

The Regulation of Working Hours:

AS SUBMITTED TO

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

BY



TOM MANN,

President Dockers' Union.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

December 1891.

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TO deal effectively with the State Regulation of the hours of labour it will be necessary, in order to cover the general question, that attention be given to the various phases of the subject, such as—

- (1.) The present working hours in various countries.
- (2.) What demands are being made for a reduction of the present working hours in these countries?
- (3.) What gives rise to these demands?
- (4.) By what means it is proposed to obtain the reduction?
- (5.) The probable effects of reduced working hours.

(1.) The normal working hours vary considerably in the United Kingdom, from $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours per shift, for the hewers in the soft coal collieries of Northumberland, to 13 hours per shift on tramways, railways, and many other sections of labour. Large numbers yet work 12 hour shifts, of seven shifts a week, such as the chemical workers of Lancashire and the steel workers of Yorkshire. Those employed under the Factory Acts are restricted to $56\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week, unless permission be obtained from the factory inspector, which is done in many instances, especially in the Midlands. But it does not follow that the mills stop running in the textile trade, as is generally supposed, when the women and children leave in accordance with the factory and workshop regulation; in some districts of Yorkshire it is the regular practice for the men to work till eight at night, or $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours longer than the women.

In most trades where men preponderate, the normal working hours have been fixed for a period of 20 years at 54 a week, although this number is often exceeded by the men working overtime, generally at an increased rate of pay.

Some 10 per cent. of the male workers are subject to casual intermittent employment, or are out of work altogether, that is, about 800,000 in a normal state of trade such as we now experience, about one-half of whom average two days' work a week, and the remaining half, or 400,000, are entirely idle. In a time of bad trade the number of very casually employed or wholly unemployed amounts to 25 per cent. of the total, as is shown by trade union and other statistics.

Taking the countries that are closely engaged in industrial competition, the hours of labour are as follows, in all cases exclusive of meal times: Great Britain, $10\frac{1}{2}$ daily, 63 weekly; America, $11\frac{1}{2}$ daily, 69 weekly; France, Belgium, and Germany, 12 daily, 72 weekly. For years past there has been carried on a vigorous agitation in favour of reduced working hours, and at each of the congresses held the delegates from the countries mentioned have voted in favour of an eight hour working day, and in this they have been joined by the delegates of Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Norway, and Denmark, whilst the Australians have worked under the eight hours system for 35 years, though it does not apply to all trades.

(2). DEMANDS NOW MADE IN THESE COUNTRIES.

Labour organisations are rapidly increasing in all the countries named, and in nearly all of these, especially those of the continent, the eight hour day is in the fore front of their programme. But although the continental workers appear to be unanimous in their demand, there is probably much more systematic and organised effort being put forth in this country to obtain the eight hour day than is the case with any continental country, whilst between this country and America there is, practically, a race as to which shall get the eight hour day first. The Americans have made great headway during the past year and a half, and although the average working hours in America, as previously given, show them to be working one hour per day longer than obtains in this country, it is also true that they have a larger proportion of their total number of workers now working under the eight hours system than we have, and their most powerful federation of workers, known as the American Federation of Labour, is definitely pledged to this as the

foremost item in its programme. This federation is composed of many trade unions, and the Federation executive fixed upon the carpenters and joiners of America to make the first demand in May, 1890. This society at once acquiesced, and, as the result of vigorous effort, the secretary of that society reports, "That the trade movement for shorter hours among "the carpenters this season (1890) has been successful in 137 "cities, and it has benefited 46,197 workmen in that trade."

The "Knights of Labour" are also a power in many American and Canadian cities, and they too are strongly in favour of an eight hour day.

In this country there cannot be any doubt but that the majority of workers are favourable to reduced working hours; nearly every trade have had the subject under their serious consideration, and have decided in favour of obtaining the same; the principal exception to this is that of the Lancashire cotton operatives, the majority of whom at present are opposed to a reduction of working hours in their trade, because they believe the intensity of foreign competition will not admit of a reduction of working hours in this country unless their competitors also reduce theirs, and, because they fear they could not increase their output per hour, and that reduced hours would carry with it reduced wages, which they are not prepared to accept. It will not surprise anyone to learn that the weavers are not prepared to accept less wages when it is realised that adult male weavers average only 23s. a week in Lancashire, and in the Bradford district of Yorkshire 15s. represents a man's weekly wage in the textile trade. The Yorkshire operatives are favourable to the reduction of hours, and there appears to be an increasing number supporting the same in Lancashire.

(3). THE REASONS WHY—WORK FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.

There are three main causes that give rise to the demand for reduced working hours, each of which is complete in itself, though many persons are influenced by all three of the reasons.

First. The primary cause given by short hour advocates in this and other countries is in order to absorb the unemployed. The fact that in this country during a normal state of trade 5 per cent. of the workmen are unemployed, or

400,000, as previously stated, not including those who get casual employment, with a strong tendency to considerably increase as the result of extending the use of mechanical appliances, is so serious a position that no workman can think of it without being seriously alarmed, and, therefore, reduced working hours are demanded by those in work in order that those who are out may have a share, and that they and their families may have the requisites of existence. Or, in other words, the demand is made in order that the work of the country shall be better apportioned among the total number of workers.

Although this argument appears to presuppose that there would be a less output per man in order to find employment for those out of work, this does not follow, as the increased purchasing power obtained by those who found employment would serve as a market for a greater production, and it is contended by short hour advocates that the purchasing power of many thousands whose wages are very low now in consequence of the competition of the unemployed, would also be materially increased, again furnishing a market for an increased output. This is a point of the greatest importance both to capitalists and workers, and is far too often lost sight of. Better conditions for the workers means an increase in their economic capacity to consume; this increasing capacity to consume means an ever increasing market. The workers themselves are quite prepared to furnish the commodities for that market, together with a fair margin for the capitalist for supervision and organising purposes, so that to encourage a larger consumption is decidedly the best, both for capitalist and worker.

A MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH DEMANDED.

Secondly, Reduced hours of labour are also demanded by some advocates mainly because they have a conviction that at present they are not getting a due share of the wealth created by their labour. Such advocates may, or may not, agree with what has previously been said concerning the unemployed. This view that the workman does not get his due share is held by many, who also believe that, as a rule, increased efficiency attends reduction of working hours, but

they favour such a reduction of working hours and increase of wages as shall result in more of the total value produced being retained by the workers who produce it. Statistics are quoted which show that, of the total wealth produced less than half of it goes to those mental and manual workers who produce it, although they number four-fifths of the population. It is pointed out that, although the condition of the workers to-day is better than that which obtained a generation ago, the power to produce wealth, *i.e.*, the commodities themselves which constitute wealth, increases faster than the position of the worker improves.

The reduction of working hours in order to obtain a fairer share of the total produce is supported also by those who think that reduced hours will increase the cost of production, and by those who believe that greater efficiency will more than counter-balance the decrease of time. The former place their hopes upon reducing hours till much of the surplus value is absorbed, relying upon the worker to maintain at least his present purchasing power of wages, and letting the increased cost fall upon the capitalist, and the latter support this method, because they believe that to take away the competition for employment (which reduced hours would certainly do at the outset), is the best means of enabling the workers to effectually demand higher wages, which it is held should be sufficiently high as to take a considerably larger proportion of the total than is taken at present by the workers. In the previous case, where the demand for reduced hours was shown to come from those who wished to see the unemployed absorbed, it was out of sympathy for, and a desire to do justice to, the unemployed; in this latter case it is desired to absorb the unemployed as a tactical business arrangement, in order to make it possible to obtain higher wages. Both views may consistently be held by the same persons, or either view may be supported whilst consistently differing from the other.

THE DESIRE FOR CULTURE.

The *Third* main reason that weighs with the workers, resulting in a demand for shorter working hours, is due to a love of culture which is now extending to the meanest labourer, causing him to insist upon living a fuller and more complete life than has previously been possible, and it is this

desire for a higher and better life that gives the stimulus to most of our modern-day discontent, and because this desire is so general and real it serves at once as a national safeguard against ignorance and indolence on the one side, and against economic excesses on the other.

To what extent this cause operates in other countries I am unable to speak with accuracy, but I claim to have a knowledge of the workmen of Great Britain, skilled and unskilled, sufficient to warrant me in saying that if neither of the two reasons previously given operated, *i.e.*, the necessity for absorbing the unemployed, and the belief now entertained by workmen that they do not get a proper share of the product of labour, if neither of these causes operated, the demand for reduced working hours would still be amply sustained as the direct outcome of the rapidly growing demand on the part of the workers for fuller opportunities for moral, mental, and physical development of which the present hours of toil do not admit, and those who make this demand for increased opportunities for mental development are those who are strongly persuaded that increased mental development carries with it increased efficiency of production and distribution.

The effect of the better education of late years has been to impart a desire for culture and refinement, and, as might have been expected, it has carried with it a determined revolt against those conditions that prevent proper expansion intellectually and materially. We have truly a "revolt of labour" in this country, but it is not the revolt of despair, it is not a wild desire to demonstrate strength, nor a reckless willingness to be a nuisance. It is the direct outcome of careful thought given to the great industrial problem by men who have the best interests of the country at heart. It is the necessary accompaniment of progress.

These same educative forces that impel the populace onward to a higher standard of excellence, also serve to make them more effective producers of commodities, and the knowledge possessed by the workers that their power to produce is continually increasing, supplies them also with the conviction that they are entitled to a greater share of that produce. How much greater that share should be is a difficult matter to decide, nor is there unanimity amongst the workers upon this subject. It begins with those who make a vague demand

for something more, and goes on till we reach those who contend that it is morally and economically wrong for any section of the community to live upon rent or interest.

There is a strong current of opinion now running in favour of fixing a maximum rate of interest upon capital, when workmen find, as they do, that whilst they have a difficulty in keeping wages high enough to supply their families with the plainest of food, and also find a number of limited liability companies paying interest as high as 25 per cent., and in some instances as high as 40 per cent. per annum, no wonder that they consider that equity does not control the commercialism of this country, and when companies paying such high rates of interest plead that the intensity of foreign competition will not admit of any advance of wages or reduction of working hours, it is not surprising that workers should treat such statements contemptuously, and in some cases, perhaps, decline to admit the capitalists' plea of "cannot afford it," where that plea is well founded.

(4). PROPOSED METHODS.

When we come to examine into the methods whereby it is proposed to reduce working hours, there is also considerable diversity of opinion. There are those who favour a simultaneous international movement in all trades, not for all countries, but for those in a similar stage of economic development, and these advocates favour an international maximum work-day of eight hours. But many exceptions are made to this international demand; thus, the advocates of international action admit and defend the advisability of taking immediate action in this country in those departments of trade not affected by international competition.

VOLUNTARY EFFORT.

(a.) Among the trade unionists of this country there is a considerable number who favour obtaining the eight hour limit, but are determinedly opposed to legislation, preferring to obtain the same through the agency of the unions direct, by negotiations with the employers, and if that fails, either to wait longer or cease work to force it.

This section is, undoubtedly, becoming smaller year by year, judging by the votes recorded by various societies and by trades congresses.

AN ACT FOR ALL TRADES.

(*b.*) Another section demands an eight hour Act of Parliament, to apply to all trades and industries throughout the country. It is strongly opposed to anything in the shape of permissive legislation, and contends that it would be a source of weakness if certain trades obtained a reduction of hours before other trades. This section, too, is apparently smaller than formerly, not because less interest is taken in the subject, but because an increasing number is desirous of having a present partial benefit rather than postponing the advantage of getting a complete reduction later.

SIMULTANEOUS INTERNATIONAL ACTION.

(*c.*) A large section in various countries is not paying very specific attention to the actual application of the reduced hours, but, like Mr. GEORGE GUNTON, of America, contents itself with advocating a general international demand for an eight hours day in all countries in a similar stage of economic development. Mr. GUNTON proposes that America, England, France, and Germany should agree to reduce working hours by half-an-hour a day every six months until a maximum of eight hours is reached.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE OPTION.

(*d.*) Others think it unwise to wait for international action, save in those trades where international competition is keenly felt, and so they favour international trade option, some with, others without legislation.

TRADE OPTION BY LEGISLATION.

(*e.*) The Fabian Society has drafted a Bill in favour of trade option, in which it is proposed that the Secretary of State shall have power to apply the Act, when requested by a majority of those engaged in any trade. This leaves it to the persons engaged in the trade to decide when is the proper time, &c., and then, when the majority is agreed, to have their desires carried out by legislation. There can be no doubt but that this method finds increasing favour with workmen, allowing, as it does, freedom of action in making the demand, and then utilising the power of the State to carry it into effect. This section is favourable to the immediate application of the 48-hour weekly limit to all public employés,

the argument being that the governing bodies, whether local or national, should set an example to private employers.

TRADE EXEMPTION.

(*f.*) The method that found greatest favour at the recent Trades Union Congress held at Newcastle, was a method of trade exemption, the wording of the successful amendment being as follows:—“That legislation regulating the hours of labour to eight per day shall be in force in all trades and occupations, save where a majority of the organised members of any trade or occupation protest by a ballot voting against the same.” This differs from trade option to the extent that whereas, by “trade option,” no legislation would take place till a majority in any given trade demanded it, with “trade exemption,” legislation would cover all those trades where a majority of the organised workers did not protest against it.

LOCAL OPTION.

(*g.*) Another proposal is known as “Local Option.” This method requires that an Act be passed, and that local authorities be authorised to apply the same to the persons engaged in any trade in the locality governed by the local authority whenever a majority of the adult workers (male and female, trade unionist and non-unionist alike) makes application for the same to be applied, fixing the maximum working hours at eight per shift, or a maximum of 48 hours in one week; the local authority, on receipt of such application, to notify the employers concerned that after a specified notice the Act will be enforced.

The question of overtime, it is urged by supporters of the last-mentioned method, should be dealt with vigorously, and made a punishable offence both for employer and worker, except in cases of emergency, when exemption should be made by a local council composed of employers and workers.

DANGEROUS AND UNHEALTHY TRADES.

(*h.*) Looking at all sections of the community, and not at the workers only, there is now a real desire on the part of many to interfere by law in regulating the working hours of those engaged in dangerous and unhealthy trades. It is contended that it is contrary to the general well-being that those engaged in dangerous and unhealthy employment should be

compelled to continue under these bad conditions. Such as chemical workers, iron and steel workers, railway men, and miners it is felt ought to have special treatment, and that at once : therefore it is held that each case should be dealt with on its merits, and some of the worst conditions be at once relieved by legislative action.

THE BEST METHOD.

Personally, I am a strong advocate of a maximum working week of 48 hours for all employés, and I am favourable to this being done by the quickest and most effective means available.

I am decidedly favourable to voluntary associated effort on trade union lines, and I also support the view that trade unionists are completely justified in using parliamentary means to supplement their voluntary efforts.

The legislative institutions of the country, municipal and national, exist not only for the protection of existing rights, but for the promotion of the well-being of the citizens collectively ; and, as a workman, I fail entirely to see that any principle is violated by using the machinery of Parliament to regulate the conditions of adult male labour.

The effects of reduced hours upon the trade and commerce of the country will be the same whether the reduction is brought about by legislative or any other means, providing the same is demanded by the workers. If no demand were made by the workers, it would tend to show that they had not sufficiently developed as to feel the need of increased leisure, and it is conceivable that increased leisure would not be used to advantage by persons who were too apathetic or ignorant to make the demand. Few would be rash enough to say that the bulk of the workers of the United Kingdom are indifferent to better conditions at the present day, and a very slight knowledge of workmen would enable one to understand that the general belief is that the way to better conditions is in the direction of more leisure and less enforced idleness.

It appears to me very unwise to use such terms as an "Appeal to the State." I claim as full a right to use my vote as a citizen upon an industrial question of this nature, as I do to use my vote in the branch of the trade union to which I belong, and I treat the matter purely as one of expediency

as to whether or not we should use Parliament to attain the desired end. Thus, if I believed it could be brought about by associated effort—as distinct from legislative enactment—in two years, and by legislative enactment in one year, I should favour legislative enactment, and if the converse of this was likely to be the case, I should favour that. I believe that now a large majority of the workers of the country are favourable to a 48-hour working week, but the difficulties in the way of making their desires known and felt are very great. Even yet a very large proportion of workmen have no voting power, and, consequently, at election times the richer minority exercise an undue influence. To organise effective trade unions is not an impossible—but it is a difficult task, and if this difficult task were successfully overcome, the effective decision of a Trade Union Parliament for the nation would simply do as regards the hours question, what it is quite possible to do now with our present Parliament.

Even if it were possible by some means to get a majority vote of the nation in favour of reduced working hours, this would, in my opinion, be less satisfactory than a majority vote of the persons engaged in each trade. There are, undoubtedly, some trades in this country that would not be in the least injured by the application of the 48-hour week, whilst with others it might not be so safe unless international action were taken. The persons engaged in these trades are the best judges, and upon them, in my opinion, ought to rest the responsibility of intelligently setting forth the demand for reduced hours. And it should also rest with them to decide which was the best means to obtain the same, and deciding in favour of legislative enactment—as most certainly very many of the trades would,—then Parliament ought to respect that request and give effect to the same. So that I am in favour of the trade option method, but I would not make it a condition that the majority of the whole of those engaged in the country in any given trade must demand it before it be applied to any portion. Thus, if the majority of the tramway and omnibus men of London and district asked for an eight-hour day by legislative enactment, I would deal with London independently of what hours prevailed in the same calling in other towns. If the shop assistants of Lancashire requested assistance in the same way, whilst the bulk of shop assistants

in Scotland or the South of England were indifferent to the subject, then Lancashire ought to receive the advantage of such legislative assistance, and no one in the country would be any the worse. In manufacturing trades, the unit of area over which the provisions of such an Act should be applied, should be decided by the trade organisation that represented the workers in that trade, who would know, or could easily get to know, whether the demand should be made in one or several districts simultaneously. In the event of there being no trade organisation, then the workers would have to devise a method whereby to give expression to their desires. This method is now known as the "local option method," and it is this plan that lends itself most readily to be of service to the nation, because it admits of those in the respective trades deciding:—When it is desirable, where it is desirable, and, by what means it is desirable to obtain reduced working hours in those trades.

(5). EFFECT OF REDUCED WORKING HOURS UPON PROFITS & WAGES.

The effect of reduced working hours would not be the same in all trades. In all probability reduced working hours on tramlines or railways would mean an increased wage bill which could not well be met by increased efficiency of service, but with productive trades it has resulted in nearly every instance that reduction of working hours brings with it increased efficiency; the instances that could be given are very numerous and are probably too well known to render any allusion to them necessary, and it is very significant that the nations that do most work are the nations that work shortest hours, because short working hours means more time for mental and physical recreation, which make a man a more complete man and a more effective producer, but the prime factor that affects profits is the demand for commodities, and workers who are in a state to demand less working hours prove thereby that their economic capacity to consume is increasing.

The greatest mistake that can be made by employers is to treat workers as producers only, forgetting that they are consumers also, and that upon their capacity to consume rests the real markets. Upon good markets rest the employers'

profits, and, therefore, it is directly to the interests of the employers that the workers should develop their capacity to consume wisely and largely. In England, the worker consumes much more than does the worker of the Continent, but the Englishmen's labour is the cheapest. In Russia they know little of machinery, and they work long hours, but their production is far below that of the French or German, whilst the production of these again is below that of the English.

The effect of short hours upon wages would be to cause wages to rise, so that in a short time more wages would be obtained for the short hours than was formerly obtained for the longer hours. This advance of wages would not necessarily reduce profits; the factor of increased efficiency enters, which not only increases the output per man, but in conjunction with other factors increases the capacity and opportunity to consume, and so extends the market.

Wages have increased during the past 25 years in most trades, but the power to produce has increased at a greater rate. That wealth has increased much faster than population is shown by the following figures of increase of population and increase of wealth :—

Population of United Kingdom in—

1840.	1860.	1880.
26,540,000	28,730,000	34,650,000

Wealth of the United Kingdom.

1840. Estimated by Porter -	4,000,000,000 <i>l.</i>
1860. " Levi -	6,000,000,000 <i>l.</i>
1877. " Giffen -	8,840,000,000 <i>l.</i>
1886' " Mulhall	8,720,000,000 <i>l.</i>

GROWTH OF BRITISH WEALTH.

United Kingdom.

1812	-	-	-	£127 per inhabitant.
1840	-	-	-	150 "
1860	-	-	-	191 "
1882	-	-	-	249 "

The chief cause of low wages is due to the competition for work. By reducing the normal working hours employment is given to a larger number of persons, and the intensity of the competition is reduced, admitting of the workers making effectual demands for higher rates of pay; but, as already shown, the best paid workers are the cheapest workers. It is not thought that there is anything sacred about "eight hours": indeed, as previously mentioned, some miners are now working less than eight, and the opinion is becoming pretty general that miners and chemical workers would do a full share if they worked six-hour shifts, and it will pay the country well when they get it, providing the demand is made as the result of the more perfect development of the men engaged in the trades mentioned.

It would be unwise to force reduced hours, but it is equally unwise to resist a legitimate demand for reduced hours, indicating as it does a mental and moral development on the part of those who make the demand, and having the qualities to demand it, whether through the agency of trades-unionism or through Parliament. It is not only good for the workers themselves, but good for the whole community. With increased leisure character develops, the thinking faculties are sharpened, the qualities that make good and useful citizens increase, and thereby the general well-being is secured.

December, 1891.

All Orders, Wholesale and Retail, to be addressed to

GEO. REYNOLDS,

Printer and Publisher,

23, STEPNEY GREEN, LONDON, E.

Printer to The Dockers' Union, and kindred Societies.