

at restoring the economic balance and prosperity of the world. This is not likely to be done at one stroke of the pen by the signature of some all-embracing Convention. It can only be done by the conjugation of a series of successive efforts, but it is encouraging to note a number of symptoms which suggest that the real nature and magnitude of the problem are becoming generally understood, and that a beginning has already been made towards finding its solution.

"I now come to the third wave of the debate, the question of work. Here, too, I suggest that there is great virtue in applying the pragmatic method rather than in continuing to treat the question on an *a priori* basis. As the French Minister of Labour said, the arguments used in the debate are mostly the same as those which have been repeatedly heard on previous occasions, but events have now given a new force to the forty-hour week. In the United States, after four years' experience, we find a Bill introduced into Congress for again enacting the national forty-hour week; and this is all the more remarkable as, during the past two years, since the National Industrial Recovery Act was declared unconstitutional, American industry could have returned to a longer working-week without any let or hindrance, and yet Mr. Harriman stated that 'because of the use of technology, the representatives of American labour and American business can unite in supporting a wisely-drawn forty-hour Convention at Geneva.'

"We heard Mr. West at the Washington Conference relate in detail the favourable results achieved in his own mill through the establishment of the shorter work period. We find Mr. Armstrong telling us that in New Zealand the employers have not been ruined by the forty-hour week as they expected. Mr. Lebas has stated that, although the decrees applying the forty-hour week to nearly eight million workers and employees in France have only recently come into operation, they have been mainly responsible for restoring a quarter of a million persons to employment.

"These are facts, and I venture to think that they cannot any longer be simply dismissed by advancing theories and hypothesis against them—such as that a reduction of hours would disorganize prices, reduce production catastrophically, destroy the balance between industry and agriculture, and so on. These things have apparently not happened in the countries where hours have been reduced. A *prima facie* case in favour of the shorter working-week has therefore been made out by the actual experience of a number of countries. It is no longer a battle of words and ideas, but a confrontation of facts.

"Mr. Oersted reproached me with a lack of objectivity in stating that the eventual adoption of the forty-hour week was inevitable. But I find it impossible to imagine that the present hours position is one at which, henceforward, we shall for ever remain. It is true that at present, at any rate, I should not be inclined to go so far as Mr. Zaalberg and to contemplate a thirty-hour week as a possibility of any discernible future. But I find it very difficult to believe that the industrial countries which have so far refused to look at a forty-hour week are so very different in respect of psychology, conditions of life, and technical efficiency from those in which it has already been introduced.

"I cannot persuade myself that what was proved feasible and advantageous in France, New Zealand, and the United States is bound to be disastrous in every other country. No doubt a great deal depends on the degree of technical progress which has been attained. Mr. Harriman suggested that the Office should undertake an inquiry on this point. I doubt whether such an inquiry could be successfully conducted except by the national authorities in each country; but if, as I hope, such an inquiry is undertaken, I should be very much surprised if it showed so wide a difference between the rate of increase of technical efficiency achieved in Europe and the United States as the speeches and the attitude of many delegates in this Conference seem to suggest. Technical improvement is making the forty-hour week not only economically possible but also socially indispensable, and I would ask the indulgence of the Conference if I dwell on these two points for a few minutes.

"What is the present situation? As Mr. Ernest Brown (British Minister of Labour) emphasized, 'the new fact of our post-war world which overshadowed all others in industry is the amazing scale of new productive manufacturing capacity. . . . The last twenty-five years have given us a more tremendous acceleration of mechanical production and greater and more effective machinery than any other period in the world's history.' Mr. Harriman went on to illustrate this point by informing us that it had been calculated in the United States that forty-three men could produce in 1930 as much as 100 men in 1899. And we might ask how many fewer men could produce the same quantity in 1937; for technical progress, so far from having been arrested by the depression, has been stimulated by the need for lower costs to even greater achievements.

"What does all this mean? It means, on the one hand, that industry between 1914 and 1937 has become far more adaptable to a shorter working-week owing to the great increase in its productivity. Surely it means that, just as the great advance in productivity brought about between 1850 and 1919 made it possible to introduce the forty-eight-hour week without any disastrous economic consequences, so a similar advance has been made in the last twenty-five years which has brought a further reduction of hours in sight.

"But it means something more. It implies that the shorter working-week is not merely economically possible, but that the very conditions which have made it possible have also made it necessary. Mr. Lebas justified the action taken in France on two grounds—that it created new employment and that it afforded greater leisure. I have been reproached for having suggested in the report that this latter reason for shortening hours might be quite as important, if not more important, than the former. It is true that the ground on which the forty-hour week was originally advocated was mainly as a method of spreading employment. Where it has been tried it has, to some extent, fulfilled that expectation. But I am inclined to believe that the more potent reason for the change lies in the need for greater leisure. We do not, perhaps, reflect sufficiently on the little that has been done to adapt the human machine to the conditions of the new age in which we live and work. In all spheres of life we are only sub-consciously aware of the increasing pressure on our nervous system. We hardly yet realize the