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WAGE SYSTEM UNDOUBTEDLY UNDERGOING GRADUAL BUT FAR-REACHING CHANGES

British Industry Shows Signs of a Gradual Change in the Relationship Between Employer and Worker.

By C. S. M.
LONDON, England—British industry shows signs of a gradual change in the relationship between employer and worker. Modifications in the status of the man and woman in industrial undertakings are already taking place. It is satisfactory to note that the improvements which can be observed, though on the line advanced by those who have attacked the capitalist system, are not due to "agitators" or revolutionary propagandists, but to the initiative—largely speaking—of great employers of labor.

Those familiar with the literature of the Guild movement will remember the book by S. G. Hobson entitled "The Wage System and the Way Out," in which this author (who is, by the way, the organizer of the Building Guild in Great Britain) attacked the capitalist system on the ground that the status of the worker was a form of slavery (the term used was "wage-slavery"). Through the analysis and reasoning employed in the book do not find universal agreement, it is still true to say that its emphasis upon the status of the worker as distinct from his remuneration, was in harmony with much of the best political and social thought of today.

Democratization of Industry. Leading and responsible men are now to be found uttering arguments for the elevation of the employe to a higher level in the world of industry. The Archbishop of York, for instance, recently said: "Whether people liked it or not, the worker would increasingly demand in industry the same sort of a status that he had in citizenship. He would not consent to be a ruler in the state and a mere servant of industry."

One of the most significant features in conditions of employment today is the great extension of the practice of payment for holidays. It is well known that the Building Guild has adopted the plan of treating every worker as a partner whose income is continuous, and not contingent upon the actual hours of work, fine weather, and other exigencies upon which the wage of building workers usually depends. But the development to which reference is here made is taking place in ordinary commercial enterprises. It is estimated that at least 2,000,000 work people are now covered by agreements providing for certain annual holidays with pay. In some cases the method adopted is to establish a fund to which both employe and employe contribute, and the workers draw certain fixed sums—for the various holidays. In other cases the firm makes a payment to the employe of a fixed amount, representing a certain number of days' wages, or, when piece-workers are involved, of an amount calculated on average earnings.

An official of the National Alliance of Employers and Employed said recently that they were conducting an inquiry into the extent and development of the system. The inquiries are not yet complete, but printing, lead manufacture, sugar refining, electricity supply, commercial road transport, match, export packing and process engraving are some of the industries in which employes are already granted an annual holiday with pay, as well as statutory holidays. The period of these annual holidays is in the main six days, and they are usually dependent on 12 months' service. For shorter periods of service, correspondingly shorter holidays are allowed. In addition the majority of workers connected with railways, tramways and other public utilities are paid for annual, in addition to statutory, holidays.

The soap and candle trades, coco and chocolate, asbestos manufacturing, quarrying, cement, paper making, tin-box making, chemical, pen making, paint, color and varnishing, flour-milling and glove-making are among some of the more important industries which have adopted the policy of allowing—under various conditions—an annual holiday each year on full pay. In many of these cases, however, statutory holidays are not paid for. The Joint Industrial Council, governing the brush and broom trade, has made a recommendation urging all employers in the industry to grant a week's holiday with pay during the summer months, while the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association is among other large industries that are considering a similar proposal.

Employers Given Voice. It will be seen that the introduction of this system contains the germ of the idea of partnership. Admitted that the worker gets very little more than he pays for at present, yet it is obvious that once the practice of enjoying a holiday on full pay becomes general, and the feeling that he is part of the concern, even though to a limited extent, takes hold of the wage earner, there will be no bounds to the possible extension of the innovation.

Wise employes are already seeking to interest their work-people in industry by giving them a voice in the arrangements and conditions under which they work, and by assisting their help and co-operation. The wage system is undoubtedly undergoing gradual but far-reaching changes, and its worst evils are being subdued by the application of more humane ideals. The age of mastership is being replaced by the age of leadership.

1921.
Burst—"How come you're taking up chewing tobacco?"
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