

## 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.'

**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

MANY 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.

I

RAILWAY WORKERS

## ENGINE CLEANER by J. N.

J. N. was born in 1876 on a farm which was then kept by his maternal grandparents. Here he spent the first four or five years of his life, after which he lived in very poor circumstances. Owing to poverty he had to leave school at twelve and began work as a boy postman in rural districts.

At thirteen he became a chemist's errand boy, and twelve months later a bookstall boy with a well-known firm of newspaper agents.

In 1890, at the age of fourteen, he started as an engine-cleaner. Subsequently he has acted as a fireman at various stations, and after doing some spare driving, he passed the examination for permanent driving work, eventually becoming a regular driver in 1905.

The three following articles deal with the work as it is to-day: they do not describe conditions as they were at the time J. N. experienced them. In 1890 the wages of an Engine Cleaner were 6s. a week, rising to 16s. a week in five years. The cost of lodging was then about 13s. a week.

\*

|| AM just off to work, seven o'clock in the evening. It is not a very nice time of day to start, and all my friends employed in other occupations have finished their duty, been home and 'cleaned up' and are just thinking of an evening of leisure. But I, having chosen the Locomotive Department of a railway, have to work mostly at night, owing to the majority

## RAILWAY WORKERS

of engines working during the day and being in the shed for cleaning and other attention during the night hours.

As I walk to work with my food basket and bottle of cold tea under my arm, I think over the four years I have served in this capacity, and I remember the first morning I started. How, on entering the shed at 6 a.m. when it was three-parts full of giant shapes prepared for their day's work — these monsters, dimly seen in the darkness and through the murk of smoke, all humming as their boiler water was being boiled into steam, impressed and nearly terrorised me, and I remember the first winter, standing in a pit beneath the tender, cleaning tender-wheels, how I shivered and wished that I had chosen some other occupation.

However, I have passed up from cleaning wheels to cleaning other parts of the engine, then to cleaning one of the smaller engines myself, and so on until now I am cleaning one of the track 'flyers.' And what a job it is after a rainy day, when everything is muddied up and in the hot parts burnt on so that it takes some elbow-grease to remove it; and how horrible the job after the engine has, during its run, been trying conclusions with a horse or cow which has strayed on to the line, or, worse still, after an unfortunate human fatality has taken place. Then one wishes that one were anywhere and engaged in any employment rather than removing the horror from that particular locomotive.



## ENGINE CLEANER

These thoughts soon give place to activity, for, arriving at the shed, I report for duty, am served out with my cleaning oil, torch flare-lamp, and sponge cloths on cotton waste, and make my way to the engine allotted to me. Here, hour after hour, I work round the engine, doubled up into all sorts of fantastic shapes as I deal with the complicated mechanism of the motion parts, until the bell rings for supper-time, when I, with twenty or thirty other youths, crowd into a not-too-clean cabin to partake of our meagre suppers, which having completed, we are routed out by the foreman cleaner to continue our work. The worst part of the night is during the early hours of the morning, when sometimes the difficulty of keeping awake is tremendous; but the work must be done, and so we sometimes bathe our face and hands in cold water at one of the shed hydrants so that nature may be overcome and the work carried on.

Clambering about the parts of the engine, saturated as they are with oil, is not one of the most pleasant of jobs, for the oil soaks through outer clothing and under clothing, so that when I get home the following morning, my skin is patched over with oil-marks like the hide of a leopard, and this takes any amount of hot water and soap to remove, I can assure you.

The happy breaks in the monotony are when, owing to pressure of traffic, or illness, I am called out from my cleaning duties to temporarily take the place of a fireman. The change of work, the

## RAILWAY WORKERS

thought that promotion is before me, and the pride of being on a locomotive, as one of its crew, helps to make me resigned to the long years of apprenticeship which I am serving, although I look with some apprehension on the stringent medical and eyesight examination I shall have to pass to become a fireman, for failure means dismissal and starting all over again in a new walk of life.

My wages now are 6s. per day, but as I have been moved from home to this depot, and in lodgings paying 30s. per week, I have not a great deal of surplus, and I am looking eagerly forward for my next and last advance, before I am made a fireman, to 7s. per day, and at that I shall have to remain possibly for another two or three years.

I am said to have an eight-hour day, but as an hour is taken out of that for meal-time, I am on duty from booking on to booking off nine hours, and by the time I get to my lodgings and clean away the filth of the night's duty another hour at the least is easily spent.

However, I live in hopes of passing the various examinations and eventually coming out as a 'full-blown' footplate man, and although it may be looking ahead thirty or more years, I may some day reach the height of my ambition and become a driver on the great express trains of the country.

*July, 1924.*

## FIREMAN by J. N.

IT is 9.30 in the evening, and my wife calls me from sleep to remember duty, as I have to book on at 10.45 p.m. to work the midnight 'Goods,' which is a 'two-home' train, as I have to lodge at the other end of the trip and return the following night to my home station.

I rise from bed, not with very great delight, but still I am used to it as my hours of duty alternate all round the twenty-four hours, and so, after years of it, one gets used to going for duty at hours when other people are either comfortably in bed or preparing to go there; and as I am a goods fireman, and the big goods trains run mostly during the night, my duty is generally during the hours of darkness, and it frequently happens that I do not see my children between Sunday and Sunday, as they are either at school or in bed when I am coming from or going to my duty.

I make my way into the living-room of our three little rooms in an apartment house in the big industrial town in which I am stationed, and find my wife has a cheery bit of fire, late as it is, so that my last view of home may be a pleasant one. During my hurried supper, we speak of the apparent impossibility of ever getting a little house of our own, as owing to the housing shortage ever since I have

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been transferred to this station, now four years ago, there has been no house available, and so we and our two kiddies have to crowd into three rooms in the house of other people. It is not very pleasant, but after all, as I remind the wife, we are better off than many locomotive people, as I know scores of men that I come into contact with in many parts of the country, who, after removal from one station to another, have been years without being able to get even apartments, and they and their wives and families have been parted, except for occasional visits, for long periods, and they also have the expense of keeping as it were two homes. However, such are the exigencies of our calling, and, having finished supper, I tiptoe into the little room and kiss my sleeping children 'good-night,' don my outer clothing, pick up my food basket packed for two days' absence, and with a hurried 'good-bye' to my wife, set out for the loco depot.

Arrived there I report for duty, obtain the engine tool-box keys from the stores, and locate our 'iron horse.' My first duty is to get out the tools, oil bottles, feeders, etc., required by my mate and myself. I set the engine right for oiling, examine the water in boiler and tank, see that the ashpan and smoke-box are clean of ashes and fire of the previous trip, and commence to trim my tender of coal and build up the fire for the journey. Before I have completed this, my driver arrives, and we both work all speed to get ready for the long, heavy trip before

## FIREMAN

us. Finally, with fire up, head-lamps and footplate gauge lamps burning clearly, we make our way out into the loco yard, whistle for the signal, and proceed to the great traffic sidings where our train is awaiting us, having been prepared with much toil and trouble by the shunting engine.

Having backed on to our train, our guard comes up and informs the driver that we have eighty wagons of goods, a 'full cargo,' as we say, attached, and that we are 'right away' on the first fifty-mile run of our journey of 135 miles. So, whistling for the main line and getting the signals, we pull with much snorting and heaving, and an occasional slip, out from the yard and are away on our journey.

Now my real work commences, and I begin feeding the firebox continuously with the coal I have properly prepared, broken to the correct size; and, as every skilled fireman knows, the work is not only shovelling coal from one place to another, but on the jolting, swaying, and oscillating footplate I have to keep my equilibrium and feed the fire with coal at the right time, in the right quantity, put it in the right place, and with some engines I have known, or with inferior coal, put it on the right way up too, if we are to get sufficient steam.

My work is now without cessation, the shovel passing continuously between the tender and the firebox, the injector I have to keep almost continuously at work, and in the brief seconds between putting down the shovel and picking it up again I

## RAILWAY WORKERS

also, supplementary to my driver, watch the signals on the road ahead; but after a time it becomes difficult to pick them out quickly, as the continual gazing into the tremendous incandescence of the fire under the heavy blast of the working engine makes it so that, on first looking ahead on the blackness of the night, I see nothing but the white arc of light left in the eye from looking through the circle of the firehole door.

We are now roaring along with almost the speed of an ordinary passenger train, no time for conversation, I attending to steam and water, and my mate steadily gazing ahead and occasionally altering the position of his lever or regulator, seeing to the working of his lubricators, and no doubt occasionally casting a supervisory eye over my own work.

As I look at him there, the firm, stolid, engine-man, knowing his work to the last item, confident of himself, I wonder if his thoughts ever turn to the near future, when the periodic eyesight examination may find a defect caused by the years of exposure to the weather and the flying dust and sparks from the engine, and hurl him from the position it has taken him thirty years to attain and turn him from the magnificent engine-man of to-day into a heart-broken man, found some inferior work about the loco department with very greatly reduced wages. Or does he think of the time when, if all other dangers pass, he is retired by the age limit without any pension or superannuation of any kind? There

## FIREMAN

are such things on some few companies, contributed to by our men and the company; but our company is not one of them, and so our drivers carry on as long as they are permitted, long after they have earned a rest from their labours, and so they unwillingly retard the promotion of us who are anxiously waiting therefor.

I know that his case will be mine if I have the luck to pass the stringent eyesight and mechanical examinations necessary before I can attain the position of a driver. Many people think that locomen are well paid, because they only look at the wages of the 'top money driver' who may be approaching fifty years of age before he reaches it. I have done fifteen years' service for the company, and to-day only receive 11s. for a day of eight hours, and with the irregularity of work and meals, the night duty, the double home work, and the examinations I am continuously submitted to, I certainly do not feel myself to be over-remunerated. Even after I may succeed in attaining the position of a driver, I shall be into the sixth year of regular service before I reach the top wages of our profession, and by that time, as appearances are to-day, I shall be well over forty years of age; but I tremble to think what may happen should I fail to pass any of the mechanical, physical, or eyesight examinations which are before me, in which event, not being a driver, I may be dismissed, or at the best given a lowly paid labouring job in the depot with all my

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acquired skill and knowledge of the engine useless to me.

But I have little time to think on my grievances. I must leave them to our locomotive trade union, and attend strictly to my duties, which require my full attention. Anon, we arrive at our first stopping-place, where, whilst we are replenishing the tank with water, the examiners look round our train to see that no defect has occurred, my mate hurries round his engine for a brief examination and the necessary oiling, and I up on the tender hurriedly shovel forward another ton or so of coal for our next sprint.

So away again, through the night, and although muscles may ache, or food may call, the fire and steam require all my attention; but eventually, after another stop at an important junction, where some of our traffic is exchanged and we are occupied fifteen or twenty minutes in the work, we arrive at our destination. It is now daylight, and as we draw cautiously into the great goods yard, away from the hurly-burly of the main-line rush, we are able to see each other and note the oil and coal-grimed hands and faces, and, almost for the first time during the trip, exchange a word or two generally about the work and the engine.

Safely arrived in the yard, we put the wagons of our train into two of three appropriate sidings, and are released for the shed. Arrived there my pay stops, and although I have to lock up the tools,



## FIREMAN

gather in my head-lamps, leave the engine safe and secure, and walk over to the booking-off office, I am not paid therefor, so that I may very easily be twenty minutes, after pay ceases, before I finally quit the company's premises.

My mate and I now wend our way to the most unpleasant part of our footplate lives. We are seeking our private lodgings, and although we usually lodge at one place with the widow of one of our late footplate men, we are never sure of finding a bed ready, because she, poor woman, has to take as many comers as possible to enable her to live.

One or two other companies at some few places have properly equipped barracks for what we call double-home men, and, in spite of the fact that these are usually on the company's premises, close to the noise and smoke of the railway loco yards, they are an improvement on private lodgings because you are always sure of accommodation. Whereas, it frequently happens in private lodgings that you may arrive during the night, often with wet clothing, at a little cottage kitchen with no fire, no hot water to help to remove the clinging grease and coal-dust, and after a mouthful of cold food from your basket, proceed to look for a bed, and, finding them all occupied, have to return to the kitchen, light your pipe and make yourself as comfortable as possible until some other set of men get up preparatory to their return journey. You then, about half asleep, often chilled through, turn in, the two of you

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together into the same bed which the other driver and fireman have just left.

This is a miserable, unhealthy, and uncomfortable situation, and it is no wonder that so many men complain so bitterly and in some cases even refuse lodging jobs where no barracks are provided.

However, in this case, we get to our lodgings during the morning when our landlady is about and a fire going. We hand some of the food from our food basket to her to be cooked whilst we wash and clean up as well as possible, and having had our food and not caring to hang about in the way of the home, we turn in, weary and tired, to take rest in a strange bed, and with a strange bedfellow, ready for duty at night and a return to our home depot and our own homes.

*July, 1924.*

## ENGINE DRIVER by J. N.

I AM awakened from deep slumber by a continued knocking and for a moment I am confused as to what it can be, but quickly I realise that it is the call-boy summoning me to duty, and however unwilling I may be, I have to spring from my bed and go to the window to answer, for nothing will quell the noise except my personal answer to the lad who is hammering away below.

Immediately I do so, the knocking ceases and the call-boy informs me that it is a quarter to three, and that I am wanted on duty to work the 5 o'clock a.m. passenger train to B—and return with the express.

It is a bitterly cold morning and raining at that, but inviting though the bed appears, I dare not turn in again even for five minutes, lest I oversleep and cause delay to my train, which would mean more uncomfortable questions than I care to have to answer. So after a hurried wash, I slip into my working clothes, the outer ones being particularly cold and greasy, and whilst the kettle boils on the gas-fire for a cup of tea before leaving, I lace up my boots, put the food which my wife has prepared overnight into my basket, and fill my stone bottle with the cold unsweetened tea already in the jug, and then having swallowed my cup of hot tea with a slice of

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bread and butter, I muffle myself in my greatcoat and, with cap pulled well down, sally forth into the storm.

Arriving at the loco shed, I present myself at the office and report for duty, following which I examine all posted notices which have reference to the road over which I am going to work, keeping a sharp look-out for points where reduction of speed is ordered, new signals erected, or anything else appertaining to the safety of my train, and having obtained printed notices and time-tables which I have to carry with me, I ascertain the number of the engine which is booked to me, and proceed to find her amongst the scores of others in the great shed. Having done so, whether she is under cover or out in the rain, the greatcoat has to be discarded, and as I only have an hour in which to get her ready and leave the shed, there is no time to be lost. So with a cheery 'good morning' to my fireman, I examine the engine tools to see that I have got a full set, see that I have sufficient coal on the tender for the journey, and proceed to the stores for oil and other requisites for the trip. Returning to the engine, I commence oiling all working parts and at the same time carefully examine for any loose bolt or nut or other minor defect, and finally, everything complete, whistle for the signal, and, leaving the shed, proceed to the passenger station. Arrived there, I proceed under the direction of the station shunter to get out the requisite number of coaches for

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my train from the sidings and back them into the passenger platform, where, when safely at rest, whilst passengers and luggage are being loaded up, I take a final look round the work of my fireman, see that his fire is made up correctly, that he has sufficient water in the boiler, and his coal trimmed ready for the journey.

At last, after much banging of doors, comes the 'right away' signal from the guard, so I steadily open the regulator, and with a good head of steam draw quietly out of the station. Now I must be satisfied that all in connection with the engine is correct, and must pay strict attention to the signals and the road ahead.

In the multitude of signals surrounding the great terminus, I have to carefully pick out my own, and as we gather speed and clear for the open country, I am able to tell from the rhythm of the engine's beat and general working that all is well with us.

The train I am working stops at a good number of stations on the way down; in fact, for the first forty miles of the journey it stops at all stations, so that by the time we have got fairly into our stride, I have to shut off and prepare to stop at the first station, having to judge my distance in the darkness, the wet nature of the rail due to the rain, the weight of my train and its brake power to enable me to stop within a yard or two at the first platform. A minute here, and away again, and so from station to station until daylight gives me a clear view of the road ahead,

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and enables me to judge distance much more easily. But now other care has to be exercised, as permanent-way men are beginning to work about the line, and station staff about the stations through which I tear without stopping, at fifty or sixty miles an hour, and often my heart-beats are accelerated a little when the workmen near the line, or actually on it, do not immediately respond to my warning whistle, for I am not sure whether they may be so intent on their work as not to hear its repeated sounding, and so, when I have been in a jangle of doubt as to whether to shut off steam and reduce speed or not, they finally step clear and wave their hand in greeting, I shake my fist at them in passing in a friendly way to notify them of the little nerve-jar they have given me.

So the run goes on, easing my engine up or letting her out, keeping an eye on my fireman, roaring through tunnels and over bridges, picking up water *en route*, stopping at stations and away again, until finally we glide smoothly into the great station which is the end of our outward run. It is now eight o'clock. We have been three hours on the journey of 120 miles, with a stopping train. We are hooked off from our train, which another engine will take further on its journey, and I make the best of my way with my engine to the shed. Here I proceed first to the turntable, where my mate and I with great labour turn our engine round head for home, then back to the water column, fill up the tank with water, to the

## ENGINE DRIVER

coal stage and have another two tons or so of coal tipped on to the tender, then back to the engine pit, in which I get underneath my engine and carefully examine her to see that nothing has gone wrong on the journey down. I also again oil all moving parts, and make her ready again for the road. It is now nine o'clock, it having taken an hour to get from the station to the shed and do the work already indicated, and I have to be out again and back to the station to work the 9.30 up express. So I hurriedly get out my food basket and my bottle of cold tea, and begin to have a hurried meal, but whilst doing so I have to whistle out of the shed and proceed down to the station, finishing my meal whilst standing in the middle road waiting for my train to run in. Promptly on time, at 9.25, in she comes. Then there is a hurried changing of engines, the one that has brought it in scurrying away to the shed whilst I back on and take his place. We are now ready for the 'flyer.' My mate has a great glowing fire, a good head of steam, and all is in order for our run back home without a stop, in which we must cover in two hours the 120 miles which took us three hours with our stopping train. 'Right away' and off we go with our long line of corridor coaches, and the restaurant car, in which even now belated ones may be having breakfast. No time now for thoughts of anything but the engine and the road. No time to look at the scenery we pass through. My fireman is now working like an automatic machine, his shovel

## RAILWAY WORKERS

passing from the tender to the firebox with almost one steady, continuous movement, the engine is roaring and clattering, and stations, towns, and villages flit by in a continuous stream. Now the warning whistle has to be sounded quickly at a group of men on the track a mile away, for I shall be on to them in a minute and all must be clear. I whistle at stations, junctions, tunnels, to warn every one of our approach, for it would be a serious matter were I to take human life, and so for the whole of that two hours' run my nerves are keyed to a high tension, and glad I am when, without mishap, and with no even minor failures to the engine, and without the difficulty of keeping a good head of steam with bad coal, which is sometimes my luck, I am able to shut off steam and glide gracefully into the great terminus strictly on time.

Whilst the passengers from my train flow by in a stream, I am able to pop down and examine round my engine for any slight looseness or defect and cautiously feel the working parts for anything which, in spite of my care and attention, may have become heated on the journey.

Eventually the coaches are pulled from my engine by the station shunting engine, and I am relieved to get back to the shed, where on arrival I take my engine to the firepit, and having carefully completed my examination, I hand her over to the shed staff for stabling, for I have now been on duty eight hours and fifteen minutes, a quarter of an hour



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more than my normal hours for a day's pay; but traips cannot always be arranged to the strict eight hours, as is the case in workshops or factories, and with a good part of other railway work which has not to do with train working.

Having taken my coat and food basket from the engine, I go to the shed office, enter in a book any repairs needed to my engine, make out a statement or 'ticket' of my run, the number of vehicles I have hauled, signal delays, etc., and finally book off duty and leave for home, where I arrive about 12.30, some nine hours after I have left it; but it still takes me an hour to discard my greasy and coal-dust-laden clothing, bath and get into clean clothes, and finally sit down to a real meal; which I can have in comfort, seated at a table instead of on a locomotive, and with my mind at rest.

*July, 1924.*

## SIGNALMAN by A. S.

A. S. was born in 1884; his father was a railway inspector.

At the age of eleven, he won a County Council scholarship, entitling him to a three years' free tuition at a technical school, but in his own words, 'resenting the snobbery practised by the paying sons of the middle-class,' he requested his parents to send him to work.

At fourteen, he entered the railway service as a messenger in a telegraph office at a commencing wage of 6s. a week.

After a year's messengering, he was drafted to a signal-box as a telegraphist-cum-booking lad. His wages were increased to 9s. a week with annual increments of a shilling. Every sixth Sunday he undertook a telegraph clerk's responsibilities in a big office all 'on his own,' for which he received 1s. 8d. extra.

At sixteen, he was shifted 240 miles from his home station, his wages then being 10s. a week, and his lodging bill being 11s. It can be imagined, as he says, that he had 'a pretty thin time of it.'

After five years' experience in the boxes, he became a fully qualified signalman at 21s. a week with an annual bonus of £2 if his record showed no delays or derailments.

When the War broke out, though he was a married man with four children, he immediately enlisted and served for four years in France with the Royal Engineers. Upon demobilisation he returned to the signal-box.

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WITH all his or her – generally her – fussiness, the average railway passenger is a sublimely confiding soul. He or she – generally she – will ponder anxiously over the ‘arr.’ and ‘dep.’ of the jigsaw time-tables, fume at the fare, fret at the fate of the luggage, and then – loll back on the cushions for a sixty-miles-per-hour dash through sunshine, darkness or fog, perfectly impervious to ‘how it’s done.’

Most people outside the railway service – and lots of people inside – possess not the slightest knowledge of the *modus operandi* governing the signalling of traffic along the ‘iron road.’ To them the task of the ‘man in the box’ is the enigma of railwaydom; the ‘chap that pulls the levers’ is something of a marvel and very much of a mystery. A brief visit to a fairly busy signal-box engenders intense admiration for the staff thereof; those privileged to peep into a very busy box are filled with awesome respect. The guard, the driver, the shunter, throw no stones of envy at the signalman’s glass-house.

There are times, of course, when the job becomes a sinecure. A certain nobleman cherishes a photograph of himself ‘manning’ a signal-box during the wilful absence of its legitimate occupants. The lordly blackleg is seen manipulating a lever after the best regulation fashion. His lordship places a peculiar value upon that picture, despite the pertinent argument that any fool can work a signal-box when there are no trains running! Given a normal train service, our august strike-breaker might have dis-

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covered that a signalman's lot is not a happy one.

The signalman of to-day is a highly skilled worker. Railway veterans old enough to be the writer's grandfather recall the time when 'block working,' semaphore signals and locking gear were things unknown. In the dawn of railwaydom the men responsible for the passage of trains were termed policemen; they wore helmets and carried truncheons (outside grades still refer to a signalman as the 'bobby' or 'officer'). They were stationed at small 'booby-hutches' alongside the line; the levers were situated at the points and signals. Trains were signalled on the 'time interval' system, i.e., no train was allowed to proceed until a specified margin had elapsed for the previous train to clear the section. With the evolution of railways came mechanical and electrical safeguards; each section was controlled by signal-boxes wherein were centralised the signal and point levers, locking gear was installed (making it impossible for a signalman to lower opposing signals), and a system of 'block telegraph working' introduced. Improvements in the mechanical and electrical apparatus were gradually effected, and an elaborate code of rules and regulations set up and enforced with seccotine adherence. The perfecting of safety appliances still goes on, present-day projects aiming at greater centralisation (with, of course, consequent economy in man-power) by the substitution of one signal-box with an electrically manipulated lever frame for two, three, or even

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four of the older type of box. A few of these electric power boxes have already been erected and are proving entirely successful.

But with all the multifarious devices for facilitating the movement of the enormously increased traffic and minimising risk, the human element remains the all-important factor. Accidents can happen even in the best regulated signal-box.

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SIGNALMAN

For the purpose of an elementary insight into the duties and responsibilities of a 'leverite,' let us suppose the reader has been invited to accompany Signalman John Smith for one daily round in his particular glass-house. This cabin, although one of a certain liveliness, and situated on a main line, is not exactly a hot-house. Before the National Settlement of 1922 it was a 'first' class box, but under that iniquitous Agreement (which all signalmen repudiate), when every signal-box in Great Britain was re-classified by means of a scale of 'marks' assessment based upon an hourly average of manual work performed (we will illustrate the 'marks' system later), Smith's signal-box was dumped into Class 3 as one of comparative unimportance.

Upon arrival at the box, Smith's first task is to sign himself 'on duty' in what is called the Train Register Book under the last entry of the signalman he relieves (who must sign off duty). The latter apprises him of any matter calling for special attention, and he

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commences his eight-hour shift. Time was, not so many moons ago, when signalmen (excepting those in the large centres) worked ten and, in many cases, twelve hours per day, but no railwayman now works more than eight hours per shift. •

The first thing that catches the visitor's eye is the distinctive colouring of the levers. The levers working the 'points' are painted black, those operating 'home' and 'starting' signals and ground 'discs' are painted red, 'distant' signal levers are painted green (distant signal arms have a swallow-tail cut in them), 'facing point locks' are blue, 'detonator levers' (for placing detonators on rail) are black and white, spare levers are white, and so on. Each lever has a brass tab attached, containing number, description and numbers of other levers to be pulled first (if any). The levers situated at one end of the frame control the line or lines for trains approaching from that end, and vice versa. Over the lever frame is a long shelf holding all the block telegraph instruments, and these are so arranged that they are nearest to the line or box they communicate with.

Until the grouping of the railways each railway company had its own particular pattern of lever frame and block telegraph instruments, some of them cumbersome in the extreme. Each of the Big Four will, of course, eventually standardise signals, levers, instruments, etc., to the choice of the group's chief signalling officer. Without prejudice to other patterns, the writer's opinion is that the Great Western

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Company's apparatus is the most simple, effective and up-to-date.

From the moment Smith takes over the duties from his mate until he himself is relieved he is 'on the go' pulling levers, pressing plungers, ringing bells, telephoning advices and booking trains. As express passenger, stopping passenger, fast goods and slow-moving mineral trains follow each other in close succession, the visitor looks on, bewildered. How coolly does Smith allow a long train of coal to crawl out of the sidings towards the section in advance with an express passenger train crashing along at a mile a minute not many miles away! Again, knowing that up and down expresses are thundering towards his box, he'll crack jokes with the shunter who is fouling both roads with a string of fifty wagons. Yet, just in the nick of time, the 'bobby' shuts the shunting engine in, and the expresses roar by unchecked. Each train has to be watched from the box windows, and a code of emergency signals put into operation for this or that emergency. Always must Smith assure himself that the train passes with tail lamps complete before sending 'Train out of Section' to the box in the rear. And he must enter the time each bell signal is received or sent in the Train Register.

In the course of his week's work Smith may have to signal over two hundred expresses and sandwich a few hundred slower trains of all sorts and sizes in between, together with innumerable shunting opera-

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tions. Yet he calmly and truthfully asseverates to the visitor that he hasn't stopped or even checked a 'flier' for goodness knows how long since. And he's never caused an accident in his life.

### THE METHOD OF SIGNALLING

A complete survey of the signalling apparatus, locking gear and block telegraph instructions would fill a thousand-page book, but a brief explanation of the ordinary mode of train signalling will remove from the reader's mind much of the mystery attached to the signalman's calling.

Let A, B, and C represent three signal-boxes. The distance from A to B is four miles, and from B to C six miles. The signalman at A has a train approaching for the direction of B and C. If the line upon which the train will travel from A to B is unoccupied (the signalman at A will know by the fact of having received the bell signal 'Train out of Section' from B for the previous train), A will send the 'Call Attention' signal (one beat on the block bell) to the man at B. The latter acknowledges the 'Call Attention' by returning one beat and A then asks 'Is Line Clear?' for the particular class of train he desires to send on. A code of bell signals is arranged — so many beats on the bell indicating the class of train (e.g., 4 beats signify express passenger, 3 pause 1 indicate stopping passenger train, 3 pause 2 express goods, 3 beats signify slow goods). If the signalman at B is in a position to accept the train



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offered under what is termed 'Absolute' Line Clear (i.e., a quarter of a mile beyond his 'home' signal), he repeats the beats on the bell and pegs his block instrument to 'Line Clear.' 'Line Clear' is reflected in the block instrument at A. The signalman at A may then lower his signals and as the train passes must send 'Train on Line' to B, who repeats that signal (2 beats) and pegs his block indicator to 'Train on Line.' ('Train on Line' is then reflected in A's indicator.) Until the train reaches B and the signalman there, after satisfying himself that the whole of the train has arrived intact and is within the protection of his fixed signals, has sent 'Train out of Section' to A, the line must be considered blocked and A must not ask 'Is Line Clear?' for another train.

Immediately B receives 'Train on Line' from A he must give the 'Call Attention' to the signalman at C (providing 'Train out of Section' has been received from C for the previous train), and after C has acknowledged the 'Attention' signal B must ask 'Is Line Clear?' for the train approaching from A. If the man at C can accept under 'Absolute Line Clear' he will repeat the bell code sent him and B will then lower his signals for the passage of the train to C. As it passes, B sends the 'Train on Line' signal to C, who acknowledges and pegs his block indicator to that position. If the train passes or arrives at B with tail lamps complete, B sends 'Train out of Section' to A, and the signalman at A may then ask 'Is Line Clear?' for another train.

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That is the standard method of train signalling in use on all British main lines. There are well-defined modifications for the acceptance of trains under a stipulated clearing point when the signalman at the box ahead is not in a position to give the 'Absolute Line Clear,' in which case the train is checked or warned at the box in the rear. It is interesting to note that the distant signal (i.e., the rearmost signal) must not be lowered unless there is an 'All Clear' road to B or C.

A question passes through the visitor's mind as he watches the rapid jugglery of levers and bells. Supposing Smith lowered his signals for the express whilst the shunting engine is pulling a string of forty wagons across the main lines! As a matter of fact, try as he would, Smith could not pull off his main-line signals whilst a train is crossing the main line. For under the lever frame is fixed an intricate system of locking apparatus. Thus, the 'distant' signal, which indicates to a driver whether he may proceed 'all out,' could not be lowered until the home and starting signals applicable to that line had been lowered. And no main-line signal can be dropped if a train is passing over siding points leading to or from or across such main line. Nor can the signalman lower his signals for a train to pass from one line to another (e.g., at a junction, through a cross-over, siding to main line, etc.) until he has set the road or points applicable to the operation. In the absence of locking gear of this description, with the

## SIGNALMAN

modern density of traffic, the newsboys' shout of 'Railway Disawstahl' would be heard with monotonous frequency,

In justice to the signalman, be it reiterated that, with all the mechanical and telegraphic assistance afforded, the 'man in the box' has not yet been reduced to the level of a Robot. The man himself is still the deciding factor; his physical and mental ability and agility are prime essentials. Smith, in his box, *could* 'slip up' any minute and bring trouble, possibly disaster. With all the latest safeguards to be found in modern signal-boxes, there is not one box from which the possibility of a 'smash-up' has been entirely eliminated. The rarity of railway calamities on our British lines is a tribute to the excellence of the personnel manning the signal-boxes.

Under the National Agreement of 1922 the wages of signalmen are based upon an agreed assessment of work actually performed. For the purpose of arriving at the class and rate of pay of a given box, a 24 hours' record is taken. During that period every movement made by the men on duty is checked, and a specified number of marks awarded. For example, pulling or pushing any lever counts 1 mark, sending or receiving a verbal message counts 1, transmitting such message counts 5, opening or closing crossing gates counts 5, receiving or forwarding a written message counts 3. The minimum marks for passing a through train are 10, for booking same in Train Register 3, and so on. The whole of the marks

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for the time the box is open during the 24 hours are counted up, adjustments are made in proportion to daily average of trains, messages, etc., for four weekly periods spread over the busiest and slackest months, and the final total divided by number of hours box is open on day of record.

Thus:

Daily average lever movements	3,385
"    "    telegrams	132
"    "    phone messages	154
Verbal phone advices	33
Oral communications	40
	<hr style="width: 10%; margin: 0 auto;"/>
Total	<u>3,744</u>

Box open 24 hours.

Divide by 24 :  $\frac{3,744}{24} = 156$  marks per hour.

There are seven classes of signal-box, and the standard rate of pay for each class is as follows:

Class.	Average Number of Marks per Hour.	Rate.
Special	375 and over	75s.
1	300-374	70s.
2	225-299	65s.
3	150-224	60s.
4	75-149	55s.
5	30- 74	50s.
6	1- 29	48s.
	46	

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It may be mentioned in passing that signalmen generally are keenly dissatisfied with both the scanty scale of remuneration and the method of assessment. To show how unfairly the latter operates, it will be observed that a signalman making 147 marks per hour only receives the same rate of pay as the man making 75 marks per hour. His responsibilities may be fourfold those borne by the 75 marks man, yet both receive the 10 per cent. addition to their total movements for such. Again, a man in the 375 category may and does make four, five or even six hundred marks per hour, but his pay stops at the 75s. limit.

The crux of the signalmen's complaint against the present agreement is that whilst the manual part of their work is most minutely measured, insufficient credit is given for the mental strain involved. Efforts are now being made through the National Union of Railwaymen and the newly formed Union of Railway Signalmen to substitute a more equitable scheme of remuneration for the present (dis)agreement.

All signalmen are entitled to one week's holiday per year, with pay. A Staff Pension Fund has also been established, from which contributors receive the munificent sum of 15s. to 20s. per week when (or if) reaching the age of 60.

### TOWARDS GREATER SAFETY

Our concluding remarks upon the riddle of the

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signal-box shall consist of a few recommendations to the 'powers that be' whereby the lot of the signalman may be lightened and greater immunity from risk of accident be ensured. Inquiries in numerous quarters lead us to opine that siding accommodation for the temporary disposal of slow-moving traffic is but sparse. 'Refuge' sidings and loop lines laid down at and between all main-line stations would avoid the constant and dangerous see-sawing from this to that line to clear the roads for more important traffic. A consensus of opinion from representative signalmen confirms the view that there is not nearly enough loop and siding room to cope with the traffic now passing over our railways.

The general adoption of 'track circuiting' apparatus is another absolute necessity calling for legislative action by the Ministry of Transport. This arrangement consists of electrifying the permanent way, the 'negative' and 'positive' currents passing through the rails. A train coming on to the rails 'shorts' the circuit and causes an indicator in the signal-box to show 'Track Occupied.' At the same time the lever operating the signal immediately to the rear of the track is electrically locked to prevent the signalman from lowering such signal for any other train. Nor can he, in some instances, peg 'Line Clear' to the box in the rear until the train is off the track. A treble safeguard is the fact that the signalman in the rear cannot lower his starting signal until the signalman ahead has pegged 'Line Clear.'

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Some companies have already introduced this 'track circuiting' apparatus at busy centres or where a signalman's view is obscured. With its extension to all lines, signalling errors could be reduced to the vanishing point.

A third recommendation is the doubling of all lines. Certain routes called branch lines have only one track for trains going up or down, and are worked by a system known as Tablet, Staff or Token working, a method which would take up a volume to explain here. This mode of signalling, whilst perhaps fairly safe, is too complex, very cumbersome, and quite antiquated. With a fair volume of traffic the signalman's task is an extremely trying ordeal, and delay cannot be avoided.

Fourthly, we urge a reduction of hours worked by men in the busier boxes from eight to six per shift. Only the men themselves can testify to the intense mental and physical strain endured daily by eight hours' continuous 'slogging' with a train service averaging thirty per hour.

At the inquest on the victims of the Waterloo smash some years ago, the Coroner made the following statement:

'As one of the travelling public I have always felt under a debt of gratitude to the men in signal-boxes. It has been a source of wonderment to me how these men, who have daily charge of hundreds and thousands of human lives, fulfil their responsible

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tasks. Since this accident I have been enabled to visit various boxes and witness for myself the work done. And I have come away with a profound feeling of respect and admiration for signalmen.'

A worthy tribute to a worthy body of men.

*July, 1924.*



## NOTES ON THE RAILWAY INDUSTRY

### WAGES

	Average weekly Earnings for full week, September, 1925. Wages and Bonus.		
	£	s.	d.
Driver	4	7	5
Fireman	3	5	6
Cleaner	2	6	4
Porter (Grade 2)	2	6	0
Guard	3	4	4
Signalman	2	19	4

These figures are taken from the Statement submitted by the Railway Companies to the National Wages Board, November, 1925, in support of their proposals for a reduction of wages. If these proposals had been accepted by the Wages Board there would have been a reduction of 4s. a week in all the wages mentioned above, except those of the porters, which would have been reduced by 3s. The Board, however, decided that salaries should remain at the existing level for those already in the industry, but that the bonus addition included in the above figures should be reduced in certain grades for new entrants.

Various Household Budgets collected by Mr.

## RAILWAY INDUSTRY

Cramp were laid before the Board, giving the weekly expenditure of some of the lower-paid Railway men. They show no margin for a reduction. It may be of interest to quote two or three of the budgets submitted.<sup>1</sup>

I. Weekly Household Budget of Mr. 'B.,' employed as an Underman at Llantwit Major Station, G.W. Railway. Present Rate of Pay, 50s, per week. Has worked five Sundays this year, for which he received a total of about £5.

*Family:* Self, wife and 3 children aged 14, 10 and 6 years.

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Rent	10	0
Rates	—	
Coal: 1½ cwt. at 2s. 3d.	3	4½
Gas or other Lighting	1	10
Soap, Soda and Polishes	0	6½
Renewals of Furniture	1	0
Bread: 10½ Loaves at 9d.	7	10½
Flour	1	3
Pastry, Cake, Biscuits	—	
Meat: 2½ lb. at 1s. 4d. lb.	3	4
Fish	—	
Bacon: 1 lb. at 1s. 9d.	1	9
Butter: 3 lb. at 2s. 2d.	6	6
Milk: 3½ pints at 3d.	0	10½
Eggs	—	

<sup>1</sup> Report of National Wages Board, November 1925, pages 104-107.

## NOTES

Lard: 1 lb. at 11½ <i>d.</i>	0 11½
Cheese: 2 lb. at 1 <i>s.</i> 3 <i>d.</i>	2 6
Tea: ¾ lb. at 2 <i>s.</i> 8 <i>d.</i>	2 0
Coffee	—
Cocoa	—
Sugar: 4 lb. at 3½ <i>d.</i> a lb.	1 2
Jam, Syrup, etc.	0 8
Dried Fruit, all kinds	—
Condiments	0 3
Rice	0 4
Vegetables	—
Fresh Fruit	—
Meals away from Home	—
Boots and Repairs	2 0
Clothing	3 0
Insurance, Sick Club and Trade Union	1 3
Holidays	—
Newspapers	0 2
Tobacco and Sweets	—
Matches and Firewood	0 3½
Entertainments	—
Other Expenditure	—
Grand Total	52 11

II. Weekly Household Budget of Mr. 'C.,' employed as Parcels Porter at Melton Constable Station, M. and G.N. Jt. Railway. Present Rate of Pay, 5*s.* per week. No Sunday Duty.

## RAILWAY INDUSTRY

*Family:* Self, wife and 3 children, aged 10, 4 and 1½ years.

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Rent	7	0½
Rates (included in Rent)	—	
Coal: 1 cwt. at 2 <i>s.</i> 5 <i>d.</i>	2	5
Gas or other Lighting	2	2
Soap, Soda and Polishes	0	6
Renewals of Furniture	—	
Bread: 8 Loaves at 4½ <i>d.</i>	3	0
Flour: 1 stone	3	1
Pastry, etc.	—	
Meat: 3 lb. at 1 <i>s.</i> 8 <i>d.</i>	5	0
Fish	—	
Bacon: 1 lb. at 2 <i>s.</i> 3 <i>d.</i>	2	3
Butter and Margarine: 1 lb. each	3	0
Milk: 9 pints at 3 <i>d.</i>	2	3
Eggs: 10 at 2½ <i>d.</i>	2	0
Lard: 1 lb. at 1 <i>s.</i>	1	0
Cheese: 1 lb. at 1 <i>s.</i> 3 <i>d.</i>	1	3
Tea: ½ lb. at 2 <i>s.</i> 9 <i>d.</i>	1	4½
Coffee	—	
Cocoa: ¼ lb. at 2 <i>s.</i> 2 <i>d.</i>	0	6½
Sugar: 5 lb. at 3 <i>d.</i>	1	3
Jams	—	
Rice	0	4
Dried Fruit, all kinds	0	10
Condiments	0	4
Vegetables	2	0
Fresh Fruit	0	6

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Meals away from Home	—
Boots and Repairs	2 6
Clothing	1 0
Insurance, Sick Club and Trade Union,	2 5
Holidays	—
Newspapers	0 8
Tobacco and Sweets	—
Matches and Firewood	1 0
Entertainments	—
Other Expenditure	1 4
	—
Grand Total	51 0½

III. Weekly Household Budget of Mr. 'D.,' employed as sub-ganger at Rossington Station, L. & N.E. Railway. Present Rate of Pay, 51s. per week. No Sunday Duty.

*Family:* Self, wife and daughter aged 13 years.

	s.	d.
Rent	8	0
Rates	1	10
Coal, 2 cwt.	4	6
Gas or other Lighting	2	6
Soap, Soda and Polishes	0	6
Renewal of Furniture	—	
Bread	—	
Flour	2	6
Pastry, Cake and Biscuits	1	3
Meat, 4 lb.	6	8

## RAILWAY INDUSTRY

Fish	—
Bacon, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.	1 0
Butter, 2 lb.	5 0
Milk, 14 pints	4 1
Eggs, 12 at $3\frac{1}{2}d.$	3 6
Lard, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.	0 6
Cheese, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.	0 4 $\frac{1}{2}$
Tea, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.	1 7
Coffee	—
Cocoa, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.	0 6
Sugar, 3 lb.	0 10 $\frac{1}{2}$
Jam and Syrup	1 0
Rice	4
Dried fruits	6
Condiments	6
Vegetables	—
Fresh Fruit	—
Meals away from Home	—
Boots and Repairs	1 0
Clothing	—
Insurance, Sick Club and Trade Union	2 6
Holidays	—
Newspapers	—
Tobacco and Sweets	—
Matches and Firewood	—
Entertainment	—
Other Expenditure	—
Grand Total	51 0

## NOTES

### ACCIDENTS

Statement handed in by N.U.R. before the National  
Wages Board, September, 1925

*A. In accidents to trains, rolling stock and permanent  
way.*

Particulars.	1923.		1924.	
	Killed.	Injured.	Killed.	Injured.
Passengers	3	449	24	502
Servants	9	105	8	139
Other Persons	7	12	10	42

*B. In accidents caused by the movement of railway  
vehicles, exclusive of accidents to trains, etc.*

Particulars.	1923.		1924.	
	Killed.	Injured.	Killed.	Injured.
Passengers	66	2,262	85	2,677
Servants	201	3,491	220	3,764
Other Persons <sup>1</sup>	60	121	61	97

<sup>1</sup> Exclusive of Trespassers, Suicides and Attempted Suicides.

## RAILWAY INDUSTRY

### *C. In accidents on Railway Premises not connected with the Movement of Railway Vehicles.*

Particulars.	1923.		1924.	
	Killed.	Injured.	Killed.	Injured.
Passengers	9	727	3	787
Servants	38	15,467	35	17,195
Other Persons <sup>1</sup>	14	470	16	438

### *Number Employed.*

Railwaymen are graded into 43 grades, plus miscellaneous workers, the total number of employees being shown below.

19/3/21	25/3/22	24/3/23	29/3/24	28/3/25
735,870	676,802	681,778	700,573	702,062

<sup>1</sup> Exclusive of Trespassers, Suicides and Attempted Suicides.

*July, 1924.*



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MIÑE WORKERS

## MINER (HEWER) by W. R.

W. R. was born in 1880, the fourth of a family of twelve. His father was a miner, whose earnings varied, according as trade was good or bad, from as low as 3s. 6d. per day, to, at rare times, about 7s. per day.

He left school at eleven, worked one year at the pit bank for 1s. a day, but immediately he was twelve he went down the pit and worked as a miner at the various phases of labour till 1915, when he became a check-weigher at a mine.

\*

**T**HE miner's day generally begins at a very early hour — 5 a.m. usually. His wife is generally up half an hour before that time, getting the fire ready so that he can have a cup of tea before he goes out, and so that his clothes can be warmed ready to put on.

Generally speaking, miners are not at all talkative in the early morning. Many of them rise and don their clothes, take their frugal breakfast, and depart with only a curt 'good morning' to the wife, and a kiss it may be in some instances. But few words are spoken.

Tired and stiff and sore, he rises reluctantly, for he hardly ever seems to get enough rest. Out into the morning air he goes, and as he nears the scene of his labour, he meets with others of his comrades,

## MINE WORKERS

as they come from all points of the compass to be ready at the given time to descend for the day.

In winter it is not such a heartbreak to go away from God's sunlight and fresh air for the best part of every day of one's life; but in the summer mornings when the birds are singing, and the soft fragrances of earth have been quickened by the overnight dew – when everything has the virgin freshness of young life, it is not such an easy thing to bury one's self away in the bowels of the earth, when every bone in one's body is crying for the sun and glorious freedom of a British summer's day.

But however reluctant one may be, coal must be got, and wives and children have a greater call upon one's heart and soul. True to time, the men begin to descend in batches of anything from four at a time in the case of a small pit to as high as forty or more in the case of a large colliery.

Down they plunge from daylight to darkness, with the swift motion of the engines paying out the cables that are attached to the cages. A short journey, though in cases of very deep pits, a swift journey, soon lands them at the bottom, for speed is essential in getting the men in in time.

Cages are quickly emptied, and away they go once more to the surface for another load of human beings. As soon as the men step out of the cage, they scurry off in different directions, each intent on getting to his work as quickly as possible, the young boys and youths jostling each other and joking and playing

## M I N E R

tricks on each other; the older men, more staid and sober, sometimes chiding the boys for their high spirits. But all is generally good-natured banter, and off they go, with hardly ever a thought of what lies ahead, except it be an occasional twinge that the task set may be too much to be accomplished in the time.

Arrived at the coal face, which may be two or three miles in many cases from the bottom of the shaft, clothes are hurriedly torn off, until only a thin shirt and trousers are left (or in the case of deep, hot mines, nothing except a pair of bathing pants and boots are left), and the miner gets hold of his tools and prepares for his labour.

He carefully, though hurriedly, examines the roof and sides of his working place, tapping suspicious-looking places here and there with his pick or hammer, and being able to tell by the sound whether it is safe or not. If unsafe, timber must be 'sett' at once, so as to secure the roof and keep him safe from sudden falls of rock.

Then, if it is a thin seam – say two or three feet in thickness (in some cases seams are worked as low as eighteen inches) – he has to get on to his hands and knees and crawl into where the coal is, and, lying down in a curiously crumpled-up position upon his side, his legs drawn in beneath him, he begins to undercut the coal.

This is very skilled work, and only after a man has served through all the various grades, and has been for a period of some years in the pit, does he become

## MINE WORKERS

a hewer. Brains as well as brawn are needed, and often a very small diminutive man will show a greater cutting capacity than another who is very much heavier built, just because he uses more skill in studying the nature of the strata, and knows how to use every ounce of his energy to the best advantage. Hour after hour passes, and the regular tapping of his pick continues, as he travels along the coal face, always lying in the same cramped position, and only changing over to his other side so that he can rest a bit, by changing his limbs in motion. A short respite is snatched for the eating of the frugal meal, generally of bread and butter or cheese, which his wife has prepared for him before he left in the morning, then with a drink of cold tea from his flagon, he is back at work again plying his pick, while the sweat pours from his body, and the work progresses.

When his undercutting is completed, he drills his shots, gets them charged, and withdraws to a safe distance till the explosion is past.

As soon as the shot has gone off, he is back in ; for now he can tell whether his efforts will be successful for the day or not. If the shots have succeeded in bringing down the coal he has thus prepared, tubs must be got, the coal filled into them hurriedly, and away they go loaded, pushed sometimes by the boys and the young men, who will some day be hewers themselves, or drawn by ponies out to the main roads, when they are taken by haulage power to the pit bottom.

## M I N E R

All day long this alternate undercutting, timbering, blasting and loading goes on, without a break, the air already warm by reason of the depth of the mine, now absolutely polluted by the powder smoke, that slowly drags itself along in thick clouds, obscuring the little light which his lamp gives off, and adding to the difficulties of the mines as the day progresses.

Cursing at failures, joking with comrades, singing when the work is going well; but all the time performing epics of labour, which no other class of worker I have ever seen, performs, the miner toils on. At the end of the shift he dons his clothes, and, now tired, with every ounce of energy wrung out of his body, he drags his limbs along the low roadways to the shaft, more like a native of darkest Africa than a white civilised being made in the 'image of God.'

Then the journey to the surface, and home. Dirty and drenched with sweat, he has got to wash, with very few facilities for doing so; for few miners' houses are provided with baths.

In the operation of washing, the house which the wife has taken such a pride in cleaning during the day is in uproar, and when he has finished it needs to be cleaned and washed out all over again.

For the sake of his womenfolk, the law ought to make it compulsory for baths to be erected at the pit-heads, where he can leave his dirt, and his sodden clothes to be dried, and come home like others; even

## MINE WORKERS

if we did not look at it from the point of view of benefit to his own health.

This is a reform that is long overdue, and now that women are of importance politically, I do hope they'll unite in having this done, so as to help one of the finest classes of women that our country possesses, the miner's womenfolk.

Such is a brief outline of a miner's day. But it is impossible to go into the details that go to make it the very trying thing that it is for him and his womenfolk.

*July, 1924.*

## COLLIERY SURFACE-MAN by H. E.

H. E. was born in 1885. He was the sixth of a family of ten. His father was a collier and earned 3s. 6d. a day. 'On that sum,' says H. E., 'he contrived somehow to develop a most romantic, quaint and the kindest spirit I have ever met.' H. E.'s mother was a wonderful reader and teller of realistic stories. She used to sing to her children the old Scottish songs.

H. E. left school in his eleventh year to become a herdbooy. After six months of this he began work in the pits.

\*

AT 5.45 a.m. the call of the pit steam whistle awakens the mining community to a new day. A hurried slipping on of pit-clothes, a clockwork-like domestic activity and hasty good-byes, and the pitmen's feet beat out a crude rhythmic measure as they make their way towards the colliery.

By 6.45 the surface-men begin the day's toil; while the miners are descending, the surface-men are attending to the loading of underground props, rails, and all such every-hour essentials to coal production.

By 7.15 all the gear on the pit-head and the screens have been examined and oiled, and every care has been taken to ensure that no interruption of output should happen.

The coal begins to be swiftly raised.

Like a river it streams down the shoots, over the classifying and grading screens, where the old and



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the young – the grandfathers, and the baby army of colliers – are bending, with aching backs, picking out the stones and foreign material.

Over in the wood-yard the props are being pitched out of the wagons by the surface-men, and being built in an orderly manner according to the sizes of the varying seams.

A load of straps and crowns are urgently required below. A 'creep' is affecting a section, and the surface-men are straining themselves lifting the ill-balanced and heavy timber.

The anvils are ringing treble notes that are heard clearly above the deep bass of the driving air-fan and the semiquavers of the winding engines.

At the fire-doors the stokers are busy with rake and slicer and sweat-rag. Yesterday, and the day before, the steam pressure went down. The best coal had been sent to the markets, and the rubbish, unsaleable, can only have a steam-raising value when mixed with 90 per cent. human labour power. A coalpit without coal economy *in excelsis!*

Out on 'the dirt-bing' the surface-men are up-ending ton-loaded trucks, lifting them in their arms sixty minutes to the hour.

Having been through those grades of the mill, I am employed at the mouth of the shaft drawing away from the cages the full trucks as they are raised; taking them down to the weigh-bridge, and into the automatic 'tumbler' which revolves with the truck, the full truck displacing the empty in turn.

## COLLIERY SURFACE-MAN

Every three minutes there are four trucks to be handled by two persons – forward and backwards, backwards and forwards from the cages to the tumbler, and again as often from the tumbler to the cages, up and down all day long. We broke the record yesterday, and to-day the 'gaffer' is standing over the shaft with watch in hand calculating whether yet another ton more can be raised.

When the sun glints through the perforated roofing we see the myriad specks of fine coal-dust floating around us, and we understand why one day we could eat as much as our whole pay would buy, and on another could eat but a meagre bite even should our pay equal the drawings of royalty owners who live comfortably in the castle, or basking somewhere in other lands in the free, fresh winds of God in heaven.

But we must not pause to think – the cage is up again, and every half-minute lost means a ton less output.

There is a halt. The bottomer has signalled four. Raise steadily. We all know what that means. There is activity around the ambulance station. A miner has been hurt. Already the doctor is present, and he has everything in order for his patient. One of the most wonderful characteristics of a colliery community is demonstrated in time of accident. A greater miracle than telephone, telegraph or wireless has operated. It matters not where the doctor may be at the time of accident, there is a mystic touch

## MINE WORKERS

which runs with uncanny speed throughout the reaches of the whole mining area, and the doctor is invariably at the pit before the wounded miner is raised to the surface – and in cases of serious injury the collier doctor descends the pit.

Off the cage, into the ambulance station, the unfortunate miner is taken, and the winding of coal is resumed.

We know that likely as not one day later on our miner will find a place amongst the surface-men. Around us are several cases of partially mended victims of the industry. Those men are not yet strong enough to wage the hourly fight against nature down below, and so they huddle around the surface, bearing testimony and witness to the most inhumane side of pit-life. Their fellows help them as best as they can, but the convalescent worker knows that he is only being tolerated by his masters, and all because the insurance people must have profits!

In this is a heart-cry for legislation creating the State guardian of the wounded in industry.

My working mate has now gone to the open bridge with a few crusts for our friendly sparrows that chirp around the roof and winding gear all day long. He carries this act of a moment out with the fervour of a daily religious rite.

The signal bell has again rung; and now a blacksmith is descending with a pair of shoes for one of the dumb little friends of the miner, the pit pony.

There goes the steam whistle. It is breakfast

## COLLIERY SURFACE-MAN

hour! For twenty minutes the surface-men will dine. Squatting down in an old dusty nook or corner, we hurriedly eat our humble fare, fill our pipes, and off to our tasks again.

Those twenty-minute periods have the psychological effect of evolving ready and concise conversationalists.

I have heard the merits of whippets, the pedigrees of horses, the political crisis, the industrial next step, the Church and the State, the baits of fishers and the habits of country streams, and poaching advice – all expertly analysed within the confines of twenty minutes, plus breakfast and smoke. The King's English has undergone a rustic – or is it industrial? – revision, and has attained a remarkably graphic state all its own.

No one can doubt but that, had many of those minds around the colliery not been neglected in the days of their youth, there had been an immeasurable asset to the citizenship and the country honour retained. Students all: conscious and unconscious, though their subjects may give only a transient effect – and the good results that well might have been are lost for ever. Such minds, such memories, such intensified gathering of ideas, such futility of endeavour, would impress the onlooker from any other department of life or phase of our social polity!

The whistle calls – and the wheels of industry move again. The unfinished task is resumed, the everyday work of the surface-men continued.

## MINE WORKERS

At 2.30 p.m. the day's work is done. There is the helter-skelter of the young, the weary tread of the aged, the painful home-going of, the partial compensation victim – all home again!

Toil is over – and all for 4*s.* 11*d.* per day! Plus 1*s.* subsistence wage, which, because of its rise and fall according to the Industry Ascertainments Returns, was known to us as the subsidence wage.<sup>1</sup>

A rent of 7*s.* 6*d.* per week – maybe five days' work. How do we live?

Who would describe the life? Is there a race of people who can so successfully hide poverty like the collier-wives?

And added to the rent many of the surface-workers paid 8*d.* per day train fare.

The heroic – is that the word? – womenfolk came to the rescue of the home – or is it industry? and again country? – by working in the factories and the mills.

The men and women, children of the pits! Home-life! and an Empire for 4*s.* 11*d.*!

Yet the dreams come and go. The desire to become an engineer (not a colliery tradesman, for he has but the wage of the surface-man), a mine manager, a musician, a clergyman, a Civil Servant, a something better – and the billiard gambling saloon

<sup>1</sup> The accuracy of these figures has been challenged, but if reference be made to the note on page 72, it will be seen that in May, 1924, many of the day-wage men were only earning 30*s.* Five and a half days' work at 5*s.* 11*d.* a day is 32*s.* 6*d.* Five days' work would be 29*s.* 7*d.*

## COLLIERY SURFACE-MAN

and the pub is so handy: the glorious forgetting of it all – and who will blame when the DREAM goes?

Football, cards, and horse-racing are the saviours of modern industry and civilisation!

My work-mate who took his first pay to the store to buy food for the hens from which he had had many an egg when other cupboards were bare: my mate who had to borrow his breakfast the morning he started work – Ask him!

Ask the mine-worker after all records of coal-raising have been broken and himself without a fire in the dead of winter – Ask him!

Ask the fair lassie of a few brief years ago, who to-day is wondering what has become of the romance of her youth – the clean, white simple blouse, the neat print frock – gone – now hungry bairns, worn clothes, and rose-faded cheeks – Ask HER!

Ask the men who are kept at the surface on dirty, heavy and cheap jobs, kept like the victims of the Chinese human treadmill for raising their voices against the unjust, raw edges of industrial life; ask those men whose desire is to see legislation which will provide homes for the people, opportunity for education for all, legislation which will make the care of the sick and the injured the first charge on industry and the State, and who for such claims are subjected to relentless victimisation throughout the coalfields – Ask those men!

Having come those collier roads, I know.

*December, 1924.*

## MINER'S WIFE by Mrs. K—

Mrs. K— was born in the year 1855, in the West of Scotland Black Country. She brought up a family of ten children, some of whom have shown remarkable ability. She has lived in various parts of the Scots coalfields, and, in spite of a very busy life, she has always been a keen reader of general literature. She cannot understand why there should be such a struggle for a bare living when there appears to be enough and to spare for everybody.

\*

SOMEONE has taken an interest in the lives we miners' wives spend, and desires to hear how the day goes with us. My parents were miner-folk, and I married a miner when I was twenty years of age, and had a home of my own: one thing I am very sure about, the miner's wife has little time to cultivate the King's English and the craft of words, so my writing will have nothing of the art-polish about it — about as plain as the rows we live in.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MINER'S WIFE! There is no beginning and no end to that. We are told that the sun never sets upon the British Empire; well, calendars and clocks do not indicate the hours in a miner's home. Our mornings are made up not of minutes and dawns. The morning is a shift coming in, at 4.30, the drying of pit-clothes, the outgoing shift at 5.15. The clothes hang all night before the fire in the room where we have to sleep, and those

## MINER'S WIFE

dirty, wet clothes must be turned through the watches of the night. That is the first part of our morning. The day-shift gone, it is time for the school bairns, and the lighting of the wash-fire. In our ill-ventilated houses the wee bairns rise mostly heavy, and until they get out into the fresh air they seem to be scarcely awake. At any rate, the joy of life that the dawn should bring to those so young is not theirs. It is a heart-burning shame that our children should be cheated so early in life.

The children off to school, the baby is to be attended, and the washing put in order and gone on with, and the overcrowded hovels we have to live in must be tidied up. In the doing of all this there is so much hard and unnecessary labour, because there are no facilities. The things we have to move and remove over and over so that our homes can be kept clean! And as soon as our daughters are grown up so that they can help, we mothers have to part with them and off they go to help others who have already all the comforts of life.

At 1.30<sup>1</sup> in the afternoon another outgoing shift, and by 3.15 the day-shift returns – dinners, clothes-drying, sewing, lessons for school, and ironing. At 8.30 the night-shift outgoing, and 9.30 the afternoon-shift returning.

<sup>1</sup>Three shifts:

8.30 p.m.	1.30 p.m.	5.15 a.m.
4.30 a.m.	9.30 p.m.	3.15 p.m.

*July, 1925*



## NOTES ON THE COAL-MINING INDUSTRY,

*Wages.* The average wages of miners of all grades for the quarter ended September 30, 1925, were as follows:

	Average Weekly Wage.		
	£	s.	d.
For Great Britain	2	9	7
For Kent (the best-paid district)	3	2	3
For Somerset (the worst-paid district)	2	2	2 <sup>1</sup>

The Court of Inquiry over which Lord Buckmaster presided reported May, 1924, on page 11, as follows: 'In the district of Lancashire, North Staffordshire and Cheshire, for example, it is shown that of the day-wage men who worked the full number of days that the pits were open, 20 per cent. received between 35s. and 40s. for the week, and that 67 per cent. of the total were between 30s. and 50s. In the case of the piece-workers, 14 per cent. earned less than 40s. and 37 per cent. between 30s. and 50s. In South Staffordshire the limits of 30s. to 50s. covered 64 per cent. of the day-wage men, and 39 per cent. of the piece-workers.'

In connection with these figures, it should be noted that many deductions are made from wages.

<sup>1</sup> Mines Department Statistical Summary, Sept. 30, 1925

## NOTES

These include charges for tools, oil and explosives. The price of explosives varies from £1 per set of men per fortnight down to 4s. per set of men per fortnight, two in number.

I have before me the details of a miner's pay-sheet with the name of the colliery company, number of pit, etc. It is dated March 11, 1922. For the week he hews just over eight tons, working for five shifts, and receives £2 19s. 10d. From this, deductions are made as follows:

	s.	d.
Lamps	0	7
Picks	0	2
Train	1	8
Hospital	0	1
Doctor	0	5
Checkweighman	0	4
Conciliation Board	0	2
National Health Insurance	0	9
Nurse Fund	0	4
	4	6 <sup>1</sup>

Since these figures were published, the insurance contribution has increased.

### WAGES

The latest figures of miners' wages are those published in the *Report of the Royal Commission on the*

<sup>1</sup> *These Things Considered*. By Margaret Pollock, p. 158.

## MINE WORKERS

*Coal Industry* (1925), pp. 156 and 157. Wages vary greatly according to districts: the following represent an average, classified according to occupation.

Hewers (piece-work coal-getters)	13s. 10d. a shift (say) 76s. a week
Timbermen	11s. 10d. a shift (say) 65s. a week
Subsistence wages, Underground and Surface (Principal Districts)	7s. 6½d. to 8s. 9d. a shift (say) 41s. 6d. to 52s. 9d. a week
Underground Labourers (1923)	9s. 7d. a shift (say) 52s. 9d. a week
Pithead and Screen Men (1923)	8s. 2d. a shift (say) 45s. a week

At the present moment (April, 1926) a considerable portion of these earnings are paid out of the Government subsidy. The following table prepared by the officials of the Miners' Federation shows that this amount varies from 9d. a shift in Yorkshire to 4s. 3d. a shift in Kent.

If the whole of the subsidy were withdrawn, and the miners were required to bear the full effect, average wages would be reduced to 6s. a shift or 33s. a week in Northumberland (the lowest), and 10s. 1d. a shift or 55s. 6d. a week in Yorkshire (highest).

## NOTES

District.	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	Actually paid.		Borne by the Industry.		Balance made up by Subvention.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Scotland	10	4	7	7	2	9
Northumberland	9	2	6	0	3	2
Durham	9	11	6	4	3	7
S. Wales & Monmouth	10	8	7	5	3	3
Eastern Division	10	10	10	1	0	9
Lancs & N. Staffs	9	11	8	9	1	2
North Wales	8	10	6	5	2	5
S. Staffs & Salop	8	9	6	9	2	0
Bristol (East)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forest of Dean	8	11	7	2	1	9
Somerset (Newbury)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	13	0	8	9	4	3
Cumberland	10	8	6	11	3	9

### OUTPUT

The output per man per shift in Great Britain was 18 cwt. In the first quarter of 1925, compared with an estimated output of  $16\frac{3}{4}$  to  $17\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. in Germany in July, 1924, in France it was  $13\frac{3}{4}$  cwt. in 1913 and 11 cwt. in 1924; in Belgium it was  $10\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. in 1913 and  $9\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. in the first quarter of 1925. 'No basis is left for any general charge of "ca' canny" against the men directly concerned in output' (page 120, *Report of Coal Commission, 1925*).

## MINE WORKERS

### UNEMPLOYMENT PERCENTAGES <sup>1</sup>

	Total Number of Wage-earners on Colliery Books.	Percentage of Insured Persons Unemployed.
June 22, 1925	1,058,565	25
August 24, 1925	1,048,542	22·2
October 26, 1925	1,060,526	19·9
December 21, 1925	1,084,560·	11·3

*Accidents.* The following figures were quoted in the House of Commons on March 31, 1925, by Mr. G. Hirst, M.P. <sup>2</sup>

	Fatal.	Non-fatal.
1920	1,103	116,930
1921	756 (4 months' lock-out)	86,145
1922	1,105	185,115
1923	1,297	211,598
1924	1,293	211,610
Total	<u>5,554</u>	<u>811,398</u>
5 years	<u>5,554</u>	<u>811,398</u>

Before the Buckmaster Court of Inquiry, Mr. Herbert Smith, President of the Miners' Federation, stated in April, 1924:

'Marshal in one huge procession this army of bruised and broken humanity . . . four men in a rank, each  $1\frac{1}{2}$  yards apart, and you get a procession stretching a distance of 45 miles. Every 15 yards of that tragic march you would have an ambulance

<sup>1</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard, March 31, 1925.*

## NOTES

conveying a man who was seriously injured, and every 21 yards a hearse. This is part of the miner's wage, part of the price he pays in the struggle with natural forces, that the people may have coal and that he and his family may have bread.'

Every working day an average of 850 men and boys are injured, while every hour, 32 are injured.

## HOUSING

The following extracts are taken from the *Coal Commission Report* (1925), Vol. I, page 199:

'The housing conditions of colliery workers . . . show great diversities. They are often very bad—many of the old villages consist of poorly constructed cottages, small and frequently overcrowded, with sanitary arrangements primitive and inadequate, the aspect of the villages being drab and dreary to the last degree. At the other extreme there have been built, by some of the large new colliery companies, garden villages, which are well planned, well constructed and well equipped, equal to any in Great Britain.'

Page 200:

'The fact remains, however, that the information clearly shows that the housing conditions of the miners, particularly in those two counties (i.e. Northumberland and Durham) and in Scotland, are often very bad. . . . In almost all districts, and particularly in some parts of South Wales, there are considerable numbers of houses which have been condemned as unfit for habitation but which remain

## MINE WORKERS

occupied by miners, since there is no immediate prospect of their being replaced by better ones, and the closing of them would merely increase the existing overcrowding.'

*Pit-head Baths.* In France, Germany and Belgium baths are provided at the pit-head. In this country they exist in connection with only six collieries – five in S. Yorkshire and one in Durham County. In the original draft of the Coal Mines Act of 1911 they were made compulsory. But before the Bill became law a provision was inserted to the effect that they must only be provided if two-thirds of the miners voted in favour of them *and if the total cost did not exceed 3d. per head.*

The establishment of Pit-head Baths is recommended by the 1925 Coal Commission. The Report says, page 207:

'A further point to be borne in mind is the undeniable moral effect on miners' children which may sometimes result from the practice of general bathing in the living-room; the effect on their health of being frequently exposed to a steamy atmosphere; and many cases of children falling into tubs of scalding water; and the offensive smell of drying clothes in the cramped accommodation of the miner's home.'

On page 209 (*ibid.*):

'Pit-head baths are clearly a part of the necessary equipment of the collieries, and the obligation should properly rest in this country, as it does in others, upon the colliery proprietors.'

**III**

**BUILDING TRADE WORKERS**



## BRICKLAYER by G. P.

G. P. was born in 1879. His father was a small master-builder. He started work at the age of eleven, waiting on bricklayers. After serving the apprenticeship period, he joined the Bricklayers' Union in 1896 at the age of seventeen. He worked continuously as a bricklayer from that date until 1909, when he became a foreman bricklayer. Later he became general foreman and works manager.

★

**A** DAY in the life of a bricklayer is, perhaps, a little more varied than a day in the life of a factory worker or mill operative. It has its interests, its trials and troubles, and its toll of human endurance.

The bricklayer usually rises in the morning about 6 or 6.30 a.m. The seasonal changes do not make much difference, though he may have a slightly longer working day in the summer. He hurriedly scrambles down his breakfast, for he has to be on the job, before the buzzer blows, at eight o'clock. Between his home and his work, particularly if his home is in one of the dormitory districts of our great industrial centres, there is usually one hour's travelling by train or tram. He hurries to catch either the one or the other, experiencing all the delays and petty annoyances of such travelling. The workmen's trains

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and trams are always overcrowded and straphanging is the rule. It used to be the practice, when the bricklayer arrived on the job to work before eight, to have a short time, half an hour at the most, for breakfast. He works from eight till twelve, has one hour for dinner, and then works from one till five. Thus he nominally works eight hours a day, though his working time, if we take the necessary time spent in travelling into consideration, is actually more frequently ten and ten-and-a-half hours a day.

The changes in the weather are very important factors in the day's work of the bricklayer. If the weather is fine and sunny it is not so bad, though if he is working on white glazed brickwork the reflected glare of the sunlight in his eyes, while working, may irritate him. If it rains he is either 'stood off,' when he gets no pay, or he gets wet through. How truly miserable a human being can be who works all day in clothes that are wringing wet, and then goes home in them, all bricklayers can tell. Snow, frost, fog, all the tricks of the climate and temperature, affect the day's work of the bricklayer. Many a day, after travelling to the job, the bricklayer has to hang about, waiting for the rain to cease, or the frost to break, or the fog to shift, so as to enable him to start work. This question of working or not working during bad weather, and the difficulties that arise therefrom, is one of the fundamental grievance of the bricklayer. If there is plenty of work about the foreman does not mind the bricklayer getting

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soaking wet while working in the rain. If, on the other hand, there is slackness of work, then the foreman can play all manner of tricks on his unfortunate underling. He may be told to work, he may be told to wait awhile, or he may be told not to start. He has paid his travelling expenses, and he usually waits for awhile. Even if he cannot hope to start he may have to fill up his time somehow, until he can make the return journey with his workman's ticket.

Nor is it always due to the weather that the bricklayer is 'stood off.' Though of late years there have been many improvements in the management of building jobs, the bricklayer may find himself denied the opportunity of working – of earning wages on which to live – through shortage of material, the non-delivery of bricks or of other building requisites.

The casual nature of building work is not generally realised. The bricklayer is employed on the understanding that an hour's notice, on either side, can terminate his employment. The casual nature and changing conditions of the work, particularly in periods of bad trade, always prevent the bricklayer from knowing whether he will take home a week's wages or not. Even to-day, when there is a much greater degree of permanency in building work than there was before the War, this uncertainty still largely remains. Hence arises the demand of the bricklayer for a guaranteed week. It is not his fault if it rains or freezes, or if the inefficiency of private

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enterprise causes failure in management or delays in the supply of material.

It used to frequently happen in the past, though such terms of employment have considerably altered now, that the bricklayer would be employed a long way away from his home. He would then have to secure lodgings within reasonable distance of the job and pay for them out of his own earnings, going to his own home at the week-ends. The strain of keeping two homes going on the wages he received was a terrible burden. The privations then endured, both by himself and his family, were enough to knock the spirit out of the stoutest-hearted. He would frequently hardly take sufficient home to pay the rent. Though, to-day, certain allowances are made by employers for lodging expenses, there are quite justifiable reasons for the bricklayer to refuse work outside a reasonable radius of his home.

Building jobs are so various. The day's work of the bricklayer may be on any one of the many parts of building for which bricks are used. He may be setting bricks at the foundations of a house; he may be fixing chimney-pots. He may be engaged in laying Blue Staffordshire bricks, which, in bad weather, require very great attention and considerable skill in keeping plumb level. He may be employed on gauged brickwork, which requires each brick to be shaped perfectly, to radiate to a given centre, and the joints to be no thicker than a sixpence. These points may be made of fresh lime putty or of white

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lead and shellac, generally the latter if carving has to be done on the brickwork.

He may be required to fix boilers, ranges, stoves or do domestic drainage and inspection chambers to same, manholes, building interceptors and to make connections to the main sewer. He may be doing the glazed tiling along the walls of stations on underground railways, etc.; he may have to fix concrete sills and lintels, or, in many parts of the country, roof tiling and slating. He may have to do wall tiling in lavatories, sculleries, etc. In many parts of the country also, he may be employed on cement floors for larders and outhouses, or on laying paths of cement, crazy-paving or brick. It is this variety of work which makes it absolutely futile to talk about an average number of bricks which the bricklayer should lay in a day.

He performs this work amidst the dirt, dust and mess that are inseparable from building work. He is generally working in a stooping position. If he is working in a high wind the dust is a positive nuisance to his eyes. The constant lifting and rubbing of the bricks against his fingers, particularly if they be wet, may cause them to become sore and sometimes bleed. Most bricklayers have, on occasions, worked all day with bleeding fingers, the pads that some use being an inadequate preventative. The constant lifting and placing of the bricks tires out the muscles of the arm and wrist, and leaves the bricklayer dead tired when the day's work is finished.

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There is much dangerous work which the bricklayer may have to do. In underpinning at the bottom of buildings, in working on the inside of factory chimney shafts, two hundred feet or more high, and in working on the fronts of buildings in swings and cradles, considerable risks are run. To make sanitary connections good by cutting away outside piping, on the walls of buildings, in a bosun's chair, is another risky job which the bricklayer has frequently to do as part of his day's work. Unfortunately there is no legal compulsion on employers to insure the bricklayer against accident. Many small jobbing builders do not bother to insure those who work for them, and, as a consequence, full liability is not met by them when an accident occurs. They dodge their liability through the Bankruptcy Court. Many an injured or crippled bricklayer has suffered as a result of this neglect, and there is need for legislation on the matter. There is also need for closer safety and welfare inspection, the testing of scaffolding and the provision of adequate safeguards.

The bricklayer is liable to all the illnesses resulting from exposure to bad weather, rheumatism, lumbago, sciatica, etc. The building industry is reckoned to be one of the healthy industries, but close examination will prove that it is not so healthy as it seems.

No account of a day in the life of a bricklayer would be complete without reference to the circumstances under which he has his food. While the

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accommodation for messing purposes on building jobs has vastly improved, it still leaves room for improvement. To be surrounded with bricks and mortar, plaster, paint, all other kinds of building material and dirt, without, in most cases, adequate means for properly washing one's hands or warming or cooking one's food, does not enable one to dine in comfort. Long usage and rough fare may harden the bricklayer to tolerate conditions that are not conducive to physical well-being or to heighten the sense of human dignity. But he has the right to eat his mid-day meal in the same degree of cleanliness and comfort as other human beings – and he feels that he has this right.

The bricklayer receives no payment for holidays. What are known as holidays – Christmas, Easter, Bank Holiday, and so on, are to the bricklayer not holidays at all but so many days out of work. These holidays usually leave the bricklayer in gloomy despair. It is very seldom, indeed, that what with the lost time, he has sufficient means to really enjoy them.

For working the bricklayer receives 1s. 8d. per hour, National A Grade rate. The chances of getting in a full week's work, for which he would receive £3 13s. 4d., are always uncertain. Different rates of pay prevail in different districts – the country rate being lower than that of London. The grades are A, B, C, and D – divided as highly industrial, semi-industrial, residential and rural. From such wages

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must be deducted National Health Insurance, trade-union contributions, fares, etc.

After the day's work the bricklayer is tired in limb, tired from stooping, tired in the eyes. If he is wet he is not disposed to take a rosy view of life — or to feel particularly at ease in his soiled clothes when sitting amongst the other passengers travelling home on tram or train.

*January, 1925.*



## PAINTER by F. L.

F. L. was born in 1893, the eldest of a family of ten children. His father was a carpenter-joiner, whose earnings at that time were between 30s. and 35s. a week. At times, of course, he was out of employment, 'and,' writes F. L., 'I well remember the anxious times my mother would have in trying to feed the many mouths she had to care for. It was a struggle always to pay her way on the money she received, and the curse of unemployment is that it throws a working-man's wife in arrears for food, rent, etc., from which she never really recovers. Speaking of mother, she died a comparatively young woman in 1915, and looking back on her life over the many years I can remember, I know her life was one long sacrifice for her children. I think the struggle wearied her into an early grave. She seemed to be glad to be out of it all.'

F. L. left school at thirteen, having passed a Labour Certificate Examination which allowed him to leave before he was fourteen, to work. He was then in the top standard. For about eighteen months he worked as an errand-boy for a draper, making long journeys with heavy parcels. He worked from 7.30 a.m. to 8 p.m., except on Saturday, when he worked till 10 p.m., with one half-day off per week.

At fifteen, he was apprenticed to the house painting and decorating trade. He worked at this trade till 1915, when he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He would not join as a combatant as he had a strong belief that it was wrong to take life.

He came through the War safely and after a month's holiday returned to the old trade.

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**I** SUPPOSE the average painter would consider himself 'lucky' if he was continually employed, for however unpleasant the conditions he has to work under, he must exist, and the sad fact is that men fight like wolves to get a job that gives them a bare existence.

The painting trade, whether it is house or ship painting, is very casual, and no description of a painter's life would be complete without describing the misery and horror of unemployment.

Unemployment is the lurking phantom that haunts a painter's mind, unless he is one of the very few who are considered 'lucky' to have a regular job.

Ship painting is far more casual than house painting. It is no uncommon thing for men to be taken on for one or two days and then discharged.

They then have to hunt around the various ship-painting yards in the docks district looking for another job.

During the winter months especially men tramp down morning after morning, week in and week out, in rain and deadly fog, seeking work.

I wish everybody could realise what this soul-and-body-killing process means.

The effect on the body of standing out morning after morning in a cold biting November fog, waiting for the chance to get taken on at some firm, is beyond description, and he just feels aching all over from limb to limb.

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It is no uncommon sight to see a hundred men at one shipyard almost fighting for a job, with perhaps as many at a yard near by.

Sometimes not one man is taken on; sometimes a few; on very rare occasions all are taken.

After the refusal of employment the weary march home begins again. The married man with a family has the prospect of meeting his wife's anxious strained face again. His brain is working out all the time how much more he is slipping into debt or how much more of his home he has to part with to find bread for his family, though it is only fair to say that in districts where there is a Labour Board of Guardians some of this anxiety is lifted from his mind.

Most men I know hate Labour Exchanges and Relieving Officers like poison, and those who say the workers do not seek work cannot realise what utter trash they are indulging in when they say so.

I have seen men almost fight like animals to get a job.

I wonder if people realise what a seasonal or casual trade such as painting means to those who are engaged in it. It means no security, no peace of mind, no certainty of the future and no incentive to improve the condition of the individual self.

Also, is it ever taken into consideration what effect upon the proud, sensitive type of mind it must have, to be always hawking around their labour, and incidentally their bodies, like so much merchandise.

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and to be met time after time with an almost contemptuous refusal?

If they are engaged, to be used for a few days, and then thrown upon the scrap-heap again, so soon as they have served the purpose for which they were set to work?

This question of casual work is one which means tragedy to the worker in every sense of the word, and only those who from bitter experience suffer from it realise what suffering it entails. The great wonder to me is that amongst men, who day by day have to fight one another to get a job which will give their loved ones just an existence, one finds any comradeship at all. Perhaps the common suffering which all endure overcomes the instinct of the jungle to fight one another for bread, and makes all realise they have but to unite together to end a system which entails such needless anxiety and suffering.

Once having secured a job on a ship, imagine what sort of life does one have to endure. If you are fortunate, when you reach the ship to which you are sent from the yard where you are taken on, you may be deputed to paint a cabin or saloon, a fairly clean job. Or you may be sent down into the hold of the ship or the coal-bunker, dark, damp places, where you generally have a paint to use which gives off a suffocating vapour, which often makes men reel like drunken men after they have been using it for some time.

Another job one has to do is to paint the engine

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room, oftentimes with the steam still on. One has to climb around hot pipes which, when the paint is put on, boil with the heat, the fumes rising into the face and causing the eyes to smart with pain. I oftentimes wonder what the effect must be upon the eyesight and the lungs of a man who has to continually endure this sort of thing.

To paint the outside of a ship entails work which is very hazardous, and men risk their lives day by day with great unconcern and cheerfulness, and the reward for taking these risks amounts to a few shillings per day, so cheap is human life.

Men have to climb down stagings, hanging over the ship's side like so many monkeys. Sometimes there is a mishap. Only the other week a member of my own trade-union branch stepped on to a staging which was insecure, the rope gave way, he was hurled into the water. In falling he struck the side of the ship, and must have been unconscious when he reached the water. The man described his experience to me. He said he came to and, to his horror, found himself in the water of the dock, completely submerged. Instinctively he struck out to swim to the surface, but found one of his legs useless. However, somehow he reached the surface, and was hauled to safety by his fellow-workers, who had feared he had been sucked underneath the ship.

To-day that man is a cripple. He broke his knee-cap to pieces when he struck the ship. The sad irony of his case was that he was leaving his job that very

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night to make preparations to sail to some friends in Canada. Such is fate.

If you can imagine a bitter bleak day in the docks with the wind blowing in cold gusts, with rain pouring down from time to time, and then picture a couple of men on a raft with paint-brushes fixed on to long poles which act as both oars for steering purposes and also to paint the undersides of the ship, you will realise another one of those delightful jobs one has to do to earn an existence. Sometimes the rafts capsize. Only last year one of these rafts was used for conveying men back to a ship in mid-stream after they had had their meal. The raft capsized, about 20 to 30 men were hurled into the icy cold water (it was November in the Surrey Docks), and five of these unfortunate men met their death. Thus one could continue, but enough of the actual jobs has been said to show a little of the life that a man engaged in ship painting has to endure. In closing this subject I must say it is amazing the cheerfulness and good-humour that generally prevails. When one goes to dinner, into one of those miserable shacks called 'workmen's dining rooms' which can be found at every dock-side, it is a very cheerful company that sits down and partakes of food some of which I venture to suggest members of the leisured class would hesitate to give to their pedigree pets. But I suppose it is asking too much that those who toil should have good food in pleasant surroundings!

The painter who follows the house-painting sec-

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tion of the trade is more fortunate in some respects. He works generally in more congenial surroundings, and his work is not quite so casual as ship painting, though in London it is very common for the painter to follow both lines of his trade. When he cannot secure a job in the house painting, he will look for a job in the shipping if it is busy.

Whatever one may write of house-painting conditions will seem futile compared to that wonderful work describing the joys, sorrows and humour of a painter's life, i.e., *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist*. I will only say that it is a true description of life as it was in the building trade years ago in a small country town. The only difference now is that trade unionism has grown stronger and also the younger operatives have had a better education and are beginning to think.

I will say in passing that I happen to come from the town where the author of *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist* lived. I knew him when I was a lad. He was a working painter and signwriter — a keen Socialist of the William Morris type, and from all accounts a genius in more ways than one.

But the tragedy of a worker's life is that his genius stands very little chance of succeeding unless he has an extraordinary robust physique to face the hardships of poverty.

Poor Newman, the author of *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist*, was not robust. I believed he died at a comparatively early age from consumption. He is dead. His words live on.

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I am afraid I have digressed from the subject, but I could not resist the temptation of making some remark about a book which deals so exhaustively with the everyday conditions of a painter's life.'

I suppose the most unpleasant work a painter has to contend with is preparation work, such as cleaning paintwork, stripping layer after layer of evil-smelling wallpaper, which has been hanging on the walls perhaps anything from three to thirty years.

It is when one works around the poorer parts of London that you realise the actual conditions under which the poor have to exist.

The small, poky rooms, with walls bulging out and ceilings coming down. Also very often evil-smelling vermin underneath the old paper which one has to strip from the walls (on the very rare occasions that the landlord will pay for this. Generally he pays to have fresh paper stuck over the old — vermin, dirt, grease and disease all plastered over).

I have worked in rooms where the vermin could be counted by the hundred, and, worse still, they are congregated underneath door and sash frames, where they breed and multiply to torment the unhappy tenants during the night hours.

One works under these conditions with a feeling of nausea and disgust, but also hatred for a system which entails poverty, ignorance, dirt and disease. I know some of this could be remedied by personal cleanliness, but is it any wonder that these unhappy people lose hope and heart and sink into despair?



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Yet paradoxical as it may seem, with millions of houses rotting away from dirt and lack of paint and clean distemper, there are thousands of painters walking the streets in a heart-breaking search for work, and drawing relief money when they would be happier usefully employed in creating cleanliness and beauty in these dirty, ugly homes of the poor.

I oftentimes wonder what amount the actual wage of a house painter would average out if spread over the 52 weeks of the year. After deducting the weeks lost through unemployment, the Bank holidays for which no building worker is ever paid, and the fares he has to pay to reach the daily work, I am of opinion that the smallness of the average wage would surprise some of those critics who say that wages are too high in the building trade.

Paying fares to and from work is a great hardship on those engaged on house painting. One has to travel over a great radius in London to get to a job, and oftentimes fares amount from 5s. to 7s. per week. Some firms pay fares over a certain radius, but when a man actually starts on a job and is not sent to it, he cannot claim anything even if he has to travel from Barking direct east to, say, Richmond.

The dangers one meets with in the painting trade may not be compared to, say, mining, but dangers there are. One has to climb into most dangerous positions over roof-tops, etc. I have more than once been tied to a piece of rope let down over a roof to

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paint the inside of a gutter that could not be reached by ladder.

It is not exactly comfortable to stand on the top of an eighty-rung ladder painting on a cold windy day. The hands and arms get frozen and stiff, and every now and again an extra strong gust of wind almost blows one off.

Sometimes a weak spot in a ladder – there is a sudden crack – a snap and some poor unfortunate man is hurled 40 or 50 feet crashing to the ground. Sometimes a ladder slips on a piece of guttering and goes crashing to the ground, bearing down the unhappy man who may happen to be working on it.

One could enumerate many more instances of fatalities caused by the breaking of scaffold boards, ropes, etc. Things which happen day by day. You don't hear much about them, but they happen.

If you read the Official Monthly of the Painters' Society you can see the list of deaths, accidents and illness caused by working at the trade. Statistics bore; I will not give them. Suffice to say it is a dangerous trade in more ways than one, and the most deadly of all is the slow danger of lead-poisoning. Every painter has an unholy dread of that terrible evil. Every year hundreds of men are laid low by this dread disease. Some perish, others drag out a miserable existence with their teeth rotted out of their gums, with eyesight dimmed and their limbs palsied and helpless.

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If taken in the first stage some recover almost their old vitality, but this dread scourge attacks the victim slowly. Slowly but surely the lead eats into his system, till one day he discovers he is a victim to lead-poisoning. By then the poison is completely absorbed into his body. Sometimes too late he seeks medical aid. He is a helpless invalid for life.

It is amazing to think that greed can cause men to deliberately bring suffering and death to their fellow-men, and yet, how can one explain the fight that has been put up against the attempt to abolish the use of white lead by the vested interests concerned in the manufacture of it?

After a hard struggle it has been agreed by 'an International understanding' to make the interior use of white lead illegal. But even for this concession we are to wait for several years before it can come into effect.

I would appeal to all those who have any humanity at all to prohibit white lead on all work they have any control of, and to do their best to secure the legal enactment of the complete prohibition of white lead.

Yet even amongst those engaged in the use of white lead it is surprising to find what opposition is sometimes raised, especially by the older painters, against the abolition of white lead. They base their opposition on the fact that there is no real substitute to take its place for durability. This is not the case, for there are several good substitutes on the market

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now, quite equal to white lead, for general use. But even if this were not the case, it is appalling to think that men can be found so short-sighted as to support the handling of a deadly poison in their daily work, especially on the grounds of durability, for surely the ironical truth is, that under the present economic system, where unemployment is a painter's lot so often, it is better that his workmanship shall not last too long, otherwise there will be still less employment for him.

I should like to say in passing that a good many of the rank and file, who followed the struggle for the prohibition of white lead made at the International Labour Convention, are full of appreciation for the splendid fight made by the Secretary of the National Painters' Society – Mr. Gibson.

A stern fight was made against the vested interests who successfully opposed the complete prohibition of white lead. However, it was agreed that it should be discontinued for interior work after a term of years had elapsed to allow the manufacturers of white lead to make arrangements for the falling off in that production which would naturally follow.

The late Labour Government had a Bill already drafted to bring those decisions into effect in this country.

I hope these few words of mine will have done something to urge those who read them to take up this struggle on behalf of those who make and use white lead; find out the whole facts of the evil

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and force the present Government to deal with the question.

I should not like to close this article and leave the impression that a painter's life is one continual tragedy. That is not the case.

It is remarkable to find what humour exists even when men work under the most evil conditions, and, during working hours, amidst the din of clattering pails, the swish of brushes and the scraping of stripping knives upon the wall. There is many a laugh at some tale or joke (some of which, I am afraid, would not stand publication).

Also, when the whistle goes for dinner-time, and the men troop down to the room or any place where it is possible to eat their food, there is quite a social atmosphere on occasions, and at times there are quite entertaining discussions upon Evolution, Atheism, Socialism and other topics of the day. At other times there is a discussion upon subjects which one would rather not mention but which the author of *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist* described as near reality as he dared.

Yet, with all this humour to relieve the tragedy of a painter's life and with the comradeship that tries to exist amidst this struggle for an existence, the soul of any rebel burns with hatred against the environment and general conditions existing amongst his workmates. He sees them and himself forced to take great risks, to work under revolting circumstances, to inhale day after day nauseating vapours from the

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various preparations one has to use, vapours that foul the stomach and penetrate into every organ of the body, and which also ruin the eyesight; forced also to work under conditions where one gets almost wet and damp to the skin, and then if it rains too hard, packed off home with the wages for the time lost stopped at the end of the week.

Always the haunting spectre of unemployment is in the background which by a cruel irony is always likely to happen in the winter months when one needs more food, clothing, boots, fuel and other things to protect one against our treacherous climate. He also sees his craft being ruined by scamping employers who indulge in every sort of trick to reap more profit out of a contract.

To-day the painting and decorating trade is almost debased to the level of an unskilled trade. Every true craftsman amongst the painters resents this.

It is the one redeeming feature in the painting trade that one does generally see the finished work of one's own hands. To create beauty out of ugliness surely is something to appeal to the best in any man.

The painter to-day is given little chance to produce good craftsmanship. Hurry and scamp is the order of the day on most jobs.

Some of us pinned great faith in the Building Guild. It did produce good craftsmanship, but it had the whole Capitalist system ranged against it – hence it failed.

Well! The painter's train of thoughts for the day

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is ended. He leaves his work and fights his way into a crowded train or tram, home to his poor surroundings to partake of his bread and margarine with some little delicacy if he is lucky, then soon to bed to repeat his usual routine the next day – unless he happens to be a rebel, then he is off to his union or a Socialist meeting to discuss how to alter his lot.

I have attempted to portray in this article a painter's life and his thoughts about conditions as they are. I hope I have not sounded a too pessimistic note. I have written of things as they are. I have attempted to portray the minds of men as they go about their daily work.

Change there will be. The new generation, the young men, are not satisfied. They want better conditions of employment, more leisure to enjoy the good things of life. They demand not only more and better food, but, more important still, they demand a man's heritage in all the world has to give her sons.

Our hope is in Youth. May the young men, who are rebels to-day fighting for better conditions for their fellow-workers, live to see the evils I have described swept away into the limbo of the past.

If the few words I have written help in any way towards this, I am satisfied.

*September, 1924.*

## NOTES ON THE BUILDING INDUSTRY.

*Wages.* Wages in the building industry vary from locality to locality, and are classified under ten grades, varying, in England, from 1s. 8d. to 1s. 3½d. for Standard rates, and from 1s. 3½d. to 11¼d. for Labourers' rates, excluding London.

For the London region, which covers the district contained within a radius of 15 miles from Charing Cross, the authorised rates are as follows:

Within the 12 miles' radius—Standard rate, 1s. 9½d.; Labourers' rate, 1s. 4½d. From 12 to 15 miles' radius—Standard rate, 1s. 9d.; Labourers' rate, 1s. 4d.<sup>1</sup> Painters receive 1d. an hour less than carpenters, bricklayers and plasterers.

It is not uncommon to find people who believe that the rate of building trade wages is the cause of high rents in the new Council houses, and they argue that a reduction of wages or an increase in output on the part of the bricklayer is necessary in order that rents may come down.

In this connection it should be pointed out that an increase of wages by even as much as 10 per cent. has a very small effect on rents—less effect than ¼ per cent. increase interest on the capital money borrowed for the housing scheme.

<sup>1</sup>National Wages and Conditions, Council for the Building Industry.



## NOTES

The following table makes this clear:

### APPROXIMATE EXAMPLE OF COST OF SMALL NON- PARLOUR HOUSE IN OR NEAR LONDON

	£
Cost of house	475
Cost of land	100
Cost of sewers, etc.	50
Architect's fee, etc.	25
	<hr style="width: 100%;"/>
Total cost	<u>650</u>

Interest at 5 per cent., £32 10s. per annum,  
Interest at  $5\frac{1}{4}$  per cent., £34 2s. 6d. per annum,  
= a difference of 32s. 6d. a year, or  $7\frac{1}{2}d.$  a week.

Cost of building wages approximately = 40 per cent. cost of house.

	£
On a £475 house wages	= 190
If wages are increased by	
10 per cent.	= 209
Difference	= 19

Interest on £19 at 5 per cent., which represents the additional annual charge resulting from the increased initial expenditure = 19s. per annum =  $4\frac{1}{2}d.$  per week.

*Lead Poisoning.* One of the chief scourges of building trade workers, in the form of disease, is lead poisoning.

A Committee of Inquiry was instituted by the

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British Government in 1911, in connection with this disease; it resulted in the publication of a majority report deciding in favour of the prohibition of the sale or use of any paint material containing more than 5 per cent. of a soluble lead compound. No effect, however, was given to the findings of that Committee.

The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation of the League of Nations at its Third Session in October, 1921, decided upon the adoption of certain proposals for partial prohibition in the form of a Draft Convention to be submitted for ratification by the members of the International Labour Organisation.

Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, Esthonia, Latvia, Poland, Spain and Sweden have all since ratified the Convention, while Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Roumania have approved of it for ratification.

On April 3, 1924, a Bill was presented by Mr. Arthur Henderson, 'To make better provision for the protection against lead poisoning of persons employed in painting buildings.' It passed a second reading on June 20, but its further progress was checked by the dissolution of Parliament in October of that year.

A Bill in the same terms was presented by Sir W. Joynson-Hicks on May 1, 1925. It was withdrawn on December 1, 1925, and has been re-introduced on March 15, 1926. At the time of writing (April, 1926) it has not yet become law.

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Owing to the fact that lead poisoning is still not a notifiable disease, only the figures obtained from voluntary notification are available, and are as follows: •

Cases.	Deaths.
1922      247	1922      26
1923      337	1923      25
1924      486	1924      32

‘Cases of lead poisoning show a very great reduction since the beginning of the century, the figures having been 1,059 in 1900 and 863 in 1901. Deaths from lead poisoning show a much smaller reduction, having been 38 in 1900 and 34 in 1901. The reduction in the number of cases is almost entirely due to better conditions in the white and red lead industry and in the pottery industry, in which 377 cases and 210 cases, respectively, were reported in 1900, as against 37 and 44 in 1923. The industry responsible for the largest number of cases in 1923 – viz., 95 – was the manufacture of electric accumulators.’<sup>1</sup>

‘The increase in lead poisoning compared with 1923 was due to cases in shipbreaking and in the electric accumulator industry. Regulations based on the principle of exhaust ventilation are now in force in the electric accumulator industry.’<sup>2</sup>

Lead poisoning affects workers in the following industries – Coach and Car Painting; Electrical

<sup>1</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, Sept., 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, July, 1925.

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Accumulator and India-rubber Manufacture; Plumbing and Soldering; Pottery; Painting; Printing; Shipbreaking; Shipbuilding; Smelting; Tinning of Metals; White and Red Lead.

*Time lost through Inclement Weather.* The Report of the National Joint Committee (appointed under Clause 4 of the Terms of Settlement which terminated the National Dispute, dated August 22, 1924) was published on January 12, 1926. The terms of reference were:

“To inquire into the causes and circumstances of the incidence of time lost through inclement weather in the building industry and to report on the facts in connection therewith, together with such recommendations as the Committee deem desirable in regard to same. Such inquiry to be held at an early date and endeavour to report within six months from date of this agreement.”

The following are quotations from the Report:

“The Employer members . . . expressed the following views, viz.:

‘1. That the figures indicate that the average loss per man in consequence of wet weather is about 11d. per hour, or one-ninth of a penny, which on an average of 45 hours per week represents 5d. per week per man employed. The reliability of this figure is supported by the experience of the “Guild Housing Ltd.” Building Guild over a period of two years, as stated by the secretary and accountant, Mr. H. Barham, in a letter published in *The Times* on July 31, 1924.

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'2. That previous to the War, bricklayers received one halfpenny per hour more than other craftsmen in the building industry on account of their employment being sometimes subject to the vagaries of the weather. So far as they are concerned, the halfpenny already given more than covers their loss. Even if this were not so the average loss in all crafts is, under existing conditions, so small and is so amply covered by other concessions that have been given, that the employers' side see no justification for recommending any change of present practice.

'The Operative members of the Committee took a different view. Whilst agreeing that the average incidence of time lost by weather is low by comparison with general estimates on which previous consideration of the question has been based, they contended that was an added reason why their people should be freed from the anxiety which broken time entails. They pointed out that although the over-all average of time lost by weather was shown to be only 1·08 per cent., it does not alter the fact that very large numbers of their members suffer a loss of wages sometimes to the extent of 50 per cent. of their ordinary weekly wages. They further called attention to the present casual nature of building trade employment and its effect in deterring suitable youths from coming into the industry. They submitted that a scheme such as they suggested would be of immense benefit to the industry, without imposing undue hardship on individual employers. They fully appre-

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ciated the fear current in the minds of employers that such a concession might be abused, and they would willingly agree to all necessary safeguards to prevent such dangers.'

No decision was reached by the Committee, but important draft proposals were drawn up for further discussion.

### UNEMPLOYMENT IN BUILDING TRADES

	Total Number of Insured Workpeople Unemployed.	Approximate Percentage Unemployed.
December, 1922	142,292	18·5
„ 1923	97,450	13·6
„ 1924	86,025	11·9
„ 1925	101,123	13·4

Figures taken from the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*.

IV

AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

## AGRICULTURAL LABOURER (WAGONER) by L. T.

L. T. was born in 1892, the eldest of eight children. His father was a wagoner on a farm, with wages of only 14s. a week. The boy's mother therefore had a hard struggle to keep the family.

L. T. left school at fourteen, and went to work on a farm at 2s. 6d. a week, 'living in.' After being there a year or two, he went as a wagoner's lad at 7s. 6d. a week. As time went on he rose to be under-wagoner, his wages then being 16s. a week.

Owing to slackness on the farm L. T. was obliged to leave, and joined the Royal Navy as a stoker in 1911. After serving twelve months he was rated as a first-class stoker.

He served through the War and was present at Dogger Bank and Jutland battles. At Jutland the destroyer on which he was serving was sunk. After the War he returned to the farm in Staffordshire as a wagoner.

★

**I** HEREBY come to the conclusion that agricultural workers are in a desperate position, being myself a wagoner. I work from six o'clock in the morning until six at night. Sometimes you've got to stop to suit the boss, and if you don't like it you can soon go: they're not particular nowadays. The least bit that goes wrong, if they are dissatisfied with one man, they are in with the other one. Ah, don't talk about



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houses! You don't know which is the window and which is the door, for there is as much draught comes from the window as there is from the door. There are seven windows in our house, and out of the seven there is only one good window. I have even had to tell the missus to send for boxes to board them up, for I cannot get them to repair them up, and if you tell the boss about them he says, be satisfied you've got a house. He says, 'I've been offered 7s. a week now and the folks said they would do their own repairs,' on purpose to get the house, and he has taken part of the garden off me now and let it for £1 a year.

The conditions are something scandalous. A man cannot afford to buy a load of coal right out. He has to have one, and pay 2s. a week out of his money. The wages are 30s. a week, with 5d. insurance stopped out of it, and very often we have burnt our coal before we have paid for it. There are five of us in family, three children, me and the wife, and a job I've got to keep them and all. Well, it's not keeping them, it's mere existence. We can't send our shoes to the cobbler. We've either got to depend on Woolworth's for six pennyworth of leather and nails, or if anybody happens to throw some old shoes away, we have to cut a bit off them to mend ours. We don't know what new shoes are. My missus has not had a new pair this last eight years only what she has had given her. All the overtime money that I earned in the harvest was £1, and with that I bought the kiddies one pair of shoes apiece. I don't know when they will

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get any more, and for that £1 I worked hard until eleven o'clock at night in the hay. We don't get any extra pay for heavier manual labour in the harvest. We are only paid for night work.

Now you talk about keeping a pig. It takes us all our time to keep us nowadays. But if we do have a chance to get a pig, it will have to come out of the overtime money in the harvest. Then when you've kept a pig until it's something like, half of it's got to go, or at least a couple of the hams, to pay for the meal and get another little one. Of course a man whose family has grown up has got a bit of a chance. You see, when they throw in all the wages together, if it isn't much it helps better than a man with all little ones. He has to scrape to keep them on thirty bob a week.

Well, and what about thrashing? See what a dirty, filthy job that is, and you don't get a blessed copper more for that than if it was the cleanest job on a farm.

Well, I was in the field the other day and it was tumbling down with rain, and they expect you to go on. So when I was like a drowned rat I said to the gaffer: 'I'd better go in, hadn't I? Can't you find us something to do in the dry?' He said: 'No. If you cannot stick it out you'll have to go home. Who's going to pay you to stop in the building? What about my horses standing in the stable doing nothing?'

I think a farm man's wages should be nothing under 35s. standing: not have to pay his rent out and

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his insurance stopped, and have his half-day on a Saturday. When I've worked from Monday until Sunday I've only 30s. clear. We've got a job to live on this money. Nearly every Friday and Saturday it's either dry bread or no bread at all.

*July, 1925.*

## THE WORK OF FARM LABOURERS

BY COUNCILLOR W. J. SHINGFIELD,

*Sub-Divisional Organiser, the Workers' Union*

THE farm workers of England are in a class all to themselves. There is no other class of worker quite like them or even comparable.

Generally speaking, they are held by those who live in urban areas to be a backward, thoughtless class, possessing a lower degree of intelligence than other workers, incapable of accepting or appreciating developments that would be beneficial to their own best interests.

There is an excuse for those who hold this partial view. It is not a true one, and its acceptance often leads to considerable error in matters concerning the agricultural industry.

It is, however, true that the farm worker may appear slow in the uptake; that he makes his decisions very slowly – but for all that, usually very soundly. It is true that they are very uncommunicative and inarticulate to strangers, and indeed very suspicious, and their manner is, or appears to be, uncouth and abrupt.

They seldom express their point of view to a stranger, and, if asked for it, give answers that do not

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commit them. It may be this attitude that is responsible for the town worker applying to the farm worker such terms as 'John Hødge,' 'Hayseed,' 'Clodhopper' and 'Swede Gnawer.'

The reluctance to talk is a natural result of the conditions of the farm worker's life. The industry of agriculture has for many centuries been an industry of individualistic efforts; the operations are often carried on all day by men who work by themselves in fields of varying expanse, at best working with three or four other men. The work is hard and very laborious; monotonous and dirty in so far that the worker comes in close contact with mother earth, which is rough, and bruises and hardens the body. Most of the work can only be done by adopting a steady plodding attitude.

The association with his fellow-man is very small indeed, limited to receiving instructions from his employer, a few words of conversation with his fellow-workers whom he meets every day, his own family, the weekly visit to the public-house (some omit this), and a visit to a place of worship on Sundays.

Of late years village institutes have made their appearance and are usually used by the younger men.

Another very big reason for his cautious non-committal attitude is, perhaps, the biggest reason. For many, many years there has existed a condition known as 'the tyranny of the country-side.' In con-

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nection with their attempts since 1830 to organise themselves into trade unions, and to win better conditions in wages and housing, a very great deal of victimisation has taken place. It is not so rife now, but up to 1890 a man who was known to hold views on, and in favour of, a trade union was victimised and had to tramp miles away from the village to find a new job. This left such a deep impression on the worker, that the men of to-day have a very similar outlook as had their fathers who suffered the terrible pains of oppression.

The worker living in a 'tied cottage' takes this view – better expressed in the words of one of them, but polished a little:

'Some crooked word – crooked but yet too straight,  
May drive him and his family from the farmyard  
gate.'

This has taken such a hold on the farm workers that they have a studied mode of procedure which they still teach their children – such phrases as the following:

'Keep a still tongue in a wise head.'

'If asked any questions about home matters by the farmer, parson, or strangers, always say "Don't know."'

(With great glee they will tell their children they can't get past 'don't know.')

'Never let the right hand know what the left hand does.'

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'You can think what you like, but you must not say it: they can't hang you for thinking.'

(The term 'they' is usually intended to mean those in authority, or strangers.)

There can be no doubt about it whatever that the gruelling victimisation, not only in trade union but in political and even religious matters, together with the terrible wages and bad housing conditions in the years that have gone, are responsible for the reclusive and secretive attitude even now adopted.

Another very big reason is undoubtedly to be found in another rural phrase: 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' The farm worker never gets a real holiday, at the most a day to go to an agricultural show or something akin. Perhaps one day's trip to the nearest seaside town in the same county. When everybody else is enjoying their summer holidays the farm worker is working his hardest at hay and corn harvest, when he works from dawn to dark.

Readers might say that the foregoing is rather a confirmation of the town worker's point of view of the farm worker, but that is not so. Although farm workers have gone through the hell of terrible poverty and have been driven down underground with brutal tyranny and victimisation, those who know their ways and possess the key, can get them to become articulate, and it is then the greatness of the farm worker is discovered. Poverty has not driven the soul out of the man in the manner poverty has in the town. Instead, it has made him a veritable Stoic.

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Although his home is often insecure, and although, for daring to express a difference of opinion, or being opposed to the interests of his employer, in the shape of desiring more wages, he may often have to roam, yet he is strong in endurance, is this quiet man. As one of them told the writer:

'Full sixteen stone he'll carry on his back,  
But finds the empty purse oft the heavier sack.'

He takes his hard road patiently and as a matter of course:

'If worse comes to worst, he just does his best.  
Trust in God, and Fate – and leave the rest.'

The farm worker, generally speaking, loves his home, and the work he puts in for it is prodigious. He usually has a big family, but the care he expends on it is one of the finest things of which England can boast. After days of gruelling hard work he will come home to tend his homestead's needs, mend shoes for the children, cut fire-wood, 'kindling' trimmed by moonlight often from his employer's trees, given to the worker for trimming. No wages paid for doing it. This he will saw and rive in his back-yard. The whole family will do all sorts of things to make the home as comfortable as may be. In spring and summer he will tend his garden-plot, and some of the best produce can be found there. In his home life he has again to suffer. The girls have to leave for domestic service because he cannot afford



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to keep them at home. Most of the domestic servants of this country are drawn from the homes of the farm worker. This is repeated with the boys. The youngsters will not go on the land. They prefer the police force or the railway or the brewery. It is a fact that 80 per cent. of the Metropolitan police are recruited from rural England. Railways are staffed, especially the uniformed staff, from the same source.

As a measure of his particular type of intelligence, he can tell the hour by shade, read the next day's weather from the sunset, or by the rattle of a cart-wheel on the roads, or by the pranks and tricks of the cattle. To him the glide of his cutting tools or the smoke from his cottage chimney denotes what Nature has in store. He lives with Nature and he understands her ways, and in what he understands he is the equal in intelligence as a class to that of any class in the land.

His work, of whatever section, is highly skilled. It calls for memory, craft, energy and patience. The farm worker possesses these things in full. His work with cattle, horses, sheep and Nature bears the impress of his individuality.

*The Tied Cottage and the Tenants.* The tied cottage is the bugbear of the farm worker's life. It is the term applied to cottages that are let to the farmer with his farm or alternatively sold to him. They are usually occupied by the horsemen, stockmen and shepherds, and sometimes by the day labourers.

They are usually situated close to the farm itself,

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the idea being to have those who look after the live-stock living near enough to call in in the event of anything going wrong. In fact, they live near enough often to know if anything is wrong.

The term 'tied cottage' means that the occupation of the cottage is conditional on employment, and a notice to terminate employment carries with it the necessity to give up possession of the cottage on the termination of employment. It may also mean that there are other conditions imposed, such as that no pigs or poultry may be kept. Some farmers insist on this as a protection to themselves, believing that the labourer's pigs would be fed with the farmer's cattle food.

In the villages of England there has been, ever since the writer can remember, a shortage of cottages. Thus the worker feels the fact that he is tied to his employer, and this adds to the cautious non-committal attitude mentioned in the preceding pages.

The rents for these cottages are seldom what is known as a real rent, the tenancy being a service tenancy. The rent is usually deducted weekly from wages. Sometimes the contract of service is 'wages and a house.' The possession of a 'tied cottage' is called a 'benefit and advantage' under the Wages Regulation Act, and the maximum allowed to be charged for such a house is 3s. per week. For this the house must be reasonably fit for human habitation, and the Wages Committee has the right of entry and of assessment, based on condition of repair, as to the

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amount which may be deducted as rent from wages under the Minimum Wage Regulation, 1924.

*Provision for Unemployment.* There is no provision for unemployed farm workers. They are excluded from the general unemployment scheme. The only place where any relief can be secured is at the local board of guardians, and help from rural boards of guardians is not easy to get; besides which there exists a most terrible disinclination to 'ask the parish.' Many people in rural England would rather die than 'go on the parish.' The writer knows nothing that hurts the farm worker's dignity more. It is regarded as the last straw. They would rather beg or even steal than go to the guardians.

To unemployment insurance the farm worker has in the past been opposed, except where he has had the benefits explained to him by his union officials. He is prejudiced against it generally because the farmers have told him that to contribute to a general unemployment fund would be to keep a lot of lazy people in towns lounging about at his expense.

This is a matter the farm worker does not understand, so he just lets it go by; but where he has had it explained to him, he is keen on being included, because, as one told the writer:

'I can see why my boss is against it, it will cost him something; then he knows that if when I am unemployed I am drawing benefit, and not starving, I

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shall not take any old job and at any old price, but I shall stand out for a fair living wage. Ah, boy! They are an artful lot.'

*Recreation.* Recreation is very limited, but the cycle and the 'bus have done much to broaden out rural life since the War. The favourite game for grown-ups amongst the men is quoits; the youngsters play cricket and football, and make cycle runs into neighbouring towns. Village life is not so good now from the social side as it was thirty years ago. The feasts and dances connected with various seasons have completely died out. One particular function, 'the harvest horkey,' is now very seldom heard of. There are, however, still garden fêtes held, at which can be seen relics of the old English dances, sometimes, but compared with the 'frolics' the writer used to attend thirty years ago they bear very little resemblance.

There is still in the Eastern Counties a very fine recreation – 'bell-ringing' (church bells).

The inclination for pleasure seems to draw young and even old to the town, for pictures and such-like.

*Day Labourer.* The work of this type of farm worker might very well be styled 'the man with the hoe.' The hours vary from village to village, and even from farm to farm, but generally speaking the labourer now works under the regulations of the Wages Board for his particular county. In Suffolk,

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Essex, Norfolk, Cambridge and Lincolnshire, the winter period is 48 hours per week. This starts on the 1st of November and ends on the last day in February; summer period is the other eight months of the year, and is 50 hours per week.

In the summer he rises from his bed soon after 5 a.m. so as to be at his work by 6 a.m. In some cases he will have a short distance to walk and in others sometimes as much as 3 miles. From 6 a.m. till 8 a.m. he works, and then takes his breakfast under the lee of a tree or hedge, with a faggot for his truly rustic seat, or on the brow of a ditch. With some hastily gathered wood he may kindle a fire to warm his tea or cocoa which he carries in a tin bottle. Breakfast usually consists of bread and fat pork or sometimes bread-and-cheese and onions. Only those who have had meals under these conditions can truly appreciate a hot breakfast under comfortable conditions. The writer has often taken such meals, with an old overcoat thrown over his head, his back to the wind, with a stick-fire in front. Thirty minutes is usually spent on this meal. Sometimes the labourer will take a 'bloater' with him and toast it on a sharpened stick at his stick-fire, eating it with the aid of his fingers, which are of necessity grimed with the dirt of the fields.

At 8.30 a.m. he will resume his work, hanging the frail basket in which he carries his food on a stump in the hedge, over which he throws his overcoat or sack. He will then work on till 12 or 12.30.

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when he will take his dinner in a similar manner and of similar food, except that he may for dinner have cold meat pudding. A favourite dish is pork and onion, or pork and apple dumpling. Over this meal he takes an hour, which gives him rest which is very necessary. At 1 or 1.30 he will resume his work, and work away until 4.30, when he will make for his cottage home. He usually takes a hot meal about 5 to 5.30 p.m., consisting of more pudding and plenty of vegetables, but very little meat, and if meat there be, it is usually pork, unless he may be lucky enough to find a rabbit, which he sometimes does, but this is a matter on which he keeps the information very much to himself.

The work of a day labourer is highly skilled, and he has to find his tools, which consist of spade, shovel, four-tine fork, hay fork, billhook, hedging hook, brushing and slashing hook, scythe, turnip hook, 3 sizes of hand hoe (4 inches, 6 inches, and 9 inches), spud, weeding hook, rub, draining tools and leather gloves. Sometimes he is expected to find axe and mattock. With these tools he does hedging, ditching, hoeing and mowing. He will sow artificial manure up to two tons per day broadcast on the fields, which means he has to carry two tons on to and across the cultivated field and throw it on evenly by the handful; clean and harvest root crops; be able to clamp them in airtight cover made with straw and earth. He assists in corn threshing and dressing, carrying corn sacks weighing very heavily, particu-

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lars of which are given in the description of a 'horseman.'

A farm labourer is supposed to be able to do anything on a farm that he is asked to do; plant trees and take them down; lop or trim them: deal with special crops such as seed crops; dress clover seed; and be ready to take the place of any man who is ill.

In the winter he starts work at 7 a.m. instead of 6 a.m., and now that the Wages Regulation Act, 1924, has once again set up the Wages Boards in Suffolk, he gets for all his effort 7d. per hour. The average for the whole country, including all grades of workmen, is 31s. 6d. per week.

*The Horseman.* The horseman starts work an hour to an hour and a half earlier than the day labourer. He has to be moving from his bed about 4.30 a.m., to get to the stables at 5 a.m. He then baits his horses, harnesses them, waters them, and has to be ready to turn out at 6 a.m. for ploughing, harrowing, drilling, horse-hoeing, rolling, cultivating, cutting crops, manure carting and general carting.

Between 5 and 6 a.m., while the horses are baiting, he may return to his cottage for a cup of tea and a snack.

He works away with his horse in the fields until 8 a.m., when he may join the day labourers, if they are working in the same field, for his breakfast, and he will partake of similar food, his horses remaining on while he has it, so that he has to keep an eye on

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them all the while. This makes difficulties sometimes, especially if he has a young horse. From 8.30 he works again until 11.30, when he again stops for fifteen minutes to get a snack, his horses again remaining on. At 3 p.m. he 'takes off' and returns to stables, when he cleans and baits his horses and cleans out the stables, over which he usually spends an hour. At 4 p.m. he goes to his cottage near by for his dinner. About 5 he returns to stables and cuts hay from the haystack, and 'racks up'; sees that everything is all right for the night and then goes home.

On some farms there is a system of head horseman, second horseman, third horseman, etc. The head horseman will be in charge of the stable and field operations. He may have from four to six horses to look after, while the next man may have three or four, and the third, usually a young man, will have two. On some farms the head horseman will do all the baiting, and the other men the cleaning. On some farms a system known as two journeys will be worked. In that case horses will be taken off the fields at 12 noon and go to the stables until 2, returning to the fields again until 5 p.m., the men leaving off at 6 p.m. instead of 5 p.m.

The previously described system is known as one journey.

The horseman usually carts all produce to stations or to markets; works all mowing machines; takes charge of building corn stacks and hay stacks; carries



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all corn, the weights of sacks being about: wheat, 16 to 18 stone per comb; oats, 12 stone; barley, 16 stone; peas and beans, 19 stone; clover seed, 20 stone. Thus it will be seen that the farm worker is able to carry in some cases nearly twice his own weight.

The men usually take a great interest in their horses, and although they use reins they seldom ever need touch them, controlling their horses by talking to them.

In Suffolk one can hear the most weird noises coming from the horsemen when at plough. 'Cuppy-we-hard' means 'Come this way to the left,' 'Whesh-hard' means 'Go to the right,' 'Whoa-a-a' means 'Stop,' of course.

Generally speaking, the men are very kind to their horses. Whips are seldom used, and the writer has known men to fight because one has kicked a horse. In some parts of the country a horseman is described as a carter.

*Day Ploughman.* There is another type of horseman, who only uses a horse, but does not bait or clean. He uses them in the fields, works the same hours as the day labourer, and is paid the same wages.

It will be seen that the horseman works longer hours than day labourers, usually about 8 to 10 hours per week, as he has to feed and clean horses on a Sunday. For this he is paid an inclusive sum of 6s. per week for feeding, cleaning, mucking out,

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bedding down and immediately caring for his animals, otherwise hours for hours his wages are the same as the day labourer's, i.e., 7d. per hour, or 28s. per week, plus 6s. - 34s.

*The Shepherd.* There are two classes of shepherds, those looking after a dry flock and those looking after a wet flock - i.e., a flock of breeding ewes. The shepherd is a highly skilled man. His hours are supposed to be the same as the day labourer's; wages the same as horsemen's. In reality the shepherd at certain times of the year is about all day and all night, getting his sleep when he can. He has a hut with the sheep and sleeps there in snatches, especially at lambing time - January - which is the wettest and the coldest and the darkest time of the year. He is usually paid a price per lamb, on lambs reared, above his ordinary wages. He has to prepare the folds for his sheep - fold setting is very heavy work - and prepare the lambing fold with straw hurdles, which is all very heavy work. Food also has to be prepared for all sheep. He has to know all about their ailments and be ready for any emergency. He usually has a younger person with him who is known as 'the page.'

In a flock of 500 sheep it is remarkable how the shepherd knows each sheep, and I am told the sheep know him. An amusing little incident was told me by a shepherd on the estate of Mr. C. Rhodes, at Dalham, in Suffolk. 'The flock was proceeding along the road when it was met by a rather fine lady who

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addressed the shepherd thus: "What a lot of fine mutton! I suppose you always have plenty of mutton, shepherd?" The shepherd's reply is now history in the village and often quoted: "Well, ma'am, we smell it, but we never eat it."

This was intended to convey to the good lady what is an unmistakable fact, that these fine workmen who produce England's finest mutton never earn enough money to buy any back to eat themselves.

*The Stockman and Cowman.* Under this head we get cowmen, men who milk; bullock feeders, men who feed fat cattle; pig feeders, men who breed and fatten pigs. On some farms they are all rolled into one. It depends on the size of the farm.

The working hours are the same as the day labourer's, except that the stockman has to go on Sundays. In fact, on some farms there is very little difference between the hours worked on Sunday and those of other days of the week. He is the most tied worker of the land – a very dirty job indeed, walking about on wet manure in the stock-yards all day. The work is very heavy, and consists of milking morning and evening, preparing food for fattening cattle, which has to be in many cases prepared by hand, chaff cutting, mangold grinding, meal grinding, cake crushing, all of which have to be carried in to the cattle, to the various pens, in baskets weighing about 8 stone each. He also has to clean out all cattle pens and milking byres; cleanse all milking utensils, churns, and in some cases load milk and take same

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to the railway station; feed pigs, which is a very hefty job; know all about the breeding of cows, or cattle and pigs; have a veterinary knowledge of their complaints and be ready to treat them. He will often be called upon to sit up all night with a cow, especially a cow having her first calf.

The stockman's heaviest work is, of course, in the winter; and there is a difficulty in getting men to take up this work because of the tied nature of the work. The stockman can usually take his meals at his own table, as he gets very little fixed work, but the job is a very dirty and wet one. On up-to-date farms special facilities are used for milking, and overalls (washable) are provided.

*The Casual Worker.* These usually consist of women, and it depends on the nature of the productions as to the number employed. Crops such as peas employ a lot of women in the season. Fruit is usually handled in the same way. The minimum wage for women workers is 5d. per hour, but many of them take their jobs at piece-work. There are still places where women work at stone picking and root singling, but of late years the women have dropped off and very often the work they used to do is not done at all.

There are, of course, other classes who are agricultural workers in a sense. There are the threshing machine tackle drivers and attendants, steam ploughing teams, farm blacksmiths, tractor drivers, foresters or woodmen, warreners, ratcatchers, thatchers, etc.,

## AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

but they are often interchangeable terms and jobs and are usually paid by the job.

Agriculture is England's oldest and certainly one of its biggest industries. There can be little doubt that it is the most valuable. Yet to-day the conditions and nature of the people engaged in it are very little known by the rest of the country. It is true that they appear to be slow compared with the quickness of the town worker, but for solid and thorough knowledge of what he understands the farm worker is second to none as a real man. He far surpasses most classes. He is usually very honest. He does not tell an untruth very easily. He is straight. There can be very little doubt that he has been treated very badly by a class who should have known better, but as I have said earlier, in spite of all the oppression and the tyranny, he has soul-greatness, and while he has not very great powers of conversation or communication, the writer knows many hundreds of farm workers whom he is proud to know and address as friend.

Deep down in the farm worker's heart there is a great love for the piece of land he knows. The most hurtful thing that can be done to his feelings is to discharge him from a place where he has been employed all his life. I have seen men convulsed with feeling who have been so discharged. I have heard their cry of 'I have worked there all my life.' I have felt its meaning. The labourer longs for a piece of land he can control and call his own. If this

## WORK OF FARM LABOURERS

condition is ever brought about in rural England, the writer feels certain that it will produce one of the finest sets of independent workers the world has ever seen.

*January, 1925.*

## NOTES ON AGRICULTURE

In 1851 there were 1,110,311 people employed in agriculture.<sup>1</sup> In 1921—notwithstanding a very great increase in the whole population—there were only 609,105, and this diminution has not been arrested: the number given in 1924 in the debate on agricultural wages being only 600,000 permanently employed, and 100,000 to 150,000 casually employed.<sup>2</sup>

To ascertain the cause and cure of this steady drop in agriculture is of vital importance. One branch only, however, of the inquiry concerns us here—that which deals with the life conditions of the land worker and with the nature of his work and his responsibility. As to these, amazing ignorance exists among town-dwellers, especially among those comfortable classes who have their bread brought to their doors by the baker and their milk, butter and eggs by the milkman, and who never stop to consider the toil of ploughing, sowing and harvest, of stock-tending and dairying, without which these staple articles of diet could not exist. How few of such folk realise that the men who spend their long working days in producing our food never have enough milk for their children and have to be content with margarine instead of butter.

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Edition (p. 413).

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary Reports, June 2, 1924. Speech by Sir H. Cautley, Col. 922.

## NOTES

EXTRACT FROM MR. NOEL BUXTON'S SPEECH IN THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS, JUNE 2, 1924

'I want, however, to bring the minds of hon. members to the real condition which now characterises in a marked degree our agricultural population. There was a particular case of quite an average farm labourer —, not at all an abnormal case — a man with four children — two at home. The general conversation turned upon the food the children got before they went to school in the morning. We were told they got bread and some cheese. I asked what they took to school for lunch. I was told they took bread and a bit of cheese. Then we asked what they had for their high tea before they went to bed. We were told that again they got bread and again a little cheese. They did not get any butter at all. This was their invariable food day after day. . . .

'I have been at some pains to get one or two budgets of farm labourers' families whom I know, and one of them would interest the House. There are five children, from two to eleven, and the exact figures of the weekly expenses have been got out. They are people who live in quite a good house, and they pay 3s. 9d. per week for it. . . .

'I notice there is one luxury put down. It is 6d. for six copies of the *Daily Herald*. I do not know whether it is looked upon as a luxury or a necessity. The budget continues: One-and-a-half lbs. of margarine, no butter, although it is needed, 2s. 9d. for meat (only pieces) and 7s. for flour. That appears to



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be a very large item, but I think the return to home baking and British flour is a very good move that might be set going. This is a case where, as the woman bakes, 7s. represents the consumption of bread. Sugar, only 3½ lbs. Milk, 1 pint each per week, and that skim-milk at 1d. per pint. I am told that my children are supplied with a pint of milk a day. These children have to put up with a pint of skim-milk a week! Then rent, insurance, clothes, candles, oil, soap, and coal take up 9s., leaving 15s. 10d. for food, or three farthings per meal. I can give other budgets. They are all on the same lines, but many show that the people must run into debt in order to get along. Why should people of this kind be driven to borrowing, or to charity, or to the vile alternative of under-feeding? There was a very interesting report on the subject by the late Mr. Wilson Fox, where it showed that the proportion of bread to the general items in 1902 was 20 per cent. Now it appears that, owing to having to pinch and screw, it is 50 per cent. I am told that in many normal households 19s. is the maximum that can be found for food, and that gives an average of under 1d. per meal per person. There is not much room for luxuries in those houses — no chance of an orange for the childrer, which doctors say is of great importance. Can we feel that such a state of things can be tolerated?

'It seems to me that the sacrifices which the man himself is called upon to make are such as I would not care to make. He has either to deny his children

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food or deny himself tobacco. I know many cases where a man has not had a pipe per week, and he badly wants it. I can only say that the man who denies himself his pipe is a hero of the first water.'

Since this speech was delivered, owing to the establishment of the Wages Board, agricultural wages have risen roughly from 28s. to 32s. a week, but are still as low as 28s. in Norfolk, where previously they were 25s.<sup>1</sup>

*Wages Boards and Wages.* Labour in 1913 introduced a Bill to set up County Wages Boards, and thus give agricultural workers a legal minimum wage, but the Bill was refused a first reading. Following this, Mr. Lloyd George began his Land Campaign and promised to 'see that the labourer does get a minimum wage.'

The first Agricultural Wages Board was established by the Corn Production Act, 1917, and continued by the Agriculture Act, 1920. Six months after the passing of this latter Act the Wages Board was thrown over by Mr. Lloyd George.

The labourers had then to wait until 1924, when the Labour Government passed the Agricultural Wages Regulation Act. The net result is that 43 out of 47 Committees in England and Wales have agreed on a minimum wage in their areas. The average works out at 31s. 8d., with an average week of 50

<sup>1</sup> Since this has been to the Press the Norfolk labourers have succeeded in getting a 30s. minimum.

## AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

hours – plus a guaranteed week in many districts, as against the previous average of 28s.

'*Devon Dumplings.*' It is significant that in the Annual Report for 1923 of Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education, he states that country children were then poorer in physique than town children. The following Report of the School Medical Inspector for Devon is incorporated in the Report of the Chief Medical Officer:

"The country-bred child was, in former years, far superior in health and vigour to its less fortunate sister and brother who were reared in a town, and the difference in appearance and health was obvious to the most casual observer; but the rural child has now lost its heritage, and the town-bred child is now wearing the lost mantle.

"One formerly pictured the country child with a chubby face, pink cheeks, bright, alert eyes, and sturdy figure – the "Devon Dumpling," in other words. Now you find many of the children in country schools (excepting the children of farmers) are pale-faced, anæmic-looking, with eyes lacking lustre, undersized, underfed and sad-faced, and without the *joie de vivre* expressed in their general pose and countenance. Why this change?

"That there has been a steady and progressive decline in the general physique of the majority of country children is abundantly manifest, nor is the decline associated with any special area, but exists practically all over the rural areas, even in moorland

## NOTES

children, though, I believe, in the latter classes different causes operate.

'The chief factors causing this decline of health are, in my opinion:

'(1) Migration of the "fit" from the country to the town and consequent breeding from the unfit.

'(2) Bad housing.

'(3) Lack of sufficient and suitable food.

'(4) Intermarriage.

'(5) Large families.'

With regard to the bad housing, he further states:

'Bad housing comes next, in my opinion, to breeding from the unfit, in the causation of the progressive degeneracy of the rural population. The labourers' cottages in many villages are, in some cases, quite unfit for human habitation. The only solution appears to be either a larger wage for the farm worker or State-owned cottages.'

*Unemployment.* As agriculture is one of the 'excepted employments' with regard to unemployment insurance, no statistics are available as to unemployment.

As is pointed out by Mr. Shingfield, this fact adds a heavy anxiety and distress to the agricultural workers, whose lot is already so sorrowful and hard. It is to be hoped that this may be altered as the result of the sitting of the Departmental Committee which was appointed by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Secretary for Scotland 'to consider and report whether it is desirable that

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workers in agriculture should be compulsorily insured against the risk of unemployment, and, if so, on what terms and conditions and in what manner the insurance of agricultural workers can be most effectively provided either by the inclusion of agriculture within the scope of existing legislation or by means of new legislation.'

V

**BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS**

## BARROW-MAN by T. J.

T. J. was born in 1874. His parents were poor and there were many children. Education was not free in those days, and his mother could not pay enough threepences to send all the children to school every week, so they went in turns, and T. J. confesses that when his turn came he generally used the threepence to satisfy a perpetual hunger and played truant.

At the age of eight he commenced work as a half-timer, and with a very vague idea of the three R's. At eleven he began to work full-time in a sawmill. At twelve he worked in a brickyard assisting a brickmaker at a wage of  $1\frac{1}{4}d.$  per 1,000 bricks. At fifteen he was out of work for several months and knew what it was to go dinnerless most days.

At sixteen he got his first experience of blast-furnace work when he had charge of a ladle that conveyed the liquid iron from furnace to bessemer. The wages paid were too low to feed and clothe him, so he obtained work in the bessemer, where he worked 120 hours a week at  $1\frac{1}{4}d.$  per hour. Too tired to play, he tried to read and found words of three syllables too hard to understand. He then purchased for 2s. four little books, *How to Speak Correctly*, *How to Write Clearly*, *How to Punctuate*, and one on *Arithmetic*. He worked hard at this library and learned to read with understanding. In his own words he 'created an appetite for books and books and more books, any kinds of books, but chiefly books on economics, industrial and trade union history and political creeds.' He interested himself in political work. He writes (Jan., 1926): 'At present I am one of the million and a quarter superfluous workers, who are such a nuisance to politicians

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

and the cause of deep concern to statesmen. I think I mention in my essay that I have a wife and children. That's all I have of any value after forty years of heavy toil.'

\*

**R**-R-R-R-R-ING! R-r-r-r-r-ing! Reluctantly I raise my head from the pillow and sleepily stare at the alarm-clock to discover that it is 4.30 a.m., and time for me to rise if I intend to reach my working place at 6 o'clock.

Out of bed and fairly awake, my first thought causes me to go to the window to ascertain what are the weather conditions - my working place being without roof, I am exposed to frost, hail, sleet, snow, rain, brilliant and burning sunshine, or any other kind of weather that may come along to influence, for good or evil, my working conditions. This morning I am profanely silent when my dreaded anticipation is realised by a steady downpour of rain.

Leaving my wife asleep, I stumble downstairs in my army pyjamas. Moving aside the clothes-horse, upon which my working 'togs' have been all night to dry, I stir the fire, put on the kettle, and commence to dress. My stockings are dry but a little stiff; my trousers are caked with dried mine-sludge, and require a hard rubbing and beating to make them pliable. Now, where the deuce is my leather belt and yorks? I find them at last, kicked into a corner of the room. By the time I have donned my waistcoat the



## B A R R O W - M A N

kettle boils and I pour the water into the teapot. My heavily nailed boots are now given a coat of grease and laced on. My blanket coat is examined and placed nearer the fire as it is not quite dry – my stars, it *did* rain yesterday! I place my slouch hat on the knob of the oven door and sit down to hurriedly drink a mug of tea and eat a hunk of bread and butter. The buzzer shrieking out 5.30 causes me to gulp down the last mouthful, slip on coat and hat, snatch up tea-jack and food-tin – filled last night by my wife – and out I go into the pouring rain for a mile walk to work.

At five minutes to six I reach the blast-furnace top and proceed to a small cabin (10 feet by 6 feet) where I place my food, and any spare clothes I may have as an extra precaution against the wet weather.

After greeting my mates on the outgoing shift, I go to the weighing machine, where I can see the score of the work done on the previous shift. I ascertain here at what rate the furnace is smelting and gain some idea of what I shall be required to do on my shift. This morning the tally-board shows 32 rounds (or charges) – a good night's work which prepares me for a busy day.

Now a 'round' or 'charge' is composed of eight barrow loads of iron-ore, each load weighing 16 cwt.; four loads of limestone, 6 cwt. each; and eight barrow loads of coke, 9 cwt. each, which equals 6 tons 8 cwt. of ore, 1 ton 4 cwt. of limestone, and 3 tons 12 cwt. of coke. It is my duty to fill two

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

barrows of ore per round from the bunkers, draw them to the weighing machine to be weighed, and then take them to the skip, where the charge hand tips them in correct order.

I clean and oil the axles of my barrows and examine my shovel, muttering complimentary (or otherwise) remarks concerning the way it has been treated on the last shift. The barrows, empty, weigh about 7 cwt. each, and my shovel is a 12-inch square blade of steel to which a handle about 4 ft. 6 in. in length is attached.

I take my barrows to the bunker, where iron-ore in thousands of tons has been dropped through hopper-wagons from the railroad 'gantry' 50 feet above. Through much rain the ore at the foot of the bunker has become a mass of sludge. Having placed my barrow in a good position, I drive the blade of the shovel at the bottom of the ore, thrusting against the middle of the long handle with my thigh and simultaneously throwing the whole weight of my body forward. The blade being driven well into the ore, I now use my thigh as a fulcrum, and weighing on the crutch with the upper part of my body, I lever and hoist about a half-hundredweight of ore into the barrow. Time and time again this operation is repeated: a swing backwards, a drive and press forward, weigh and heave.

When I think there is sufficient load on, I catch hold of the barrow handles and draw it behind me to the machine 40 yards away, where it is weighed and

## BARROW - MAN

a little ore added or taken off if it happens that the load is light or heavy, correct weight being essential. Off again for 25 yards, drawing my load of 1 ton 3 cwt. behind me to the 'skip.' I may state here that the 'skip' is a large steel box upon wheels that is drawn by a hoist engine up an incline and the contents tipped on the bell of the furnace ready to be lowered inside.

Now back with my 7-cwt. empty barrow to the bunker 65 yards away, and repeat operations *ad fin.*

The rain continues and I am wet to the skin and covered with sludge. The road I travel is covered with cast-iron plates unevenly laid, and as my barrow passes from plate to plate water splashes up through the joints and quickly fills my boots with water and grit. Still, on I and my mates go, heave and fill, weigh and draw, always alert that some small obstacle may not throw us off our balance and cause our barrow to tip up. Two hours and forty minutes we keep up the rush and then stop — twenty minutes for food. In the cabin we take off our wet coats, and those who are fortunate enough to be in first can hang them close to the fire to dry a little during breakfast-time. We gobble a little food and pass sultry jokes upon our bedraggled appearance, then commence to discuss the 'doings' of our local Council, give opinions about the favourite for the 2.30 race, or Hobbs' score in the last match

At 9 o'clock I am off again on the barrow track for a 3 hours and 40 minutes' run. Still raining, and

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the gas and sulphur creeping over the top of the furnace, being too heavy to rise in the light atmosphere, it drifts about me, entering the lungs, making breathing difficult, and filling the mouth with a filthy taste.

To and fro I travel, towards the furnace with my heavy load that compels me to keep a strict control of my breath; with my lightened barrow back I go, spitting out rain, sweat, gas, and, I fear, a swear word occasionally.

At 11 o'clock the charger signals that the furnace is nearly full and I hope to be lucky enough to obtain five minutes' breathing spell, but a red glow showing above the furnace-top proves that iron is running out below. Suddenly there is silence. The blast engine has stopped. Then a voice rings out, 'All hands down to the bottom! Clambering down a 70-foot iron ladder, I find the iron has broken out through the tap-hole and I see a picture that places Dante's Inferno in the shade. There is a large space covered with molten iron and slag. Steam, rain, and gas vapour mingled in clouds. Perspiring, half-naked men leaping here, leaping there with bars in their hands. Keepers, slaggars, moulders, appearing and disappearing in the sulphurous clouds like so many hobgoblins of the nether regions. Oaths and curses come out of the mist as sparks of hot metal strike naked flesh. Now a yell of pain as some poor fellow places his foot accidentally in liquid slag or iron, and out of the inferno comes a group of men carrying the

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injured and groaning man. Steaming with heat and covered with grime, these men look like fiends with a victim in Hades, but in reality are succouring angels and are handling their injured comrade with a care and gentleness that cannot be surpassed.

However, I join in what can only be called a 'mad mêlée,' with a bar breaking the iron and slag, while it is in a brittle condition, into pieces small enough to be dragged away with hand hooks. For an hour I scorch and strain and heave, and the mess, when cleared up, leaves me a very exhausted man. Still there is no rest. There is a roar and rush of flame and dust from the explosion doors. The burden has been hanging in the furnace and has dropped into the liquid below, filling the tuyères with slag that must now be cleared out. That means I have to use a heavy sledge-hammer upon the bar my mate holds in the clogged tuyères. But an end comes at last and up the 70-foot ladder I struggle slowly, completely fagged out. There is no time to waste and off I stagger with my barrow and make an effort to fill it before 'jack-bit' time at twenty minutes to one. It comes at last, and this is the time that cheers men out of depression. There is not much eating; appetite for food has gone. A deep swig of drink and we commence to talk. Now it is discovered that the strong, hardy barrow-man is not merely a beast of burden. Political opinions of all shades are hurled across the cabin. One man knows Gibbins' *Industrial History* from cover to cover; another knows more of Sidney

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Webb's *History of Trades Unionism* than he does of the Bible; that one can repeat whole essays from Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* and recite complete chapters of *Unto this Last*. See yonder strongly built man who has stripped off his saturated shirt. He is stripped to the waist and striped like a zebra with streaks of perspiration and dirt, his hands and arms ribbed with muscles that work in and out of knots as he declaims Ernest Jones' 'Organise! Organise!' and as an encore gives Rienzi's 'Appeal to the Romans.' From bench to bench fly shafts from *Das Capital*; *Wealth of Nations*; *Mill's Political Economy*; Communism, Collectivism, Co-operation, State Socialism, Free Trade, Protection, Tariff Reform, Fiscal Policy, Sweated Industries, Russian trade and requirements, Compensation, Health and Unemployment Insurance, Stabilisation of the Exchanges, Profits, Credits, Prices, the functions of banks, and every current political and industrial topic. Then someone starts the lot laughing as he reads what some intelligent gent. has stated 'are the aspirations of the working classes.' There are professional political speakers who could improve their political education at the barrow-man's 12.40 'jack-bit.'

Another hour's run with the barrows and my wage-earning – not my work – is completed for the day.

Thirty rounds is the 'tally.' I have drawn a load of 25 cwt. over a difficult road 2½ miles; I have

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returned the same distance drawing a 7-cwt. empty barrow; I have lifted with a heavy shovel 48 tons of ore into the barrows; I have had  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours' tussle with a break-out of metal (for which I get no wages), and all has been done in the pouring rain. It doesn't sound much — but try it! Perhaps I shall get 10s. for my day's work, and it has been well earned. With a 'cheerio' to my incoming mate I make my way homeward, where I arrive at 2.30 p.m. I strip off my dripping jacket and shirt, my filthy trousers and boots, throw my stockings into a pail of water, and then get into a tin bath of water prepared by my wife.

After a wash and clothed in a dry suit of clothes I am ready for my dinner. The inner man satisfied, I take up the *Daily Herald*, but the warmth and comfort after the strain and exposure overcomes me, and I fall into a doze from which I am sharply awakened by a rat-tat at the door. Someone has come to seek advice concerning a claim for compensation. As he leaves, another arrives whose unemployment pay has been stopped and he wishes to know what steps to take to again acquire benefit. My lad of nine years arrives from school and commandeers the *Herald* to read Bobby Bear and the cricket scores. My girl of fourteen years follows and requests my assistance with her home-lessons. It's a lovable task helping your children to a better education, and an hour is well spent in this way.

We now have tea together, and it is the happiest

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

time we experience. Cares are forgotten for the time being, and it feels good to be alive as you listen to the chatter of the children and watch the mother's care and control.

At 6.30 p.m. I am due to take part in a debate at the Trades Council on Sweated Imports. This means a mile walk to the Labour Club, but the trouble is amply repaid by the interest and enthusiasm of the meeting, which carries us on till ten o'clock, and is not finished when we part outside the hall.

Back home and after a light supper I arrange my working clothes before the fire to dry, then off to bed at 11.15 p.m.

But you say, 'Surely this is not an *ordinary* day's experience?' There is no such thing as an ordinary day in the working life of a barrow-man; his working conditions are chiefly governed by the weather, and one is forced to admit that in this provoking but lovable island the weather is generally extraordinary. Where workmen are exposed to excessive heat alternately with extreme cold, they should at least be protected from rain, snow, sleet, etc. I am partly protected by Board of Trade regulations and the Compensation Act against the risk of accident, and I *should* be protected against unnecessary risks to my health. A compulsory law for the roofing of the barrow-man's working place – say with corrugated iron – would give a fillip to trade, and some protection to the health of the men. It may mean a



## BARROW - MAN

little expense, but if we turn our attention towards royalty receipts we are convinced that a small levy at that source would cover the cost. Money would also be saved by Health Insurance Departments and great comfort added to our lives.

I live in a four-roomed cottage and can only afford to keep one fire; and that is generally surrounded by wet and dirty working clothes. My house is too small as my rent is too high. Bedroom and bathroom accommodation is needed, but wages won't cover such necessaries if they could be acquired, and I live where the housing question is acute. A few hundred houses under the Wheatley scheme would be a boon.

Again, I work on an average 56 hours per week, 6, 7 and 8 shift weeks consecutively. On one day in the 8-shift week I am compelled to do a double shift of 16 hours. It is altogether too long at such heavy, exhausting toil, and a maximum 48 hours' week is badly needed and would do something to ease unemployment.

Profiteering in food and clothing is responsible for a great scantiness of good articles in both lines, and causes the mother great worry as she patches, patches, and can only help us to very coarse food. The Forty-eight-hour Week; Compulsory Housing; Profiteering, and Protection of Health, should receive immediate legislative attention.

I have described an average day's work on the morning shift, and it is the easiest shift. On the afternoon shift I have partly daylight and partly

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artificial light to work by. It is on this shift that I find time for serious study. At present I am engaged in Gide's *Political Economy*; D. H. Robertson's *Money*; and H. D. Henderson's *Supply and Demand*.

On the night shift, before attending to my Trade Union, Trades Council, Labour Party and Education Committee duties, I spend my spare time in the allotment garden.

But as I stated, on the morning shift I am in bed at 11.15 p.m., wondering what class of weather will prevail to-morrow. Unconsciously oblivion comes until R-r-r-r-r-ing! R-r-r-r-r-ing!!! and it is 4.30 a.m. and again time to rise.

*July, 1925.*

## CRANE-MAN by P. O.

P. O. was born in 1883. He left school at the age of fourteen and started work at an ironworks in the neighbourhood in which he lived. He has worked for the same firm ever since, and has never been out of employment. He attended evening classes for two seasons after starting work, and a study club for one season. That, with his elementary schooling, is all the education he has had. From twenty to twenty-eight his chief interest was sport – football and amateur athletics. As a runner he has won prizes to the value of nearly £100 in all. At the age of twenty-eight he married and has now six children. 'My greatest problem,' he writes, 'and one requiring for its solution more knowledge than I possess, is how to feed and clothe the said children, my wife and myself on the wage of £2 7s. 6d., which I get from driving a steam crane forty-seven hours per week.'

★

**B**LAST-FURNACE work being continuous, the day of twenty-four hours is divided in three shifts, the first shift commencing work at 6 a.m. and finishing at 2 p.m., the second shift working from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., whilst the third (or night) shift starts at 10 p.m. and finishes at 6 a.m. Each man commencing work relieves a particular man on the shift going off. In the majority of cases the workman lives a considerable distance from the blast-furnaces, and as it

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is a custom to relieve one another a few minutes before the specified hours, he has to make preparation for work at least an hour, and in many cases one and a half hours, before the time he actually starts to work. On the first shift he must be up not later than 5 a.m., and after making himself a drink of tea and eating a slice or two of bread-and-butter, he puts his 'bait' tin under his arm, takes a three-pint can of tea in his hand, and sets off for work. Arrived there he finds plenty of it waiting for him, work of the most laborious kind which only the strongest and healthiest of men are capable of doing, work which must be done whether it rains, hails or snows, or whether the sun is shining with a heat that resembles that of molten metal. Hot weather is the most trying time of all for the blast-furnaceman, as he has to contend with the heat of the molten metal at tapping time as well as the heat of the sun, and if, as often happens, the metal goes down the beds instead of into the ladles, the men must go on top of it and break it into pigs of iron. When this has to be done, every man's clothes will be saturated with sweat at the finish, and cases have been known where a man has 'stopped sweating' on a cast of iron, a sign of complete exhaustion. As the furnaces (at this plant) tap every four hours, the above experience may happen twice in one shift, therefore C3 men will *not* be found working at blast-furnaces, though C3 wages *are* paid to most of the men engaged at present. The men are allowed two 'spells' each shift of a quarter of an hour

## C R A N E - M A N

each, for the purpose of meals, but if the furnace is working badly they get no spell at all, and often take their bait tins home without having had a chance to open them. In wet weather the men are exposed to the elements, blast-furnaces not being covered in; but the work must still go on, even if their clothes are wringing wet, so they must remain until, being relieved at the end of the shift, they may go home and change them. The ca' canny system is not in operation on blast-furnace plants; the men are paid a bonus for every ton above a certain fixed 'make,' and every man does his utmost to increase the output of his particular furnace, as by doing so his wages are increased. If the workman is a 'frontside-man' his duties are to help in tapping the furnace, attend to and guide the molten metal into the place assigned to it, either into ladles or down to the pig-beds, clean up after tapping, attend to running of slag and cleaning of slag fall, break iron when necessary and put 'umpteens' beds of moulding in to receive the next cast. When his furnace taps every four hours, the above process has to be done twice in one shift, so it will be admitted that the frontside-man is not likely to be afflicted by the fashionable complaint of ennui. If his work is at the 'backside,' he is responsible for filling the furnace with the raw materials necessary for the production of pig-iron, i.e. ore, limestone, coke, scrap, etc. His wages are regulated by 'input,' the more raw material he puts in the more his wages are, and the amount he is supposed to put in is so

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

calculated that he must work at top speed all the shift to earn 10s. per day at present. If everything goes on all right during the shift he will just be finishing his work when his relief arrives, and he can then depart for home, which he reaches at 2.30 or 2.45 p.m.

On arrival home, after washing, and changing from working clothes to his night clothes, he sits down to his dinner at 3 p.m., after which, in most cases, he goes to bed to rest for two or three hours. Getting up about 6 p.m. and partaking of tea, he then goes out for a stroll or perhaps to some place of entertainment. Returning home at 9.30 or 10 p.m., after a light supper, to bed again to prepare for another day's hard work at 5 a.m. the following morning. After working for six days on the 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. shift the blast-furnaceman has to work on Sunday (the day of rest?) from 6 a.m. till 10 p.m. for the purpose of changing shifts. He must do a 'long turn,' i.e., double the amount of work he has had to do on any of the previous six days, and returns to his home absolutely dog-tired, longing only for a good bed to rest his weary limbs.<sup>1</sup> The abolition of the said long turn is one of the reforms long overdue in the blast-

<sup>1</sup> See Hammond, *The Rise of Modern Industry*, for conditions in the iron industry in 1842: 'On ordinary days one shift arrived at six in the morning and left at six in the evening, to be followed by a second shift which worked till six in the morning. But in order to enable the two shifts to alternate, so that night work should be done by each in turn, it was the custom to keep the shift that began work on the Sunday morning until the Monday morning, a spell of twenty-four hours' (pp. 149-150).

## C R A N E - M A N

furnace plants in Cleveland and South Durham at any rate. After working the full week on the 2 p.m. till 10 p.m. shift he commences work the following Sunday night at 10 p.m., finishing work at 6 a.m. Monday morning for his shift, and going on to complete another week of seven days on these hours. It will be seen from the details of hours of work given above that home arrangements regarding meals, rising in the morning and retiring to rest at night, must differ considerably from those applying to the majority of working-class houses. In the case of the latter the meal-times are usually 8 a.m., 12 noon, 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., but whilst the blast-furnaceman's wife with children must also conform with these meal-times on the children's account, she must also prepare extra meals at times suitable to her husband's work. For instance, on the first shift an extra meal must be provided for the husband about 3 p.m., on the second shift about 9.30 a.m. (breakfast) and 11 p.m. (supper), whilst on the third shift the meal-times for the husband must conform with the periods during which he attempts to obtain some much-needed sleep, for of course on this, the night shift, he must go to bed during the day when the rest of the world are about and stirring. It is not too much to say that on this particular shift the blast-furnaceman cannot get the amount of sleep he should really obtain, as the noises of the street prevent him from doing so. Hawkers shouting 'coal,' 'tatoes,' 'apples,' 'ice-cream,' 'herrin's alive-o,' etc., etc., seem to have

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

formed a conspiracy to prevent him from sleeping during the middle of the day, and when at four o'clock the children in the street return from school, he finds it useless to persevere and reluctantly proceeds to get up. This he does usually about 5 p.m., and after partaking of a meal has about three hours for recreation, before he must again get ready for work. He may go to a cinema or music-hall until 8.30, though nowadays nearly all men are members of some club or other and often resort thereto for a game of billiards and a quiet pint of beer. Many men have allotment gardens where a great deal of their spare time must be spent if it is to produce a decent crop. The only time he can really obtain recreation like the majority of his working-class brethren is on the first shift, when he is able to take part in any entertainment which may have been provided by those who cater mainly for the people whose evenings are always free. On the second shift it is all 'work-and-bed,' so blast-furnacemen say, whilst on the third shift, being unable, as stated previously, to sleep, the opportunity is then taken by those men handy enough, and many are, to do any repairs that may be necessary to the boots worn by all in the household. Blast-furnace work does not tend towards suppleness for those engaged in it, and rarely will the men be found taking part in such games as football, cricket, tennis or other games calling for quickness of movement. They take, however, great interest in these sports, and in their conversations at



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the works show great knowledge of the finer points of all national sports, including racing, though in the case of the latter, and speaking from experience, I am bound to admit that they do not know as much as they imagine they do.

The houses in which men engaged in the pig-iron industry live, in the majority of cases consist of four rooms only. None of these houses are provided with baths, which are a necessity in his case particularly, as from the very nature of his work, which is so hot and dusty, he should be able to have a good bath every time he comes home from work. The rents of these houses are 9s. or 10s. weekly, which is a big slice out of an average wage of £3 weekly. This leaves £2 10s. out of which to provide food, clothing, insurance, etc., and leaves no margin which can be saved for the time when the man is unable to work, as at recurring periods the blast-furnaceman must lay off work through illness, his trade, which by its very nature exposes him to heat, cold, rain and snow, making him susceptible to diseases such as influenza, sciatica, lumbago and pneumonia. Often also he is incapacitated by accidents, and though in this case he receives compensation, the amount he receives is insufficient to maintain the average family, and in nine cases out of ten when the man resumes work he is in debt, although this applies also to the average workman in other trades. In these four-roomed houses in which the average blast-furnaceman lives, there is no room to which he may retire for quietness if he is of

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

a studious nature, and anxious to educate himself. If he wants to read or study he is constantly being interrupted by his wife doing her household duties or by children running in and out, and he often gives up his book in despair and goes out to his club, where his education, to say the least, is not likely to follow the right lines. It has been stated on the highest authority that we are all the victims of our environment. If this is true, then the blast-furnaceman is one of the worst sufferers, as his environment, both at the works and in the congested streets of our great manufacturing towns, is not the best for bringing to the surface the latent talents that are certainly lying dormant in many a man to-day who is working at blast-furnaces. Houses should be provided by the State of not more than eight to the acre at an economic rent to enable men to breathe fresh air at least when away from work. At present we are all compelled to live in an atmosphere composed of foul gases both at work and at home, a state of things not at all necessary. The greatest hardship blast-furnacemen labour under to-day is the inadequate wage they receive for the amount of work they do. The nature of their work calls for the expenditure of all their energy, greater than the amount required from the workman engaged in other industries. Their clothes and boots must be renewed oftener than those of other workmen, on account of the heat of the molten metal, alongside which they work, burning the above-named necessities, thus causing the same to wear out

## CRANE - MAN

sooner than they otherwise would. Their expenditure therefore on food and clothes is greater than that of other workmen, whilst their wage to-day is no greater. 'Increase production' is the slogan of our industrialists to-day. It is the sovereign remedy that will cure all our economic ills. Sir Hugh Bell has said, 'I care not how high a wage I have to pay a man if he earns it by increased production.' The blast-furnaceman, under a new bonus scheme inaugurated in 1919 and by giving the best that he is capable of, has increased the output of pig-iron enormously since that date. Are the ironmasters grateful? Have his wages increased *pro rata*? Did Sir Hugh Bell smilingly pay over to the workman the increased wages he had so hardly earned? The answer to all three questions is decidedly in the negative. Instead they sought, Sir Hugh's firm amongst others, to raise the maximum standard make of the furnaces and by so doing decrease the amount of bonus payable to the men. They succeeded in their object, thus exposing the fallacy of increased production proving beneficial to men, or to the nation, and also proving that the bonus system is a delusion and a snare. 'A fair day's work for a fair day's pay and no bonus' should be the slogan of blast-furnacemen in the future, and if any industry is unable to pay to the workmen engaged in it a wage adequate to enable him and his family to live in frugal comfort, then that industry has no right to exist. The first charge on any industry is a living wage for those engaged in it, and if through fear of

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

starvation, or some worse evil, he is compelled by an employer to accept less, then he is the victim of fraud and injustice and should be protected by the State. As the State to-day is in the control of the employing class, he need look for no protection, but that their reign may soon be over is the daily prayer of P. O.

*July, 1925.*

## THE WORK OF BLAST-FURNACEMEN

BY THOMAS MCKENNA

*Gen. Sec., the National Union of Blast-furnacemen,  
Ore Miners, Coke Workers and Kindred Trades*

**B**LAST-FURNACE work may be divided into the following three categories:

Frontside, Backside, and Subsidiary or Machinery men, such as Locomotive-men, Blast Enginemen, Hoistmen, etc. The arduous and exacting work at a blast-furnace, however, is covered by the first two classes – front and backside.

Possibly it would be well to give a brief outline of a blast-furnace and its operations. Furnaces vary in height and diameter. The height varies between 60 and 90 feet, and the inside diameter will vary according to the height being less at the top, or the bell, than at the bosh, which is the widest part, and may be anything up to 20 feet diameter. From the bell to the bosh there is an outward taper, and from the bosh to the hearth an inward taper; the diameter of the hearth may be anything up to 11 feet, whilst the depth varies but is not usually greater than 6 to 8 feet. Iron-ore, coke, and limestone are filled into barrows by men on the backside of the furnace, who wheel the barrows to a hoist on the ground level, from whence it is lifted by electrical, steam or

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hydraulic power to the top of the furnace. Here chargers and their assistants wheel the barrows from the top of the hoist and deposit the contents into the bell at the top of the furnace. These barrows are tipped in systematic order to ensure a thorough mixing of the ores, coke and flux. The empty barrows are then wheeled back on to the hoist, lowered to the ground level, unloaded and taken away by the mine-fillers, etc., for refilling. This process follows in regular succession throughout the shift. The bell of the furnace is lowered at brief intervals, which allows the ore, etc., to fall into the furnace. The latter is thus kept charged up to a certain level. So much for the work of charging, or filling the furnace. The burden of the furnace is smelted by intensive heat being blown under pressure into the furnace from hot blast stoves, which causes the molten mass to run into the hearth of the furnace, from whence it is ultimately drawn by tapping the furnace at regular intervals. The work of tapping or casting and the preparations for same is the duty of the frontside staff, which is composed of a keeper, who is directly responsible for the care and management of the furnace; a slagger, a helper or moulder, and labourers. The molten iron is run either into ladles or on to the pig-beds. In the latter case it is carried off the beds by hand, or by overhead crane. If it is cast into ladles it is for use in steelworks or foundries, usually. This tapping is carried out in regular succession and on a systematic principle, the

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periods between the casts varying according to the blast pressure applied. In some instances casts are made every three hours, whilst in other cases casts will be made every six or eight hours. Regularity in this work is of the utmost importance, as changes have a bad effect on the working of a furnace. Changes of temperature, or of burden, have a tendency to affect the good working.

Blast-furnaces, like human beings, are susceptible to changes; the more regular an individual is in his habits the less disordered does his system become. So it is with blast-furnaces, and so long as they are running in a well-regulated and orderly manner the better is it for the blast-furnaceman; but there are times when furnaces work badly, and then they cause no end of trouble and anxiety for the men engaged about them. The work is very hard and strenuous in an ordinary way, but when these extraordinary occasions arise it becomes, to use a blast-furnaceman's phraseology, 'blood for money.'

Whether a man's labours are at the frontside, at the backside, or on the top of the furnace, and the furnace is working smoothly and regularly, there is no denying that the toil is hard. There is a regular succession of barrows being charged into the furnace and a regular succession of discharging or tapping at intervals; the men are subjected to sulphurous fumes, coke-dust particles, carbon-monoxide gas and changes of heat and cold. All the men working round the furnace are subject to these conditions, and

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in addition there is the dull monotony of the three-shift system with its continuity of employment during week-ends and holiday periods from year-end to year-end. The three shifts worked are, first, the morning shift, from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.; second, the afternoon shift, from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.; and third, the night shift, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. The men work in successive weeks on each of these three shifts and the change of shift is effected by one shift of men working every third Sunday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. This is known as the double shift, or, as the men call it, their 'long turn.' These changes of shifts necessitate special arrangements in the domestic circle, and naturally cause extra expense in the provision of food. They also interfere with the social side of a blast-furnaceman's life, and really only leave him one week in three in which to partake of social amenities. Consequently his life becomes modelled on lines different from those of the regular day worker. The average life of a blast-furnace in Great Britain may be placed at, say, ten years, and it is the object of a blast-furnace operator to run the furnace during the whole of its lifetime without slackening or cessation, and the men are expected to work, if they are able, every day or every night in the week the year round. Saturdays and Sundays are the same as Mondays and Tuesdays to the blast-furnaceman, and there are no statutory holidays which he is allowed to take. His work is dully, deadly, and monotonously regular.

According to whether a man resides in town or



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rural areas, so is his walk in life affected. Blast-furnaces mostly are in industrial centres, and as a rule the workers are living in congested areas with living accommodation of a most primitive nature. The adjective 'primitive' would also apply to the rural areas, the only advantage in this case being the absence of congestion. But whether in town or country, one of the greatest essentials in the home of a blast-furnaceman is lacking, namely, a bath with a hot and cold water supply and facilities for drying and airing wet clothes after a shift's work. Blast-furnacemen are of an industrious nature and endowed with more than an ordinary share of intelligence: where hobbies are taken up they are followed with a whole-hearted devotion. Many blast-furnacemen have allotments and by these help out their weekly earnings. Breeding of dogs, rabbits, homing pigeons, etc., with bee-keeping and pig-farming in the country villages, are among the pursuits of blast-furnacemen.

The work of the blast-furnaceman is painfully laborious. The barrowmen and fillers manipulate a barrow, which of itself will weigh, say, 7 cwt., into which they fill with a shovel or from a slide kiln usually 15 cwt. of material, and all the shift through keep pace with the furnace, pulling 22 cwt. a distance of from 35 to 50 yards, and in some cases more, to the bottom of the furnace. The ore is sometimes filled from wagons. In some instances the ore is shovelled from the ground into the barrows, as is the

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

limestone. The usual quantity filled by shovel in a shift's work is anything from 25 to 35 tons. The quantity of coke filled into a barrow varies between 6 and 9 cwt.: usually coke-fillers are engaged on this work apart from or in addition to ore-fillers. There is a regular succession of barrows to and from the lifts, together with the arduous work of filling the same. Mostly these men are exposed to the elements.

The frontside work consists of tapping or casting the furnace and preparing the moulds of sand to receive the iron. The principal man at the frontside is the keeper. Whilst this tapping operation is in process the men are subjected to intense heat and perspire very freely, and of course, being in the open, are subject to weather conditions as well. The changes from intense heat to cold and wet are responsible for many of the ailments of a blast-furnace-man. After the tapping operations and the iron is run on to the beds or in a molten state to ladles, the tapping hole has to be stopped up, which again is the duty of the keeper. The introduction of the mud-gun has improved this work considerably. The slaggers are responsible for the tapping of the slag, which is run into ladles, taken away by loco-men and disposed of on slag-tips, etc. In addition, like all the rest of the frontside-men, they assist in the casting and the moulding into pig-beds, and, like the keepers, are subject to the intense heat and weather conditions. Helpers or moulders prepare the pig-beds and assist in the general work of the frontside.

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Whichever one of these jobs a man may have, it is absolutely essential that he should keep himself up to a high standard of physical fitness; weaklings soon go to the wall.

Owing to the changes of weather, even the strongest amongst them are subject to pulmonary complaints which are attributable to the constant changes from the intense heat and cold. At casting time on the frontside, the men usually have a spare shirt into which to change. Rheumatism, sciatica and lumbago are prevalent complaints among the blast-furnacemen.

Coming to the domestic side of his life, owing to the constantly changing shifts it can be quite readily understood how his home life is affected. One week he commences work at 6 a.m., the next week at 2 p.m., the following week at 10 p.m. This calls for varying arrangements in the preparations for food, drying and airing wet clothes when the shift is finished, ablutions, etc., which considerably affect the domestic arrangements. With the restricted housing accommodation and provisions, wet clothes and shirts have to be frequently dried in the living-kitchen.

As to the question of wages, these vary slightly according to districts, but in a general way at the moment these run for a keeper – say from 10s. to 13s. 6d. or 14s. per shift; slaggers, 9s. 6d. to 10s. 6d.; moulders, 9s. to 10s.; labourers, 6s. 6d. to 7s.; chargers, 10s. to 11s. 6d.; fillers, 9s. 9d. to 11s.

## BLAST-FURNACE WORKERS

There are no recognised holidays, as such, at blast-furnace plants. The men have to work on all holidays, on ten of which in the year they receive extra payment at the rate of time and half. On Saturday from 2 p.m. until Sunday morning at 6 o'clock, that is Saturday 2nd and 3rd shift, men receive payment at the rate of time and quarter, and for the three Sunday shifts, namely, 6 a.m. Sunday to 6 a.m. Monday, they are paid at the rate of time and half. Prior to 1913 no extra payment was made for either holidays or week-end work.

With reference to the improving of their conditions either by legislation or by any other means, possibly one of the first considerations should be that of housing, with adequate accommodation, and the first of all essentials in the working-class home — a bath with hot and cold water supply and drying facilities set apart from the living-room of the family. Considerable improvement might be effected in the conditions under which the men work. For instance, there could be afforded some protection from the elements, and particularly the wet.

Compensation might be paid from the first day of the accident. Protection might be given against unemployment. The provision of an adequate water supply with hygienic sanitary system might be made.

Whilst these men are subjected to intense heat, it is natural that their thirst develops. The time allowed for feeding is confined to two periods of 15 minutes each during the 8-hours' shift, which

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permits only of a 'snack.' Liquid refreshments are of great value. Beer, also ales and porters, provide a useful substitute for food, and the introduction of legislation to reduce the duty and so bring it within easier reach of blast-furnacemen's purses would prove a boon and a blessing to the men in the industry.

The foregoing applies to hand-charged furnaces because they are in the majority.

There is, however, a tendency to develop mechanically charged furnaces, but at the moment these are in the minority.

The latter intensify the work of the frontside-men, but relieve considerably manual labour at the backside. They also dispense with some of the backside-men.

*August, 1925.*

## NOTES ON THE BLAST-FURNACE INDUSTRY

### THREE-SHIFT SYSTEM OF WORKING ON BLAST-FURNACE AND COKE-OVEN PLANTS

	1st Week. Oct. 25 to Oct. 31 inclusive.	2nd Week. Nov. 1 to Nov. 7 inclusive.	3rd Week. Nov. 8 to Nov. 14 inclusive.	4th Week. Nov. 15 to Nov. 21 inclusive.	
<b>Mr. A—</b>	a.m. p.m.	p.m. a.m.	a.m. p.m.		
Sunday	6 to 10	10 to 6	resting		
	p.m.				
Monday	2 to 10	10 to 6	6 to 2		Men are back to the turns of the 1st week.
Tuesday	2 to 10	10 to 6	6 to 2		
Wednesday	2 to 10	10 to 6	6 to 2		
Thursday	2 to 10	10 to 6	6 to 2		
Friday	2 to 10	10 to 6	6 to 2		
Saturday	2 to 10	10 to 6	6 to 2		
	8 shifts	7 shifts	6 shifts		
<b>Mr. B—</b>	p.m. a.m.	a.m. p.m.	a.m. p.m.		
Sunday	10 to 6	resting	6 to 10		
			p.m.		
Monday	10 to 6	6 to 2	2 to 10		
Tuesday	10 to 6	6 to 2	2 to 10		
Wednesday	10 to 6	6 to 2	2 to 10		
Thursday	10 to 6	6 to 2	2 to 10		
Friday	10 to 6	6 to 2	2 to 10		
Saturday	10 to 6	6 to 2	2 to 10		
	7 shifts	6 shifts	8 shifts		

## NOTES

	1st Week.	2nd Week.	3rd Week.	4th Week.	
	Oct. 25 to Oct. 31 inclusive.	Nov. 1 to Nov. 7 inclusive.	Nov. 8 to Nov. 14 inclusive.	Nov. 15 to Nov. 21 inclusive.	
Mr. C—	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Sunday	resting	6 to 10 p.m.	10 to 6	10 to 6	Men are back to the turns of the 1st week.
Monday	6 to 2	2 to 10	10 to 6	10 to 6	
Tuesday	6 to 2	2 to 10	10 to 6	10 to 6	
Wednesday	6 to 2	2 to 10	10 to 6	10 to 6	
Thursday	6 to 2	2 to 10	10 to 6	10 to 6	
Friday	6 to 2	2 to 10	10 to 6	10 to 6	
Saturday	6 to 2	2 to 10	10 to 6	10 to 6	
	<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>	<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>	<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>	<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>	
	6 shifts	8 shifts	7 shifts		

### UNEMPLOYMENT<sup>1</sup>

#### BLAST-FURNACEMEN

	Number of Unemploy- ment Books remaining lodged.	Percentage Unem- ployed (Great Britain and N. Ireland).
Dec. 22, 1924	5,446	18
„ 21, 1925	5,305	20·2

<sup>1</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette.*

VI

PORT WORKERS



## DOCKER by R.G.

R. G. was born in 1879. His father was a docker and R— being the eldest of a large family was obliged to go out to work very young. He started at the age of fourteen, being a 'tea-boy' — i.e., a boy who takes cans of tea to workers at the docks. The hours of work were 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and he had to leave home at 6.40. The work, he says, 'was none too pleasant in dreary weather.'

This work continued until R— was fifteen, at 4s. a week, plus food.

After that he took a job 'telling marks,' which he describes as follows: 'There would be a pile of deals piled up after being unloaded from the boat laid on quays with a stamp mark, 1st, 2nd or 3rd, whichever the case may be. Now, I had to call out to my work-mate 1st or 3rd or whichever it would be, so he would know what pile the deals were to be placed on, so as I called out he would carry away. One hour was allowed from twelve to one o'clock for dinner, finishing up at twelve on Saturdays.' The hours were 6.30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the wages 10s. per week. After that he started harder work, loading carts, wagons, etc. This was very trying, as there was no fixed wage and he earned what he could, being paid by piece-work: 2s. to 4s. a day would be the utmost on those days. Later he became a docker proper.

\*

A DOCKER does not work every day, weather being often against it. Again, work is not constant all the year round, for after December until the

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end of April there is barely anything to do at all.

I will explain shortly the different sections. Each yard has a man known as the 'ganger,' who takes charge of a job. That is to say, when a boat comes into the dock it is taken by contract. The contractor gives an estimate to have the boat unloaded for so much money in a certain amount of time. This is the work of stevedores. Sometimes the boat will come in loaded not only with deals or boards, but with different stores, such as poles, bales of paper, timber, etc. These are also attended to by stevedores. Now the poles and paper are put into barges, timber being thrown over the side of the boat into the water and joined with stout ropes and staples in the shape of rafts. They are taken by men known as 'lightermen' to different parts of the docks and laid by until needed. Of course, there are all sorts of different work. A docker never has the same work to do: it would never do. For instance, if you only took the work, taking deals, perhaps they would not be wanted ten weeks in a twelvemonth. General cargo, such as meat, bacon, butter, etc., are placed in cold storage, not left out in the open. These kinds of things, being cased and too heavy for the men to handle, are discharged from the ship by means of a hand-crane. To describe this: it is a large chain, weighing some hundredweights, fastened to the ship's mast by a pulley which at the end has a large hook. This chain is lowered and fastened round the cases. Then they are drawn up by the winch and

## DOCKER

lowered off the side to the men that are waiting to take them away on trolleys. This work gives about one hundred men three days' work. Then there is a standstill, perhaps no more doing for a week or two.

In the latter work explained there are many dangers. There are in the holds of the ship about eight men. Should a case happen to slip from the sling, through not being securely fastened, many lives would be in danger.

Taking deal work, which is the hardest and most unfortunate of all. There are several men together, one holding up the deals. Three men carry away while two others pile. The others carry away under the sheds. It is very difficult. That means you have a good run, several yards, then up a plank on to the top of a pile of deals, several feet high, before being relieved of load. This going on through the day, making one's shoulder unbearable to touch. I have known myself to come home not knowing what to do to relieve the pain. This only happens until the shoulder gets hardened to it. The pilers in this job have to be most careful that the edges of deals are kept straight, otherwise the lot would topple over, which is often the case, the result being a broken leg. I met with an accident, having a gash several inches up the middle of my leg caused through a deal slipping off the pile.

This work, when I began, was a shilling an hour. This work comes and goes, on and off, through the

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summer months, no work being done when the weather sets in wet.

This is the main bad point of a docker's work. One is never sure of a full week. You may do a day's work one day and not another for a month. There are many hardships in a docker's life that one dreads to tell, but at the present time there is the dole money that helps one along. I have had a good many hard times through the years written of, when I have had to sell off the furniture to keep a roof over my little ones' heads. When nothing else could be done I have been compelled to go to the relieving office to get help. Once, going there for help, I was given six weeks' work at Bostall Heath, the work being 'turfing,' paying one-and-three for fare, leaving me 18s. 9d. to keep my wife and five children and pay rent, etc. After having done this six weeks I would again have another spell out of work, which has been very trying. For years this has gone on until my older two sons were able to earn their own living, one being very unfortunate. I have not been able to get a day's work for the last month, which makes things very disheartening, especially when one has a very large family and high rent to pay. If there is not such as the dole I would not know what I should do. Starting from the first thing in the morning, say at seven o'clock, walking from one dockyard to another not getting any luck, continuing so until reaching the end, there I have to sign on the unemployed. Taking another stroll, still

## DOCKER

not succeeding, waiting about until one o'clock to sign on the unemployed again, this being done twice a day except Saturdays. If you are not there to sign on you have the unemployment money stopped.

This little neighbourhood where I am living now, and have lived since birth, is surrounded by docks, mainly called 'Surrey Docks,' being lotted in several yards. It is, in the summer, quite a healthy and interesting place, but most dreary in winter, no boats or noises of deals, etc.

*December, 1925.*

## THE CONDITION OF THE PORT WORKERS

BY A. CREECH JONES

*National Secretary, Administrative, Clerical and Supervisory Group, Transport, and General Workers' Union*

I AM to describe the conditions of life of port and waterside workers, and shall make little reference to what is being done to find a solution to the problems I may mention. Out of the general background of port industrial life, it will be possible to build up the daily round of the docker.

Docks and poor social conditions seem to go together. Ugliness and squalor are the usual features of port neighbourhoods. Bad housing, indifferent health and poor conditions of life are the rule for the working population in these areas, even after allowing for the advance in recent years in general social amenities.

Dock employment is not an attractive form of employment and is popularly considered as undesirable and a 'last resort.' The ports have been thought of as places to which the unwanted and unemployable in our industrial towns may drift to try and eke out an existence by doing whatever casual work was offered. Certainly the docks have received in days gone by the men who were denied work in

## CONDITION OF PORT WORKERS

other industries – the men who have found all other openings of employment closed to them. The labour has been hard, conditions have been miserable, and the life has brought much wretchedness. But much of the work has called for little thought and next to no skill, and so the ports have been collecting grounds for those unfortunates thrust well below the poverty line. They have intensified the scramble for work and increased the precariousness of the livelihood which the ports offered. The districts of our ports have usually been seething areas of intense deprivation and poverty, of social horror and ugliness. These conditions have seldom failed to win from the public a ready sympathy for the dockers, and the subject of dockland has been a perennial theme for social investigators.

Dock labour is chronically under-employed, whether there are periods of trade prosperity or periods of depression. There is no definite relationship between the demand for labour and the supply available. The fluctuations in demand for workers can hardly be anticipated, and certainly cannot be brought under such control as to secure a regular volume of employment day by day. The forces of climate, tide and storm are beyond human control. The amount of work is influenced by the uncertainties and variations of trade and the effects abroad of seasons of abundance or seasons of drought. Fluctuations in demand for work are occasioned, too, by the variety of cargo to be handled. The

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method of handling, whether mechanical or by hand, and the amount of handling required by certain classes of cargo, are variable. Moreover, there can be no mechanical regularity in work where such influences as the diversion of a boat or the unexpected arrival of a ship, a traffic delay, the breakdown of machinery, a spell of wet weather, a rush order, affect the number of workers required. Even changes in freightage rates on competitive forms of transport have a bearing on the volume of work. Changes in national or international relationships have their reactions, as have been witnessed in the past few years in our east coast ports. It is really difficult for ports to attract sufficient seasonal work throughout the year in order to create a steady demand for labour. And these fluctuations, which not only occur as a result of the trade cycles but from season to season and from day to day, really mean that the labourers for the greater part only obtain work in accordance with the swelling or contracting of the traffic.

The work is therefore so precarious as to eliminate any certainty in the arrangement of the docker's life. Irregular income is not conducive to good house-keeping and careful expenditure. It tends to create a feeling of recklessness and irresponsibility. Men are thrown on their wits to eke out a livelihood as best they can. The anxious quest for jobs, the fretting resulting from baffled attempts to find work, the idleness in the streets and at home, the hanging



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about from one call-time to another, create far from healthful tendencies on character. The low standard of conditions that are produced as a consequence find expression in the unsatisfactory features of home life. Anxiety is never-ending. Hope and disappointment alternate in the mind. The family life is damaged and deranged, and the effects are pernicious to the individual, to the family and to social life generally.

There are probably 120,000 men engaged in dock work. Comparatively, only a few of them are in permanent employment. The vast majority are engaged day by day. A crowd of applicants assembles round the gate or office or at the calling-on places scattered often throughout the port; sometimes at the ship's side, at street corners, outside public-houses, wherever custom or the convenience of individual employers has established these places. When labour is wanted in the docks the foremen appear on call points, and this is a sign of struggle and confusion, pushing and elbowing, to attract his attention. Sometimes they take on those men they know or those with a preference card, for in certain ports there are preference men singled out from the rest. Speaking generally, however, the same competition for work described many years ago goes on day after day about the docks. Now in most ports only registered dockers can apply for work, and this practice is becoming increasingly the rule. Employment in the ports is being limited only to bona fide

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transport workers, and the influx from other industries and the drift of men from the towns is thus checked. This limitation of the volume of labour is doing something to average up the amount of employment to each individual man. Work is for a half-day engagement, and wages are paid at the end of each day, if the engagement lasts the day, except at Liverpool, where weekly wage payments have been established by a central clearance system. No longer can the employer engage a docker for an hour and throw him off when he has no further use for him. The men usually work in gangs, some at piece-work, where labour becomes intense, and the old have to keep pace with the young; some at day-work, where there is no special incentive to urge the men on.

The great competition for labour and the fluctuations in demand have led to the toleration of a much bigger army of workers about the docks than is really necessary. The docker, therefore, is lucky if he finds work on the average of more than eight half-days per week. It is difficult to obtain exact information, the average employment in the respective ports varies. A docker who is a genuine transport worker on the Hull docks during the past three years has been only able to average  $2\frac{1}{3}$  days per week. At Swansea the average is said to be  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days, at Bristol  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days, at Glasgow 4 days; at seasonal ports the employment is more erratic. I give the specimen record of a man at Liverpool for a

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period of three months: — First week he worked  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days with Cunard Co.; next week,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days with Messrs. Williams & Jones; next week, 4 days; the last week in December, nothing at all. The first week in January, 3 days; second week, 2 days with the White Star; third week,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  days with Messrs. Williams & Jones; fourth week, 2 days. In February, first week, 2 days and 1 night; second week, half-day; third and fourth weeks, nothing at all. The first week in March he worked  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days; second week, 3 days and a half-night. The employment offices in the ports all record large numbers of men seeking work in the docks, the majority of whom are genuine transport workers.

It is also difficult to record exact earnings of these workers. Including overtime and piece-rates, one worker at Grimsby in 14 weeks in 1924 took on the average £2 6s.  $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. per week; another at Hull, for a period of 52 weeks, £1 17s. 4d. per week; another at Boston, for 13 weeks, 12s. 2d.; another at Goole, for 13 weeks, £2 12s 1d.; another at King's Lynn, for 52 weeks, £1 11s. At Liverpool, from the official figures we note that in a week at the beginning of 1924, 5,200 out of nearly 20,000 men did no work at all; 4,200 received for the week less than 20s. (this covered all payments); 1,500 received between 20s. and 30s. Only 4,000 received more than 5s. A docker at Greenock has kept a record of work during the past year, and he earned in 155 days £8 1s.; drew for unemployment benefit £14 6s. 4d.

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Out of this income he paid £2 7s. 10d. in unemployment stamps, £1 8s. for trade-union contributions, and £2 11s. 8d. in car-fares. I also take, at random, some figures of a group of dockers at Liverpool. Their weekly earnings in full work out over a month as follows: £1 13s. 4d.; £2 9s. 4d.; 12s. 10d.; 3s. 8d.; £2 13s. 4d.; £3 19s.; 10s. 4d.; £1 2s. 3d.; 18s.

Household budgets of requirements for five persons are of little use in such circumstances. Most of the people are always in want. I have collected some statements of expenditure and they show the minimum of expenditure in clothing, boots or household replacements, and little or no provision for amusements and recreation.

Generally speaking, too, dockers during periods of slackness are unable to find work elsewhere. Although certain ports try to attract trade during their period of slackness between brisk seasonal periods, the dockers have no alternative but to hang about the port in the hope of something turning up. Only in a few cases do a small percentage of the men perform odd work. In Dundee, I am told, a number of men go into agriculture, fishing and the building trades during the slack season. At Grimsby, a small proportion go to work in the malt-kilns, oil-mills, fishing and fish lumping. In the Hartlepoons, a small percentage go into the shipyards and iron trades. But the generalisation is true, that the vast majority of dockers earn their living entirely in the docks, and are unable to supplement their income from any

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other source except, possibly, the Unemployment Insurance Fund or the Poor Law.

Seasonal work in many ports is very well marked. Owing to ice, the Baltic is closed during the winter and spring, and it is not until May and June that timber and other produce can be sent. Cotton from America is seasonal, and fruit and potatoes only arrive in a limited period from July to the end of September. One might easily give a list of the seasonal work in the ports, but it is sufficient to refer to the evidence submitted in the Transport Inquiry of 1920. The trade at Southampton in June, it was shown, was 16 per cent. above the average for the year, while in December it was 8 per cent. below. At Liverpool, in December it was 14 per cent. above the average, but in September 10 per cent. below the average. At Glasgow, the June figure was 14 per cent. above the average, while the January figure was 13 per cent. below. Cardiff shows July as the busiest month, with 19 per cent. above the average, while May, as the slackest month, was 14 per cent. below. The river Tees showed April as 14 per cent. above the average and December as 11 per cent. below the average.

Dock labour is not only a use of brawn and muscle. While a great deal of work involves little more than physical strength and is sheer drudgery, much of it needs skill in its execution and can only be done by men who have acquired experience in the handling of various classes of cargo. In a port there is quite a

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number of classes of work, and each class calls for its special technique. Machinery, it is true, has displaced a great deal of manual labour in loading and unloading, but the main factor in the port industry is the factor of labour. Timber portering, coal trimming, stevedoring, sorting, weighing, checking and measuring, grain portering, maintenance work, mechanical work, coopering and work on the rivers, are some of the divisions. Perhaps the rigidity of specialised work has been modified to some extent in London during the past few decades, so that stevedores, watermen, deal porters, grain porters and coal porters are a small number in contrast to the large number of general dockers, but in many of the ports there is little interchangeability of labour between the various main groups of work. The docker in a port usually learns to do a particular kind of work and becomes known to the foremen of particular firms, and it is to those firms he goes day by day in his search for work. In fact, with few exceptions, labour does not freely move from place to place in the port according to demand. But the existence of the classes of work we have mentioned and the method of the engagement of the workers required, create pools of casual labour attached to the various classes of work and the individual firms throughout the port.

The workers cannot foresee the demand for labour in the groupings formed. This demand fluctuates a great deal in these groupings. The busiest day in one group is not the busiest day in

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another. But there are no means for labour to move from one point where it is not needed to a point where it is needed. In a big port, too, there are geographical limitations on movement, and consequently each group of employers or class of work has its own daily surplus or deficiency in labour.

The life, too, is dangerous. The occupation ranks third in the Home Office returns for fatal and other accidents. There is now a tightening-up of regulations for the prevention of accidents, but many of the mishaps are due to insufficient attention by the docker himself. The intensity of the labour tends to make men less heedful of their personal safety. The precariousness of their livelihood causes them to take risks in order to save time and get work done, so that their earnings may be higher. The periods of unemployment, too, do not make for physical stability. Apart from this, however, many accidents occur because of the risky nature of the work. For instance, men sometimes become entangled in slings or they are struck by suspended loads or gear. Sometimes men are damaged by falls of goods or the breaking of chains or cranes. Men sometimes slip and fall into the holds of boats from the deck, due to slippery stages or slippery decks; ropes or ladders break or men are jammed between vehicles on the quay. Thus in all these ways the work is full of risks.

By great efforts the dockers themselves have secured some remarkable changes in recent years. The hours of work are now based on an 8-hour day

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or a 44-hour week. But the general erratic conditions of employment have contributed to the worst forms of sweating, and poverty has only been softened by the action of the authorities in the creation of suitable health and education services for the benefit of the children and women dependants. The conditions of life for the men have been fairly exhausting to their physique. So far as pauperism is concerned, the number of casual workers in the docks who apply for outdoor relief used to form a considerable percentage, and in some districts it is stated that as many as 40 per cent. of those asking for relief from the Poor Law were dock and riverside workers. The feeding of school-children was a useful supplement in dock areas, while since the institution of unemployment insurance benefit in the docks industry, the drain on the funds for the under-employed and unemployed dock workers has been very considerable. Indeed, some millions of money have been paid at the expense of the workers and employers in other industries because of the neglect of the industry to deal with this problem of casual labour.

We see, then, that until there is secured some sound relationship between the demand and supply of labour in the ports, and some form of 'maintenance' during periods of enforced idleness, the docker is condemned to a precarious and casual livelihood. The conditions create social and moral evils and a great morass of misery and degradation. In the past a great subsidy has been paid by the various agencies



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brought into being to relieve the appalling poverty and suffering created. But more fundamental changes are necessary. Attempts at social amelioration have too often been defeated by the wretched conditions of life. The development of social amenities and the spread of education have, of course, had their influence in the improvements in recent years, but the main driving force has been the movement which the men themselves have built up.

Port authorities and shipping companies have too often been indifferent, their only concern being that labour was available to do the work they wanted done. It is remarkable, then, that with the human material we have described, organisation was possible and that a collective sense could be developed at all. It is still more remarkable that dignity and manliness have not been crushed out of the dockers altogether. In spite of all, they have shown themselves responsive to progressive ideas and civic responsibilities. By tenacity and courage they have created powerful organisations to compel attention to their conditions of life, and these have brought the opportunities of more tolerable conditions of work, have forced up wage standards, and have now imposed on society the responsibility of seeing that the problem of casual labour is solved and a regular weekly income guaranteed. The docker asks for a recognition of his human worth and the elevation of his industry to bring forth his pride in calling.

*August, 1924.*

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### NOTE

A Committee (under the presidency of Sir Donald Maclean) representing the Dock Employers and the Transport and General Workers' Union, was set up by the Government after the dock strike at the beginning of 1924. It is still at work on the problem of registration and maintenance. Already nearly all the ports have adopted registration schemes to control the entrance to the industry and to obtain reliable data on which a maintenance scheme can be developed.

VII

**ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING  
WORKERS**

## ELECTRICIAN by M. S.

M. S. was born in 1896 of fairly well-to-do middle-class parents. His early life was, in his own words, 'quite naturally very pleasant.' Owing to illness he did not attend school until ten.

When M. S. was twelve years old his father was left penniless owing to a business crash; the latter endeavoured to obtain a living by clerical, labouring or factory work, but owing to his lack of experience except in his own line and the state of the labour market he was unable to obtain anything.

At the age of thirteen, M. S. left school to start work in order to help support the family, which then consisted of father, mother, and two children besides himself. He and his mother, who worked as a needlewoman, between them supported the family for nearly two years.

M. S. started work as an errand-boy and for twelve months carried heavy parcels in all kinds of weather, working on an average 74 hours a week for a wage of 6s.

When fourteen, he started work for a well-known biscuit manufacturer and was employed on various operations in the machine-room (bake-house). The job was heavy, but the hours worked were less, being 54 and the wages 8s. or 8s. 6d. per week.

He remained at this biscuit factory until sixteen, when, the family having become independent of his wages, he was apprenticed to an electrical contractor and received 2s. 6d. a week and 5s. after one year, 7s. 6d. after two years, and so on.

In 1914 he left his employer and started work as an improver at 25s. a week.

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At the age of nineteen he was working as a fully qualified electrician, and since then has had the usual electrician's experience, and has struggled for technical education, as shown in the following article.

★

**E**LECTRICAL engineering is so developed to-day that it covers every sphere of industrial, commercial and domestic life. The industrial group whose interest is bound up with electrical engineering is one of the most powerful of the forces behind the Federation of British Industries.

The story of the rapid growth of the industry from the experimental and research work of numerous well-known pioneers to its present position, the forefront of modern capitalism, sounds more like a work of fiction than a statement of facts.

The activities of the huge horizontal and vertical combines, whose capital runs into millions (one such combine has actually capital exceeding £53,000,000), together with the schemes of super power stations, the Severn scheme, etc., which are at the present time being considered, tend to add to the atmosphere of romance already shrouding the industry, and quite naturally the workers engaged in the various sections of the industry are visualised by the average person from the view-point of this romantic atmosphere.

The workers are considered as receiving good remuneration for work which appears to these inno-

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cents so interesting. Another illusion is that the industry offers great opportunities for 'getting on' to all those who may care to take advantage of the opportunities offered.

There is, therefore, an air of bewilderment and pained surprise when the Press indicate that the seventy odd grades of electrical workers employed by the public supply companies throughout the country are considering strike action to enforce a national advance of 10s. per week to all grades.

True, the workers employed by the supply companies have a fairly steady job and consequently enjoy greater economic security than the casual type of worker; however, the electrical workers engaged on constructional work, on shipbuilding and repairing, are in fact nothing more or less than casual workers, suffering intermittent unemployment for more or less long periods.

The remuneration of such workers for a 47-hour week is 37s. 6d. for the semi-skilled and 47s. 6d. for the skilled; the maximum London rate for the skilled being 60s. (August, 1924).<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the better known type of worker is the man who works in and about the building trade, the man who is engaged on the erection and maintenance of electrical installations in the factories, commercial houses and the home. There are just as many illusions about the conditions of work

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written there has been a 6½% increase in wages for No. 10 area (Greater London).

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and pay of this class of worker as about the others.

The whole of the workers in the electrical engineering trades are paid by the hour, and are discharged or leave the employer at the end of one hour's notice. It is the custom for the employer to engage men for a contract and discharge them upon completion, unless he has another job starting, in which case some would be retained and others engaged as the job developed, therefore an electrician may be engaged on a contract lasting a few days or as many months.

There have been so many electricians unemployed since 1920 that no contractor retains a permanent staff. It is usual for unemployed electricians to call upon the contractors daily, either at the office or on the jobs, to ascertain if there are any vacancies. There is at least one large contractor in London who provides a 'men's waiting-room' where unemployed electricians who are generally engaged by this firm wait for hours daily, hoping that the foreman will come out and pick out some 'lucky' individual. In this way this firm has always a permanent staff at its beck and call without in any way having to maintain it.

Most men travel long distances on this daily round of contractors' offices, in all kinds of weather, in shoddy boots and clothes. Very often the individual whose duty it is to engage labour does not commence duty until after nine o'clock, therefore those who live some distance away, and who travel by cheap work-

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men's fares, are compelled to wait in the open until after nine o'clock.

In London the electrician seeks and obtains work in any district where work is being carried out; very often he will be working anywhere between ten and twenty miles from his home, travelling to and from work in his own time and at his own expense.

I have known electricians living at Hammersmith and Hanwell to travel to and from Tilbury Docks daily. I have myself travelled from Hampstead to Epsom, from Dollis Hill near Willesden to Millwall Docks and other docks. I am at present travelling from Hampstead to Hampton Court and have to waste 16 minutes at Richmond waiting for a connection.

The London District Committee of the Electrical Trades Union have an agreement with the Employers' Federation on working conditions.

Rule 7 of this agreement reads as follows:

'Travelling expenses - when working out within one mile radius of the shop, no fares or travelling time to be allowed, unless booked on daily at the shop, or sent from shop to job in employers' time, when travelling time and actual fares will be paid.

'When working out over one mile radius from shop and under twelve miles radius, the actual fares to be paid from shop to job and job to shop.

'Unless the employer requests men to book on or off at the usual starting and stopping time.'

The words 'actual fares' are often disputed, the



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men claiming that it means the ordinary schedule fares, while a good many employers claim that it means the actual fares paid at the time of booking same, including cheap workmen's fares. This interpretation is accepted by most workers, and the hardship will be appreciated when it is realised that cheap workmen's tickets are issued on the condition that the railway company's liability in case of accident be limited to a maximum of £150, and in view of the fact that the worker is travelling in his own time, the employer is free from liability under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Many employers refuse any fares at all. Unfortunately the large number of men unemployed (which is generally a threat to the security of the employed) has resulted in many men accepting this abuse.

Many employers avoid paying fares, and possible complications, by insisting upon engaging labour on the job and treating this as the 'shop.' Men sent out of town on 'country jobs' are paid according to the agreement quoted above ; 3s. 6d. per night for the first fortnight, and 3s. per night afterwards.

The workers are very seldom asked if they would like a country job; it is generally an instruction to go or 'pack up.' The theory is, apparently, that the worker must see eye to eye with his employer when he is told to proceed to the other side of the country.

A few months ago, I was employed by a large London contractor whose managing director generally instructed men by wire or phone to proceed to

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Wales and other distant jobs, within two or three hours. Fortunately for the individual in question, I was never instructed as indicated above.

The conditions on the job vary according to the type of work and building, and it also depends on the strength of the trade union on the job.

It must be remembered that many men dare not protest against abuse, because of the fear of being 'sacked.' I know quite a number of trade unionists who have had their spirit crushed by perpetual victimisation.

When engaged in carrying out extension or alteration of the existing installation of a country or town dwelling, the conditions on the job may be quite good. For instance, in the winter the worker will probably be sheltered from rain and wind. He will have a place where to hang his clothing during working hours, and facilities for preparing his tea or other beverages for his midday meal. He may also be able to find a clean, quiet spot where he can have his food. Furthermore, his tools, all of which he has to purchase himself, will be quite safe after his day's work.

If he is engaged upon erection of an installation in a building under construction, he will have to leave his clothing wherever he can, anywhere among the dust and dirt of a building under construction.

His midday meal, generally consisting of a few sandwiches which were cut the night before, will have to be consumed either in a public-house, or on

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the building, using the floor as a combined seat and table.

If the men on the job are well organised and are determined, they may be able to force the provision of a mess-room. A bucket of water is placed upon a fire half an hour or so before the meal-time, so that each man will be able to prepare his beverage. Sometimes the men club together and make tea in the bucket for all. A job such as this is quite usual and is considered comfortable, except during the winter, when it is very cold and miserable.

I have worked on buildings during the winter months, where the windows, doors and flooring had not been fixed. One job in particular the roof was uncompleted. I have worked eight and a half hours on the joists with cold draughts in all directions, and sat for one hour during the midday meal trying to enjoy my sandwiches in a miserable hut in which a coke-fire was burning without any outlet having been provided for the smoke and fumes.

The eight and a half hours' working day, together with the meal-hour spent in the same atmosphere, plus the travelling time, generally lengthens into eleven hours or so. This endurance does not tend to sweeten one's outlook upon civilised life as at present organised. These jobs are always associated in my mind with my fellow-workmen, who very often had not had sufficient food for weeks because of unemployment, and at times feeling very sick and miserable, but were compelled to drag out the day

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for the sake of the few shillings which meant so much at home.

When working under these conditions, men catch colds and other ailments which sometimes develop into serious permanent illness because they cannot afford to rest a day or two.

Should a worker leave his employer of his own free will, or should he be dismissed for misbehaviour, he will not receive State unemployment pay.

This 'interesting work' goes on with monotonous regularity and is only broken by spells of unemployment which quickly swallow up whatever small savings a worker may have put aside.

Let us consider the opportunities we have of 'getting on.'

The vast majority of the electrical contractors in the building trade have no means of giving to the apprentice a good workshop training, consequently modern engineering practices are unknown to him either as an apprentice or mechanic. Technical training on the premises or during working hours is unknown. Technical training in the evening is not even mentioned, let alone insisted upon; many boys are not aware of the necessity or possibility of it. When youths and men do enter evening technical schools they immediately feel the difficulties under which they have to study—lack of mathematical training, very often the lack of a private room at home for studying and home-work, and the fact that he goes to school straight from work and enters the

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lecture hall or laboratory tired out by a long and hard day's work. I have personally attended a technical school two nights per week from 6.30 until 8.30, and and one night from 7 until 9.30. This meant going straight from work and 'carrying on' without food or even a wash. I had to rise at 6 in the morning to be at work in time, and did not return home until 9 to 9.30. Besides this there were four lots of complicated home-work to do every week.

I met students who were even harder put to than I was. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that students starting off with enthusiasm, find it too much and give it up. Even the training which the contractor does offer the apprentice is a comparatively limited one, as these contractors generally only specialise in 'wiring,' therefore when the apprentice has completed his apprenticeship he finds that the positions which, after years of hard work and study, would offer opportunities for 'getting on,' are closed to him because of his ignorance of modern engineering practices.

The only conclusion possible is that the vast majority of contractors are only interested in exploiting the apprentices as cheap labour.

The present rate of pay for an electrician in the building trade in London for a 47-hour week is £4 5s. net. The rate for an electrician's assistant is £3 7s. net (August, 1924). This figure is diminished somewhat when allowance is made for tools, trade-union dues, and fares to and from work. I am at

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present engaged on a job in Hampton Court which costs me 8s. 6d., per week in fares. I am entitled to only 4d. per day fares, because the 'shop' is in Teddington. It should also be borne in mind that three to four months' unemployment, out of twelve, is about the average. No holidays are paid for, and even Bank and other national holidays have to be borne at the worker's expense. Five workers well known to me have had between them nineteen months' unemployment this last eight months; this is not unique, I have picked these five men at random.

During these periods of unemployment homes are broken up, in some cases families are split up and scattered world-wide. On one occasion my friend Bill and I were both unemployed. We walked the streets of London for weeks, besides writing scores of applications. Finally we received a reply from the chief of the electrical department of a firm of ship-builders in Clydebank, Scotland, inviting us to apply personally at the works. Bill, his wife, and I discussed the situation, and in view of the impossibility of obtaining employment in London, decided that Bill and I were to proceed to Clydebank, Bill's family following us as soon as arrangements were completed.

We arrived in Clydebank Monday morning, and proceeded to interview the manager of the electrical department of the firm. He asked us numerous questions which we answered to his satisfaction, and we

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were told to start work the next morning, and to book on and off work by means of a small metal disc, with our number stamped in the centre. We were to work a 47-hour week, for which we were to receive £3 10s.

The firm would not consider refunding the whole or part of our travelling expenses. We had been 'taken on' at the 'shop.'

We left the yard and began the search for lodgings. After calling upon various prospective landladies, we discovered a homely Scotch housewife, in Kilbowie Road, who was willing to have us as boarders. We were to have a bed-sitting-room between us and all our meals for 30s. per week each.

We had not had anything to eat since breakfast, nine hours before, so we returned to Glasgow to collect our tools, luggage and have a meal.

We started work the next morning in a cargo boat which was being built. The iron plates were rusty and painters were busy 'red-leading.' The noise of hundreds of riveters was deafening. Our first impressions were not very bright; however, later on in the afternoon, we were transferred to another ship, where Bill and I were to spend some months.

The construction of this ship had been going on for a couple of years and she was floating alongside the quay. We had not been aboard long before we noticed a general gloom. We were quickly informed of an accident which had occurred that morning, when three engineers had been blown to pieces, the

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explosion occurring on opening the manhole of a tank in which foul air had accumulated. This was our introduction to the ship, and we did not like it.

We were given a job down in the bowels of the ship far below the water-level. Our job was to run and fix heavy lead-covered cables running from the searchlight generator rooms to various positions. This meant working in badly lighted compartments, in which the air was foul and heavy with lead. The temporary ventilation system was inadequate to keep the ship free from foul air.

Red lead was being constantly applied to the iron, and the accumulation of all kinds of dirt and filth did not add anything pleasant to the atmosphere. All day long we heard the perpetual roar of the riveters. At that time I think there were about 3,000 workers busy aboard the ship.

During the summer months it was so warm below that Bill and I literally perspired for eight hours a day. The only daylight we saw during the working day was during the hour we had for the midday meal. This meal was not a pleasant affair. There were no facilities for washing even our hands, and consequently we eat our sandwiches with hands that had been in contact with lead paint and metal lead and other filth for over four hours.

We had to consume our food in what corner we could find. I never saw or heard of a mess-room for the workers. Those who did not like it could go out and buy a dinner in a cook-shop, or eat their sand-



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wiches in a public-house. Every one was compelled to book off and on every meal-time whether they went out of the yard or not. One abuse in connection with the booking on and off system was that the whole of the workers booked on and off in their own time. The booking boxes were alongside of the jobs, which in many cases were quite a long way from the works entrances, to make sure the workers booked on in their own time. The works gates were closed a few minutes before starting time and the timekeepers in the booking boxes did not commence booking off until after the hooter had sounded.

In this manner the working day of eight and a half hours was lengthened into nine hours.

To go in and out Bill and I had to cross the turbine shop, the fitters' shop and the turning shop. In view of the fact that we were in these shops in our own time, the firm would not have been liable to pay compensation in case of accidents to us. In fact, quite likely the firm would have charged us with trespassing. To have come in and out by the main entrance would have taken us right out of our way.

One other source of discomfort was the employer's detectives (spies), which were always patrolling the job. In July we were stood off for a fortnight. This, it was alleged, was a holiday (Glasgow Fair). During this holiday we did not receive one half-penny.

Bill was left penniless, for it must be remembered

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that out of £3 10s. he received per week, he was paying 30s. for his lodgings, and this left him £2 to send to his family, his wife having to pay 10s. 6d. out of this as rent.

When we went back to work, Bill and his wife decided to sell up the home and settle in Clydebank. However, the housing shortage compelled them to remain in lodgings; this cost them £3 per week for the family of four, leaving 10s. for all private needs, clothing and saving for 'a rainy day.'

The housing conditions were awful, families occupying one room being common. In fact, in Kilbowie Road 'one-room houses' (tenements) had been built and let as such.

I know of cases where a family 'living' in a 'one-room house' had taken in a lodger as well.

In our case we were considered fortunate, because we lived in one of the few five-roomed cottages in Kilbowie Road. In this five-roomed cottage lived six adults, three minors between the ages of fifteen and twenty, and three children under the age of ten. As I have already indicated, we were considered fortunate.

A little relief was experienced when Bill and I were put on night shift, those sleeping during the night having more room. Bill and I slept in the daytime in a bed having just been vacated as we arrived home from work.

This night work was a terrible business. We worked a twelve-hour shift and generally working

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on heavy cable, which could not be easily carried on during the day on account of the number of men working aboard. We were compelled to eat our sandwiches amid the stink and dirt because of the cold and darkness above. We only saw daylight coming to and from work. One bad effect on me of this night work was caused by the fact that, being a light sleeper, I was aware of all the daily noises of a busy engineering and manufacturing town. I can honestly say I never had a decent rest the whole of the night-shift period, and suffered in well-being as a consequence.

One other thing that has made me a rebel against night work, and this is the brutal life we were compelled to lead. It was all work and sleep. We had to be in the works at 6 p.m. and did not leave them until 6 a.m. This left us twelve hours in which to go to and from work, clean off the grease and filth the result of twelve hours aboard, rest, and partake of our meals. Mixing with our friends was impossible. Even the folk in the house were either at work or did not wish to disturb us. Walks into the open country or a little sunshine was only enjoyed once a week, on Sundays. Literature, music, lectures, or any of the other things that make life agreeable to an intelligent being, were to us something that seemed so far back and so far ahead.

One misfortune befell Bill on this night work. One evening his tool-box was not in its usual place. We looked high and low and inquired everywhere;

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finally we realised that Bill's box with all his tools had been stolen.

The management accepted no liability whatsoever. Bill has never been able to replace his kit completely.

At last our night-work period was completed, we therefore returned to the more natural day work.

Another accident occurred aboard this ship, which I do not think will ever be erased from the memory of those who witnessed it. The ship had to be moved from her berth to a position under a large crane, to enable some heavy gear to be placed into position aboard. During this operation one of the wire hawsers snapped and, coiling round the leg of a worker on the deck, cut his leg off above the knee as a steel wire cutting cheese. This man lay on the deck in the snow for fully fifteen minutes before being removed, and then only in a small rowing-boat. He died that night.

A good deal could be done to improve working conditions by the introduction of suitable cloak-rooms and lavatories, with hot water and towels. The w.c.'s in the Clydebank yard and in other yards are too filthy and disgusting for me to attempt or desire to describe.

The terrible conditions of these places did not prevent a yard in which I worked in Birkenhead to actually have a w.c. timekeeper installed inside the place to check (by means of a workers' tally) all the workers who entered the place, the number of such visits per day, and the time taken in each case. This

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should be illegal and modern sanitary arrangements should be enforced.

The compulsory provision of dining-rooms and medical attention in the yard, and even on the job if sufficiently large, would also be welcome.

Booking on and off should be done at the works entrance.

Employers should be called upon to provide all tools, and technical schools set up in the works which apprentices would attend in the afternoons.

When the ship was completed and handed over to the owners, most of the workers, including Bill and I, were discharged. The engineering and ship-building slump which was rapidly developing compelled us to return south.

Back in London we have had ups and downs, sometimes going through long periods of unemployment, on one occasion Bill and his family having to seek relief from the Walthamstow Board of Guardians. It is impossible to describe fully in this short chapter the common lot of the worker in the electrical industries, and in conclusion I append a description of the shelter which Bill was able to procure for his family. This shelter, a ground-floor flat, consists of a kitchen, scullery and bedroom, for which he pays 9s. 6d. per week.

The house is situated in a turning off Coppermill Lane, Walthamstow. It is similar to dozens of other houses, all of which are divided into two flats. The kitchen is 10 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 8 feet high:

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about 640 cubic feet capacity. The scullery has about two-thirds off this cubic capacity, the major part of which is taken up by the gas-cooker, copper and sink. The bedroom is 11 feet 6 inches long, 10 feet wide and 9 feet 6 inches high; about 1,090 cubic feet capacity. There is not a bathroom in the house, and the one w.c. in the yard outside the house has to serve for the two families. The whole district lies in the Lea valley, this part being the lowest. During heavy rains the air-vent, 3 feet deep, under the front and middle part of the house, is flooded to a depth of 8 to 12 inches, and when the rain is exceptionally heavy, then 15 inches to 2 feet. On these occasions the kitchen (living-room), which is 2 feet below the street level, is also flooded, together with the scullery, in each case up to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches and 3 inches respectively.

On floods subsiding there is left a sewage deposit of approximately half an inch on the floor, and for some days the occupiers are troubled with large water-rats, these having been washed up the drains and stranded. On one occasion Bill discovered a snake 2 feet 4 inches long roving about.

With the exception of the upstairs kitchen, every room in the house is damp.

As the kitchen is below the water-line, Bill was unable to use the kitchen as a second bedroom of a night for his boy, consequently the family of four have to sleep in the same room.

*August, 1924.*

VIII

FACTORY WORKERS

W.D.

P

## TEXTILE WORKER by S. B.

S. B. was born in 1892; her father was a printer's labourer, and was able to hand over to his wife 16s. 8d. per week with which to maintain the family.

S. B. attended an elementary school, and when ten years old won a scholarship for secondary education, but unfortunately the economic circumstances of the home made it impossible for her to take it up. At that time she was the eldest of five children, and the family income was £1 a week.

At twelve S. B. began work in a spinning factory (half-time), and continued for two years, when she was able to leave school entirely and work full time, 55½ hours per week, for 8s. 6d.

At nineteen, she entered the weaving factory and worked there till 1922, when, through the medium of a Working Women's College Council, she was granted a free scholarship for one year's residence at the College. There she spent the happiest time of her life. 'For a whole year,' she writes, 'I really lived, and, furthermore, I learned to appreciate most of the things that make life worth while.'

At the end of the year she was obliged to return to the old life, 'but,' she says, 'the old life had disappeared. . . . I arrived home to find everything different . . . buildings which had stood for years almost unnoticed by me suddenly became interesting.'

★

I AM asked to describe under what conditions the factory operatives live and labour. Let us see what one of their working days is like. We will take,



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for instance, a dark winter's morning at six o'clock. All is quiet except for the occasional tread of the policeman, but soon other steps are heard – not so common now as they were a dozen years ago, but still in existence. They are the steps of the knockers-up (people engaged to rouse the workers from sleep).

These men, and in some cases women, are by this time very busy rattling at the bedroom windows with their long poles, in answer to which the toilers often surlily jump up and tap back at the pane, grumbling, 'What! time to get up already?' and in some cases wishing the factories at the bottom of the sea.

At six o'clock, workers who like myself have to travel four and in some cases five and six miles to work, have to be up and doing. No time is lost at this end of the day, for there is none to lose. In fifteen minutes' time we have to leave our homes in order to catch the 'bus, tram or train, so the allotted time is fully spent in dressing, often in a semi-stupefied manner. To partake of a meal before leaving is entirely out of the question, for there is no fire and only a very small percentage of the workers' houses boast a proper gas-stove. Most people have, however, just an ordinary gas-ring, the pipe of which has to be attached to the double burner of the gas in the living-room. Many a time the force of gas is so poor that a candle has to be used for lighting purposes in order that the ring (which, by the way, resides majestically in the middle of the only table) may

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be more fully equipped with gas. With the aid of this one does manage to obtain a warm drink, except, of course, on some mornings when bed pulls extra hard – on these occasions the drink is sacrificed.

It is now 6.30 a.m. and the hideous steam-buzzers are beginning to shriek. In a few minutes the streets will be full of the great procession of workers hurrying and scurrying to get to their various factories and workshops. The town is getting up to its work, the older folk grumbling at having to rise and the children of fourteen having literally to be lifted out of bed.

The tram and train service, however, provides us with little cause for comment. Our tram conductors are simply fine, and never seem to mind how many passengers they take – their platforms and steps get crowded, yet they never seem to mind so long as they can just squeeze through and take their fares. One marvels sometimes at their patience and sense of humour, as, intent on clearing the streets, they pick up the people waiting at the various stopping-places almost as a net picks up fish.

The minutes now speed on towards seven o'clock and the procession begins to thin. A few more minutes and the patter of feet will have ceased almost as suddenly and as strangely as it began. The streets are again almost as quiet as midnight. Now the mills are all aglow from cellar to roof and the wheels of the spinning-rooms and weaving sheds begin to stir the

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silence with a buzzing sound and the hum of the machinery fills the gloomy air.

The factory operatives' early morning rise and march to work in winter is entirely without novelty. In summer, of course, the conditions are changed somewhat for the better – snow, chilly rain and freezing cold are absent, but the early rising and trudge breakfastless to work are always there in every season.

Before going any further one must admit at the outset that the conditions of factory life have in many respects considerably improved during the past twenty years. The factory system has been rendered less evil as a result of slow legislation, long struggled for and in some cases only obtained after fierce fighting. Educational facilities have been increased; the sanitation of workshops and factories improved; amusements and recreation have been multiplied; hours of labour lessened and the half-time system completely abolished. The last is not only by any means the least, but, in my opinion, one of the finest pieces of modern legislation.

I myself commenced work at the age of 12 years (half-time), and my own mother first entered the spinning mill in order to contribute to the family income at the age of 7 years. I have often heard her talk of her sister who also commenced at 7 and who was so tiny that the overlooker (a man) used to carry her down the steps for fear of her being trampled under the feet of the older people.

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Is it to be wondered at under the circumstances that my mother considered me very fortunate indeed at being able to remain at school so long? I am afraid I was very ungrateful and didn't appreciate the position at all. My spinning days, which covered a period of seven years, were little less than a nightmare to me, for I loathed every single day of my life while tied to the spinning and twisting frames; not because of the work but because of the conditions under which my schoolmates and myself worked.

Generally speaking, the operatives in a spinning room are much younger than in any other textile department.

Children leaving school who intend entering the factory almost invariably enter the spinning first. There are, of course, exceptions, but very, very few. A young girl is first of all employed as a 'sweeper out,' the duty of whom is obviously to keep the room clean and tidy. The brushes are big, heavy and clumsy, but it is surprising how soon one gets used to them. In some factories this is not such a bad job, and after all a tidy room as a result of one's own efforts gives no end of satisfaction. On the other hand, there are places that are far too big for one sweeper, and in these cases it becomes overpowering. The task is too great and the satisfaction and remuneration too small. The day's work becomes a drudge, for it is sweep, sweep, sweep from morning till night, and in spite of this the room is always

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littered with waste and grease. From sweeper, however, one rises step by step until finally becoming an actual spinner.

To-day, as in years gone by, the complaints to be made relate to the conditions, rather than the process of spinning. Spinning operatives are chiefly girls — only a very small percentage of them are boys, and these (with the exception of jobbers who are engaged to assist the overlookers) are very young. In view of this, it is, in my opinion, a deplorable fact, that dozens of factories exist to-day without a woman supervisor or welfare worker.

Every one of these young girls, whether sick or well, is subject to the ruling and criticism of a male overlooker and manager.

Male overlookers, however, are essential owing to the character of the work, and I am glad to say that some of them are quite decent even from a human standpoint. But there are a great many others who are absolutely unfitted to take charge of young people. They may be very capable men in dealing with machinery, but they are entirely lacking where sympathy and consideration are required. Under such conditions, it is very sad when at a time of sickness and worry they have no one in authority to whom they can turn for a little help and advice. Many of these spinners — especially those employed in the centre of the city — come from very sordid homes. So bad are the conditions under which they live that they look forward to the time when they will

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be old enough to work and thus get away from the squalor.

The absence also of cloakrooms and dining-rooms is a very great inconvenience. In a great many cases factory workers, and especially spinners, have to partake of their meals inside the mill. You will find them sitting about either on the floor or on bobbing cans eating their bread-and-butter from their laps amidst dust, grease, oil and waste. This is not only unpleasant, but very injurious to health. It may sound remarkable, but it is none the less true, that the older people have become so used to this method of mealing that some of them very much resent the setting up of dining-rooms for their own convenience.

The factory where I work has a splendid dining-room where very good meals are provided at a very reasonable cost. We are attended to by waitresses (girls taken from the various departments of the factory, who are paid time wage for the hours spent in the dining-room;  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours per day).

These girls are our own girls, and understand our requirements and seem to find great pleasure in ministering to our needs – no black looks, and no unnecessary waiting. I often wish every firm was so well catered for. Yet, in spite of this, grumbling still continues among the older people. They somehow dislike what they call publicity and would very much prefer the privacy of their own little corner by their machine. They are, as it were, conservative and very slow to change.

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Work inside the factory is much harder than it used to be owing to the great speeding up of machinery. The toil is now almost ceaseless; the machinery demands constant attention. Thirty years ago this was not the case; the machinery ran very much slower and the operatives had a little leisure during working hours, but all this has been abolished.

Production has increased without the corresponding increase in hands, showing that machinery has largely superseded human labour. Whether spinner or weaver, the textile operatives are on their feet from the first turn of the wheel in the morning till the last turn in the evening. Their feet are never still, their hands always full of tasks, and their eyes always on the watch. For 48 hours a week year in and year out one is expected to keep up to the great machine monsters. While the machinery runs the workers must stand; it cares nothing for fatigue or weakness or worry, and must not be interfered with by human pain or woe.

Were it not for its effect upon human beings, a textile mill would be a splendid monument to man's skill. The marvellous and complex machinery that seems to work with hands, feet and eyes, that acts almost as if it had a conscious brain, is startling in the almost human, though automatic, perfection it has reached. One looks with wonder at the automatic looms of to-day which stop just at the right moment and dispose of the empty shuttle, pick up a full one

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and re-start as though possessed of magic power. One is inclined to think 'what a boon to the worker,' but this is not the case, because a weaver of ordinary looms tends two, but an automatic weaver tends four with very little difference in wages. This is one of the many cases where invention exploits the worker.

At 5 p.m. the shrill steam-whistles blow again and the machinery gradually comes to a standstill, symbolising, so far as the factory is concerned, the close of a day's toil. There is the usual rush for hats, coats, lunch-bags, books and papers, etc., for in spite of the long days some of our workers do quite a lot of reading, although it is not always of the best kind. Cheap novels and picture papers are far too popular; they are easily read and do not call for deep thought and concentration. It has been stated over and over again that, owing to the monotony of the work, the majority of textile workers cannot bear too long a strain of thought or study. They prefer light and sensational reading. For poetry and good literature they have very little inclination. Generally speaking, when their day's work is done they are too weary to engage in mental pursuits. They want something exciting and thrilling – hence the crowded cinemas and the extensive sale of cheap literature.

There are, of course, exceptions, and one feels proud to meet young men and women who take an active part in the various clubs, classes, study circles, political parties and trade union organisations. And there are also many more who would simply



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love to do so, but are prevented as a result of domestic circumstances.

There are more married women employed in the textile trade than in any other. Babies are put out to nurse at a very early age – very often at six weeks old. So small is the family income that the mother is obliged to work in order to provide even the barest necessities: food and clothing for her children. In the event also of sickness of husband or any other wage-earner, the mother naturally turns to her own trade for support. This, of course, makes it very inconvenient for all concerned, for instead of arriving home to a little rest and comfort, one is faced with a full day's domestic work waiting to be pushed into a few hours. For after all, one must have clean clothes, clean beds and a clean house if it is to be a home at all. Bread must be baked and food cooked, and the quantity of sewing, darning and patching tends to increase rather than decrease where boys and girls are left unattended to from morn till night. Hence one's leisure disappears, and what entertainment and education one gets is stolen at the expense and inconvenience of other members of the household.

It is impossible to quote all the various wages in the textile trade, and as this article deals chiefly with spinners, I might say that a spinner's wage is approximately 26s. for a 48-hour week. Out of this is generally paid from 18s. to 22s. for board, and the remainder must cover clothes, travelling expenses, insurances, club contributions, and the preparation

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for holidays. We have an average of fourteen days' holiday per year, *without pay*, therefore one must be prepared, or these days would become dreaded days.

One must also (if at all possible) be prepared for sickness, for in the event of such there is only the National Health Insurance, 12s. per week. That is very useful and fills up a gap, but is a long way short of keeping body and soul together.

The insecurity of employment is another thing to be faced. There is so much unemployment in the country that one always runs the risk of being turned off, and I venture to say that no factory worker, entirely dependent on her own income, can ever be in a position to stand a long period of unemployment. When a worker feels ill she is almost afraid of staying off her work long enough to enable her to recover. She reads with fervour the 'promise of life, health and happiness,' displayed on the great patent medicine advertisement hoardings, and willingly invests what little money she has in hand to be whipped like a tired horse, only to find that she is still languid as soon as the whipping has ceased.

Surely there is something wrong with a state of society which allows this kind of thing to continue. Factory workers perform services which are essential to the existence and happiness of the community. Furthermore, they are waking up to their own importance and are demanding a reasonable and comfortable livelihood, with a decent minimum of food, clothing, leisure, recreation, education for their

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children and houses fit for human beings to live in. This demand is not an extravagant one, and what is so often referred to as 'labour unrest' will certainly continue, with ever-increasing determination, until some such reforms are conceded. If these new standards are applied their value will be proven to the whole nation, and we look for the hope of the future to the general spread of education – true education that informs the mind and teaches it to reason.

*December, 1924.*

## SHIRT-MAKER-(MACHINIST) by N. L.

N. L. was born in 1892, the eldest of a large family. Her father was a railwayman and his earnings averaged 25s. a week. She left school at fourteen and remained at home for two years on account of ill-health.

At the age of sixteen she started work in an artificial flower and feather factory, receiving a weekly wage of 2s.

In 1915, N. L. took up work as a machinist, doing Army work, and continued in this factory until 1923. In that year she was fortunate enough to get a year at college and has since obtained a post as matron in a rescue home.

In this case the writer of the following account has preferred to give it in an impersonal manner.

\*

IT was a quarter to eight when Millie Martin stood in the tiny kitchen of her home, hastily drinking a cup of tea. She was due at the factory at 8 a.m., where she earned her living as a shirt machinist, and her thoughts before starting revolved round the question of whether there would be sufficient work for the day, or whether the workers would have to lose another half-day.

Her firm, like many others, was feeling the trade depression acutely. She had not put in a full week for nearly seven months. Moreover, she was a piece-worker, and the fact that the workers were constantly

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kept waiting during slack periods, rendered it even more difficult for her to earn a fair wage.

Ten minutes later she arrived at the works. One is sometimes conscious of a sense of importance when entering the gate of a factory, through which a procession of women and girls is passing. It is a daily occurrence which usually excites a certain amount of interest among passers-by. Millie was moved by a consciousness of herself as a unit; a cog in the great industrial machine, and the thought brought her a certain sense of satisfaction.

The staff, or those who receive a regular weekly wage, are required to clock on when entering the works. This is done by means of an automatic machine which registers the time of entering or leaving the works.

The piece-workers, conveniently styled 'the hands,' were not asked to clock on, it being to their own advantage to get in punctually.

'Just fancy! the Sanitary Inspector has been visiting in our neighbourhood, and he says the houses are unfit for habitation,' said Annie Rooney, who worked beside Millie. 'Six of them have been condemned, but there's a sight more than six that want rebuilding, I know.'

'He came round our way a month or two ago,' answered Millie, 'and he pulled a piece of paper off our bedroom wall and found nine layers of old paper under it. No wonder people contract disease, and

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our rooms are so tiny you couldn't swing a cat in them; what with the size of the rooms and the state of the repairs, it's a wonder we manage to exist.'

'In the street where I live,' remarked a third speaker, 'there's been a lot of fuss about overcrowding. The landlords say that four-roomed houses were not built for sub-letting, and if tenants let rooms, they do it at their own risk and will have to do their own repairs. What else are they to do but let, with rents as high as they are? I don't know how my mother would manage if she didn't let a room.'

'Well, as far as that goes, my mother lets two,' resumed Millie. 'She lets the front room upstairs to a young couple, and the back room to another couple, and we four in our family have to manage in two rooms. Mother puts my brother's bed down in the kitchen every night, and rolls it up during the day.'

'That's not so bad as a family I know,' said Annie Rooney. 'Eight of them live and sleep in two rooms. I don't know how they manage; for there is a son of seventeen years and two daughters of thirteen and fifteen. The father is blind and generally drunk, and the mother — well, the less said about her the better.'

As Millie's needle flew over her work, rapidly converting the material into a shirt, she began thinking. Why were there such slums in a nation which called itself civilised?

Of course, the East End of London has the docks, which partly account for its congested areas and its maze of narrow streets. Naturally people find it

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convenient to live close to the great factories which line the river-side.

Her thoughts reverted to an article which had recently appeared in the magazine of a local Women's Settlement. It was the report of an inquiry into conditions in the borough during the year 1923. In it she had read that the houses in a certain area are . . . in nearly every case jerry-built, that they are nearly always on marshy ground; and what is even worse, the accommodation is entirely inadequate. There is overcrowding to the extent of 37 per cent. amongst the girls with which this inquiry was concerned. One instance will suffice to give an example of this evil.

A family of ten living in three rooms, the eldest a girl of fourteen and the youngest eleven months. They have a kitchen, and in one bedroom sleep father, mother and three children; in the other five children, a boy of thirteen, girl of fourteen and three younger children: length of room, 8 feet; width, 5½ feet. Four sleep in width of room and one in length. For beds they have palliasses stuffed with straw on wire frames on the floor.

Some of the mothers appeared to be unaware of the moral and physical danger of overcrowding, but many were distressed and at their wits' end to know how to keep their boys and girls separate.

It was only possible to get one doctor's opinion on the effect of factory work upon the adolescent. He agreed that there is a terrible gulf between four-

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teen and sixteen when the health of girls is not attended to. Many of the mothers said their girls were not strong. One has only to look at the pale faces, flat chests and undeveloped bodies to be certain that this is true. The doctor consulted said that there was a marked difference in the number of girls who came to him after they had reached their sixteenth birthday, when they could obtain medical treatment through the insurance. . . . He was of opinion that there was a larger amount of sickness among girls of fourteen and sixteen working in factories, than would be found in ordinary middle-class life where they were still attending school.

As these words recurred to her, Millie glanced round the workroom, in which a number of girls of fourteen years were working. Mere children, many of them, and as she looked, a fresh realisation of the inefficiency of our industrial system was borne in upon her; a system which allows its children to be lifted out of the schoolroom and dumped down in the bewildering atmosphere of the machine-ridden workroom. It was appalling! But her lack of knowledge prevented her finding an answer to the problem. So it is with many of the workers: uneducated and ignorant, they pass their lives groping in the darkness for disillusionment.

Her meditations were brought to an abrupt close by the voice of the forewoman — 'Toppers out this afternoon.'

'My word!' exclaimed Annie Rooney. 'Another



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half-day. We've had every afternoon out this week; I shan't earn enough to pay my way.'

Millie said nothing, but her face took on the care-worn expression which was becoming habitual. She had a widowed mother, and oh, how she loved books! If only she could earn sufficient to buy even one!

'I say, Millie,' broke in Annie, 'have you heard that the time-rate is going down again? I heard a rumour of it yesterday: it's only  $7\frac{1}{2}d.$  an hour now, and  $6\frac{1}{2}d.$  to pay for every thousand yards of cotton we use. I think it's a shame to make us buy our cotton, don't you? V-'s don't.'

'No!' retorted Millie. 'V-'s don't, as you say; but they have an even worse system. They fix their prices as low as they dare, and then offer a bonus on output. If that isn't sweated labour, I don't know what is. Their workers become slaves in the effort to earn sufficient to enable them to get the bonus, and what's the result? If we go to our supervisor and say we cannot earn the time-rate, she tells us that the workers at V-'s earn it and their prices are lower than ours. What did she tell us last week when the price of shirts was lowered by fourpence per dozen? If we cannot earn our money, there are numbers of girls at the Labour Exchange who would be glad to work for her price.'

For the benefit of the reader, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the method usually adopted in the shirt-making industry. The makers are divided into

## SHIRT-MAKER (MACHINIST)

four groups – toppers, seamers, sleeve-hands, and hemmers. There are also button-holers, buttoners, examiners, and, finally, folders and packers; so that a shirt passes through a good many pairs of hands ere it is complete. In most factories these workers are paid by the piece-work system. The topper lines the shirt, puts on yoke, fly, collar and pocket, if any, and receives from 2s. 6d. to 1s. per dozen, according to the type of shirt. The sleeve hand receives about 7½d. per dozen pairs of sleeves, the hemmer about 3d. per dozen shirts, and the seamer 1s. to 1s. 2d. The prices vary in different factories. The average working day is from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m. The piece-worker does not receive pay during holidays; in fact, she receives pay only for actual work done. If she is kept waiting for work (which often happens during slack periods), the loss is hers. Moreover, in many factories she has to buy the cotton and needles used in manufacturing her employer's goods. The piece-work system is one of the defects in our industrial machine. It is unfair because the slow worker is up against the difficulty of earning the time-rate, and is not-wanted by the employer. It also encourages sweating because the quick worker is constantly trying to earn a little more, with the result that the price is often lowered on her account.

Here is an illustration. Millie had worked in this particular factory for eight years, and was one of the quickest toppers. When the prices were lowered a short time ago, the girls went in a body to the super-

## FACTORY WORKERS

visor, and complained that they were unable to earn their money. Her reply was, 'Millie earns it, and if one girl can do it you'll have to; if not'—and she shrugged her shoulders.

What are girls to do in a case of this kind, especially in the East End of London where unemployment is rampant? I venture to think that the abolition of the piece-work system would in a measure alleviate this evil.

At one o'clock the shirt-workers were finished for the day, many of them having earned the small sum of 3s. Some went home to help the harassed and often irritable mother. Others went to an afternoon *matinée* at the cinema, and a few went for a walk, during which they discussed the possibility of trying to get another job.

Millie, feeling very depressed, walked slowly home, to where there was little if anything to relieve her low spirits. The tiny kitchen was hung around with wet clothes from the washing; while the smell of soap-suds mingled with the odour of mutton broth. She found it difficult to spend her afternoons very profitably. It was almost impossible for her to do any real reading at home, for the kitchen had to serve as library, sitting- and dining-room.

It is not difficult to understand why girls become discontented with the circumstances that compel them to live under such conditions. And what of the mothers? Is there any joy in dragging out an existence in a badly built house? The daily round be-

## SHIRT-MAKER (MACHINIST)

comes drudgery as a result; while they themselves often become soured and embittered in the eternal fight against poverty and squalor.

Millie was acutely aware of the dull monotony of her home surroundings and she longed to be able to lift her brave, sad mother out of it all and place her in a brighter atmosphere, but it seemed impossible. She, like many thousands of those who toil that England may live, was compelled to go on day by day; her intellect awakened and eager, yet denied its birthright — development. Some day, it may be in the near future, there will be brighter homes for the workers and education for all. Not until the whole community claims its right (not privilege) of securing a sound knowledge of the cause of the great problems confronting our nation to-day, shall we get the legislation that is going to alter and improve the existing social order. Then shall the factory become 'a thing of beauty' instead of the pile of bricks with its whitewashed interior which we know to-day.

And behind these walls work Millie Martin and thousands of her type; enjoying life in their own way yet dimly aware of something richer and fuller beyond their grasp.

It is that which only education can give that these women are longing for; many of them perhaps not yet fully aware of their need. But if the opportunity is given them, I believe they will grasp and use it for the uplifting of women and children.

*November, 1924.*

**IX**

**WORKING MOTHERS**

## NOTES ON WOMEN IN INDUSTRY \*

Two exceedingly grave problems are revealed at the first glance at the position of women in industry, namely –

- (1) the fact that women have always been exploited to undersell men; and
- (2) the moral degradation of any society which, while denying to women a living wage, yet compels them to be economically independent.

It is fair to say that trade union organisation and the setting up of trade boards have been the main factors in raising the status of women in industry, so far as it has been raised. But trade boards have been set up in connection with only 44 industries, and as to trade union organisation, only one in six women workers are organised, as compared with one in three men workers. How much is still to be done may be realised from the following table, where rates of pay, taken at random from among the lowest paid industries, are set out.

Industry.	Rates of Pay per Week for Adult <sup>1</sup> Women.
Engineering Workers	24s.
Bedmakers in Cam- bridge Colleges	28s. 6d.

<sup>1</sup> The definition of an adult worker varies in different industries, between the ages of 18 and 21.

## NOTES

Industry.	Rates of Pay per Week for Adult <sup>1</sup> Women.
Beatsters	18s. (average)
Capsule Makers	24s.
Fancy Leather Workers	18s.
Cutlery Workers	21s. to 23s.
Pencil Workers	14s. to 20s. (time-work)

These figures are neither average, maximum nor minimum, but are definite instances of wages actually being paid at the present time.

### UNEMPLOYMENT<sup>2</sup>

	Number of Unemploy- ment Books remaining Lodged.	Percentage Unemployed.
Dec. 22, 1924	272,573	8·7
„ 21, 1925	231,489	7·3

<sup>1</sup> See note on preceding page.

<sup>2</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette.*

IX

WORKING MOTHERS



## WORKING-MAN'S WIFE

by Mrs. E-

Mrs. E- was born in 1890. At the age of seven she went to a convent school in Killarney, Ireland, where the children were taught by nuns. There she remained until the age of thirteen, when she lost her father, her mother being left with five young children to feed and clothe. She was too proud to accept help or relief from any source, so she had to leave school before her allotted time, as all the children had to earn a few coppers to assist their mother. The mother used often to work until the early hours of the morning by the light of a candle; she used to extinguish the oil lamp, as the bright beam showing through the small windows might attract the tramps, mental deficient, and other queer folk who roam the country-side.

Mrs. E-'s first earnings were 2s. a week earned by lace-making (the real Curra-macras lace), this having been taught her by a nun at the convent school. It took her eight months to learn to make lace, and at the end of that time she could get 5s. for a collarette which took fourteen days to make. Then the outbreak of the War destroyed the market for lace. However, the convent was supplied instead with Government orders for shirts, for which the workers were paid 9d. for the completed article. Tiring of this, Mrs. E- made up her mind to the bold venture of coming to London, where she obtained a situation as under-housemaid at £26 a year. At the end of two years her mistress went abroad, leaving Mrs. E- to get another position as housemaid at £36 a year, where she remained until her marriage.

## WORKING MOTHERS

I WAS married in March, 1921, my husband being a wireless operator in the Royal Navy. I had recourse to taking furnished apartments wherever he was stationed, paying on the average 15s. a week rent out of 28s. he allowed me. So that I had only 13s. to provide fire, light and food for myself, and also for my husband every other night. In February, 1922, my first baby was born. When Baby was seven weeks old my husband was discharged from the service. Then began a struggle to live, as civilian clothes had to be bought for him besides a heavy rent of 17s. 6d. a week to be paid, and no weekly wage being earned for six months, when we had to apply for out-relief. But my father-in-law being a proud man came down to Chatham and brought us to London, where after three days my husband was successful in obtaining a situation as a roundsman at a salary of £1 and commission, which was about £2 a week. Then we took a furnished room for 12s. 6d. a week, as we had no furniture of our own. After three months my husband was again idle owing to the firm selling out, and to make matters worse, Baby was stricken with bronchitis and whooping-cough, necessitating a doctor, which cost me £2.

Weeks went past and still no work or unemployment benefit, so that we had to apply for outdoor relief, which was obtained after a struggle owing to being in furnished rooms. This was in the latter part of the year 1922. Then, but for the goodness of

M R S . E -

my landlady, we would have been cast on the street, she supplying us with firing, light and shelter, when for ten days my husband obtained temporary employment in the Post Office. Still the weeks wore on with no sign of work, so that I had to leave Baby, whom I was feeding myself, and take up a morning situation for 12s. a week, which was insufficient to pay the rent. After two months I had to give up, as I was suffering over feeding Baby, so that at Easter, 1923, my husband's parents gave us their last pound to go to Ireland and try his luck there. Arriving in Ireland we stayed with my aunt in Blarney, being unable to proceed further owing to the trouble that existed at that time. After numerous recommendations and applications, all of no avail, due to the fact that he was not of Irish nationality, he became very depressed as misfortune still pursued him, more so because his life was in jeopardy with the Free State troops, being a stranger in the locality, many times being fired upon. So that he returned to London, leaving Baby and me behind.

After arriving in London he remained with courteous friends, who were kind enough to feed and shelter him. He remained with them for six weeks, when once more fortune smiled upon him, he obtaining a situation as a greengrocer at a salary of 50s. a week. After a fortnight he sent for Baby and me, and we once more lived in a furnished room for 14s. a week. After three months we arrive at Christmas, 1923, when my second child was born,

## WORKING MOTHERS

I having to go to hospital, the doctor despairing of my life. Early in February, 1924, we obtained one back unfurnished room for 12s. a week,<sup>1</sup> we having managed to get a few pieces of furniture together, with the help of some friends and relations. All was well for about one year and three months, when my third baby was born, this being in March, 1925. After ten days my baby began to sicken, and had to be moved to the hospital, where he died at the age of three weeks. I having no money and being unable to raise the necessary expense to defray funeral costs, I had, much to my sorrow, to allow my darling baby to be buried at the parish expense. Two weeks later my husband was put off his work through slackness of trade. To make matters worse, I asked my landlady to renovate my room, but, much to my dismay, she summoned me to court, demanding possession of the room. As the house was decontrolled she was successful and I had to pay £2 7s. costs, and in addition would have been cast on the street with my two children, who are two and four years respectively, but for the timely help of a lady who secured two rooms for us to live in.

At present my husband has been at work eight weeks at a salary of £2 5s. a week, out of which he has to keep 10s. for his fares, midday dinner, tea and cigarettes, which in itself is barely enough considering he has to work Sundays up to four o'clock. This

<sup>1</sup> This is no overstatement. I inspected the room myself and also saw the rent book. — *Editor's note.*

MRS. E-

gives my weekly wage at 35s. a week, out of which I pay as follows:

	s.	d.
Rent	12	0
Insurance	1	0
Clothing Club	1	0
Coal	1	6
Light (Gas)	2	6
To Solicitor for Court Proceedings	2	6
Bread	2	6
Milk	2	6
Meat	3	6
Bacon	0	6
Soap, Soda and Blue	0	6
Tea	1	0
Sugar	0	9
Cocoa	0	4
Vegetables	1	0
Bloater Paste	0	3
Butter, Margarine	1	0
Quaker Oats	0	8
	<hr/>	
	35	0

The room I live in is a back room on the second floor, with no bright outlook and only 12 feet square. Owing to limited space, my children, husband and I have to sleep in one bed, and drinking-water is drawn from the bath-tap, which is situated a few inches from the lavatory-seat, it being a com-

## WORKING MOTHERS

bination bathroom and lavatory which is used by five families. I have no convenience for washing, having to boil my clothes on the gas-stove and wash them in the one room which we live and sleep in. I am very discontented, not only for the inconvenience it affords, but due to the fact that the house is overrun with vermin.

My daily routine is, rise at seven o'clock, prepare my husband's breakfast; at seven-thirty I am washing up the breakfast things, after which I clean the grate and light the fire; then I prepare the children's breakfast. When nearly ready I get the children up, wash and dress them, then sit them down to their breakfast, after which I again wash up. I now remake the bed, sweep the floor, dust all round, and wash any article left dirty so as to keep down the washing. Now I scrub out my room, after which I prepare the dinner. At midday I serve dinner for the children and myself, after which I again wash up the utensils, sweep up the floor, then dress the children and myself, go out for a walk, except on Monday, when I go to the Children's Welfare. I return home about four o'clock, undress the children, put away their clothes, make up the fire, give them their tea. After grace is said I wash up the ware, sweep the floor, then go out about six to get the next day's meals, return back home, give them an hour's recreation with their toys, at 7.30 p.m. undress and wash them and put them to bed. I now tidy out their toys, then lay the table in readiness for my

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husband's supper. Now I sit down and do my mending and sewing, until my husband's arrival at nine o'clock, then I get my hubby's supper, after which he assists me to clean up in general, after which wash and lay the table in readiness for the morning, when we now retire to the land of rest and sleep.

*December, 1925.*

## WORKING-MAN'S WIFE

by Mrs. B-

Mrs. B- was born in 1878, and was one of a family of twelve. At the time of her birth there were already eight children, and her father's wages, as a policeman, were 28s. a week. The latter joined the Police Force in 1860 and left after 26½ years' service in 1886. At no time did his money come to more than 30s. a week (no coal or rent allowance was made, but his uniform was found and there was a contribution towards his boots). But even when his wages were scheduled at 30s. there were always deductions for Superannuation Fund and other subscriptions.

Mrs. B-'s mother, therefore, had a heavy task to keep things going and was compelled to supplement the family income by doing upholstery, other kinds of needlework, and occasionally taking in washing.

Mrs. B-'s father was granted a pension of £1 a week when he left the Force, but he found it very difficult to get any regular work and there were at that time seven children under thirteen years of age. There was a very hard struggle, especially as there was no free education and 2d. a week had to be paid for each child, but things became a little easier when the five eldest children began to earn for themselves.

Mrs. B- left school at fourteen and was apprenticed to the dressmaking business; later she entered domestic service.

In 1910 she married. Her husband, who served in the South African War, was unable to serve in the Great War, as he had seriously hurt his right arm. This also prevented him from returning to the trade to which he had been apprenticed.



M R S . B -

- that of a plasterer. For some time he was only earning casually, but eventually secured a post at a firm of booksellers which he still retains.

\*

I AM the wife of a working-man who earns £3 3s. a week, and as we have three children, ages 13, 12 and 4 years, I find it very difficult to manage without going out myself to swell the budget. Fortunately, I am a very fair needlewoman, and every Friday I go from 9 till 6 to a boys' school to do the mending: then for 2½ hours every Thursday I go to another place for housework. This brings me in an additional 8s. I am able to take my little boy to both of these places, for which I am very grateful. As I have to go out like this, and still consider that the *home* should in no wise be neglected, it keeps me pretty busy. I rise at from 6 to 6.30 each morning, light fire, sweep and clean kitchen, etc., and prepare breakfast for the family at 7.40 (food for husband to be put up for day, also one girl at long-distance school). The eldest girl attending a nearer school is able to help wash up, etc. Mondays I usually do the washing. Our living-room, or kitchen, as I've already spoken of it, has a sink with water laid on, but there is no copper, so I have a way of my own, which does away with the necessity of boiling the clothes, as I only have a very small kitchen range and a gas-ring. I also find it best (especially in the winter when

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practically all the drying has to be done indoors) to have *two* days for washing; even then, I'm not always able to get it done by dinner-time, but I do if possible, for this reason. I leave my beds to be made late in the day after stripping them, etc., etc. Of course there is often shopping to be brought in, and if this is the case, and I'm able to take my little boy out in the morning, I'm left free to sit down to needlework in the afternoons. I have a large front room, occupied by myself, husband and little boy, another good-sized room shared by the two girls, a landing, one flight of stairs, hall, step, etc., to keep clean. We have no garden, but in the good weather I'm able to dry my clothes in the yard at the back of the shop. This is quite a convenient flat on the whole, as there is a lavatory and coal cupboard, besides a coal cellar at our disposal downstairs. Wednesday and Thursday afternoons is usually spent in cleaning the two bedrooms, as going out on Friday, I have to get a good bit of housework in Saturday morning, having made it a rule to be always ready for my husband, who comes home at two o'clock on Saturdays. There is always a hot dinner on that day and Sundays, as he has to have cold dinner all other days. I think this is advisable, if not imperative. You will see the items that go to make up £1 9s. 6d. of the £3 3s. It leaves £1 13s. 6d. for food, clothing, and all sorts of sundries too numerous to mention. The boots for children and husband are a big item, but are all repaired at home by the father, as also practically all

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the children's clothes, and my own, are made by myself. I also take in needlework, just now being engaged in making a set of very fine nightdresses, mostly handwork.

As regards unemployment, my husband belongs to a union, which as far as we can see is all he can do, except doing his best to keep his present job.

It is very difficult, wellnigh impossible, to *save* for the future, but I still hope for the best always, and perhaps when the children are able to help later on, it won't be so hard; meanwhile we are much better off than a great many and are thankful.

<i>£</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	
0	11	6	Rent
0	3	9	Coal
0	2	0	Light
0	3	3	Sick Clubs
0	0	6	Clothing Club
0	5	0	Fares to and from work (Husband)
0	0	11	Daily and Children's Newspaper
0	0	6	Child's Fare
0	2	1	Insurance
<hr/>			
1	9	6	
1	13	6	Food and Sundries
<hr/>			
<u>£3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	

*November, 1924.*

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'The problem with which we are faced is this. There are not less than, say, 700,000 mothers in England and Wales giving birth to children per annum. Of this number approximately 3,000 per annum have died during the last ten years in the fulfilment of this maternal function. . . . Yet the number of deaths by no means indicates the whole loss, for a vastly greater number than 3,000 of these mothers are permanently injured or invalided in this physiological process of childbirth. Nor is the magnitude of the problem showing any signs of substantial diminution, for whilst there has been a remarkable decline in infant and child mortality, the death-rate among women in childbirth has shown but little proportional lessening in the last twenty years. . . .

'Since 1902 maternal mortality has not declined proportionately in the same degree as the death-rates from all causes of women at reproductive ages, as the general death-rate for all persons at all ages, or as the infant mortality rate for children under one year of age. In fact, the child-bearing mother is not sharing equally with the rest of the population in the improved public health.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prefatory Note by the Chief Medical Officer to the *Report on Maternal Mortality*, by Janet M. Campbell, M.D., M.S., published by the Ministry of Health, 1924.

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The reforms suggested by Dr. Campbell may be thus summarised:

1. An improvement in the quality of the professional attendance.
2. Action through the Public Health Department of the Local Authority for ante-natal and post-natal care of all pregnant women, chiefly by the establishment of maternity centres and of maternity hospital treatment.
3. Social and educational measures, which include the provision of suitable nourishment for necessitous expectant and nursing mothers; consideration of extension or modification of sickness benefit during pregnancy under the National Health Insurance Act, and wide-spread educational propaganda through official and voluntary agencies.

Dr. Campbell then adds: 'It is recognised that the establishment of a comprehensive and efficient Maternity Service designed steadily to improve the standard of midwifery, and thus to eliminate the avoidable risks of childbearing, is *largely a matter of administration and finance.*'<sup>1</sup>

Further light on the life of the 'working-man's wife' is thrown by an extremely interesting collection of letters from working women compiled by the Women's Co-operative Guild and published by Bell shortly before the War.

The letters are selected at random and give an account of the average life of a working-man's

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

## WORKING MOTHERS

wife living in a large town. The husbands of these women were railwaymen, builders, engineers, boot operatives, etc.

I will quote one or two extracts:

The first letter is from a woman whose husband is earning 28s. a week, with six children. Speaking of her pregnancy, she writes:

'During this pregnancy I never dare think of the time when the baby would be born. First, because I knew the pain would be so bad, and then because I realised that I would not be able to work when I got near the end, and for some time afterwards. I believe if I had felt quite comfortable as to the position of my other children during the time when I would be laid up, my sufferings would not have been so great, or my dread of labour. . . . I well remember the prostrate condition I have been in on several occasions owing to lack of nourishment and attention at the time. I found I could not get anybody to come into the house or do the work unless I could pay them 10s. a week.'

It might be noticed, in passing, that these wages of 28s. a week would equal about 49s. to-day, 7s. more than the railway owners were offering to the lower-grade men during the negotiations of November, 1923, and more than the average mining wages in Somerset. It is probably difficult for the owners to realise what life means on the wages they propose.

The second letter is from a woman describing how

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she feared she might be losing her mental balance:

‘I dared not tell a soul, I dared not even face it for some time, and then I knew that I must fight this battle or go under. Care and help would have cured me, but I was too proud for charity and no other help was available. You may say mine is an isolated case, but it is not. Sympathy borne of suffering brings many mothers to me, just that they may find a listening ear. I find this mental state is common, and the root cause is lack of rest and economic strain – economic strain being the greatest factor of ill of the two.’

The last letter from which I will quote runs as follows:

‘The first part of my life I spent in a screw factory from six in the morning till five at night, and after tea used to do my washing and cleaning. I only left two weeks and three weeks before my children were born. After that I took in lodgers and washing, and always worked up to an hour or so before Baby was born. The results are that three of my girls suffer with their insides . . . one dear boy was born ruptured on account of my previous hard work. . . . I can only look back now on the terrible suffering I endured that tells the tale now upon my health. I could never afford a nurse, and so was a day or two after my confinement obliged to sit up and wash and dress the others.’

X

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?

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### 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

## APPENDIX

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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