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EDITORIAL

CLUCKING THEM ON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

EVERYONE is familiar with the peculiar “clucking” sound used by drivers to urge their horses to a faster gait. Whether this persuasive cluck is used, or the more brutal lash, is a matter of policy with the driver only. The effect to be obtained is in both cases the same—an increased speed, sought always for the benefit of the driver, never for the good of the animal in the traces.

Of just this order of clucking is the statement arising from the lips of Harrington Emerson, one of this new crop of “efficiency experts” so much heard of nowadays. On March 6th, before the New England Society of Orange, he said, according to the capitalist press of the following day that “he was trying to impress upon labor leaders the scientific fact that the problem of shorter hours and higher pay would be solved if the unions would give attention to increasing the output per individual.”

Falsar statement never crossed the teeth of willing falsifier. Every fact in every industry is against it.

When, between long practice, relentless slave-driving and improved machinery, the workers in the laundry industry increased their “efficiency” to the point where half a dozen women could turn out 30,000 pieces of flat work a day, did that solve their problem of shorter hours and higher pay? Scarcely. The week’s work was compressed into four days, on which they had to labor inhumanly long at the old pay, and they were laid off altogether on Mondays and Saturdays, in which time they received no pay at all.

In all industry where piece-work prevails, it is the overabounding experience of the workpeople, recorded in chapter upon chapter in even bourgeois investigations, that the increased output of the individual only means in the end a decimation of the piece-work rate, bringing lower wages and frequently more extended hours upon

the mass, together with the intensified labor to which they have been spurred by the false hope of increased earnings.

In the very railroad industry itself, of which Emerson presumes to speak, the events of the last ten years are roaring megaphones drowning out his false pipe. Steadily have trains been lengthened, steadily have loads been increased, and just as steadily have train crews been decreased, or not increased as fast as the added work was piled on. To make one man do the work two did before has ever been the motto of the railroad manager. But have hours been shortened, or wages sent up? Ask the trainmen, whose mangled limbs tell the tale of their ruthless exploitation.

Feeling the working class grow restless under the whip, exploiterdom is now resorting to a smoother policy. The “efficiency” speeches of Emerson and his ilk are but the cluckings of the jockey—clucking the workers on.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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