THE FIVE-DAY WEEK

By WILLIAM GREEN

PEOPLE work in order to supply the things and services needed by other people. Work periods must be long enough to get the work done. In the old days of hand labor, the work hours were long—often from sunup to twilight. The story of the shortening of these hours has been only partially recorded.

The Shortening of Working Periods

In 1822 the millwrights and machinists declared that work ought to begin at 6 a.m. and stop at 6 p.m. with an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. Three years later the Boston house carpenters precipitated a strike for the ten-hour day. In this strike, the historian tells us, the employer-capitalist was represented as supplying raw materials, financing the cost of production, marketing the finished product, and owning vacant lots and desiring to build on them. The carpenters were propertyless wage-earners with interests antagonistic to all others. The declaration of the master builders in reply to the demands of the strikers was classic. They could not believe this project to have originated with any of the faithful and industrious Sons of New England, but were compelled to believe it an evil of foreign growth. These good employers dreaded the consequences of such a measure on the morals and well-being of society. Similar arguments have regularly been brought up against efforts to alter customary hours of daily labor.

As machine power, materials and methods of production have been improved, productivity, or the output per individual, has increased. As the workers were able to do more work in less time they suggested that, instead of laying off the workers who would be superfluous under the old standard of working hours, the work day be shortened. From twelve to ten hours, then from ten to eight hours, new standards were established. Then the week began to readjust itself to one day’s rest in seven, then Saturday half-holiday, and later the five-day week. Progress was slow and uneven, for employers are not equally progressive.

Each step has been contested by employers on the grounds of expense, upsetting of customary regulations, and decreased output. Yet since both the work day and the work week have been shortened, unit costs of production have lessened, output has increased many fold and all of industry has learned more efficient habits. The force which employers ignored in their arguments is the adjustability of industry. Production is a live thing that finds new methods of its own volition or under compulsion. Pressure brought on any one point forces all other factors to meet a new situation. Demand of workers for higher standards has been a stimulus to industry to find more efficient methods.

The Logic of Reducing Working Periods

Reduction in hours of work whether by the day or week constitutes one of the ways by which workers share in economic and social progress. The whole purpose of technical progress is to reduce the human labor necessary
for production. But unless the hours of work are reduced as productivity increases we defeat our purpose.

If the necessary output can be turned out in less time, there is no point to keeping the work day or work week at any customary standard. Many employers have in the past tried to corner all the benefits of technical progress and some have temporarily succeeded. Even yet vestiges of the twelve-hour day and seven-day week remain. Labor standards that belong to half a century ago have no place in modern industry. Change has been an outstanding characteristic of industry of the past twenty years. Former methods and even industries have been replaced. The substitution of mechanical power for human muscles, and of machine tools for hand tools, has revolutionized the kinds of skill which workers must supply. The amount of horse-power used in industry increased from 4,284,499 to 15,868,828 between 1919 and 1925. The primary horse-power per wage-earner increased 30.9 per cent between 1919 and 1927.

Since mechanical power is furnished steadily without the fluctuations due to human fatigue, the human operative works at high tension. His output is higher and the demands upon his concentration and sustained efforts are also higher. Shorter work periods are therefore necessary as a human conservation policy.

*Has the Reduction of Working Periods Kept Pace with the Mechanization of Industry?*

The rapid mechanization of industry within recent years has made possible a far greater reduction in hours of work than has actually taken place. The production of the average worker in industry has increased far more rapidly in the decade since 1919 than in any other period of which we have record. From 1899 to 1909, productivity increased 27.5 per cent. The decade from 1909 to 1919 brought a temporary check and, through the war readjustments, no further progress was made. But with the tremendous urge toward efficiency and technical advance in the decade from 1919 to 1929, productivity rose 50 per cent. Thus the advance in these ten years nearly doubled that of the previous twenty years. This amazing technical achievement made possible an increase of leisure for those who operate industrial machinery. But leisure has by no means increased for them in proportion to their increasing power to produce—quite the contrary, in fact.

During the decade 1909 to 1919, when productivity did not increase at all, great advances were made in shortening the work day. This made it possible to bring up labor standards so as to overcome the discrepancy between labor and industrial progress. The Census of Manufactures shows that, in 1909, plants operating on a 48-hour-week basis employed only 7.9 per cent of the wage-earners in manufacturing; in 1919, 48.7 per cent were working in 48-hour plants. But far less progress has been made since 1919, in the decade when improving technique has curtailed work time per worker per unit by one-third. From 1919 to 1923 the percentage of wage-earners working 48 hours a week actually declined from 48.7 per cent to 46.1 per cent. Since that date we have no comparable information from the Census of Manufactures, but the Bureau of Labor Statistics carries the record forward in certain industries.

In the boot and shoe, woolen-goods
and cotton-textile industries, hours of work have actually increased since 1922. These increases have occurred in non-union establishments. In foundries and machine shops there was a slight shortening of hours from 1923 to 1929, amounting to 1.4 hours a week in foundries and half an hour a week in machine shops. But average full-time hours are over 50 a week in each industry, in spite of the machine displacement which has laid off thousands of workers. In slaughtering and meat-packing, the full-time week was nearly one hour longer in 1929 than in 1921, and hours are now 49.3 per week. In the automobile industry, in spite of the fact that productivity has increased nine per cent since 1922, average work time in 1929 was shorter by only seven-tenths of an hour a week. These figures include the Ford plant, and the effect of his five-day week on the average hours per week must consequently be offset by increases in the rest of the industry.

It is significant also to compare the changes in hours of work before and after 1919. In men's clothing, hours averaged 54.4 a week in 1911;1 by 1919 they had decreased to 47.9; from 1919 to 1922 there was a further gain of 3.8 hours a week, bringing the average schedule to 44.1; but since 1922 there has been practically no change, and hours still averaged 44.0 in 1928. Thus in the eight years before 1919, hours decreased by 6.5 a week, after 1919 they decreased by only 3.9 in eight years, and this gain was before 1922. In cotton goods, hours decreased from 58.5 in 1910 to 51.8 in 1920, a gain of 6.7; from 1920 to 1930, how-

Why Have Working Periods Recently Increased?

This increase in hours was one of the consequences of so-called labor liquidation. After the World War industrial management was dominated by an obsession to liquidate labor. The industrial depression of 1922 provided an opportunity, and price cuts were immediate and severe. At the same time all conditions of work were made more severe. The results in hours we have just discussed. But these things meant that labor standards were moving backward while technical development went rapidly forward. The cumulative result of these maladjustments made itself felt in declining markets for the products which were being turned out.

These figures are enough to show general tendencies in industry in the last decade, when increases in productivity have made reduction of hours not only possible but imperative. It is a shock to find that not only have we not yet attained the eight-hour day and the 48-hour week in many unorganized industries, but hundreds of thousands are still actually working 60

1 Figures for 1910 and 1911 in this and the following items are for "selected occupations"; for later years they include all occupations. The difference is not more than three-tenths of an hour in 1914 when both groups are given.
hours or more per week. In the cement industry, employing 30,961, weekly hours actually average 60.8 a week for all wage-earners. In oil mining, 66% work over 48 hours a week and 49% 60 hours or more; on oil pipe lines, 77% work over 48 hours and 24% work 60 hours or more; the 48-hour week for any large number of workers exists only in California where union standards are established. Even common laborers employed by municipalities are no better off; in 351 cities they work 10 hours a day and 60 hours a week.

These are sore spots in our industrial organism. The 10-hour day and 60-hour week are thought to be things of the past, and every forward-looking citizen knows that they should be far behind us.

Resulting Maladjustments

Because reductions of working time have failed to keep pace with workers' increased power to produce, we have serious maladjustments. The average worker in manufacturing in 1929 could produce in 5.3 hours what it took his predecessors eight hours to produce in 1919 and 10.2 hours in 1899. Because the change since 1919 was made in a brief 10 years, the population has not been able to consume the rapidly increasing output of our factories. In the past when such changes took place over longer periods, the power to consume kept a closer parallel to the power to produce and we found demand finally increasing enough to keep men at work.

But in 1929, our factories, railroads and mines actually produced and transported their hugely increased output with 900,000 fewer men than in 1919: 546,000 fewer were employed in factories, while the reduction in force was 253,000 on railroads and 100,000 in coal mines.

Forty per cent of our 28 million industrial wage-earners normally depend on these industries for their living. Add to this the fact that our population is increasing and that slightly more than 500,000 persons seek work for the first time each year. This stream of new workers with the vigor of youth forces out the older workers, creating a new problem. With those laid off since 1919 we had by 1929 about 6,000,000 workers for whom jobs had to be found in industries normally employing only 60% of all wage-earners—the service industries, trade, communication and construction. Employment has increased in these industries and some of the work seekers have undoubtedly found jobs there; some also have probably succeeded in joining the ranks of the white-collared. But this accounts for only a small portion of the six million. Dr. Isador Lubin, in a study of 750 workers laid off in three typical cities, found that only 13% found work in these so-called "newer" industries.

The Need for Reducing the Number of Working Hours

When we have so many more workers than are needed to do the nation's work under modern methods, clearly the logical way out is to reduce the hours of work and create more employment. This is the only fundamental solution and it is thoroughly in keeping with modern progress, both industrial and social. For in industry, as new and complicated machinery is introduced, the wage-earner's job requires more intelligence and responsibility. Much of this new machinery is very costly and delicate. The man who operates a knitting machine with its
hundreds on hundreds of tiny parts and delicate adjustments can do thousands of dollars' worth of damage in a few moments. Perfect work requires constant attention and the highest type of skill. The knitter cannot be allowed to become tired. Even the comparatively simple machinery used in paving a street takes far more cool-headed intelligence than do a wheelbarrow and shovel. So throughout industry. Modern power machinery requires steady nerves, "pep," quick thought and action.

The five-day week increases these qualifications. Many of the employers who have tried it note this. "Greater relaxation over the week-end gives added pep to the week's work," says one. In another plant the rate of illness has been reduced 30% and lateness 80%. Generally an improvement in morale, with more active cooperation and application, is noted.

In our modern social life, leisure is more important than ever. How can a working man understand the complex problems of his work unless he has time off for study? He needs to know something of elementary economics if he is to plan his living intelligently. He needs to keep constantly in touch with new techniques in his work. A glance at the monthly journals of unions having the five-day week will show much material of this sort—new techniques in carpentering, the latest inventions in electrical craftsmanship, and discussion of problems of production and consumption, money and cost of living, and others. Their wide circulation speaks for the worker's interest in these subjects when he has leisure in which to study them.

By giving the workers a full free day on Saturday the four or five extra hours of leisure count for more than they could if scattered through the week. A break of two days means relaxation and change. Many men use it for work around the house and garden, or tinkering on the car. Married women find time for shopping. Excursions in the car are frequent, especially in warm weather when tourist camps make lodging easy. The chance for family life is one of the most far-reaching benefits because it means for children and parents alike a richer spiritual and intellectual companionship. Economically the needs which one discovers, with time to work around the house or on the car, lead to a desire for more comforts and consequently to more buying and more efforts to secure the money with which to buy. Shorter hours have always had this effect.

Health also is an important consideration. With the strain and pressure of our modern industrial work, nervous disorders among workers are increasing. Striking evidence of this comes from recent scientific investigations in Germany, where a physician who has examined the patients passing through the insurance sanatoria says: "The increase of diseases of the nervous system among working people in the last decade is a fact that is now firmly established by extensive statistical inquiry. On all sides proofs of the enormous increase of neurasthenia as a cause of inability to work are being presented." A St. Louis physician notes that 20 or 30 per cent of the 7,000 garment workers who applied for relief at the Jewish Dispensary were neurasthenic subjects. The increase of nervous disorders, with their devastating destruction of human character and capacity, is a danger we cannot afford to ignore. A better remedy could hardly be prescribed than the five-day week with its two days of relaxation.
Practical Experiences with the Five-day Week

Where the five-day week has been tried, employers generally have found it practical. A recent study of the National Industrial Conference Board, covering 270 plants, found that advantages outweigh disadvantages. The five-day schedule brought a number of operating economies. The Saturday half-day, with costs of stopping and starting for a few hours' work, makes overhead per unit of production high. Attendance is generally worse on Saturday than at any other time. Many plants mentioned the advantage of having Saturday for maintenance and repair work. This meant less lost time during the week from machine failures. Greatly improved morale of the work force, better attendance and promptness during the week, better attention to work, were among the most important advantages.

The study showed that the five-day week does not necessarily reduce production. Many plants found production increasing. In one, the value of product shipped per dollar of wage cost increased from $5.11 in 1920 to $9.71 in the first half of 1928. While this change is not entirely to be attributed to the five-day week, it shows the type of progress in efficiency which can be made under the five-day-week schedule.

At present the five-day week is most prevalent in the building trades and the automobile industry. But several thousand also have it in the garment industries, printing, brick and clay manufacturing, cloth, hat and cap and metal industries, building materials, textiles and paper. It has been widely used during the past year to prevent lay-off when work was reduced, and it seems likely that about one million workers are today enjoying the five-day schedule. This is good progress since 1926 when the campaign for the five-day week began. But our progress needs to be far more rapid if we are to keep pace with modern machine developments.

The Goal of Management: Balancing Production and Consumption

The degree of interdependence which exists in the modern industrial structure makes it very important to prevent maladjustment. Prosperity is conditioned by all groups in industry moving forward together. Balanced progress is the problem. The whole process of setting up planning in production, as opposed to present unplanned production, rests upon establishing and maintaining balance: balance between output and markets; between distribution and consumers; between distribution of the returns from the output of industries and the consumer market; between credit and individual and business needs; between productivity and consumer capacity to use.

Labor constitutes eighty per cent of the customers in our retail stores and spends fifty-four per cent of the nation’s income. Unless workers have sufficient leisure and inclination to raise their standards of living, they cannot be counted upon as buyers for the increased output of our industries.

That failure to reduce hours of work in proportion to other progress has contributed to unemployment is evident from wide-spread provisions for part-time work, rotation of force and similar provisions to make employment go round. Many companies have put in the five-day week as an emergency measure. The most effective single measure that could be taken against unemployment is to make the five-day week universal. It would bring read-
justments that would absorb the jobless.

No really competent manager will forget to watch the adjustments between productivity and work hours, so that reductions shall be immediate and gradual to prevent the cumulative problems of maladjustment.

The Human Values

In addition to the economic necessity for more leisure for workers, increasing participation in leisure is necessary for material and social progress. It is part of our American ideal of equal opportunity for all. Technical progress is worthwhile if it enables those with small incomes to share in the benefits of recreation which leisure brings and to have time for the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in addition to earning a living. Democracy makes heavy demands upon its citizens, and only those who have a measurable degree of leisure can meet its requirements.

No group of citizens should be forced to restrict their lives to industrial problems and environment, but each should have opportunity for a rounded, balanced life. By reducing the hours to be spent in earning a living, opportunities for cultural development and social service are opened. Standards for every kind of human relationship should make it increasingly possible for every individual to share in those things which give lasting satisfaction in living.

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