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THE "EIGHT HOURS" AND THE DEMONSTRATION.

Now that the noise and clatter of the 4th of May demonstration are over, it may be profitable to consider what it was that that huge meeting was crying for, and whether it is likely to get it.

But first we must assume that the 4th of May demonstration did not aim at showing any expression of sympathy with labour generally throughout the civilised world. It was in fact an English trades-union meeting distinct from the meetings held on the Continent and in London on May Day, although it was only the agitation on the Continent that made it possible. The English workmen, if we may believe the *Star* (which is now a definitely reactionary paper) have got together a huge demonstration, which, while it was a mere hanger-on of the revolutionary meetings abroad, disclaims any solidarity with those who first began the movement, and allows the English press to insult them with jingo rot unrebuked.

The legal eight hours, then, is the thing claimed by the 4th of May. Of course, I do not deny that many who attended that meeting go much further than that; but then a great many more do not go as far, and only have very hazy ideas of what they want.

Furthermore, the spirit of that demonstration was a kind of missive to Parliament. It practically said: "We want the eight-hours day: you, Parliament, must get it for us, and settle how it is to be."

That this was its spirit is clear enough from the fact that no sort of hint has been given of any action to follow the demonstration. For instance, one would have thought that with such a definite and apparently small aim before them, the leaders of the movement would have called a congress of at least the London workmen to settle on some course of action to push the Parliament on toward some steps for giving effect to the workmen's wishes: but as above-said, nothing of the sort is being done, and the matter is to be allowed to go cold; and in the meantime the capitalist press is having *its* innings, and is showing with a mixture of truth and falsity peculiarly easy of employment under the circumstances, that the limitation of the hours of labour is impossible, and that if possible it would be of no advantage to the workers. Of course, these capitalist agents do not mean by this to put forth the matter from a Communist standpoint, as will have to be done here presently: all they mean is, that resistance wherever possible to the amelioration of the workers which is the great object of modern politicians.

Now let us look at this eight hours claim for a little and try to find out what it means. In the first place, no one who is not a slave-driver (and most middle-class persons are slave-drivers), would deny that it would be a good thing in itself for the maximum day's work to be reduced to eight hours; although on the other hand it would not in itself be even a step in advance towards Socialism. From that point of view it would be nothing more than an amelioration in the lot of—slaves; just as an increase in the wage-earner's wages is an increase in the slave's rations. Now, one must say that this kind of amelioration is just the thing which can only be gained by that species of "self-help" which is called a general strike; and that if it were gained *in this manner, the manner* of gaining it would be so educational that the gain would have a very different and much greater significance than it would if thrown to the people by Parliament as a mere tub to the whale.

Now, as to the gain of an Eight Hours Bill, what would it amount to? In the first place, would it benefit the whole of the workers or only a part? Surely there can only be one answer to that question. For instance, how is such a Bill going to deal with the work of the agricultural labourers? And I may notice in passing that this body of workers, at once the most useful and the most hardly used of all, are

generally left out in the cold when it is a question of these partial "ameliorations"—unless where it is obviously intended to "work" them for some political plot. Many other instances of workers who would not benefit by an Eight Hours Bill will occur to any working man who thinks about the subject.

Again, the Bill passed, a struggle between masters and men will begin as to the *wages* to be paid for the shorter day's labour. Will Parliament deal with this difficulty, I ask? I will show presently what it will mean if it does. Meantime I assert that the men will have to deal with it by strikes—*i.e.*, they will have to fight the whole battle over again. Once more, if the capitalists stand to lose by the change, they will strain every nerve to recover that loss; and the intensification of labour is one obvious means of doing this. Improved organisation (*i.e.*, slave-driving) in the workshop, improved machinery in the factory, will set the capitalist right again and force the workers to produce more in every hour—*i.e.*, to *waste* their bodily and mental powers more.

Surely all these things must, in any case, be dealt with by the usual methods of a Labour war, and the mere machinery of a statute will have very little effect on that war. Why, then, when the workers must of necessity make the new bill work themselves, should they not save time and toil by making the unwritten custom themselves at first hand? Of what use will be the mere ornament of a legal enactment when they have got what they want without it? And let us also remember once more that every gain won by the combination of labour hasters the day when the odious distinctions of class will be abolished.

But some people will say, "This may be true if we are to stop at a mere eight hours bill; we mean much more than this." Quite true; every Social Democrat who knows the aims of his party, knows that a legal eight hours day will be unworkable without a legal minimum wage in each big trade (how about the little ones?), and that that again will be useless without the enactment of a maximum price of all general articles of consumption; and these enactments will make it necessary to establish national workshops in order to destroy the profit of the capitalists, *i.e.*, the capitalists themselves. This means complete State Socialism, with which we Communists do not agree, because we believe that the difficulties besetting it are so great, that the realisation of Communism would be no more difficult on the one hand, and on the other would mean a whole revolution, and not that most fertile parent of counter-revolution, a half revolution.

But apart from this, does any man in his senses suppose that any Parliament in England (or the world), on this side of civil war, would hesitate one moment between allowing an eight hours bill to become mere waste paper and accepting the logical consequences of it? Our artful Social Democratic friends would find they had done nothing with the small end of the wedge but jar their hands by hammering on it, and that they would have to begin all over again, unless they had force enough to *compel* the capitalist enemy to disgorge his ill-gotten gains for fear of worse.

We may be sure that whatever part of the Social Democratic claim Parliament yields to, will be given with the intention of its being either a nullity or a bait to quiet possible revolution.

One thing which the Demonstration of May 4th asked for they may get in a fashion, that is, the eight hours day in government factories; but it will be given, if at all, in the hope of its acting as a little bit of corruption. The price expected to be paid will be the quieting, the de-revolutionising, of the workmen so employed. One may indeed hope that the price will not be paid. But this on the other hand is sure to happen, that the Parliamentary capitalists will think they have done a prodigious stroke of Socialist business, and will take care not to do any more Socialism till the Revolution is thundering at their doors, and no man cares a button what they do.

Meantime, one must use the thread-bare fable again, and say that when the *labouring* mountains have produced *this* ridiculous mouse, the music of his squeak will scarcely pay us for all our trouble and all our—shuffling. State Socialism?—I don't agree with it; in fact, I think the two words contradict one another, and that it is the business of Socialism to destroy the State and put Free Society in its place. But State Socialism in the hands of a bureaucratic department—that is indeed a strange birth of compromise and "moderation."

WILLIAM MORRIS.