

## WORKING DAYS

**S**PECIMEN days in the lives of the workers collected at first hand. Mrs. Pollock has presented the days as nearly as possible as they have been written for her by the worker concerned.

This book is an attempt to give the public an insight into the lives and thoughts of a few among the millions of men and women who are engaged in industry in this country. It is hoped that it may be of use to those readers among the general public, who, while wishing to know more of the world of work and thought outside their own experiences, yet find it difficult to give life and meaning to the statistics contained in Blue Books and other publications.

Lord Buckmaster says in his introduction, 'Sympathy cannot be taught, but knowledge can, and given knowledge sympathy may grow. The book is intended to give the knowledge, and I wish it a wide circulation.'

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APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

*Reprinted from an article by Ernest E. Hunter in the 'New Leader,' April 3, 1925, by kind permission of the Editor*

On Friday last the House of Commons rejected the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Bill. By so doing it struck a deadly blow at the Prime Minister's appeal for industrial peace, and declared to the working people of Great Britain that the only peace in which it was interested was that of slow starvation and death. No other conclusion is possible.

What are the facts? Mr. Hartshorn told the House that 'there are to-day in the South Wales coal-fields scores of thousands of men, married men with families, whose daily income does not exceed 8s. 0½d., and whose average week is not in excess of five days.' In 1922-3 the average wage in the whole mining industry was £2 10s. per week. Mr. Walsh gave even worse figures. In Shropshire the minimum wage is 6s. 5d. a day; in Cumberland, 7s. 7d.; in Bristol, 6s. 1d.

It is difficult to bring home the full significance of these figures. The human mind is apt to live in the past and, despite all the facts of everyday existence, to think of 6s. 1d. in the terms of money value before the War. But cost of living is now 80 per cent. above 1914. The 6s. 1d. daily wage in Bristol is really only worth 3s. 4½d.

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Take it another way. As far back as 1901 Seebohm Rowntree worked out what he called a Primary Poverty Line, which allowed 21s. 8d. per week for a family of two adults and three children. His budget allowed 12s. 9d. for food, rent 4s., clothes 2s. 3d., fuel 1s. 10d., and everything else for five persons 10d. per week. It allowed nothing for fares, or newspapers, or postage; nothing for amusements, for smokes or beer. To-day the Bristol miner, even if he works a full five and a half shifts per week, is living below this Primary Poverty Line.

The nominal wage standard of the Bristol miner, *if* he works all the time, is about 33s. 6d. All the talk about the need for every industry to be self-supporting cannot disguise that it is a scandalously small sum to be paid to a grown man for a full week's work, and dangerous at that. In order to bring home the moral there is a temptation to compare it with the Cabinet Minister's £96 per week; but perhaps the most telling contrast is to put it into relationship with individual items in the budgets of people living on a much lower and a much more normal standard.

This week I have worried a number of friends for details of their weekly budgets. Here is the budget of a family of four with a housekeeping allowance of £4 per week: Rent 14s. 6d., coal 5s., gas 2s., insurance 4s. 6d., milk 8s., bread 2s. 6d., fruit 6s., butter 2s., eggs 4s., meat 10s., vegetables 3s., bacon

## BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

2s. 6d., groceries 8s., fish 4s., washing 4s. Clothes, fares, amusements, etc., are not taken into account — the above is simply the ordinary living expenditure. Food alone accounts for 50s. per week. Milk alone is 8s. per week, or one-third of the Bristol miner's wage! All the information culled, not from rich people, but from those living at just a reasonable standard, shows that the men and women compelled to keep families on anything between 30s. and £3 3s. a week must be in hell to-day.

On the following page is a budget on the borderline. It represents the expenditure of a wife and husband with one child, with an income of £4 per week. I give it in full. It contains no real extravagances, unless tobacco or papers are considered as such. It just allows three persons to live. It is twice as high a standard as is possible for the Bristol miner bringing in 33s. 6d. per week.

This budget allows nothing except the odd 2s. 4½d. per week for clothes for wife or child, for holidays, for concerts, for civilised amenities, and makes no provision whatever for household depreciation and renewal. It is swollen by the heavy London rent and by the man's fares and dinners — but otherwise it is a thoroughly good index of what life can be for even those in regular work and receiving what is almost a princely income in these days.

But if this is the standard of those in work, what of those in receipt of unemployment pay?

## APPENDIX

### A £4 PER WEEK BUDGET

	£	s.	d.
<i>Food:</i> Bread 3s., butter 1s. 9d., cheese 1s., tea 9d., sugar 1s. 1½d., milk 4s. 1d., bacon 1s. 3d., jam 1s. 2d., meat 3s., vegetables 1s. 9d., fruit 1s. 6d., flour 6d., lard or suet 6d., oatmeal 7d., rice, beans, etc., 1s. 1d.	1	3	0½
<i>House and General:</i> Gas and coal 5s., window-cleaner 6d., laundry 1s. 3d., insurance 1s. 6d.		8	3
<i>Man away all day:</i> Fares 3s., dinners 8s. 6d., tobacco 2s. 6d., trade union and insurance 1s. 4d., clothes 4s. 8d.	1	0	0
Papers		1	4
Rent (London)	1	5	0
	£3 17 7½		

I called the other day on a skilled craftsman who had been unemployed for four months. He was out looking for work, but when he returned I asked if he would tell me how life was at all possible. He was very willing. 'I get,' he said, '25s. per week for myself, wife and child. 12s. of this goes in rent. Bread costs 6s., and coal and lighting 3s. 6d. (By the way, we buy coal in small quantities of 14 lb.) Milk, tea, vegetables, and so on have to be bought somehow or other with the remainder. I don't know,' he added, 'how the wife manages at all.'

## BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

That very day, he told me, the child had been taken to the school doctor, who had ordered plenty of good food, cod-liver oil, and a rest in the country.

'When you are in work,' I asked, 'are you able to save money?'

'Not exactly save,' he replied; 'we defer spending. We deny ourselves necessities in order that we may just live in harder times.'

'When did you last have a new suit?'

'I don't quite know,' he answered, 'but I have only had two new suits in seven years.'

My friend, who was an urban district councillor, then took me round to see an ironmoulder who had been unemployed for fifteen months. Everything pawnable or saleable in the house had gone. The man, wife and two children received £1 7s. unemployment benefit, supplemented by 6s. in cash and 1s. in kind from a Labour Board of Guardians. Rent took 12s. a week. He gave me the following household budget: Bread 5s., milk 3s., meat 3s., insurance 3s., gas 1s., coal 3s. (in small quantities). As regards clothes, all the family have for years had to be content with patched clothes or part-worn garments given by neighbours. In another case, where there was a family of six children under twelve, the father had been out of work for nearly eighteen months. All the blankets and decent sheets had been sold and old coats were the only bedding the family possessed. These the wife tried to keep washed and

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clean, but as she said, 'It's a hard job. They take such a time to dry since I sold my mangle.'

What earthly use is the appeal for peace and goodwill under such conditions?

Here are millions of people without the wherewithal to live ordinary decent lives.

Here is a system which cannot even provide milk and eggs for its children.

Here is a system which, according to Mr. Hartshorn, allows the miner's wife about 2*d.* per head per meal when catering for her family.

What keeps such a starvation system in existence? Is it entirely self-interest, or callousness, or lack of knowledge on the part of those who hold the reins of Government?



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**WORKING DAYS**

# WORKING DAYS

Being the

• Personal Records

• of Sixteen Working Men and Women

• written by themselves

• and Edited by

MARGARET A. POLLOCK

with an Introduction by

The Right Hon. Lord Buckmaster



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'The guidance I want is from the man who is earning his bread; the more opulent is much less reliable; besides, he can always frame an individualist paradise and thus escape the need for a social one. The worker in every grade has always something useful to say, if not about his personal demands, at any rate about his conditions of work, and what he tells one has always some bearing on the material form in which to shape the structure of the city.'

*(Talks on Town Planning,*

H. V. LANCHESTER)

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## PREFACE

BY THE EDITOR

**T**HIS book is an attempt to give the public an insight into the lives and thoughts of men and women engaged in some of the most important occupations in the country.

For obvious reasons it was decided to let the writers remain anonymous, and to ensure this, the initials have been altered in the biographical notes; but I can guarantee that, with the exception of the three signed articles by Mr. Shingfield, Mr. McKenna, and Mr. Creech Jones, these accounts have in every instance been written by people who are now, or were at one time, earning their living by the work they describe.

A few minor omissions have been made and here and there a word altered to make the meaning clearer, otherwise the articles remain exactly as they were written.

Many people feel moved by the sufferings of the submerged who yet have little sympathy to spare for those who are engaged in active work; Mr. Churchill, for example, when he said (April 28, 1925): 'The average British workman in good health and enjoyment of standard wages, does not regard himself and his family as an object of compassion.'

The contents of this volume may give some help in judging whether the 'Standard Wages,' when



## EDITOR'S PREFACE

translated into terms of purchasing power, provide a standard of living with which this country, considering its immense powers of wealth production, should be satisfied. Some of the articles contained in this book appeared earlier in the year in the pages of the *Spectator* and provoked considerable correspondence. Many people wrote to the Editor describing how their own days were spent, and asking whether they were workers or whether they were not. It should hardly be necessary to say that, in presenting these accounts to the public, I have not the slightest intention of suggesting that the title of worker is only applicable to those engaged in manual work.

No such book as this would be complete without some account also of those women whom the Census describes as 'not gainfully employed.' The working-class mother has perhaps benefited less by the advancement of science than any other class of workers in this country. Inventive genius has not been engaged in solving the problem of how to lessen labour for the poorer housewife. It is true that the new Council houses show a great advance, but their price is prohibitive for the majority of those who need them, with the result that the average working-man's wife has to struggle on unaided, without any conveniences for washing or drying her clothes, without any room for her children to play, without comfort and without privacy, and for all she does, she receives for herself often little enough in the way of food and no financial reward.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

In this book no political theories will be discussed, but it is hoped that these accounts, written by men and women with personal experience of life as lived by many millions in our country to-day, will do something to convince the reader that, measured in terms of human life and happiness, the conditions revealed are often so unsatisfactory as to justify grave discontent.

Two books of a similar kind have already been published: *The Worker's Daily Round*, by Charles Watney and James A. Little (Routledge, 1913); and *Workers on Their Industries*, edited by Frank Galton, 1893. In the former book the authors attempt, in their own words, 'a careful and accurate résumé, in popular form, of the conditions of life governing the existence of various types of the chief workers in the country.' But the accounts, twenty-three in all, were written by Watney and Little themselves. In each case a hypothetical worker was taken. The workers do not, as in the present case, speak for themselves. The other book, *Workers on Their Industries*, was the outcome of a course of lectures on 'Industries' delivered at South Place Institute. This book is of exceptional interest, but the accounts given are in the nature of a review of the whole industry, its history, development and possible future. They do not aim at placing on record the average worker's view of his occupation.

The conditions of life are, in many respects, altered to-day, and in addition both books out of print.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

This is no place to thank the various writers who have responded so readily to my request for an account of their daily work. The book is theirs and not mine, and whatever interest it may be found to possess will be entirely due to them. But I must use this opportunity to express my very great indebtedness to Miss M. B. Colebrook, who has taken infinite trouble to obtain recent and accurate information on the various industries, and to Mrs. D. L. Wise and Mr. H. J. Tozer for reading through the whole book in proof and for much valued criticism. I also wish to express my gratitude to Mr. H. N. Brailsford for giving me permission to reprint the excellent article by Mr. Ernest Hunter, published in *The New Leader*; to Mrs. Emily Townshend, for her great assistance in dealing with the subject of Agriculture; and to my husband, who has helped me throughout in the task of selection and arrangement.

M. A. P.

*April, 1926.*

## INTRODUCTION

BY LORD BUCKMASTER

**M**ANY years ago I spent the night at Leeds, and in the darkness of the early morning I was awakened by a sound I had never heard before. It was the clatter of the clogs of the girls and children walking to their work. The sound raised in my mind a question to which all the experience of many subsequent years has failed to provide an answer. What is it that, in accordance with principles of equity and justice, entitled me to lie in bed during the early hours of a cold winter morning while people, weaker and younger than myself, hastily fed and roughly clad, tramped through the raw Yorkshire mists to their daily work?

There is no answer to this question, excepting one that condemns the injustice of nature, and the injustice of man. The former we cannot alter; the latter is under our control. To think that it can be remedied by any means that will secure an equal standard of comfort, even measured rateably in terms of intellect and character, is impossible, but much may yet be done. Individuals, even in the minds of the strongest individualists, do not stand alone. They are regarded either as part of a nation, or more comprehensively as part of the human race. The former is the least difficult of the two hypotheses. As members of a nation, all must together bear the nation's burdens, and, in the last resort, be ready to stake their

## INTRODUCTION

lives for the nation's continuance. But this ideal cannot continue unless Society is held together by some stronger cement than that of economic laws. One half of the nation does not know how the other half lives, and many do not care. It is this fact, inflamed and exaggerated by angry men, that creates the enmity which has produced, and will always produce, revolutions and the overthrow of Society. Sympathy cannot be taught, but knowledge can, and from knowledge sympathy may grow.

This book is intended to give the knowledge, and I wish it a wide circulation.

BUCKMASTER.