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PHILADELPHIA, FEBRUARY 6, 1926

The Ups and Downs of Wages

PROF. PAUL H. DOUGLAS, of the University of Chicago, has lately made public some figures which are the result of his elaborate studies of the movement of real wages in the United States during the past thirty-five years. Real wages, as distinguished from nominal wages, are estimated not in money but in what money will buy; that is to say, in the purchasing power of the nominal wage over commodities and services in general.

According to this economist, those who work with their hands are, on an average, 27 per cent better off today than they were in the 1890's. The most spectacular advance is in the real wages of school-teachers, whose purchasing power appears to have increased 140 per cent.

It is important to note that during the period studied, real wages of factory workers have increased 28 per cent. Most of this gain has been achieved since 1914, for in that year the general level of real wages was about where it was in 1890.

Two-thirds of the betterment reported has taken place since the early part of 1918. Steadily rising manufacturing efficiency also has brought about a striking increase of per-capita production, for while the factory worker's real wage was advancing 28 per cent his output rose 52 per cent. "What," asks Mr. Douglas rather pointedly, "happened to the 24 per cent increase per worker in the physical activity of manufacturing which the workers did not receive?"

Unless we are very much mistaken, the answer to the professor's question is to be found in the labor-saving machinery and equipment which made such a marked increase of production possible. We are by no means convinced that the increase of production noted was secured by greater physical activity, if by this phrase Mr. Douglas means the outlay of human energy. Love of machinery is our national passion and we indulge it with special freedom when we can thereby diminish physical exertion. Thus we create not a vicious circle, but a sort of economic merry-go-round. A device may be styled labor-saving by those who use it; but it did not come into being without making labor or furnishing jobs to all who assisted in its construction. Moreover, the machinery which contributes most highly to efficient manufacturing must be repaired, renewed and eventually replaced in a market whose tendency is upward rather than downward. It can scarcely be doubted that investment in steadily improving plant equipment accounts for a substantial proportion of the 24-per-cent discrepancy about which Mr. Douglas inquires. It must be remembered, too, that most of the added equipment cost is, somewhere along the line, mainly a labor cost, and that factory workers are thus the gainers both coming and going.

Again, figures alone rarely tell a well-rounded story. Even if labor-saving machinery yields no cash profits to either employer or workmen, its adoption is likely to be advantageous whenever it relieves factory workers of the wear and tear of industrial life, allows them to use judgment rather than muscle or enables the head to save the heels. It is a misfortune of a large class of white-collar men that the nature of their work is such that it is not susceptible of being speeded up by the installation of new machinery. The chief exceptions are those operations which can be performed on billing machines, typewriters, duplicating apparatus, the whole ingenious family of calculating machines and those elaborate devices which click out statistical work by electricity. All these modern inventions tend to increase production and lower unit costs; but only a small proportion of office men benefit by these mechanical labor savers. American invention has nowhere been more active than in the organization and development of office systems and appliances. A considerable proportion of the nation's clerical work is performed more efficiently and more systematically than ever before; but it nevertheless appears to be a fact that the rank and file of office workers are just about where they were in 1890, in that their output depends, in the main, on skill of head and hand and not upon the revolutions per minute of a length of electrically driven shafting. There is no known method whereby all our office workers can be reduced to one typical group and its per-capita production achievement measured and compared with that of the group engaged in similar tasks back in the 1890's; and yet, if such a thing were possible, no one could suppose that during the past generation it has bettered the old performance either by 52 per cent or by anything like it.

There is often real pathos in the lot of these office workers. Loyal, intelligent and industrious, they have entered a race in which there are many competitors and few prizes. Had they gone into machine shop or factory, their superior education and broader outlook would have brought them to the front and won them the rewards to which they would have been entitled—but they would insist on a white collar. In the beginning, a white collar costs but a quarter; and yet the continuing fixed charges on it and all it implies may run into hundreds or even thousands of dollars a year.

Inequality of pay often seems to be without rime or reason; but if one looks deep enough, the reason, at least, is always to be found. The reason that school-teachers are better paid by 140 per cent than they were in the 1890's is not that grateful taxpayers and paternal school boards insisted upon giving them their due, but that the rising bids of business and industry for the services of bright young women gradually exacted a higher scale of pay in order to keep our schools staffed by competent instructors.

Dread of contact with machine oil and overalls and factory grime is blighting the careers of thousands of our over-nice young men; and the curious thing about it is that the less exalted their social origin is, the more strongly they feel they will lose caste if they soil their hands. Railroad presidents' sons, just out of college, often go into the car shops and think it a lark. They get blacker than coal heavers before the whistle blows at quitting time; but there is not a case on record in which the grime struck the skin and soiled the young man's reputation for being a useful and respected member of society.

New Boundaries for Yellowstone

THE Teton Mountains, immediately south of Yellowstone National Park, are regarded by world travelers who have beheld their serrated peaks, rising six to seven thousand feet sheer above pine-bordered lakes at their base, as the most beautiful range in America, and there are many who believe these mountains unsurpassed by any others on the face of the earth. The Grand Teton, 13,747 feet, highest in the range, has a central steeple of granite that dominates the entire range; but below it and all around it are lesser spires, straight and symmetrical, that give to the peak the appearance of a vast cathedral. Its surface is sculptured by glaciers, and this work is still uncompleted because the tools of ice are still etching according to Nature's plan of her temple.

There are several other peaks in the Teton Range that almost equal the Grand Teton in grandeur. All these peaks are separated by cañons cut by glaciers almost to the level of the surrounding region. The entire range is mirrored in a group of lakes nestled in forests at its feet. The largest of these, Jackson Lake, has been hopelessly destroyed as a thing of beauty through conversion into an irrigation reservoir, and its shores are littered by millions of dead trees, killed by raising the surface of the lake. However, the remaining lakes are nearer the Tetons and are more a part of them. They have been filed on as irrigation reservoirs, but have been saved by Executive order in aid of a plan to give them national-park status as a division of the neighboring Yellowstone.

This park proposal has been pending ten years, and if previous plans of somewhat different character are to be considered, the Tetons have been regarded as entitled to park protection for more than thirty years. Several Presidents and Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture of many Administrations have recommended the future safeguarding of the best part of the Tetons in a national park. Once a bill to accomplish this purpose passed the House of Representatives unanimously, but was lost in the Senate.

During the summer of 1925 a special commission selected by the President's Outdoor Recreation Committee, which is composed of five members of his cabinet, studied the Yellowstone boundary question and examined the Tetons.

This commission was made up of park and forest experts of wide experience in the West. They recommended unanimously the revision of Yellowstone's boundary lines to conform to natural features—rivers and mountain summits—and they also recommended the establishment of a Teton division of the national park, to protect the best part of these mountains and all the unspoiled lakes. Careful consideration was given to Wyoming's economic resources, and all territory affected by the commission's conclusions is without commercial value except the lakes, which should never be used for reservoirs.

The headwaters of the Yellowstone River, a very scenic region naturally belonging to the park, would be added if the commission's recommendations are accepted by Congress. This is a favorite range for moose, and when unmolested by hunters, they will multiply and become a great attraction to summer visitors, who, more and more, are using the game trails of the park instead of hurrying through in automobiles.

From every standpoint it appears that the commission's recommendations are essentially correct, and they should receive the early approval of Congress through passage of the Yellowstone boundary-adjustment bill. There is opposition to the measure in certain parts of Wyoming. Some of the stockmen's organizations, and other very local interests that see possible future advantage to themselves in leaving the Tetons in their present status, are contending that Wyoming should not give up any more land to the Federal Government. Of course, the land really belongs to the nation now. It is under national-forest administration, and the United States Forest Service agrees that it should be turned over to the National Park Service, because that body is especially authorized by law to protect inviolate the nation's finest scenery and natural phenomena, as well as her most cherished landmarks on the public domain.

The Congress should assign the Tetons and other territory affected by the altogether admirable decision of the President's commission to the Federal organization that can best protect and administer them in the interest of the whole nation, and for future generations as well as for those of our time.