

The Eight Hour Day.
by
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The movement in the direction of a shorter working day has been going on for many years, particularly in the English speaking countries. The day has been successively changed from fourteen to twelve hours and again to ten and in some cases even to nine and still the agitation goes on for a still further reduction to the eight-hour limit. Not so much, in the later case, because longer hours are injurious to health, nor because shorter hours make higher wages; but from the want of additional opportunities for self cultivation and the enjoyment of life.

In this age of the world's progress, when machinery is so plentiful, transportation so cheap and rapid the productiveness of any country turns largely on the vigor and intelligence of its working class, and these qualities can only be obtained when the labours have sufficient leisure for recreation and self culture. Society should not compel its members to simply live to work but should allow them the privilege of working to live. But simply considering men as machines it will be found good policy to keep up their intelligence and ~~spirits~~ spirits of labor, and as I have said above this is best done by giving them opportunity for

rest and study.

John Rae in his, 'Eight Hours for Work' attributes England's commercial supremacy to the superior vigor and intelligence of her working-men caused by their shorter hours. The eight hour day, it seems, is not of recent origin in that country. Adam Smith in "Wealth of Nations", speaks as if eight hours was the common working day among the miners. Arthur Young says in 1771 that the miners in Yorkshire had half a day left to themselves after their stated task. The English Labor Commission reports that farmers do regularly eleven or twelve hours actual work exclusive of meal time, while in 1789 William Marshall said that in most parts of the Kingdom eight hours a day was the ordinary custom for team labor.

The Factories Commission of 1833 report the evidence of a very old man who had worked nearly seventy years at the stocking frames. He said that when he started to work in 1745 the knitters never wrought more than ten hours a day for five days and then had Saturday free, but later were compelled to work twelve and of late years as many as fourteen or

fifteen hours per. day. Fuller in his "Church History" says that the shorter hours and better fare were the two great inducements that persuaded the Flemish weavers to settle in England under Edward the Third.

Sir John Fortescue, Chief Justice of the Kings Bench under Henry VI, attributes some of our free institutions to the greater leisure of the English labourer. He says, writing from France, that it would be impossible to establish such a thing as trial by jury in that country - Because the French people were so fatigued with hard labor that, 'twelve honest men of the neighborhood' could not be found who had sufficient mental energy left in them to discuss the rights of an intricate case.

But with the advent of machinery and the attendant enlargement of the factor of capital in production the working day was gradually increased, at first to twelve hours, as in Arkwright's time, and then to thirteen, fourteen and in some cases to sixteen hours a day. In Manchester at the time of the Reform Bill the mills ran from five in the morning to nine at night, only stopping one hour for

dinner

As might be expected this change from short hours to long ones under the factory system began to tell in the lives of the people. Mr. Gurst in his, "History of the Cotton Manufacture" says, "in less than a life time the very tastes of the English workmen changed. Instead of their old manly sports of wrestling, quoits, foot-ball and long-bow they betook themselves to pigeon-fancying, canary-breeding or tulip-growing."

In spite of the continued and persistent effort, on the part of labor in England during the last thirty or forty years, to reduce the hours of labor there is yet much to be accomplished in that country. A few of the trades have an eight hour day, still more only work nine hours but a large part of the workers work longer, thousands never seeing their little children out of bed on work days, and nearly all work too long for their physical health.

From the Fabian Tract No 23 I take the following cases of hours now being worked in England:

Tramway workers, many work fourteen hours. One conductor in Bradford worked regularly

fifteen hours a day not including meal time at three shillings per. day.

Rail way workers: thousands of these men work regularly from fifteen to eighteen hours at a stretch and in 1889 about one in seven of the brakemen in the United Kingdom was injured.

Shop hands: The President of the Shop Hours Labor League, says that a majority of the shop assistants in England work from seventy five to ninety hours per. week.

Women workers; washerwomen in small laundries work not less than seventy-two hours per. week; barmaids often work over one hundred hours.

In the United States the average nominal length of a days work outside of Mass. is eleven and one half hours, and is said to be greatest in those industries in which the largest percent of women and children are employed. In Mass. a ten hour day is the legal working day and although the competition between the New England states is very strong Mass. holds her own in production and her labor is better paid than the average of the other states as is shown by the following table from the

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Labor Bureau of Mass. Report for 1881.

In Maine	avr. hours	66½	avr. wage	7.04	per. wk.
" N. H.	"	66¼	"	7.44	" "
" Conn	"	65¾	"	7.87	" "
" R. I.	"	66	"	8.61	" "
" N. Y.	"	65½	"	7.57	" "
" <u>Mass.</u>	"	<u>60</u>	"	<u>8.32</u>	" "

In the United States the eight hour agitation did not assume very great proportions until it was taken up by the Knights of Labor in 1878. In 1868 Congress passed the following law approved by Pres. Johnson, June 25. "That eight hours shall constitute a days work for all laborers, workingmen and mechanics now employed, or who may hereafter be employed by, or on behalf of the government of the United States, and all acts or parts of acts inconsistent with this act be and the same are hereby repealed." But in interpreting this law the Secretary of the Navy reduced the wages of the men one fifth and the Attorney General A. R. Hoar confirmed his decision. President Grant was appealed to and on investigation issued a proclamation directing that no reduction of wages should follow a reduction of hours of labor in Government workshops. No attention

bring paid to this Grant on the eleventh of May, issued another Proclamation directing the heads of the departments not to reduce wages, this also failed and on the 18th of the same month Congress passed a resolution that all working men should receive compensation at the rate of two hours pay for eight hours work.

In Victoria Australia the 21st of April is "Eight-Hour Demonstration Day" and has now grown to be the annual festival of the colony. Eight or ten thousand workmen march through the streets bearing banners among which is the "old patched and revered banner of 1856" inscribed. "Eight hours work, Eight hours recreation, eight hours rest. In 1856 only seven hundred men and nine separate trades took part in the demonstration: now fifty or sixty trades in order of their ballot march through the streets and people of all classes repair to the parks for a general good time. "Speeches are made in which capitalists, politicians, and labourers all rejoice together over an experiment that once caused many anxieties, but which they acknowledge has, without doing any injury to trade, given the working people time to live the life of rational beings."

The eight hour working day in Victoria has been obtained by the workmen themselves through their organizations and has been a gradual operation - In 1879 there were only seven or eight trades in Melbourne, in 1883 there were still only twenty, in 1885 there were thirty four, in 1890 fifty and in 1891 there were sixty. The only trades that now work longer than eight hours are the dyers, tailors (except cutters, trimmers, and pressers) textile workers, soapmakers and of course agricultural labor. Only one fourth of the people of Victoria work longer than eight hours.

It has been found in many cases that the long days, which have been gradually brought about by the desire to get the most out of the capital invested in machinery are very unprofitable ones for the employers. It was at one time considered that the last hour gave the profit, and that each additional moment the machinery could be got to run would add just that much to the profits at the end of the year. But some are beginning to realize that with the human machine an hour more work did not necessarily mean an hour more product but that after a certain

limit had been reached an extra hour's rest was of more value in production than the hours work.

The answer to the question as to whether shortening the day will affect the production favorably or unfavorably depends on the effect such a change will have on the personal efficiency of the labour, and upon the system of management. The friends of the movement claim;

- (1.) that labor is more active and attentive;
- (2.) that that they lose less time from tardiness in the mornings and half hearted work in the evening;
- (3.) that on account of their greater vigor the machinery can be run at a much higher speed than could be maintained under the longer day. The management, also, has more inducement to keep things moving, and lose less time from break-downs because they are prepared to ~~repair~~ the damage at once. It is, therefore, easy to see how the shorter day might be made much more profitable to the employer as well as more pleasant for the workmen. That this is no mere theory can be proven by numerous instances where ~~by~~ shortening of the hours of labor have resulted in an increased product. In some cases where

the product fell off at first it again came up to the old standard after six or twelve months when the shorter hours had had time to tell on the spirits of the men.

* "The managing partner of a Mass. Cotton mill told the Labor Commissioners of that state in 1883, that when he had reduced the factory hours, fifteen years before, from thirteen to eleven hours he found that with the same machinery the production of prints rose from 90,000 to 120,000 yards per week, and the Middlesex Company of Lowell, on making the still greater reduction from thirteen hours to ten hours and twenty-four minutes, in 1872, found that by increasing the speed of their machinery so as to make as many revolutions in the day as before, and replacing female labor by male to a very slight degree (3½%), their product increased by 290,117 pieces (or about \$675,000 worth) in the year and the earnings of their working people by fifty seven percent."

While these are extraordinary cases it tends to show that shortening the hours do not necessarily lessen production. That this was generally understood by employers is proved from the fact that immediately after the

'Ten Hours Act', between the years 1850-1855, seven hundred and fifty new mills were built in the United Kingdom: that two hundred and twenty six old mills were extended by additions. This is conclusive evidence that the profitability of the ten hour day was generally accepted by employers.

But it will be objected that all the above examples are wide of the subject; that the reductions where made were from excessively long days, and while a reduction from fourteen to twelve or from twelve to ten hours might show such results it does not argue that a still further reduction of from ten to eight hours would still give an increased production. It is evident that there is a certain limit below which any reduction in hours will certainly reduce the product and the question becomes one of finding the length of day at which the maximum results can be had from a minimum expenditure of vital energy.

But examples are not lacking to show that the reduction to eight hours does not under most cases reduce the production, and consequently the wages of the workmen and the

Profits of the employers are not lowered. Of course in certain kinds of work, such as that done by watchmen, conductors and engineers on railroads, where they cannot do any more work on account of their longer rest, the shorter day will necessarily require more men, and to that extent, cut down employers profits, but what is lost in dividends to capitalists will be distributed among the labours and thereby, perhaps, do more good to society as a whole.

* In 1844 Mr. Grog, a large cotton manufacturer, accidentally discovered that when his mills were running only four days a week in slack times his men often produced five days quantity and earned five days wages.

* A. Mr. W. A. Darbshire, slate quarry owner in Wales, thinks as much can easily be done in eight hours as in ten, because he always finds when he puts his quarry on short-time during bad trade, and works five days a week instead of six, the total production is never diminished, and is sometimes increased.

* Messrs W. Allen and company on the first of Jan. 1892 reduced hours from

fifty three to forty-eight per. work. When the reduction was made the men consented to a temporary reduction of wages of five percent, but at the end of six months Mr. Allen found that the production had increased so he gave them back their old wages and paid up the arrears of the five percent reduction. This result was obtained in machine work as well as in hand work and was attributed to, less waste of time, more energy in the work, and more regular attendance of the men in the mornings, etc.

It would seem that where labor does the same work in the shorter day it should receive no reduction in wages, and it has been found that even in piece work and in the case of men working at machine made articles by the piece, that in most cases, the wages of these piece workers do not fall off, at least only temporarily. For example, the bakers of Melbourne reduced their working day from fifteen hours to eight without adding to the price of a loaf of bread or losing anything in wages. It seems to be shown from all the evidences that where ever production has not

been diminished wages have not been lowered, and that where wages had been reduced because it was expected that production would be reduced they have risen again when it was discovered that the production did not fall off.

There are many persons who argue for an eight hour day because they think it will make room for a large number of the unemployed labor. Mr. Guntton, author of "Wealth and Progress", goes so far as to say that; "The direct and immediate effect of the general adoption of the eight-hour system in the United States, not including agriculture and domestic service, would absorb not only all the unemployed of this country but also the unemployed of England, Wales, Scotland, France, and Germany as well. This," he says "is not fanciful speculation but is what would necessarily result from the natural operation of economic forces in the effort to supply the normal consumption".

But what are the facts? What, for example, was the result of the passage of the "Ten Hours Act;" This act took eleven

hours per. work off of 500,000 textile workers and would, according to Mr. Guntous figures provide for 90,000 new men; but the evidences in the case point irresistibly to the conclusion that the "Ten Hours Act" did not make room for one hundred new men.

In 1883 the building, iron, and tobacco trades of New York had seventy-four successful strikes for shorter hours. It had been estimated before hand by the employers that it would necessitate the employment of one thousand and three new men, but did not require the assistance of a single new hand the old staff did the same work in the shorter day.

When three eight hour shifts are used instead of two twelve hour ones it would seem to require an increase of fifty percent in the number of hands. But Messrs Brimmer, Mound & Co only required twelve and a half percent more hands on introducing the three eight hour shifts—and it is not stated whether these extra hands were required to keep up the former rate of production or were employed to increase the product. But we might be

warranted in supposing that an increased product was desired, because the old hands regained their old rate of wages and therefore probably, did the same work in the shorter day.

But it is in the effect on the laborer himself that we must look for the greatest benefits and that in the line of mental, moral, and physical development. As before stated the natural factors in production are open alike to all nations, and in the future a nation's industrial standing will depend mainly on intelligent labor.

What avails it if we have compulsory education if our laborers have no time to read? Of what good to the working man is his vote if he has no time to think? Under a short hour system the workman has two or three hours more at his disposal; he is less exhausted and will naturally enlarge his social relations. He will discuss the issues of the day, read books and papers, thus keeping himself abreast of the times and adding to his general information. He will also have some

incentive to use his time to some advantage. For example in Victoria where the system is more prevalent than in any other country many of the working people have neat little houses in the suburbs of the city, where they spend their evenings cultivating a garden or at odd jobs about the place thus adding immeasurably to the comfort and convenience of the family.

I think it will be seen, from what has been said, that an eight-hour day, if it could be brought about, would be a very desirable thing and no one who has investigated the matter doubts that it would be a great thing for labor. But when we come to put the theory in practice the difficulty begins. Employers are as a rule busy men, who have worked up a successful business by looking out for the small things, and are generally only making very moderate percents on their investments. It is natural for such men to shrink from any change in their business methods so radical as this appears; and it is no wonder that they can see nothing but failure for themselves in such a course. Even where

men have become convinced of the merits of the shorter day, and would be glad to change if their neighbors would, they fear the consequences of starting out alone and closing their factories or stores while their competitors are running. It is evident, therefore, that little can be expected through the voluntary concessions of employers.

Of course the labours can do much by united effort through their organizations but this method is open to several objections. In the first place strikes of whatever sort are wasteful in the extreme and should never be resorted to except after all other means have failed; and when they become general as in the case of the Chicago strike, they involve national interests, and cannot be tolerated. Again, but a small part of labor is so organized that it can demand what it wants and the labor that needs the shorter hours the most is the very kind that has no organization. Yet much has been done in this line by the labor organizations: for example the short hours enjoyed in Victoria are due almost entirely to the efforts of labor organizations. As to legislation, the subject is

so complicated that any direct legislation would be out of the question. There are many trades that it would be manifestly unjust to put under an eight-hour day - viz. in all trades where the work is pushed during a short season and then, perhaps, nothing done for weeks. A law that would be of any service would have to be very general in its scope, allowing great freedom for adjustment to the needs of special trades. (by some scheme of trade option, perhaps). It should also provide officers and other means of enforcement.

On the whole the question is a broad one and one that cannot be solved in a day. The solution will be brought about only by an intelligent and determined demand on the part of labor for its rights. In the evolution of society reforms never come suddenly but progress is made very gradually little by little. But the tendency seems to be towards a shorter day and let us hope that the time will come when everyone in "Free America" can have "Eight hours work, Eight hours recreation, Eight hours rest."

Frank E. Chapple