
The Eight-Hour Movement

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There are certain conditions precedent to any practical enforcement or successful inauguration of the eight hour system.

1. Idlers — spoliating idlers — must be converted into productive workers.

2. Such works and manufactures as are justly regarded as luxurious, superfluous, sumptuous, and the like must be stopped.

3. The hands reclaimed from idleness, from sham work, from dead work, and from wicked work must find it best to join those engaged in producing necessary, expedient, and substantial things and results.

If this transportation or transmutation were effected:

- The task of supplying the *common* wants would be divided among a greater number.

- The labor required of each would be lessened and take less time.

- Those who are now over-burdened would be helped.

- And the work of all would be equal, while it would be rewarded by greater comforts, better clothing, better housing, and better food.

Every Communist should favor the eight-hour movement. While the Communist sees clearly that this reform cannot be realized under the present selfish and iniquitous organization of society and government, he also sees in the eight-hour movement a protest against the excessive burdens imposed upon the toilers, and a determined *tendency* towards the true solution of the social problem. The reduction of the hours of labor now imposed upon the toiling millions, upon the vassals of an unjust and oppressive system, can only be the fruit, the result, the sequence of a multitude of *preliminary* reforms. The causes of the unequal distribution of wealth, the legal instruments

¹ *The Communist* was a publication associated with an Icarian Community splinter group called The Reunion Community, based in Carthage, MO.

and defenses of spoliation and avarice, must be annihilated before the weary laborer shall enjoy his right to rest. The hordes of upstart idlers who now, like locusts, devour unproductively the substance of the land, must find it necessary to take their turn of work and help to supply the common board, before those who now do all the *real* work can realize the dream of an hour's daily leisure. Some general and radical method of saving the poor from being compelled to compete with one another, to sell their life and limbs to underbidding hirers, must first be resolved upon and enforced. Then, and only then, will and eight-hour, a six-hour, a four-hour rule take effect and be practical and beneficent.

This rule adopted and applied is to be the *fruit*, the *end* of reform — the *realization* of right and justice. Its practical establishment will come after a series of changes in the customs, manners, and economy of the country — *after* the recognition of other principles than those now governing the distribution of wealth, *after* other and better incentives to labor and production are substituted to those now prevailing. To admit that speculating on the rise and fall of provision markets, on the demand and supply of labor, on the enhancement of the price of vacant lands; to admit that one may sow and another rightfully reap; to legalize gain due to the scarcity or overflow of unemployed capital; to permit individual appropriation of riches arising from general causes and works; to allow hiring, renting, profits, and interest, and at the same time propose the eight-hour law, is simply inconsistent. *These two systems are incompatible.*

Hence we look upon the eight-hour movement as tacitly asserting all the premises posited by Communism, and as starting an enquiry with an object which must be advantageous to the elucidation and advancement of a more equitable plan of social order.

It is clear to us that while the doctrines of classic political economy are held to be just and legal, and are acted upon by all as being inevitable and unalterable, the eight-hour law (however emphatically it may be declared by legislators) must remain without practical effect. Its advocates must first establish the grand and general principles upon which alone it can stand. The privilege of snatching, extorting, and appropriating the new fruits of other people's labor must be abolished. The chance of gaining riches individually by means of the thousand and one accidents, speculations, and frauds through which fortunes are now made must be taken away. The serfdom of the poor must be broken.

Hence the eight-hour movement must, to succeed, take a broader field and own its derivation from higher principles than heretofore. It should not confine itself as it does to asking an immediate law in favor of *Mechanics* only; but adopt a more comprehensive plan, such a plan as would embrace *Agriculturalists* also. The eight-hour law, as passed by several states, expressly excludes agricultural laborers from its operation. Why? Because, in the present order, the hours of work on farms cannot be as precisely limited and determined as they may be in factories and shops. The exigencies of weather, the precarious course of vegetation, and other circumstances control the times and durations of farm work. The cultivator of the soil cannot stop and resume work according to any arbitrary rule, but must watch the times and seasons, and strive while there is opportunity. yet the price of mechanical labor is greatly influenced by the price of food. It is mainly for food that the mechanic labors. When the harvests are abundant and provisions therefore cheaper, the mechanic is greatly relieved — his wages go farther. Hence, it is evident that if there were more hands employed in agriculture and more lands cultivated, if there were less idlers and sham workers to feed, if there were less wast of muscle and sweat in making baubles for monopolizing drones, there would be at once immense relief to the overtasked mechanic. His dream of rest and mental culture would of itself become a substantial fact. So, then, the Labor Reform Party, to be a national party, to become the poor man's party and cease to be the expression of only the class of wage mechanics, must be *transformed* so as to embrace agriculturalists also. This can be done by adopting a program of measures beneficial to agriculture: plans to increase the area and products of cultivated land by increasing the number and securing the reward of agricultural hands.

The only platform on which mechanics and tillers of the soil can stand together, fairly and equally, is Communism; for in Communism abides the remedy for all social wrong. Ponder this, ye mechanics: study Communism — ascertain how applicable it is to all branches of industry, how true and just are its principles and its methods; and you will see you way clear to the accomplishment of the reform you desire — the abatement of the abuses and oppression you now vainly struggle to shake off.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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