

Lie Hurlled at Gary; Steel Workers Anxious to Abolish the Twelve-Hour Working Day

This week's article in our war on the 12-Hour Day annihilates the contention of Judge Elbert H. Gary, head of the steel trust, that the steel workers do not want the shorter workday.

This is one of the pet arguments of the bosses in every fight against the shortening of the working day. They urge it before the courts, bribe ignorant workers to testify for them, and are usually upheld by the capitalist judges.

We urge all workers, not only those in the steel mills, to send in their letters telling us what they think, not only of the 12-Hour Day, but even of the 10-Hour Day. We will publish as many of these letters as we can. There will be two more special articles in the campaign against the 12-Hour Day as follows:

JULY 21.—Why does the United States Government, federal, state and local support the steel trust in its war upon the steel workers?

JULY 28.—Why does Gompers oppose the organization of the workers in the steel industry?

This week's article follows:

By JAY LOVESTONE

Author of "The Government—Strikebreaker"

Of all the unfounded arguments raised by the Steel Trust against the abolition of the 12-Hour Day, the point that the workers themselves do not ask for or want shorter hours is the most absurd.

Opening its Report on the Total Elimination of the 12-Hour Day, the American Iron and Steel Committee said:

"Apparently the underlying reason for the agitation which resulted in the appointment of this committee was based on a sentiment (not created or endorsed by the workmen themselves) that the 12-hour day was an unreasonable hardship upon the employees who were connected with it. The workmen, as a rule, prefer longer hours because it permits larger compensation per day."

An Old Game

This is an old game that the Steel Trust is playing. The same fraud was resorted to by the English manufacturers when the workers were struggling for the 10-Hour Day. The forefathers of the Steel Barons brought forward loads of affidavits secured thru fraud and duress, purporting to show that the workers were opposed to fewer hours.

The pith of this method is the following. First, the Steel Masters force such low pay on the workers as to compel them to labor unbearable hours in order to eke out a starvation wage. Then, they blame the workers for the continuation of the system of long hours because they dread being pushed still further below the line of least subsistence.

In the extra-prosperous month of April 1923, the steel workers, inclusive of skilled and higher-salaried, averaged less than \$28 per week. According to the Philadelphia Bureau of Municipal Research, "it would cost a workingman's family of five persons \$1854.28 annually to maintain a minimum health and decency standard of living," at March 1923 prices. And it is no great wonder that some workers may shudder at the aftermath of a reduction of working hours, since, for years, over 72% of all the workers have received wages below the minimum of comfort level set down by Government experts.

Typical Gary Propaganda

Little effort is needed to destroy Gary's reputation as a friend of the workmen. Appearing before the Senate Committee in 1919 the corporation's subsidiary presidents handed out the same line of misrepresentation of the workers' desires. Some of these presidents even assured the Interchurch Commission that in a few plants where the 8-Hour Day was introduced the plants lost their men 'because the foreigner wants to work the twelve-hour day, he wants to make as much money as he possibly can.'

From the above it is as clear as broad daylight that the policy of the Steel Corporation is first to force the long hours on the underpaid foreign-born laborers and then to blame them for it so as to divide the ranks of the workers by pitting the native against the immigrant forces. Also, the attempt is made here to spread the notion that the workers are making a comfortable living in even less than 12 hours of labor, but merely want to have more. The Steel Trust is trying to hoodwink the gullible into the belief that the workers want to labor longer hours in order to make more than they need.

While such ridiculous propaganda was being spread far and wide, 365,000 workers in 50 cities in 10 States deserted the mills in their Great Strike for the 8-Hour Day, better working conditions, and the right to organize. This is how anxious the workers were to continue on the 12-Hour basis. What is more, Gary

himself, testifying before the Senate Committee, confessed that "if we should immediately limit hours to eight and pay for the eight hours the same the men are now getting for 10 or 12 hours, every employee would favor it."

In plain English this means that the workers are pining for the abolition of the Two-Shift System, but fear to be driven into further degradation and misery.

Lieutenant Walker's Findings

Interesting evidence on the reactions of the workers to the 12-Hour Day is presented by Lieutenant Walker in his diary:

"On the first night-shifts I wondered if my feelings on the arrangement of hours were not solely those of a sensitive novice. I'd get used to it perhaps. But I found that first-helpers, melters, foremen, 'old timers,' and 'Company men' were for the most part against the long day. They were all looking forward, with varying degrees of hope, to the time when the daily toll of hours would be reduced."

And in a recent statement to the united church bodies protesting against the intolerable working hours, Walker went on to say:

"But the majority were anxious

fourteen hours a night, seven days a week, is hell."

"The gang boss says: 'Who the devil is this man Gary to tell our representative to go to hell. Somebody's going to get him for that.'"

"Another says: 'Gary thinks we worked his old twelve and fourteen hours so long, we'll stand for anything.'"

How strongly the workers felt on this question is seen from the following testimony of a gray-haired stationary engineer obtained by the Interchurch Commission on October 25, 1919, during the strike, in Youngstown, Ohio. The declaration is especially interesting in view of the fact that it is made by a skilled man.

"The other day the boss called me and told me I was too valuable a man not to be working for the Company, that all the places were filled except mine, and that he wanted me to come back. I told him I would think it over. The next day he came back again and asked me how much was owing on my house. I told him it was none of his God damn business. I told him that there was not a cent owing on my house, but if there was, my wife and family would follow me to the street before I would touch any of his dirty money. There is money owing on my house, but I would not give him the satisfaction of knowing it. I would rather lose it than go back to work before the strike is won. I had relatives in the Revolutionary War. I fought for the freedom of the Philippines myself, and I had three boys fighting for democracy in France. One of them is lying in the Argonne forest now. If my boy could give his life fighting for free democracy in Europe, I guess I can stand it to fight this battle thru to the end. I am going to help my fellow workmen show Judge Gary that he can't act as if he was a king or kaiser and tell them how long they have got to work."

The hatred of the long working hours by the mass of unskilled is still more bitter, because they are the most overworked and underpaid. But on account of the vicious detective and spy system and the close co-operation between these agencies on the one hand and the Department of Justice on the other in campaigns of suppression, much of this protest is stifled.

Conclusions of this Article

That Gary's assertion that the workers want longer hours borders on the grotesque can be seen from the following picture of the working conditions given by the Interchurch Commission:

"Every sort of long, hard, hot,

Gary and Mussolini Plot to Establish Fascism Here, "Railway Clerk" Charges

"Is it a coincidence that Mussolini begins to establish 'state branches' of the Fascisti in this country so soon after Judge Gary's visit to him? Let the citizens of the United States beware of the menacing danger of Mussolini agencies; we need no Fascisti in America."

That is the burden of a vigorous editorial in the June issue of "The Railway Clerk," the official organ of the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, etc. The editorial tells of the meeting between Gary and Mussolini and the enthusiastic invitation extended to the Italian dictator by Gary to visit America.

for a reduction in hours, even at the sacrifice of some part of their hourly rate in wages. This attitude has proved to be general when the change from two shifts to three has actually been tried."

Workers for Shorter Day

According to a report of the American Association for Labor Legislation made public June 15, 1923, the Republic Iron and Steel Company and the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company abolished the Two-Shift system at the request of the workers. The statement further reads: "Significantly, the men are so opposed to the shift that they are willing to accept less pay to secure an 8-Hour Day."

After its investigation the Senate Committee concluded that the majority of the steel workers were opposed to the 12-Hour Day. The investigations of the Interchurch Movement supported this conclusion. We cite the following from the diary of a Gary worker made in August 1919 as presented by this Commission.

"A heater who works eleven hours day by day and thirteen by night, making \$400 a month, says: 'Why shouldn't we get the 8-Hour Day without striking for it? I'd be glad to give up three or four dollars a day to get 8-Hours.'"

"An engineer many years on the job says: 'Count me in for a six day week, too, like a civilized man. This

heavy work, from shovelling weighty substances into the maws of white-hot furnaces or sledging to pieces still-hot masses of metal or slag, to picking up, putting down or heaving or carrying pipes, hot bricks, planks, great iron hooks, sheets of metal, largely with an accompaniment of grease, noise, sweat, or danger—these make up the steel jobs and the dirt, grease, heat, and long hours generally increase the lower the job is in the pyramid."

Besides, the workers are on to the infamous game of the Steel Trust's savage exploitation. They know that the capitalists are simply out to strip them to the skeleton. Turning to Lieutenant Walker's diary, we find the following on this point: "The melter broke in again. It's the dollar they are after—the sucking dollar. They say they are going to cut out the long turn. I heard they were going to cut out the long turn when I went to work in the mill, as a kid. I'm workin' it, ain't I? Christ!"

Finally, the workers also know full well that Gary and his sycophantic propagandists have for a long time manhandled the truth in so far as the 12-Hour Working Day is concerned. The Steel Trust's game of hide and seek with the truth was exposed by the antics of Judge Gary himself in denying and admitting, within the same twenty-four hours, his having sent a letter to Rev. H. L. Bowlby on the question of working hours in the mills. This travesty on truth by the Steel Barons was thus emphatically stated by P. E. Johnson, head of the Research Department of the Federal Council of Churches in his attack on the book of the Trust's notorious propagandist Marshal Olds: "This volume contains mutilated quotations, garbled statistics, and falsely reported facts. Notwithstanding this, the book has apparently been adopted by the U. S. Steel Corporation as its own defense and freely circulated by Chairman Gary."

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