
The Working Week

"Englishmen", says Marx, 'always well up in the Bible, knew well enough that man, unless by elective grace a capitalist, or landlord, or sinecurist, is commanded to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow".

There is, it is true, an even older story current among certain tribes to the effect that there was no Garden of Eden, and that as soon as man and woman were created they were ordered to start work; but for most of our ancestors it was sufficient to accept the story as given in the Bible, according to which the day was for labour and the night for sleep. This made for very long hours of work, but the religions of the West provided for a Sabbath or Sunday and there were many other 'holy days' during the year.

During the 18th century a 12-hour day appears to have been regarded as normal in Britain, mealtimes being sometimes added and sometimes excluded. From Campbell's 'Complete Tradesman' (published in 1747) we gather that in the London building trades the normal hours were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., with probably half an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. The 'millwrights' who made machinery were probably classed with the building trades, but other crafts worked longer. The London bookbinders are said to have worked from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in 1772, after which they secured a reduction of an hour by means of a strike. In 1786 there was another strike for a reduction of an hour, which was successful although their leaders spent fourteen months in Newgate; the anniversary of their release, "the glorious twenty-eighth of June", was long celebrated by a dinner of the union members. In 1794 another strike brought the hour of leaving work to 6 p.m., and a further strike in 1806 secured a tea-break of half an hour. The women employed in this trade worked from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., ceasing work at 6 p.m. on Saturdays. (See 'The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951', by Ellic Howe and John Child). Miners, on the other hand, worked much shorter hours, sometimes not more than eight per day.

The Industrial Revolution

There can be no doubt that while some skilled and well-organised craftsmen were able to improve their position during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Industrial Revolution worsened the position of many workers, the most unfortunate victims being the women and children employed in the textile industries. Efforts have been made to discredit the statements of Robert Owen and Karl Marx on this point by citing the long hours which were often worked before the Industrial Revolution, but such arguments are not really convincing. For in small workshops and on small farms the pace was set by the employer in person, who did a great deal of the work himself and was conscious of the limitations of human nature; while the general irregularity of habits (including drunkenness) resulted in many "days off". But in the factories the pace was set by machinery, the steam-engine being of course much more regular than the water-wheel., and the majority of factory workers were not stubborn craftsmen but defenceless women and children. A typical mill was that noted

by Baines in his 'History of the Cotton Manufacture', in which the adult mechanics who attended to the machinery had half an hour for tea which was not allowed to the children; and down to 1919 it was regarded as quite normal for boys and girls employed in textile mills to work longer hours than grown-up men outside.

The squeezing of work out of the operatives was achieved by many ingenious devices, which can only be summarised in brief. The principal methods adopted were:-

(i) Elimination of meal times. In 1866 a French visitor to Paisley was taken round a mill where the children worked twelve hours a day without a break. He was told that they did not feel fatigued, but does not seem to have asked the children.

(ii) Working unlimited overtime.

(iii) Working a continuous double shift. Night shifts had not been unknown in the mines and shipyards and in various crafts (e.g. bookbinding) but Arkwright introduced the practice of working his mills night and day. This was generally followed by other millowners, the saying in the textile areas being that "the beds never get cold", and it was carried on until the Ten Hours' Act of 1847. The consequent disruption of family life was so hated by the operatives that they have opposed the resumption of night-shift working down to the 20th century.

(iv) The "relay" system, known in the 20th century as the "spreadover". Under this system the shift was split into sections, as were the workers engaged in it, thus making possible all kinds of ingenious arrangements. Mantoux, in his 'Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century', cites an example in which the workers in a factory were divided into two sections, each of which worked for eight hours and was replaced by the others, so that they all worked for sixteen hours out of twenty-four. Much more complicated systems were devised between 1847 and 1850 to evade the Ten Hours' Act (Marx, 'Capital', chap.X, sect.7)

(v) Giving the skilled male workers an interest in overworking the women and children, either by paying them a bonus on the output of the letter (e.g. the overlookers), or by allowing them to engage their helpers on a sub-contract basis (e.g. the mule spinners).

The net result of all this was that, as a Factory Inspector afterwards put it: "The fact is,, that prior to the Act of 1833, young persons and children were worked all night, all day; or both ad libitum".

Matters were greatly aggravated by the wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France from 1793 to 1815; which created a tremendous demand for goods and for skilled labour at a time when skilled labour was still in short supply. Engels, who no doubt drew on the reminiscences of people who had survived the early days of the Industrial Revolution, wrote in 1881!

"The rapid extension of steam and machinery was not sufficient for the still faster increasing demand for their produce. Wages in these trades,, except those of children sold from the workhouse to the manufacturer, were as a rule high; those of such skilled manual labour as could not be done without were very high: what a dyer, a mechanic, a velvet-cutter, a hand-mule spinner, used to receive now sounds fabulous." ('Trades Unions', in 'The Labour Standard', May 28th,1881)

These high money wages can be verified from contemporary account books, but they were offset by the enormous rise in prices, which stimulated workers far beyond their powers. The handloom weavers, whose wages were falling rapidly at this time; had another incentive to overwork, since the parish overseers gave them Poor Relief as a bonus on their piece-work earnings. A writer of 1830 concluded that:

"A principal cause of the increase of capital, during the war, proceeded from the greater exertions, and perhaps the greater privations of the labouring classes, the most numerous in every society. More women and children were compelled by necessitous circumstances, to enter upon laborious occupations, and former workmen were, from the same cause, obliged to spend a greater portion of their time to increase production." ('Essays on Political Economy, in which are illustrated the principal causes of the present national distress'.)

The Rev. Dr. Malthus, not generally regarded as a sentimentalist, clearly recognised what was taking place:

"Corn and labour rarely march quite abreast: but there is an obvious limit beyond which they cannot be separated. With regard to the unusual exertions made by the labouring classes in periods of dearness, which produce the fall of wages noticed in the evidence before the Parliamentary Inquiry of 1814-15; they are most meritorious in the individuals, and certainly favour the growth of capital. But no man of humanity could wish to see them constant and unremitted. They are most admirable as a temporary relief; but if they were constantly in action, effects of a similar kind would result from them, as from the population of a country being pushed to the very extreme limits of its food." ('Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent', 1815)

Ho further commented: "I confess that I see, with misgiving, the great extension of the practice of piece-wage. Really hard work during 12 or 14 hours of the day, or for any longer time, is too much for any human being."

Early reformers

Opposition to long hours in the mills was slow in developing. It is true that the rules of the Friendly Associated Society of Mule Spinners of Manchester in 1795 provide that "no member shall boast of the prodigious quantity of cotton he hath spun" - which may have been intended to check competition among the workers. But we have it on the authority of Philip Grant, a pioneer of the movement for shorter hours, that in the early part of the 19th century any mention of the subject aroused opposition among the workers themselves. Hence the initiative came from without, in the first place from a small group of public-spirited doctors led by John Ferriar and Thomas Perceval, who in 1795 set up a society called the Manchester Board of Health.

As early as 1784 the Justices of the Peace for the Manchester area had refused to allow workhouse children to be apprenticed to factories where they were to be employed for more than ten hours a day, but this had no practical effect since the worst offenders were millowners who brought their children from outside Lancashire. A later resolution by

the Yorkshire Justices merely specified "a reasonable number of hours", which was of course meaningless.

In 1796 a report drawn up by Dr. Perceval was submitted to the Manchester Board of Health, stating that! "The untimely labour of the night, and the protracted labour of the day, with respect to children, not only tends to diminish future expectations as to the general sum of life and industry, by impairing the strength and destroying the vital stamina of the rising generation, but it too often gives encouragement to idleness, extravagance and profligacy in the parents, who, contrary to the order of nature, subsist by the oppression of their offspring." He accordingly moved that!

"From the excellent regulations which subsist in several cotton factories, it appears that many of these evils may; in a considerable degree, be obviated; we are therefore warranted by experience, and are assured we shall have the support of the liberal proprietors of these factories, in proposing an application for Parliamentary aid (if other methods appear not likely to effect the purpose), to establish a general system of laws for the wise, humane and equal government of all such works."

In 1802 an Act was passed at the instance of Sir Robert Peel, "having the assistance of Dr. Perceval and other eminent gentlemen of Manchester", which provided among other things that no parish apprentice in "cotton and other mills" should be obliged to work more than twelve hours a day, exclusive of meals. The enforcement of the Act was however left to the Justices of the Peace, who, if not themselves millowners or the friends of millowners, were far too busy hunting down 'Jacobins' and Parliamentary Reformers to worry their heads about factory children.

In 1816 a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to look into the condition of "Children in Manufactories", largely as the result of agitation by Robert Owen, who had debated with Ferriar and Perceval in Manchester and had already introduced a ten-hour day into his own works at New Lanark. One of the principal witnesses was Sir Robert Peel, who admitted that "owing to the present use of steam power in factories, the Forty-second (Act) of the King (i.e. the Act of 1802) is likely to become a dead letter. Large buildings are now erected, not only as formerly on the banks of streams, but in the midst of populous towns, and instead of parish apprentices being sought after, the children of the surrounding poor are preferred, whose masters being free from the operation of the former Act of Parliament are subjected to no limitation of time in the prosecution of their business, though children are frequently admitted there to work thirteen to fourteen hours per day, at the tender age of seven years, and even in some cases still younger."

The outcome was another Act in 1819, which extended the provisions of that of 1802 to all children in cotton factories, but since its enforcement was left to the Justices of the Peace it remained us much a dead letter as did its predecessor. Not until 1833 did a really effective Factory Act, prescribing a 69-hour week for children under eighteen employed in textile mills, contain a clause providing for the appointment of Inspectors to ensure its enforcement.

Arguments against shorter hours

The Act of 1833 did not satisfy the ardent reformers. Cobbett, whose grasp of contemporary realities was often better than his history, wrote in his 'Weekly Political Register' of Dec. 14th, 1833, that! "King Alfred, who was the real founder of English liberty and English law, laid it down as a rule, that the twenty-four hours should be divided thus: eight for labour, eight for rest, eight for recreation." The manufacturers and 'political economists', however, did not agree with King Alfred, and even the Ten Hours' Act covering adult women in the textile mills was not enacted until 1847.

All kinds of arguments were brought up against factory legislation, most of which were repeated down to modern times. The crudest was that of the millowners at the various Committees and Commissions, to the effect that the long hours were not injurious and that the children in particular really liked them. This was in fact contrary to common observation. But it was sometimes possible to produce a renegade from trade unionism who had survived factory conditions and who was prepared to testify on behalf of the employers. Thus the author of a pamphlet published in 1834 compares Jonathan Shipley; leader of a General Union of Cotton Spinners in 1810, to Masaniello (leader of the uprising of Neapolitan fishermen in 1647) but goes on to say that he had since become "a respectable mechanic", his respectability consisting in a declaration that long hours worked by children did not cause deformity of the limbs.

Champions of the workers who did not choose this form of "respectability" had to face all kinds of slanders, which are curiously reminiscent of those used against Communists and militant trade unionists in modern times. Robert Owen's atheism was extensively used to discredit his demand for a shorter working day. Dr. Andrew Ure, whose 'Philosophy of Manufactures' summarises all the arguments against Factory Legislation, describes John Doherty of the Manchester Spinners as "An atheist, who had been convicted of a gross assault upon a woman". In actual fact Doherty was an Irish Roman Catholic and a man of regular family life, although he had been imprisoned on account of a fight with a strikebreaker. Richard Oastler, the "Factory King" who had agitated against the "Slavery" of factory children in Yorkshire, presented less of a front for attack; since he was an Evangelical Churchman and a Tory in politics. He was, however, engaged in a financial dispute with Squire Thornhill of Fixby Hall near Huddersfield, who dismissed Oastler from his post as agent of his estate, and had him confined in the Fleet prison for debt.

Intelligent people saw that these personalities were merely a distraction from the main issue, and more sophisticated arguments had to be produced for their benefit, the central contention being that a ten-hour day would lead to the ruin of the textile industries. As Cobbett put it! "The main argument; of the opponents of Lord Ashley was, that if two hours' labour from these children, under eighteen years of age, were taken off, the consequences, on a national scale, might be 'truly dreadful'. It might, and would, destroy manufacturing capital; prevent us from carrying on competition with foreign manufacturers, reduce mills to

a small part of their present value; and break up, as it were, the wealth and power of the country; render it comparatively feeble; and expose it to be an easy prey to foreign nations."

('Factory Bill', in 'Political Register', July 20th, 1833.)

To this Cobbett in his speech on the Bill rejoined!

"But, Sir, we have this night discovered, that the shipping, the land, and the Bank and its credit, are all nothing worth, compared with the labour of three hundred thousand little girls in Lancashire: Aye, when compared with only an eighth part of the labour of those three hundred thousand little girls, from whose labour, if we only deduct two hours a day, away goes the wealth, away goes the capital, away go the resources, the power and the glory of England!"

The argument as to competition from abroad was, however, serious; for Marx tells us: "Between 1815 and 1830 the competition with the continent of Europe and with the United States sets in."

The first person to grasp the solution to this problem was the clear-sighted John Doherty, and the first meeting of the Society for National Regeneration set up under his leadership on November 25th, 1833, drew up a resolution: "That this meeting earnestly appeal to their fellow men in France, Germany and the other countries of Europe, and on the continent of America, for their support and cooperation in this effort, to improve the condition of the labourer in all parts of the world."

In the summer of 1834 a group of organised workers at Nantes wrote to the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union proposing "to unite the working men of several countries", and this was reprinted on September 13th, 1834, by the official organ of the newly-formed American Trades Union, which called it "the most important movement that has ever been made in this world" and went on to say: "From it will result union and harmony between nations that have ever been hostile to each other. The interest of labour is a subject upon which all workmen can agree...we may expect that it will not be long before the working classes of every part of the civilised world will be united by an indissoluble bond."

Those efforts may not have seemed very effective at the moment, but they were to bear fruit in the International Working Men's Association of 1864.

The attack on holidays

"Protestantism", says Marx, 'by changing almost all the traditional holidays into workdays, plays an important part in the genesis of capital."

The campaign against holidays was carried on with missionary zeal. The standard of perfection was set by the Rev. John Wesley, who in the model school which he founded for the children of Wesleyan ministers at Kingswood (near Bristol) made no provision for games or holidays, because "he who plays when he is a child will play when he is a man". (It is true that this proved too much for flesh and blood, and Wesley himself had to admit that even at Kingswood matters did not go entirely according to plan.)

We are told that Samuel Wilderspin of Hornsey, who carried on the work of Robert Owen in regard to infants' schools, was agreeably surprised to find on his arrival in Scotland "the superior standing of the Scottish schoolmaster to that of his own countrymen. Whereas, in England, his position was far from being respectable, and was in some cases humiliating, in Scotland he was treated with respect, was received into the best society, was held next in estimation to the minister, and had generally a vacation of two months in duration, during which he could repair to the sea-shore and recruit the health and strength necessary for the discharge of his important and responsible duties.'!

(Leitchy 'Practical Educationists')

In Scotland and the North of England the medieval week's "holiday" associated with a commercial Fair was maintained right through the Industrial Revolution and to this day, though the commercial aspect of the Fair became obsolete long ago. Such, for example, are the Fair Week in Glasgow (created by charter in 1159 "for eight full days from the octaves of the Apostles Peter and Paul"), the Whit Week holidays in Manchester, and the "Wakes Weeks" and "Bowling-tide Holidays" in the textile towns.

But in London there was nothing of the sort except the great religious festivals. The Bank of England; whose employees formed a highly select body, reduced the number of its holidays from 47 in 1761 to 40 in 1825 and to four in 1834; and smaller employers followed suit. (The four Bank Holidays were made statutory holidays in 1871) Even Cobbett, the champion of factory workers, does not seem to have seen anything wrong with this trend. In an account of the English character, written in 1816, he says:

"People of other countries have some leisure hours. An Englishman has none. . . . I wonder such a people should ever have had a Sunday or Churches. The Pope has lost us some Saints' Days but they have been disregarded by the nation at large; and, though retained for a long while in the public offices, they have all been abolished, at last, by Act of Parliament, the nation being too busy to indulge the whims of the Holy Father any longer. . . .

"But the great thing of all is the incessant labour, which is continually creating things, which give strength to a country. I do not know that we excel some other nations in ingenuity in the useful arts. Workmen are very adroit in America. They build as well, and more neatly than we do. They work as nimbly. But they do not work so much. They take some leisure, which we never do."

('To the People of Southampton', in the 'Political Register',
March 23rd, 1816.)

Even the weekly day of rest was no longer sacrosanct, notwithstanding the express provisions of the Lord's Day Observance Act of 1676, which enacted that no work at all should be done on Sunday, works of necessity and charity only excepted. In Scotland, Wales and Ireland even more stringent legislation was passed and is still in force, notably that closing public houses on Sun-days. But in England, and especially in London, evasion of the law began almost as soon as it was on the Statute

Book. To the Sunday opening of public houses was added the Sunday publication of newspapers, and excuses were never wanting for multiplying "works of necessity and charity". With the development of modern industry, it became necessary in many industries, such as iron and steel to maintain continuous production, and in addition a tremendous burden was imposed on transport and distribution which made Sunday work a necessity. In 1845 the British Government of Lord John Russell gave official sanction for the practice of Sunday work by ordering that the mails should be both sorted and delivered on Sundays and the Sunday post was maintained until 1914.

In principle Sunday work was compensated by a day off in lieu during the week, but what happened in practice is well dogcribbed by the Fourth Report of the Children's Employment Commission of 1865:

"Amongst a number of boys it will, of course, not unfrequently happen that one or more are from some cause absent. When this happens, their place is made up by one or more boys, who work in the other turn. That that is a well understood system is plain...from the answer of the manager of some large rolling-mills, who, when I asked him how the places of the boys absent from their turn was made up, 'I daresay sir, you know that as well as I do', and admitted the fact."

Religious leaders, even the most Puritanical, were remarkably tolerant of Sunday work. As Marx put it in 1867:

"In England even now occasionally in rural districts a labourer is condemned to imprisonment for desecrating the Sabbath, by working in his front garden. The same labourer is punished for breach of contract if he remains away from his metal, paper, or glass works on the Sunday, even if it be from a religious whim. The orthodox Parliament will hear nothing of Sabbath-breaking if it occurs in the process of expanding capital. A memorial (August 1863) in which the London day-labourers in fish and poultry shops asked for the abolition of Sunday labour, states that their work lasts for the first 6 days of the week an an average 15 hours a day, and on Sunday 8-10 hours. From this same memorial we learn also that the delicate gourmands among the aristocratic hypocrites of Exeter Hall especially encourage this 'Sunday labour'." ('Capital', Kerr edn. vol.1, p.291 footnote.)

Even when workers were guaranteed a day of rest on Sunday They were often compelled to work till late on Saturday, when their wages were at last paid, and as a consequence their wives, especially in London, were obliged to do their shopping on Sunday morning. In 1855 Parliament found itself so horrified by this practice that the Commons gave a third reading to a Sunday Trading Bill directed against it. The National Charter Association immediately called on the workers of London to go to Bydo Park on Sunday "to see how religiously the aristocracy is observing the Sabbath and how anxious it is not to employ its servants and horses on that day." Hundreds of thousandsof people turned up on the next three Sundays, and the pageant of aristocratic carriages was greeted with such cries as: "Why don't you Sabbatarians go to Church;" and "Get out and walk and let your slaves rest." The Bill was withdrawn.

In 1873 a mild sensation was caused by a pamphlet issued by the newly-formed United General Post Office and Telegraph Service Benefit Society, which contained a rough cartoon of a portly bishop presenting a heavily-laden postman with a tract on Sunday Observance. The union then approached various religious and political loaders on the question of Sunday deliveries. The Rev. Dr. Parker of the City Temple expressed sympathy but pointed out the great hardship that would be caused if a man were to be deprived of the opportunity of receiving an urgent message from a member of his family on a Sunday. Cardinal Manning would not commit himself since he was engaged in delicate negotiations with the Government as to the establishment of a Roman Catholic University. Charles Bradlaugh and Professor Fawcett were impressed by the postmen's arguments, but doubted the wisdom of raising the question at this juncture. The most definite support was given by Joseph Chamberlain, who thereby secured the whole of the postal workers' vote in Birmingham; but once elected Mayor he announced that the commercial interests of that city would be severely damaged by the ending of the Sunday mail. The Sunday delivery continued until the First World War. (Swift, 'History of Postal Agitation', pp.84-5)

The Weekend

It was of little use passing Acts of Parliament against Sabbath-breaking if work was carried on to such a late hour on Saturday night that the people had no time for relaxation. In 1825 this realisation brought about a Factory Act which reduced the hours of children under the age of sixteen from 12 to 9 hours on Saturdays, thus enabling factory workers to go home at 6 p.m. on Saturday evening instead of at 9 p.m. This was very far from being a "Saturday half-holiday", and it is too much to say (as is said by 'Chambers' Encyclopaedia' in an article on 'Holidays and Resorts') that! "the Saturday half-holiday movement had already become common in industry ; without general legislation, by the middle of the 19th century."

In 1844 the London engineers, whose organisation was exceptionally strong, secured a reduction of hours from 60 to 58.5 or 57.5 a week, but this merely enabled them to leave work between 3.30 and 4.30 on Saturday afternoon and as usual the textile factory operatives lagged far behind. They had hoped that the Ten Hours' Act of 1847 would give them a real half-holiday, but their employers thought otherwise and the amending Act of 1850 only allowed them to stop work at 2 p.m. on Saturday on condition that they worked 10.5 hours on other week days.

In 1871 the victory of the Tyneside engineers in securing the Nine Hour Day was the beginning of a nation-wide movement for shorter hours. The Scottish engineers secured a 51-hour week, giving them a real break on Saturday afternoons, and a number of leading employers, such as Tangyo in Birmingham, also introduced Saturday half-holidays. But the movement was not general in England, and the Scots were forced to give up the 51-hour week in the depression year of 1879. Not until 1890 did the engineers on the Tyne and Wear secure the "Twelve o'clock Saturday" by means of another strike, after which the principle was conceded in most British engineering centres. The operative cotton spinners at Oldham

struck for a "Twelve o'clock Saturday" in 1871, but without success, and successive amendments to the Factory Acts only knocked a little off the working Saturdays, the Act of 1901 (the last until 1937) merely ensuring a 55.5-hour week.

By this time, however, the principle that workers were entitled to some "time off" was generally admitted. One of the by-products of the Nine Hours Movement of 1871 was Sir John Lubbock's Act of that year which provided for four 'Bank Holidays' in the year. Even farm workers began to challenge the age-old practice of working all the hours of daylight, and by the beginning of the 20th century farmers were complaining that they could not make men work later than 3 p.m. on Saturdays. It was not, however, until 1913 that a strike of farm-workers in Lancashire secured a full half-holiday, and the official report of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was able to say; "This is the first time in the history of agricultural labourers they have ever had a reduction of hours."

Needless to say, the great development of football clubs and other societies for sport and relaxation only took place after the Saturday half-holiday had been secured.

International action

The linking of the agitation for shorter hours in various countries was first undertaken on a world-wide scale by the International Working Men's Association founded in 1864. From the time of his 'Inaugural Address' Marx always urged upon the International the need for action to secure factory legislation and the Geneva Congress of 1866 declared:

'Limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition in the absence of which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive. We propose eight hours as the legal limit of the working day.'

The International, however, could only indicate a general policy to be carried out by the trade unions of the various countries, and all kinds of difficulties were raised in practice. Thus William Allan, secretary to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, stated in 1867 that while he was in favour of an eight-hour day he could not see it coming in his own lifetime. (He died in 1874.) Allan was taken by surprise when on April 1st, 1871; the members of his own Society in Sunderland struck for the Nine Hour Day, and launched a movement which spread through the country. The successful conclusion of the movement was largely due to the effective help given by the International in preventing the introduction of blacklegs from the Continent. (A small group of Germans who were imported into Armstrong's works in Newcastle ended their period of usefulness to the employers when they demanded the Nine Hour Day for themselves.)

The agitation of this period brought forth many brilliant successes, notably that of the Fife Miners who already in 1870 had refused to work more than eight days a day, and had celebrated their victory by a gala

which is still celebrated annually by the Scottish District of the National Union of Mineworkers.

A crippling blow was however struck when the British trade union leaders, intimidated by the anti-labour campaign which had set in after the suppression of the Paris Commune; severed their connection with the International. This confirmed the fact, only too obvious to Marx, that the policy of the International was too far advanced for the British trade unions of the day. The Geneva Congress had advocated eight hours as "the legal limit of the working day", but according to the Webbs: "In the state of mind, of 1872, of the House of Commons, and even of the workmen in other trades, it would have proved as impossible as it did in 1847 to secure an avowed restriction of the hours of male adults."

The movement in America

While the movement was marking time in Europe it was making great headway in the New World. The agitation in the United States was pioneered by Ira Steward of the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' Union, together with W.H. Sylvis of the National Holders' Union and Richard Trelvellick of the International Union of Ship Carpenters and Caulkers, a native of the Scilly Isles who had already taken part in the agitation for an 8-hour day in Australia. These men took the initiative in calling a national conference of trade unions at Baltimore in 1866, at which the National Labour Union was launched. This Congress declared:

"The first and great necessity of the present, to free the labour of this country from capitalistic slavery, is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working day in all States of the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained."

Marx commented on this! "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California." ('Capital', vol.1. chap.X, sect.7) Marx points out that it was not a mere coincidence that the Baltimore Congress, acting quite independently of the I.W.M.A., nevertheless put forward the same demands. In fact, attempts were made to link the two organisations, and the Baltimore Congress expressed its sympathy for the International and wished them "Godspeed in their glorious work". In 1870 the National Labour Union passed a resolution expressing "its adherence to the principles of the International". Soon afterwards, the National Labour Union ceased to exist; but Ira Steward, in particular, kept in touch with marxists.

In 1868 the United States Congress actually passed an Eight-Hour law relating to Federal employees; but it was not enforced. "The way to get it", pointed out P.J. McGuire (founder of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and at that time a socialist) is "by organisation....

If you want an Eight-hour law, make it yourself." At the 1882 Convention of the Federation of Organised Trades (forerunner of the present A.F.L. and C.I.O.) McGuire declared: "We want an enactment by the workingmen themselves that on a given day eight hours should constitute a day's work, and they ought to enforce it themselves." This was the beginning of the famous eight-hours movement in America which culminated in the general strike of 350,000 workers on May 1st, 1886.

The Second International

On July 14th, 1889, the centenary of the Fall of the Bastille, the leaders of the Socialist movement from many countries met in Paris and set up the Second International. The American Federation of Labour was not actually represented, but its president, Samuel Gompers, sent a telegram informing the delegates of the American plans for a general strike on May 1st, 1890, and proposing that May 1st should be celebrated as "an International Labour Day", a proposal which was adopted. As is well known, May Day has ever since been celebrated throughout the world as an international workers' day, and has always been closely associated with the struggle for shorter hours.

The actual conduct of the campaign in different industries was, however, generally left to the various "Trade Internationals", the first of which was the Universal Federation of Glassworkers set up on American initiative in 1884. The Ruhr miners secured an eight-hour day by a groat strike in 1889, and the International Federation of Miners set up in the following year launched a campaign for a legal eight-hour day which gained its object in Britain in 1908 and in other countries about the same time.

The weakness of the Second International was that it was limited to Western Europe. In America, the A.F. of L. decided to leave the initiative to individual trades; the Carpenters and Joiners conducted a successful strike for the eight-hour day in 1890, but the experiment was never repeated. The leaders of the A.F. of L. became very conservative and it was not until the 'New Deal' period under President Roosevelt, in the 1930's, that American workers secured the 40-hour week.

The effect of colonial exploitation

The textile industries, which supplied Marx with so much of his data for his chapter of 'Capital' on "The Working Day", have always provided the classic example of overwork. The introduction of the Factory Acts in Western Europe merely helped to transplant the evils which they were intended to combat into other continents, (just as in the United States the very belated introduction of factory legislation into New England stimulated the growth of these industries in the Southern States). As early as 1873 the M.P. for Borwick-on-Tweed^ a Mr. Stapleton, informed his constituents that! "If China should become a great manufacturing country, I do not see how the manufacturing population of Europe could sustain the contest without descending to the level of their competitors." Marx's comment on this remark was! "The wished-for goal of English capital is no longer Continental wages, but Chinese." ('Capital', vol.1, p.658)

As we know, China has since become "a great manufacturing country", but it was preceded by India and Japan, together with the Latin-American countries. It is well known that the textile industries are the first to be developed in any country-, since the technique is fairly easy to learn (except in the manufacture of fine cloths) and the workers employed are mainly women and children who, precisely because they are women and children, have always been easy to exploit. This applies above all to the cotton industry, since the countries which have introduced factory production within the last century employ the "ring-frame" which is generally tended by a woman or girl, thus eliminating the need for a skilled male operative.

The issue was very clearly put in 1890 by John Burns who, at the Trades Union Congress held that year at Liverpool secured the passing of a resolution in favour of a legal eight-hour day, in spite of the opposition of Mr. Birtwistle of the Cotton Weavers and Mr. Mawdsley, the Tory secretary of the Operative Spinners. In a speech to his constituents at Battersea after the Congress, Burns set out the whole position:

"If I remember rightly, Mr. Birtwistle said that an eight-hour day would mean ruin to the textile trades of Lancashire....I want to show you that Mr. Birtwistle and Mr. Mawdsley are altogether wrong...."

"Lancashire trade, although it has increased 100 per cent in sixteen years to Eastern markets, is as compared with Indian exports to the same markets a relatively languishing industry. That is inevitable. England is no longer the WORKSHOP OF THE WORLD, and what is more, I don't want it to be. The right to work has been abused, the right to leisure, which is more important, has yet to be enjoyed. (Loud cheers)

"What I desire to see is that the English and Indian operatives, by one method, the eight-hour legal day, should have less work, more leisure and recreation... In the race of long hours and low wages between Lancashire and Indian operatives, death and degradation are their rewards. The employers secure the prize by exploiting both. (Cheers)"

Burns went on to explain the power of India "to beat us out of the Eastern market" as being due simply to the fact that "unrestrained by law, the Indian operatives are ruthlessly overworked and underpaid." Whereas the working week in Lancashire was limited by law to 56.5 hours, "in India they work from 72 to 100, and often labour 12, 14 and 16 hours at a stretch. (Cries of 'Shame!')" Whereas Lancashire operatives had as holidays every Sunday, with a half-holiday every Saturday and ten Bank Holidays - 88 days in all - Indian operatives "work seven days per week, and only have 15 holidays as against Lancashire's 88. ('Shame!')" He therefore urged that British trade unionists should "try and get their Indian brethren to become firm members of trades unions", and that the Factory Acts should apply to India also.

(Speech delivered by John Burns on "The Liverpool Congress", at the Washington Music Hall, Battersea, on Sunday Sept. 21st, 1890; with Michael Davitt in the chair.)

The arguments put forward by John Burns and other pioneer socialists had only a limited effect. The International Federation of Textile Workers had succeeded by 1914 in reducing hours of work in Western Europe

to something like the British limit, but they did not extend their activities to other parts of the world. An Indian Factory Act had been passed as early as 1881, but as late as 1934 a similar Act only limited hours of work in "permanent factories" to 54 per week. In China under the Kuomintang, and in Imperial Japan, matters were even worse. In China weekly day of rest was only introduced by the People's Government in 1949, and in Hongkong under British rule the old customs still prevailed in 1958. On July 1st of that year, Mr. Thornton, Labour M.P. for Farnworth, declared that

"the labour laws in Hongkong were the worst in Asia and probably the worst in the world. For women to be called on to work in a spinning room or weaving shed for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, with only four days' holiday a year and two days' loss of pay for having a day off, was a devilish and vicious system. The House should insist on something being done about it, and that being done quickly."

It was not until some months after this debate that the Legislative Council of Hongkong approved legislation restricting the hours which women and young persons between the ages of 16 and 18 were allowed to work in industrial enterprises to a maximum of ten a day and sixty per week.

The "Great Unrest"

Despair at the slow progress of the Second International in the early part of the 20th century led many workers in Europe and America into the Syndicalist movement which, as Lenin pointed out, was a "deviation" from the true path to Socialism. The bankruptcy of Syndicalism is most obvious in respect of the hours of work. Since the Syndicalists were hostile to the State as such; they attached no importance to legal regulation of working conditions. This attitude appealed to some sections of workers who were already well organised, but like other Syndicalist policies it played into the hands of the employers, who were hostile to legal regulation for their own ends. Hence although the great strike movement of 1911-14; taking place at a time of industrial prosperity and demand for labour, was able to secure many important concessions, comparatively little was done to reduce working hours.

What could have been done if the question had been effectively raised was shown by the strike of Lancashire farm-workers in 1913, one of the chief demands being a Saturday half-holiday starting at 1 p.m. The strikers at first appealed to Lord Derby, who came to terms in regard to his own estates but was unable to induce other employers to come to a settlement. An attempt was made to bring in Irish strike-breakers, but members of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union met the boats at Liverpool and persuaded the Irish workers to pass on to Yorkshire, many of them agreeing to join the Union. On July 4th, after the strike had been in progress for a fortnight, the Ormskirk branch of the Railwaymen's Union gave 48-hours' notice of refusal to handle farm produce in the area of the strike. This created general alarm, since the King was about to begin a tour of Lancashire including a visit to Lord Derby; and before the railwaymen actually took action the Superintendent of Police at

Ormskirk arranged a settlement which granted the demands of the workers. This was followed by other strikes of farm-workers which lasted until the outbreak of the First World War.

The post-war struggles

That War led to an enormous increase in hours and intensity of labour. In all countries the workers were called upon to sacrifice their hard-won gains for the sake of "national defence". The contrast between their lot and the unbridled profiteering of the capitalists was too blatant to be disguised, and the delay in the revolutionary explosion only made it the more shattering when it came. In 1917 Russia went out of the capitalist system, and one of the first acts of the now Soviet Government was to introduce a legal eight-hour day - the first major industrial country in the world to do so. (This was incorporated in the first Labour Code of 1918; which also made provision for paid holidays.)

A year later, when the War ended, capitalist governments were faced with the danger of a revolutionary upheaval. An International Labour Office (later, the international Labour Organisation, the I.L.O.) was set up under the auspices of the League of Nations to provide a settlement of industrial problems within the framework of capitalism, one of its first measures being to draw up a "Convention" for a legal 8-hour day.

But in the meantime strikes for the 8-hour day broke out in every country in Europe, and in many places went further. In Britain, action took place on the Clyde and in Belfast. On the Clyde, a Joint Committee representing the Clyde Workers' Committee, the Glasgow Trades Council and the Scottish Trades Union Congress; issued an official appeal!

;- "To the Workers: A Call to Arms!

"The Joint Committee representing the official and unofficial sections of the industrial movements having taken into consideration the reports of the Shop Stewards in the various industries, hereby resolve to demand a 40-hour maximum working week for all workers, as an experiment with the object of absorbing the unemployed.

"If a 40-hour week fails to give the desired results a mere drastic reduction of hours will be demanded.

"A general strike has been declared to take place on Monday, January 27th, and all workers are expected to respond.

"By order of the Joint Committee representing all workers.

(Signed) Wm. Shaw David Morton (joint Secretaries)"

Over 100,000 workers in all industries came out on strike, but for all that it was a failure, and nearly forty years later there was still no forty-hour week in Britain. The chief reason was that the organisation of Workers' Committees was only effective in a few centres outside Scotland; and there was no general strike except on the Clyde and in Belfast. In London the electricians threatened to come out on strike unless the Government got in touch with Glasgow and Belfast, but no effective action was taken and these centres were isolated. The Government was able to concentrate heavy forces of troops in the strike areas, to arrest leading strikers such as Emmanuel Shinwell (afterwards Minister for Defence

in the third Labour Government) and Willie Gallacher (afterwards Communist M.P.), and to break up the strikers' demonstration in St. George's Square. The Executive Council of the A.S.E. suspended its District Committees for the Clyde and Belfast, and on February 12th the strike was called off.

In Belfast the sequel was more tragic. The political labour movement here had always been very weak in comparison with the trade unions, and the workers had long been divided by their religions. On this occasion all divisions were swept aside, the mainly Protestant workers elected a Catholic as chairman of the Strike Committee, and the movement for a general strike swept the city under the slogan: "To Hell with the man who mentions religion". But the employers, with the aid of many of the trade union officials, were able to take advantage of the inexperience of the workers and outmanoeuvred them, so that they had to return to work without the 44-hour week for which they had struck. The Belfast workers then sank into a state of political disorganisation, and failed to influence the Republican struggle which was then developing. Religious divisions again asserted themselves, and within two years many of the workers who had taken part in the strike for shorter hours were shooting one another in the streets, while the chairman of the 1919 Strike Committee was among the thousands who were driven from their employment by the Orange mob.

Nevertheless the strikes of 1919 were not without effect. As the president of the Associated Ironmoulders of Scotland put it!

"In Scotland the effect of the movement was to speed up the reduction of hours for a number of workers. The Glasgow municipal employees for months prior to the strike had been negotiating over this question. The corporation committee immediately came to a decision and operated the forty-eight hours' week. Other municipalities in Scotland followed suit. The carters got the forty-eight hours, and the builders forty-four hours. The engineering trades were soon on the forty-seven hours."

(Tom Bell, 'Pioneering Days'; p.173)

Needless to say, the effects of this great movement were not limited to Scotland. In the spring of 1919 the cotton operatives of Lancashire and the adjoining counties, then numbering more than half a million, conducted a six-weeks' strike and secured a 48-hour week, which they had first demanded in 1833. The Miners' Federation at their annual conference in 1918 decided to press for a six-hour day and a five-day week, which they put forward in the spring of 1919 with a threat of strike action if it were not granted. The Coalition Government headed by David Lloyd George, anxious to prevent a repetition of the Clyde strike, promised a seven-hour day as a first instalment, and this became law in 1920.

'These were tremendous achievements. The workers had secured in a few months the aim for which they had agitated for more than a generation. In their elation, however, they failed to realise that British capitalism still had a tremendous reserve power with which to counter-attack, and that the gains of 1919; which were soon as only a first stage to better things, were by no means secure. The most advanced workers of that time were generally Syndicalist in outlook, and imagined (notwithstanding the Clyde strike) that they could gain everything they desired by means of industrial

action, without recourse to Parliament. It is perhaps for this reason that apart from the miners, who had learned a great deal from their own bitter experiences, no section of workers made any serious attempt to secure a legal limitation of the hours of labour. Even the cotton operatives, caught up in the notorious "Lancashire boom" of 1919-20, failed to ask for any improvement of the Factory Act of 1901. (The abolition of the 'half-time system' by which children under the age of fourteen were employed in the factories came about as a result of the Education Act of 1918 and was largely due to pressure from outside the cotton industry.)

The counter-attack on hours

Disillusionment soon set in as the post-war slump developed. But for several years the short-lived Governments which succeeded one another did not dare to tamper with the hours of labour. In 1925, however, Stanley Baldwin as Conservative Prime Minister made his notorious statement that: "All the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet"; and the Home Secretary confirmed the Tory policy the following day when he said; "It may be that in order to compete with the world the conditions of labour, hours and wages will have to be altered in this country."

After the General Strike had been called off and while the miners were still locked out, the Government abolished the miners' legal 7-hour day and increased it to eight hours, thus throwing more miners out of work. British miners were thus forced to submit to a working day which was longer than that of any European coalfield except Upper Silesia, and it was not until 1931 that the second Labour Government replaced it by a 7.5-hour day.

The abolition of the miners' eight-hour day was marked by a striking episode. In Scotland the old leaders of the miners had been voted out of office by a democratic ballot vote of the membership in 1928; but had refused to vacate their posts. Failing to obtain redress by any other means, the rank and file then set up a new union called the United Mineworkers of Scotland. In 1931 the coalowners announced that if the 8-hour

day were abolished (by the Labour Government) they would impose a 19% reduction in wages, already at starvation level. The old leaders of the Scottish miners gave way to this blackmail and called on their members to go on working the 8-hour day in defiance of the new law. The United Mineworkers of Scotland, however, called a strike, and under the leadership of Abe Moffat and others the miners stayed out for six weeks. Finally the coalowners accepted the legal 7.5-hour day, with only a comparatively small reduction in wages.

As A.J. Cook, the militant secretary of the Miners' Federation, had pointed out at the time, the abandonment of the miners in 1926 did not help the workers in other industries, whose turn was merely postponed for a very short while. At the end of 1927 the employers in the cotton industry demanded a heavy reduction in wages and a lengthening of hours (the legal maximum was still that of 55.5 hours laid down in 1901, but in practice only 48 hours weekly were being worked.) Attempts were made to introduce longer hours at some outlying mills, but thanks largely to the

agitation of the Textile Minority Movement and to the determined stand of the operatives these were unsuccessful, and although in the following years the cotton operatives were forced to accept terrible conditions of work and wages they did not sacrifice the 48-hour week.

The woollen workers were not so fortunate. In 1930 the employers demanded heavy reductions of wages, and although the strike which followed was, in the words of one employer, "the best organised in the history of the industry", the workers received no support from the Labour Government and suffered a heavy defeat. As a result, the unions were shattered in many important centres, and the employers were able to enforce longer hours as well as lower wages.

A trade union official wrote (in 'Are Trade Unions Obstructive?', ed. J. Hilton, 1935): "It would be true to say that one-half of the firms adopt the working hours of 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. under the Factory Acts, and the other half from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m." Writing in the 'Textile Workers' Record' (Sept. 1934; p.6) Arthur Shaw said;

"Any early riser can see the women and children going to work at 6.15 a.m. to start at 6.30, and on many occasions I, myself, have seen children half awake setting off to work their full ten hours' stretch, just as they were expected to do twenty or thirty years ago. It is not at all unusual to see young girls leaving factories at 6.45 or 7 p.m. - a state of affairs entirely unknown twenty years ago."

Other firms reverted to the continuous two-shift system, originally introduced by Arkwright in the 18th century. A leading textile trade unionist wrote in 1935:

"There are a great number of woolcombers who work from 5 p.m. until 7 a.m. next morning, without a break, night after night. That is, they work over seventy hours a week. The men strongly object to this, but they have no alternative if they want to keep their jobs. In one case the men actually worked from 5 p.m. on Friday till 7 a.m. on Saturday morning, and then went back again at noon on Saturday and worked until 9 or 10 p.m. that night." ('Are Trade Unions Obstructive?', p.307)

This, it may be observed, was in 1935; not in 1835. As a Marxist writer commented: "Such hours as these make the presence of unemployment and under-employment in the industry all the more illogical and outrageous." ('Britain without Capitalists', 1936)

The same point had been made years before with regard to the engineering industry; a cartoon in the 'A.E.U. Monthly Journal' in 1922 had the caption: "Must I work overtime whilst my mate and his family starve for want of work;" (reproduced in Jefferys, 'Story of the Engineers'). In 1921 demonstrations had been organised by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement outside and inside factories where overtime was being worked, but in the following year the engineers were locked out and (as in 1852 and again in 1898) were forced to concede that overtime was a "managerial function" with which unions must not interfere. In June 1931 the Engineering Employers' Federation demanded that the workers should agree to a lengthening of hours from 47 to 48, with heavy reductions in overtime

and night-shift rates and in piecework prices. The unions were able to avert the increase in hours, but accepted the other demands, which gave an opening for overtime on a larger scale than ever before.

Britain falls behind .

An ominous sign of this period was that Britain lost its former lead in the world movement for shorter hours, which it had held up to 1920. In 1922 a new Soviet Labour Code was enacted which included:

"the stringent limitation of overtime beyond 8 hours a day (in 1930 reduced to 7 hours until just before the War); the provision of two weeks' holiday annually with pay; the exclusion of women and young persons from night work and from 'dangerous occupations'; the prohibition of employment of children under 16 save in exceptional circumstances by permission of the factory inspectorate and then for no more than 4 hours a day) and the limitation of hours of young persons between 16 and 18 to 6 hours, falling between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m."

(H.Dobb, 'Soviet Economic Development since 1917'; p.415 note.)

The seven-hour day was in force in the Soviet Union from 1930 to 1939; and although hours were lengthened during the war against Nazi Germany and the period of reconstruction; the Sixth Five-Year Plan of 1956-60 provided for a gradual return.

In the United States., where hours had hitherto been longer than in Britain, the 40-hour week was introduced by President Roosevelt's 'New Deal' programme of 1935; and in many industries a five-day week or four-day week was later adopted, so that by 1958 many workers had a working week of only 36 or even 32 hours. In France; the 40-hour week was introduced by the Popular Front Government following the great 'stay-in' strikes of 1936, and it is still legally in force, although to some extent vitiated by numerous exceptions.

In Contrast, the British record is by no means impressive. At the Cardiff Trades Union Congress of 1921 a resolution was moved by Harry Pollitt of the Boilermakers' Society, and seconded by G. Wyver of the Building Trade Workers', calling for a 44-hour week and the prohibition of systematic overtime. But Brownlie of the A.E.U., though declaring himself in favour, proposed that no action should be taken pending the completion of investigations then being carried on by a Committee of workers' and employers' representatives. In 1924; however, the T.U.C. adopted a Charter including a demand for "a legal maximum week of 44 hours". In 1931 the following resolution was passed:

"This Congress believes the time has arrived when the normal working week should be limited to a maximum of 40 hours in the case of day workers and in the case of process and shift workers to a working week of five shifts of eight hours without any reduction in the weekly wage and with the reduction of overtime to work of agreed urgency.

"This Congress is of opinion that modern methods of production have so speeded up labour operations that the nerve strain imposed upon the workers is inimical to health and efficiency. Congress is therefore of opinion that as a matter of policy a shorter working

week should be instituted, thereby assisting in the solution of the present problem of unemployment and at the same time easing such tension and nerve strain."

Unfortunately the political power of the workers was not very great in Britain in 1931; and the resolution remained a declaration of policy without any sanctions to carry it into effect. Such progress as took place was due mainly to the initiative of the A.E.U., whose members were painfully conscious of the co-existence of heavy unemployment with systematic overtime. In 1929 the union had adopted an "Engineers' Charter" which included demands for a 44-hour week; the abolition of systematic overtime and payment for all statutory holidays, and in 1933 this was amended to include a demand for a 40-hour week. A vigorous campaign was carried on in all engineering centres, and was taken to the International Labour Organisation by A.B. Swales, then a member of the A.E.U. Executive. In 1935 the I.L.O. adopted a Convention in favour of a 40-hour week, but this had no practical effect since the Fascist Governments of Germany, Italy and Japan were openly hostile to the Organisation and the British Government had not even ratified the 1919 Convention providing for a 48-hour week.

The movement slows down

It is true that some progress in reducing hours of labour took place during the forty years following 1918, but at a much slower pace than in any corresponding period since the first Factory Acts.

The Shops Act of 1934 limited the hours of young people under 18 in retail trade to 48 per week, with permission for overtime up to 50 hours a year, provided that not more than 12 were worked in any one week. In 1937 a new Factories Act, the first since 1901 established a legal maximum of eight hours a day for women and young persons; with a rather generous allowance of overtime of six hours a week and 100 hours a year.

In transport, on the other hand the course of events once more confirmed the lesson that agitation for a limitation of hours was useless unless backed up by a militant trade union movement. As a result of the great strike of 1919 the railwayman had secured a 43-hour week and fairly reasonable conditions of work; but within a very short time they found their position undermined as a result of competition from the roads.

Great hopes were raised by the amalgamation of the leading transport unions into the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1922, but the general secretary of this union, Ernest Bevin, was one of the chief supporters of the policy of "peace in industry" after 1926. Conditions on the roads became a menace to the general public as well as to the workers (by 1934 the number of persons killed or injured in street accidents involving vehicles or horses was no less than 238,946.) In 1930 the second Labour Government secured the passing of a Road Traffic Act, amplified in 1933 by a Road and Rail Traffic Act, which provided a measure of legislative protection for road transport workers. But the permitted hours were very long, and were made longer by the notorious "spreadover system" (a revival of the relay system described by Marx, by which millowners nullified the

Ten Hours' Act. See 'Capital' -, vol.1, pp.319-320) Under this system the

workers were divided into sections whose work was spread over a long period, so that the busmen of 1930, like the cotton operative of 1850, ended his day's work twelve to fifteen hours after he had begun, although he was only credited with eight or nine hours' work in the day.

In 1937 the London busmen, one of the strongest sections of the Transport and General Workers' Union, struck for a 7.5-hour day. The London Passenger Transport Board delayed negotiations until the Coronation of George VI, hoping that public opinion as represented by the big crowds which had come into London would turn against the strikers. But the busmen stood firm. Before victory could be attained, however, Bevin called off the strike, which had been fully sanctioned by the Executive of the union, and suspended its leaders from office.

Holidays with Pay

The failure of the British trade union movement to secure any general reduction in hours of work between 1920 and 1940 was however compensated to a certain extent by the recognition of the principle of paid holidays, which to a previous generation would have been unthinkable. Before 1914 only State and local government employees, with some specially favoured railwaymen, enjoyed paid holidays at all. The South Wales miners, at the instance of their leader William Abraham or "Mabon", who was elected Liberal M.P. for the Rhondda in 1885, introduced a practice of taking an unpaid holiday once a month, but after the great strike of 1898 the coal-owners insisted as part of the terms of settlement that "Mabon's Day" should be given up. "Mabon" pleaded hard for a week's annual holiday, or even for a day's annual holiday, but the spokesman of the employers insisted that the loss of coal could not be tolerated.

Textile workers were in the habit of taking "Wakes Week" excursions to Blackpool or other resorts, but these were financed by the "holiday savings clubs" into which the workers paid contributions for the remaining fifty-one weeks in the year. In hard times there was no money for holiday savings? and in the grim years from 1926 to 1940 local newspapers in the coalfields often reported that many miners were unable even to make the journey to the seaside on the occasion of their annual gala.

In 1922 the Soviet Labour Code had provided for a fortnight's holiday with pay, and the famous resorts in the Crimea and elsewhere had been made available to the workers. But private industry in Britain continued to adhere rigidly to the principle of "payment only for work done". In 1924 the Amalgamated Engineering Union raised the question with the employers but met with no response, though the Union included "payment for statutory holidays" in the 'Engineers' Charter' of 1929.

By 1936, however, the question had aroused world-wide interest, and in that year the I.L.O. drew up a Convention on the subject. In the following year the British Government set up a Committee to study the question, and in 1938 passed the Holidays with Pay Act which gave power to statutory wage authorities to provide for holidays with pay, and encouraged industry generally to adopt schemes by voluntary negotiation.

In April 1937 only 1.5 million workers were entitled to holidays with pay in Britain, but in that year the A.E.U. secured an agreement which proved a powerful lever to workers in other industries; and by June 1939 the number had risen to over eleven millions. After the Second World War holidays with pay became general in Britain, about 20 millions out of 22 millions in civil employment enjoying them in 1955.

* * * * *

It is obvious that no general progress in the movement for shorter hours can be expected without international action on a wide scale. At the Fourth Congress of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Leipzig in October 1957 it was emphasised in a special resolution that the shorter working day without a reduction in wages was now the chief demand in many countries, and this was reaffirmed by the WFTU executive at its meeting in Budapest in March 1958. The demand for a shorter working week has also been endorsed by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, although those bodies have refused joint action with the WFTU.

The question has been sharply raised at meetings of the International Labour Organisation. As early as 1935 a Convention providing for a 40-hour week was adopted by the Organisation, but it has not yet been ratified by the leading countries and therefore remains a dead letter. The original agenda for the General Conference of the I.L.O. in 1958 did not even provide for discussion of the question, but this omission aroused lively protests from no less than 26 trade union centres, including the WFTU, the Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the British Trades Union Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour. These protests were effective in getting the question on the agenda for the 1958 Conference.

Reading List

(A) Primary Sources

For Britain detailed information can be found in the Evidence given to, and Reports of, the various Parliamentary Committees and Royal Commissions on the Employment of Children and on Public Health, from 1819 to 1863, and in the Reports of Inspectors of Factories from 1833. Regular reports on the hours of labour were published by the Labour Department of the Board of Trade from 1887 to 1920 under the title of "Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom", and were continued in the "Ministry of Labour Gazette".

The first comprehensive collection of information in the U.S.A. was made by J.D. Weeks and published in vol.XX of the Tenth Census Report.

This was followed by N.W. Aldrich's "Report on Wholesale Prices, Wages and Transportation". Information up to date is contained in the Reports of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The Reports of the I.L.O. from 1919 give facts about other countries.

(B) General studies

The fundamental economic treatment of the subject is Karl Marx's 'Capital', vol.I, especially chapter 10 ('The Working Day'), but also chapters 9, 15; 17, 20 and 21.

- C.Driver: "Tory Radical; The Life of Richard Oastler". Detailed account of the agitation for factory reform in Yorkshire in the 1830's.
- F.Engels: "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844"
- W.M. Frazer: "A History of English Public Health". Shows the close connection between factory reform and the progress of public health.
- J.L. and Barbara Hammond! "The Town Labourer"; "The Skilled Labourer". Classic studies of the effects of the Industrial Revolution.
- B.L. Hutchins & E.Harrison: "History of Factory Legislation". Useful summary of laws passed in the 19th century.
- Jurgen Kuczynski: "A Short History of Labour Conditions under Industrial Capitalism". The first attempt at a world-wide historical survey. The author's conclusions have been attacked, but his statistics have not been seriously called in question.
- A. Lozovsky; "Marx and the Trade Unions". General study with many useful quotations.
- E.C. Tufnell: "Character, Objects and Effects of Trades Unions" (This was republished in 1934 by the T.U.C. under the title of "Trade Unionism a Hundred Years Ago"). An able essay by a Factory Commissioner who was also a determined opponent of trade unionism.
- A. Ure; "Philosophy of Manufactures". A summary of all the arguments against factory legislation, by a well-informed writer.
- S. and B. Webb! "History of Trade Unionism" (Histories of particular trade unions should also be consulted.)

There is no adequate study of developments since 1920 which can be compared with those for earlier periods, but there are some useful articles in the latest edition of "Chambers's Encyclopaedia".

This pamphlet is the twelfth quarterly number of 'Our History' published by the Historians' Group of the Communist Party. The subscription to 'Our History' is now 5/- p.a. (post-free). Single copies can be obtained at 1/6 each (and some back numbers are available at that price). Orders for six or more of any one number can be supplied at 1/- each if ordered in time. Subs, and enquiries to
Mrs. Betty Grant, 78 Twyford Avenue, London W.3.

"OUR HISTORY"

(published by the Historians' Group of the Communist Party)

The following subjects are planned for the quarterly "Our History" pamphlets during 1959:

Spring! The Historical Novel (from the points of view of writer and reader)

Summer! Effect of Empire on the ideology of the British working class

(This was postponed from 1958 as the writer needed more time for research.)

Autumn: Essay on 'Namierism'

Winter: (not yet arranged)

The first number will be ready during March. The subscription is being kept this year at 5/-, which only just covers cost of production and postage. Please let us have your sub. as soon as possible. (To save postage, your receipt will be sent with the first pamphlet in March; but if you want a receipt before that, please ask for it.)

You may like to know that "Our History" is now taken regularly by such libraries as! House of Commons Library; Library of Congress, U.S.A.; New York Public Library; National Library of New Zealand; Fundamental Library of Social Sciences, Moscow; International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam. There is also a complete file in the Reading Room of the British Museum, and in the Birmingham-Central Reference Library. Single copies have been asked for at various times by colleges and professional historians in Britain, and by individuals or institutions abroad.

"Our History" also has a popular appeal, as shown by the many requests for the pamphlet on "Cromwell", following the article in the 'Daily Worker' last summer which referred readers to this pamphlet. We feel that many more people would be interested in "Our History" if they knew of it; but as we have no funds for advertising we must rely on our regular readers to help by showing their copies to friends.

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