

"A POSITIVE INCREASE IN EFFICIENCY"

Scientific investigation of work considered merely as a bodily activity has proved that a series of short periods of work with proper relaxation in between result in increased work done, with complete elimination of fatigue, bodily injury and accident.

The late Judge Higgins stated in "A New Province of Law and Order," p. 57, 58: — "In connection with the subject of hours, I may mention two curious facts tending to show a positive increase in efficiency and in results arising from well-regulated pauses in muscular exertion." The judge pointed out that "smokos" for Australian waterside workers were given with the consent of the employers without loss of wages, and these periods gave the men more heart for the work. In shearing operations the employers asked for more rest breaks than the union. Even more than a quarter of a century ago there were employers of labor not so blind to their own interests as some are today.

In an age of vast improvement of technical devices making for the speeding up of production it is astounding that it was as far back as 1920 when judgment was given for a 44-hour week, and hours have only been reduced to forty in few occupations since that date.

In 1920 the Timber Workers' Union had a case before the Arbitration Court for the 44-hour week. At that time an invitation was issued by the Court to representatives of various other industries to appear in the case as a reduction of hours would, if given in this case, be sought by similar industries. Employers' organisations and trades hall councils were invited. The Federal Government was asked to represent the general public. The Government, however, refused the invitation. We have at least made some substantial progress since that date in so far as we have a Federal Labor Government seeking to intervene rather than an anti-Labor Government declining an invitation to appear.

One of the grounds upon which a reduction of hours was sought was that more men would be employed, and thus unemployment would be relieved. The Court rejected this argument as illusory, but the Court held also against the counter argument. It stated that if the employers had to employ more men or pay extra rates in overtime that was not a valid ground for refusing a shorter hour week if the claim was just and expedient.

The Court accepted evidence from scientific research workers on fatigue and efficiency, and was impressed by the argument that workers' time and vitality should not be all consumed in their task of bread-winning.

THE SPEEDY INTRODUCTION OF SHORTER HOURS

The immediate extending of the 40-hour week to all sections of industry and to all industries working a longer period is the demand of organised labor.

We are agreed upon the urgency of it, but we are not all agreed upon the means of accomplishing our demand.

The request of the A.C.T.U. for legislation on the matter seemed to be a commonsense way of achieving the 40-hour week. The Government was asked to bring relief, a relief which was overdue partly because of the workers' acceptance of long hours for war-time production.

It is now clear that there will be strong opposition by anti-working class interests to any introduction of the measure by the Federal Parliament. The position appears to be that even if the Government agreed to introduce and pass legislation for a shorter working week, this may

not be the speedier way to achieve a shorter working week. If the constitutional issue is raised, High Court action can take months even to reach a hearing by this Court.

There are still those who insist that the Government can and should introduce the measure. This places them in the position of proving that it can be done. Many of those urging this course are not people who are wholehearted supporters of constitutional means. In fact they are quite obviously advocating this move, trusting that, because of its difficulties, the workers will be forced to take direct action in the demand for the legal enactment of their claim.

DIRECT ACTION, ARBITRATION OR LEGISLATION

Direct action is probably the most effective method of achieving any demand, but it is also the most costly to the workers. That is not to say that the cost is too high to pay for the success. It may, in the long run, be less costly than to continue to work for excessive hours. So many workers are employed at long hours that united action from them would result in a general revolt. The question to decide is whether we should enforce a shorter working week by direct action. We should not be afraid of the general strike because of its magnitude. On the other hand we must be prepared for the situation which can develop out of it. If organised Labor is not prepared to rise to the emergencies of a general strike, then a reactionary organisation will undoubtedly do so.

This is the position we must face. And those who propose generalised strike action should indicate what preparations are in hand to meet a possible revolutionary situation. Because the general strike creates such a position. A one-day stoppage is merely an irritation, and gets us nowhere.

The challenge of strike action is in this case not only to the employing class interests, but it is also to a Federal Labor Government.

A Federal Labor Government which has lost contact and sympathy with the working class demands is obviously worth little to the workers.

We have heard it asked by good unionists who are also good Labor Party supporters: "Why can't we get a 40-hour week from the Federal Labor Government?" These unionists believe that we live in a real democracy, and if Labor is in power then Labor can do what it wishes. If it doesn't introduce and pass the 40-hour week it is because it is letting down the men and women who placed the Government in power.

The Federal Labor Party had to take the Commonwealth Constitution as it found it. And it found it with certain named powers. And just as a newly elected union executive can do only those things which the rule book says it can do, so the Federal Parliament can do only those things which the Federal Rule Book—the Constitution—says it can do.

The Federal Constitution denies to the Federal Parliament, whatever its political majority, the power to legislate directly on any industrial question—hours, wages or conditions.

It can legislate to prevent and settle interstate industrial disputes, and it is by this roundabout way that the Arbitration Court comes to deal with hours and wages.

The Federal Parliament has power to deal with external affairs, and under this power it can make (and has made) treaties. Therefore, many say, if the Commonwealth has made a treaty or engagement in favor of a 40-hour week, by this means, also roundabout, the Federal Government can pass a law making 40 hours the standard working week. But the Commonwealth has not made a treaty saying it would legislate for 40 hours. All this treaty talk is very much up in the air and very confused.

FROM AN ORIGINAL IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN ARCHIVES

NOT TO BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT PERMISSION

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VTHC

Collection

May Brodrey, The Forty-Hour Week (1946)
(VIC LAB College)

The fact is that Parliament is not the supreme power that the average citizen supposes it to be. Quite apart from constitutional difficulties there are other very real limitations on the power of Governments to legislate.

We live under a system of society in which the workers are the exploited class. By their numbers they can, on occasion, elect a majority to Parliament, but the institutions which control our economic life can hamstring a Government elected by the majority of the people.

A New South Wales Government in 1932 was not allowed to legislate in the interests of the workers although it had overwhelming support from the majority of the electors. It attempted to carry out measures to protect the interests of the majority, and it was the King's representative who broke the law to force that Government out of office.

More important still, it was the institutions of capitalism, the press and the vested interests based on a universal individualism and selfishness which made the defeat of that Government possible. The Governor's act alone was not sufficient to remove the Labor Government from office. The people were stampeded, and it is important also to remember that the institutions of capitalism were supported in discrediting the Government with the people by an anti-working class organisation calling itself "militant" and working class. These same people are to the fore in urging direct action and in criticising the Federal Labor Government today.

That fact alone should not decide us against strike action, but we must be sure that organised labor is convinced that this issue will be and should be won by strike action. A vocal minority should not decide the method. It must have real and sustained support if it is to be successful.

The Federal Labor Government has now decided to intervene in the case for 40 hours brought by the Printing Industry Employees' Union before the Arbitration Court. Surely our arguments are more potent today for a 40-hour week than they were in 1920 for a 44-hour week. Surely we have enough faith in our industrial representatives proving to the satisfaction of the Court that the hours of labor must be reduced. The arguments for a reduction of hours are overwhelming.

We would have little cause to doubt our success had we used the last quarter of a century in improving our educational and propaganda work in the unions. But here again we were hamstrung because the task of breadwinning still consumes all the workers' time and energy in spite of that small measure of relief given as far back as 1920 by Judge Higgins when he gave judgment in favor of a 44-hour week. Twenty-six years is a long time to wait for a further reduction. In fact, it is too long, and further delays are not likely to be tolerated by a Labor Movement which has its mind made up on this vital question of a shorter working week.

Victorian Labor College

FOUNDED 1917



CONTROLLED by AFFILIATED TRADE UNIONS
and the TRADES HALL COUNCIL for the purpose
of Independent Working Class Education.



Classes for 1946

TERM BEGINS MARCH 19

Economics - - - Fortnightly—Tuesdays, 8 p.m.
Beginning March 19th

Class Leader: A. T. BRODNEY

Industrial History - Fortnightly—Tuesdays, 8 p.m.
Beginning March 26th

Class Leader: MARY HOLDSWORTH

**Current World
Politics** - - - Fortnightly—Thursdays, 8 p.m.
Beginning March 21st

Class Leader: E. TRIPP

**Public Speaking and
English** - - - Bi-monthly, 2nd and 4th Wed-
nesdays, 8 p.m. Beginning 12th
and 26th June

Class Leader: T. W. BRENNAN

All Classes are held at Trades Hall

Unionists:

THESE ARE YOUR CLASSES. UNIONS SUPPORT THEM.
YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THEM. THERE ARE NO FEES.

Further information can be obtained from May Brodney
Secretary, Box 39, Trades Hall, Melbourne. Phone: WX1686

THE ECONOMICS OF CAPITALISM

CLASS LEADER: A. T. BRODNEY

Object of course: To show the relation between the social and political structure of society and the technical processes of industry, particular attention being given to the character and rate of change in these.

1. The economics of Free Production for the Market.
2. The growth and nature of monopolies and the economic and political results.
3. State interference in industry—(a) In War;
(b) In Peace.

Reasons for and results of interference.

4. Nature and extent of the market in Australia, England, and Soviet Russia.
5. Prospects of a return to a free market in the light of the economic law of movement of capitalism.
6. Analysis of money reform proposals.
7. The Socialist criticism of capitalist production and distribution.
8. Proposals for reconstruction.

EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE IN INDUSTRY

(Short Course in Industrial History)

CLASS LEADER: MARY HOLDSWORTH

The object of this course is to explain the relations between people while engaged in securing food, clothing, shelter and recreation. This is obviously an historical question. The course will show how these relations have changed in the past, and what is making for the new relations today.

Main Points:

1. A broad sketch of industrial relations and facts today and how these came to be.
2. The elements and causes of change—the hindrances to change—the resulting rate of change.
3. Whither?

Special Questions for Discussion:

1. The origin of modern working and employing classes.
2. The organisation of employees in unions, particularly in Australia.
3. The methods of unions.
4. Industrial legislation.
5. The growth of machinery and enterprises. Amalgamations. Monopolies.
6. Imperialism.
7. The failure of individualism in industry.

CURRENT WORLD POLITICS

CLASS LEADER: E. TRIPP

OBJECTIVE:

To develop in the student the art of analysis of world events from the viewpoint of scientific socialism. To know the reason for political moves and their effect on world affairs. To understand the relationship of forces, and work out working class tactics for each situation.

Introductory:

1. How to make a political analysis. The superiority of Marxian analysis over all other political thought.
2. Soviet Russia today. The part it plays in world affairs.
3. The aftermath of world war. The fight against fascism. The struggle of "free" movements in France, Belgium, Greece, Poland, etc.
4. Colonial world in ferment. India, Indonesia.
5. Efforts at stabilising Capitalism: Bretton Woods, American Loans to Britain, Empire Conference, U.N.O.
6. Japan's defeat. Atom Bomb or Socialism.
7. Analysis of strikes in Australia. The fight for 40 hours. Significance of the Labor Party victory at elections. The coming Federal elections.
8. Preparation of paper by students on international situation.

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND ENGLISH

CLASS LEADER: T. W. BRENNAN

This class does not begin until June. This gives students an opportunity to study at other classes. The student will find that this is a big advantage as practical work in public speaking is a feature of the class work in its early stages, and material gathered at other classes is essential.

Mr. Brennan is exceptionally gifted in the art of making all students feel at their ease in addressing the class, and even if you have had previous difficulty in addressing meetings you will find that this difficulty is soon overcome.

You will receive points on platform speaking, debates, taking part in your union and A.L.P. meetings, as well as guidance in English and pronunciation.

*Classes Meet in Room 42, Trades Hall,
Melbourne*

Why a Labor College is a Necessity

Victorian unions, as elsewhere in Australia, have the duty, and the right, to discuss questions of policy not only on industrial matters, but also on political issues. These issues relate to minor local points and to great international questions involving war and peace, life and death of vast numbers of men and women throughout the world.

Consider for a moment how a resolution moved in a branch of a union can become the policy of the Australasian Council of Trade Unions or of the Federal Labor Party, and how such a policy can lead to great and important results.

Does it not, then, behove us as unionists to think carefully, to look ahead and to estimate the consequences of our decisions? And to do this thinking and estimating is not knowledge and wisdom necessary? And is not trade union education the means of obtaining that knowledge and wisdom?

The Labor College exists to place in the minds of unionists the necessary information. It is a simply and democratically organised body of union delegates which, at a trifling cost, provides facilities for organised discussion, in an atmosphere of complete tolerance, of all aspects of social science, industrial and political history, economics and international relations. This is a very wide area of knowledge, and not, as some critics think, a narrow field.

Former students have testified that the material discussed in College classes is drawn from an almost unrestricted field. Hence, they have found our work not only enlightening, but stimulating in a way not found elsewhere.

Out of such broadly gathered knowledge and wisdom we feel that, as unionists, we can obtain the mental tools with which to prepare and determine politics, fit not only for a union or the Labor Party, but for the emancipation of the entire working class.

We make this call to our fellow unionists to support the College in all ways, to become members of our classes, and to assist towards the common goal of socialism.

Workers found it necessary to co-operate in trade unions to protect their interests and to improve their conditions as wage-earners in industry.

Workers also found it necessary to organise their own political party because political and legal limitations existed which prevented organised unionism from obtaining justice from Governments politically opposed to the workers.

The workers have also found it necessary to establish and support their own educational institutions because the training and outlook of the existing capitalist educational institutions seek to preserve the system of capitalism.

The trade union, the Labor Party and the Labor College are the three institutions necessary for your industrial, political and educational progress and welfare.

By supporting these institutions and partaking of their benefits you are taking an active part in the establishment of a better social order.