

cussion of this subject a good deal further than that, I will follow their example by dealing, in the first place at least, with the economic applicability of an eight hours day to Government and municipal works and the railways. Where the State is the direct employer of labour, as in the case of the Arsenal and Dockyards, and where the municipality is the direct employer, as in gas-works, water-works, and the various departments of police service, the limitation of the hours could be introduced without much trouble. But even where the State and municipalities are only the indirect employers of labour they can exercise a powerful influence on the conditions under which their work is performed. For example, they might, in giving out work to contractors, stipulate that the working day of the employees shall not exceed eight hours—the wages remaining as at present. Stipulations similar in principle to this have been inserted in the specification schedules issued by the London School Board; and there is no good reason why the same policy should not be adopted by all public bodies. Were this done it would obviously improve the position of a very considerable section of the working class; and, even if nothing more could be gained, this alone would be worth striving for. The community does not want anybody in its service to be either overworked or underpaid.

So far the reduction in the hours of labour could be instituted without Act of Parliament and without reduction in wages. But henceforth we have to deal with cases where an Act of Parliament and something more would be necessary in order to secure for the workers the present rate of wages for a normal working day of eight hours.

Let us begin with the railways—these being the most extensive private monopolies in the kingdom. Can the Railway Companies afford to pay the present rate of wages for eight hours' work a-day from each employee? I unhesitatingly say they can. These Companies have had it all their own way in Britain since they started; and yet when we speak of improving the position of the railway servants we are told that the profits of railway companies will not stand an increase in wages, as they do not average more than 4 per cent.—no indication being given of what this very moderate-looking percentage actually means in the shape of gross profit. It is only by analysing an occasional balance-sheet that one realises "the meaning of railway dividends," and the extent to which railway labour is fleeced. Here are a few figures from balance-sheets of companies which are reputed to work their lines with a fair degree of liberality.