade by the Ten Hours Act of 1847 and it was then regarded not merely by employers but by its warmest promoters as a leap in the dark, yet statistics prove that production has suffered, if any, to a very slight degree. It is an acknowledged fact that the shortening of hours some 50 years ago, instead of decreasing the business of employers has been the means of bettering their conditions, not to speak of the labour side of the question at all. At present would it be possible to return to the old system of 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 hours a day? Would the employers if it were offered to them accept such a proposition? Surely not. In this century every one is looking to have some part of the 24 hours which compose the day to rest, to educate himself, and to work.

It would probably interest the House to