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Today Last Day

DAMAGED  
GOODS

MATINEE 1st Show At 2  
2nd Show At 3:35  
EVENING 1st Show At 7  
2nd Show At 8:35

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THE TRUTH ABOUT  
RAILROAD WAGES

By  
WM. LEAVITT STODDARD  
(In Pearson's Magazine for April.)

(Continued from Monday.)

As a matter of fact, although the actual totals spent in wages to railroad labor have risen, the cost of labor has been going down. That is to say, each dollar in labor has brought in a greater return than ever before. This fact the railroads will dispute, and so it is well to make it clear. It is one of the striking facts in modern industry for it applies to other fields. But in the transportation field alone this fact is particularly significant. For example:

It is the job of the railroad to haul goods. The volume of traffic is measured by the weight of the goods and the distance which they carried. The

traffic unit is, therefore, called "ton miles." Now, a very careful study of twenty-four typical railroads in western territory disclosed that it costs less to haul one ton one mile, so far as labor is concerned, than it did say, twenty years ago. For instance, for each \$1,000 paid to engineers and firemen on these lines in 1913, it was possible to handle 92 per cent more ton miles than in 1890. Taking both freight and passenger traffic together, for each \$1,000 paid to engineers and firemen in 1913, from 40 to 50 per cent more ton miles were hauled than in 1890. In a word, owing to bigger and better machinery and to other causes, railroad labor is constantly creating more and more

wealth. Put into another form, each 1,000 ton miles cost the railroads in 1890, measured in terms of the labor of engineers and firemen, almost exactly 65 cents; by 1913 this cost had been reduced to 33 cents!

The importance of this increased productive efficiency of railroad labor can hardly be overestimated. Because their labor power, applied to greater machinery, is bringing in more money, while at the same time the proportionate share of labor to profits is decreasing, the men are justified in demanding higher wages. If they do not demand something which means, perhaps, more to them at this particular moment—shorter hours. Their labor power is costing the railroads less and less in proportion to the value which it creates. A rough estimate of the staggering total of the surplus which is thus piling up as a result of the productive efficiency of the men may be gathered from an estimate made by W. Jett Lauck in the western wage arbitration case. This estimate applies only to 43 western railroads and covers the period from 1909 to 1913. Mr. Lauck maintained:

"That, after the payment of all increases in costs of operation, and after allowing interest at 4 per cent annum for expenditures for additional property during the same period, there was a balance remaining to compensate the increased productive efficiency of locomotive engineers and firemen and other labor of \$50,541,129. If a return of 4 per cent be considered too small, in the light of the present conditions affecting the supply of capital, and 5 per cent be allowed to added capital investment during this period, including the additions made from income, there would still remain \$34,629,574 available for the compensation of increased productive efficiency on the part of locomotive engineers and firemen and other labor. These gains are now contained in the accumulated surplus and other assets of the railroads, and locomotive engineers and firemen are entitled to a further participation in these gains because of their efficiency and because of increased work, duties, and responsibilities."

In addition to this enormous fund available for increased wages or for reduced hours of labor, additional sums amounting to literally hundreds of millions of dollars would be available had the railroads been wisely managed money which should have gone to wages and dividends. Highway robbery, gentlemanly looting, and the machinations of the big financiers have accounted for the absolute disappearance of many millions of dollars more. The story is an old one, and I merely mention it here to refresh the minds of those who, hypnotized by the specious pretense of honesty and concern for the public which characterizes the typical railroad magnate today, might possibly forget that while the past is dead and gone it is not yet paid for. And the men who are paying for it are these four hundred thousand who now ask, as a small share of their just dues, that their toil be limited to eight hours a day.

Estimates from railroad sources place the cost to the railroads of granting the eight hour day at a very high figure. These estimates should be taken with many grains of salt. In considering them it should be remembered that no change to fundamental as the change from a ten to eight-hour day can possibly be effected without some expense, nor can the roads expect to continue an eight-hour day without, probably, a large additional annual outlay. But for this outlay they will secure better service from men who are not being worked up to the edge of exhaustion. They will develop a body of employees who will last longer than those who now work on the railroads. Measured in life, health and happiness not to say measured in increased efficiency and therefore increased productivity, the railroads can not help but gain. The men will gain. And the public will gain.

To illustrate the probable small amount of overtime which will be required to do exactly the same amount of work which is being done today, let us take the example of the through freight trains in western territory. During a recent period over three quarters of these trains averaged 116 miles in 8 hours and 24 minutes. Now through freight service, as every railroad man knows (the dividend receivers may not know this), is the slowest service there is. Yet in this service the trains run more than the regulation hundred miles between terminals in only 24 minutes over the eight hour limit. Each worker on these slow trains, therefore, would be paid for only 24 minutes of overtime, and were the proposed overtime extra payment in effect, it is very probable that the railroads would find it entirely feasible to hurry up a little and save the 24 minutes and the extra wages. The men would help them to close work sharply within eight hours. At the very worst, no one would claim that 24 minutes of overtime would ruin the roads.

It is also interesting to know that all trains operated in through freight service showed an average time between terminals, the terminals being 113 miles apart, of 9 hours and 18 minutes, or 1 hour and 18 minutes overtime according to the present requests of the men for an eight-hour day.

In one of the most recent big railroad arbitration cases, that of the conductors and trainmen in eastern territory, the Board which finally passed on the facts and the arguments, and which handed down the award, made some very interesting statements. For example, the Board confessed itself perplexed by being told "that where population is greatest and cities nearest to each other, and where the amount of freight to be handled is the largest, that there the men should find it necessary to work longer hours than in the more sparsely inhabited parts of the country in order to earn the same amount of money."

On the question of paying time and

a half for overtime, the Board declared:

"The Board is in sympathy with the expressed desire of the men to reduce overtime as much as possible, and it recognizes that the payment of time-and-a-half for overtime is a well established custom in the building trades and possibly in some other trades. In railroads, it is quite evident that in many cases neither the management nor the trainmen can prevent overtime; and that it appears to this Board, therefore, that punitive overtime, as it is called, is an unsound principle when applied to the running of trains. The Board hopes that some other method can be devised for reducing overtime; for it does earnestly believe that the hours demanded in slow freight and construction service are unreasonably long. If no other remedy can be found, possibly punitive overtime should be tried."

That was three years ago. The "unreasonably long" hours still prevail. The roads have not made them reasonable. The overtime continues. The men, acutely conscious of the physical suffering arising from this condition of affairs, are asking for punitive overtime—overtime at so high a rate that the railroads will keep within the eight-hour schedule wherever possible, rather than pay it. It will be interesting to see whether the next Board will be as intelligent as this one.

The four hundred thousand men want an eight-hour day. The few hundred men who employ and officer this army say that the establishment of an eight-hour day would ruin the railroads. The men deny this, and in their denial they point to the fact that hundreds of miles of the most prosperous railroads in the country are now being operated on an eight-hour basis. This is a fact and it will not be disputed. With exceptional instances which do not affect the main truth of this statement, be it known that 3 per cent of the roads in western territory run on the eight-hour basis, and that 57 per cent—more than half—of the roads in southeastern territory run on the same basis. The men do not receive time-and-a-half for overtime, but they work only eight hours a day, and that is what the brotherhood primarily desire.

The names of these railroads are as follows:

Western territory:  
El Paso and Southwestern,  
Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio,  
Texas and New Orleans,  
Morgans Louisiana and Texas  
Railroads and Steamship Co.  
Louisiana Western,  
Houston and Texas Central,  
Houston, East and West Texas,  
Houston and Shreveport.  
Southeastern territory:  
Atlanta, Birmingham and Atlantic Railroad,  
Atlantic Coast Line Railroad,  
Central of Georgia Railroad,  
Charleston and Western Carolina Railroad,  
Florida and East Coast Railway,  
Georgia Railroad,  
Louisville and Nashville Railroad,  
Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway,  
Norfolk Southern Railroad,  
Seaboard Air Line Railway.

These roads, with one or two exceptions, are entirely solvent and are not in the hands of the receivers. In the southern group particularly are some of the finest systems in the country, systems which are doing wonderful work in opening up and building up the south. Perhaps because of the fact that they are run on the eight-hour basis, their prosperity is assured and sound. Certainly it is not the truth that they are going down as the New Haven went down for any cause to be attributed, directly or indirectly, to the existence of the eight-hour day. You do not hear about these roads in the publicity material sent out by the gentlemen who are trying to manufacture a public opinion which shall stand behind them in their refusal to grant an eight-hour day on the remaining 43 per cent of the southern roads, on the remaining 97 per cent of the western roads, and on the 100 per cent of the eastern roads. I don't know why, but my guess is that such facts do not fit into the argument of the railroads. I therefore take great pleasure in emphasizing them—hard.

The eight-hour day is not an impossible, impracticable dream—it is a reality on hundreds of miles of line today. It works there—why should not it work elsewhere?

There is not much else to say except to repeat that all the men are after is on eight-hour day; that they want it because now they are working hours which an official body has called "unreasonably long;" that when they get it they will be better men and better workers; that the railroads can fully afford to let them have it; and that experience in the past has proved, both on the railroads and in industry generally, that reduction of hours always means greater efficiency and greater productivity.

This eight-hour movement, this great arising of these four hundred thousand railroad workingmen, is one of the most magnificent and stupendous labor movements of the century. A division of an army, in round numbers at war strength, contains 22,000 men. These railroad workers, if organized in military fashion, would make a total of very nearly two score divisions, a force large enough to withstand any earthly invader who might want to take possession of the United States. Yesterday these men were separately organized in their several brotherhoods. Today, for the first time in history, they are together, behind a common front, demanding of the little generals and chiefs of staff who sit in New York and hand out wages and pensions and schedules of hours of toil in the industrial trenches, that their time of labor be cut. Eventually the four hundred thousand will win; of this there can be absolutely no question. But that they may win without bloodshed and riot and strike and war, it is necessary that the people know the truth, which, as the poet says, shall set the people free.

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