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HOURS OF WORK, HEALTH AND EFFICIENCY

HOW many more wars will be necessary before those responsible for working hours learn that man is not a machine, and that the very qualities that enable him to rise above himself for an emergency period prevent him from continuing that process indefinitely? This question is prompted by a consideration of "Hours of Work and their Influence on Health and Efficiency", by Dr. H. M. Vernon, recently published by the British Association for Labour Legislation*.

In war-time, the question of hours of work becomes of immediate importance owing to the need for maximum production. It is therefore obvious that as many hours must be worked as will make this possible over a prolonged period. This aspect is easily understood, but it should be equally obvious that the health of those doing the work should not be injured by demands that are neither physiologically nor psychologically reasonable. If these demands are enforced, production suffers in two ways; first, by the lowered production of those present; and secondly, by the absenteeism of those who break down.

In peace-time, the hours of work for different categories of workers and age-groups are carefully regulated, but in war-time a general relaxation of the regulations is inevitable. The serious situation caused by the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk led to an immediate extension of working hours; the seven-day week and the twelve-hour day applied to thousands of workers, women as well as men, and the almost superhuman efforts made by the munition workers did result at first in an enormously increased production, which however gradually fell, owing to the cumulative effect of fatigue, to the pre-Dunkirk level. This effect of fatigue was known during the War of 1914-18 and the data were published in the Report of the Health of Munition Workers' Committee. It is unfortunate that many factory managers and people in responsible positions are so much impressed by the increase of output resulting immediately from an increase of working hours that they are apt to continue the overtime indefinitely. It is seldom that they ascertain by careful measurement what exactly is happening to production.

Another condition often overlooked is that the proportion of women to able-bodied men increases from week to week during war. Women have usually, in addition to the hours in the factory, home duties which are often heavy enough in peace-time but still heavier under war-time conditions. The result has been a serious reduction in the hours devoted to sleep. It is true that the Minister of Labour recommended in July 1940 that there should be a return to more reasonable hours of work, but the gap between the recommendation and its application still remains in too many factories.

* Hours of Work and their Influence on Health and Efficiency. By Dr. H. M. Vernon. Pp. 38. (London: British Association for Labour Legislation, 27 Clareville Grove, S.W.7, 1943.) 9d.

Apart from reduced output, long hours result in an increase of absenteeism, of which sickness represents approximately half the total loss, although the relationship varies from factory to factory. Some of the casual absence is due to the demands of shopping, to the illness of children or to sheer fatigue. The sickness rate of men almost doubled itself after the 70-hour week was imposed, but the 65-hour week was accompanied by quick recovery. The 60-hour week in the case of women led to a considerable increase of illnesses diagnosed as nervous breakdown. Not only adults but also far too many young persons have been working dangerously long hours, with the result that many are physically and mentally exhausted. Such hours were illegal, but that does not lessen the effect on the health of the young people. The Select Committee on National Expenditure has emphasized the importance of abolishing Sunday labour: in one factory the workers lost more than three times as much time when the hours were raised from 56 a week to 69½ by means of a longer working day and work on Sunday.

In 1940 the accident-rate of fatal, non-fatal and minor accidents rose considerably above the pre-war level. The employment of inexperienced and young people is partly responsible, but it is also known that the frequency of accidents is influenced by long working hours.

If the worker finds conditions too onerous, he may absent himself altogether. The result is a high labour turnover. To restrict this tendency, in April 1941 the Government introduced the Essential Work Order, according to which no person could leave his employment or be discharged (except for serious misconduct) without the permission of the National Service officer. This had the immediate effect of reducing the labour wastage, but nevertheless in some factories workers have found ways of evading the order.

It is recommended that in the interests of production as well as of health, the ordinary regulations of the Factories Act should be kept except for special temporary conditions. For men a working week in excess of 60 hours usually leads to no increase in production, and for women the hours should never exceed 54. Young women aged sixteen and seventeen should not work more than a 48-hour week, though youths of the same age can do up to 54 hours. Boys and girls aged fourteen and fifteen should be limited to 44 hours.

The importance of limitation of hours of labour has been recognized by the Government for some time, and one result has been an investigation of the effects of war-time hours of labour on young persons. In December 1941 the Government decided that youths and girls aged sixteen and seventeen were to register, so that the local education authorities could make contact with them and that they might be encouraged to fit themselves for national work. Most of the interviewing panels were much impressed by evidence of the strain upon young people due to long hours of work. The actual working hours were rarely excessive, but to the official hours must be added the hours spent in travelling. Also many of the young

people were doing two or more jobs; for example, colliery boys doing farm work in the evenings, girls doing normal-factory hours and, in addition, working in fish-and-chip shops or acting as usherettes in cinemas in the evening. In the case of young girls who were running the home while their parents were at work, the interviewers felt that they were often carrying a burden too heavy for their years, leaving very little time for recreation. The interviewers were most impressed by the calibre of the young people and of their general morale, but point out the lack of attention they have received since leaving school. The most alarming symptom was that of mental lassitude in those who were unable to get adequate time for relaxation and recreative activity.

The report of the investigation, which has been issued as a White Paper by the president of the Board of Education and the Secretary of State for Scotland (Cmd. 6446*) outlines the action which it is proposed to take. Hours of employment are to be reviewed, travelling times reduced by transferring youths where necessary to employment nearer their homes, feeding arrangements are to be examined and interviewing panels are to discourage undue activities outside working hours. These steps are all in the right direction, but speed is necessary to prevent undue strain on those who, while they are contributing to the war effort, are also the foundation on which will fall a heavy burden in the early years of peace.

* Board of Education: Scottish Education Department. Youth Registration in 1942. (Cmd. 6446.) Pp. 28. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1943.) 6d. net.

FARM AND FOREST IN COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

ALMOST alone among the former great Powers, the Anglo-Saxon race has ignored the intimate relation existing between agriculture and forestry. This is as true of the United States of America as it is of the great Dominions of the British Empire and the Colonies under the administration of that Empire. The Anglo-Saxon races all had the same cradle, the island of Britain, and they all seem to lack feeling for the relation of agriculture to the forest. In connexion with future planning of the British countryside, reports have been issued in which the forestry side of this question is either totally ignored or receives scant mention. This want of appreciation in the past of the true role of the forest may have been a natural outcome of the absence for so long of substantial forests in Britain; the large areas of semi-derelict land in the mountainous and more out-of-the-way tracts being practically unknown or, at least, disregarded.

The Anglo-Saxon races have carried with them this lack of appreciation of the value of the forest to agriculture all over the world; in the New World, the United States and Canada, eastwards to Australia and New Zealand, and many Colonies. But out-