

When Hours Are Reduced to Thirty Will Film Business Lead---or Lag?

THE need of a shorter work week is no longer a theory. It is a condition which industry and government must meet. We have reached the point where the machine must be utilized for its greatest social purpose—the production of leisure—in order to make it an effective arm of industrial progress.

While there are no quotation marks on the foregoing paragraph you may put them there and credit what they inclose to Will Hays. They were "uttered" on the arrival of the producer executive in Hollywood, January 15. You may be sure they were not just casual remarks. They were considered, carefully considered, and after being consigned to a typewriter were examined with a microscope.

Hays of course first of all is a politician. He got his present job ten years ago because of that fact, and uninterruptedly he has held it during the intervening years because he continued to be a politician. While the immediate foregoing is not news it is mentioned merely to emphasize the fact that when Hays is quoted it is because he has had handed out by the duly qualified employe the carefully considered language certain to be bombproof against any possible attack by querulous producers.

So when the titular head of the producers' association says in a formal pronouncement—the kind all big cigar film executives love to issue whether they go places or just stay at home—that film leaders already are making plans for a greater era of entertainment expected with the shorter work week in American industry you may know that he is reflecting and uttering what previously has been said by these same big cigar film executives across the table of the association's board of directors.

Many Lean Days

That the leaders of the industry should so feel about the present situation is mightily interesting. It will be even more so to those men and women whose lives for any or all of twenty-five or more years have been a part of the picture business.

Many of these men and women during the last few years have fallen on lean days. Some there have been who have not. Some even have been called upon month in and month out to work many hours overtime. Protests made to minor bowwows of brief but great authority against the unfairness and sometimes brutality of the unnecessary proceeding have met with scant attention.

Of course if the Producers' Association members are banking on the industries of the country going on a thirty-hour and five-day week basis then already they are laying plans guaranteeing that the industry of which for the moment they are the

mouthpieces will be right in line with all other industries in this forward movement.

Surely the leaders of the industry and the capitalists who employ them would not for a moment, by aiming to continue on a daily schedule ranging from eight hours up to twenty or more on occasion, expect to capitalize the statesmanlike action of those employers who institute or grant thirty hours and five days.

If the nation or a goodly part of it goes on the thirty and five standard it is imperative that the film industry, always throughout the nation and the world in the spotlight of public attention, should be one of the leaders of the movement.

Come from Within

Any action in this direction should not be the result of yielding to the pressure of a major force of any description. It should be on the part of the industry's controllers an act of spontaneity, coming from within their own circle and unprodded from without it.

As to the individual leadership in such a movement—that is another matter. A cursory examination of the available material is not encouraging. It need indeed be a bold man and more who in the face of prevailing financial conditions will sit around the table with his associates and advocate what superficially appears to be an increase in labor costs of possibly one-third.

To the banking fraternity such a thought would be poison. That narrows the field to film men. It is possible among these there may be one with sufficient sand, one whose shoulders are broad enough, when convinced of the wisdom of such a move, to step out in front and in the face of the world say to his company and his fellows in the industry, "Let's go!"

There is one man in the group whose background stamps him as very much an industrial statesman and very little an industrial politician.

That is Kent.

Certainly the industry cannot continue its forty, fifty, sixty plus hour schedule—for the workers—and command the good-will or the commerce of those dependent on industries adhering to thirty hours.

The picture business must have the good-will of the mass, especially at home. Without that it is without a chance of progressing and expanding with its natural clientele.

The claim will be made the industry cannot survive the increased labor cost. The most vociferous will be the drones and the profiteers. The workers high as well as low know there are many spots in the studio budget where careful and impartial

incision of a pruning blade will practically offset any added labor cost.

No one denies and every one admits something must be done to change for the better the employment situation. If the men at the head of government—national, state and municipal—and business institutions are wise in their day and generation they will take immediate tangible physical and not vocal steps toward instituting a change.

Progress always is so much easier and much more smooth when the initial reformative measures are instituted from the top than from the bottom. History is filled with examples—examples as hard and unyielding as the stone walls and steel bars of the old Bastille—of what may happen when they are instituted from the bottom.

Point not your conservative finger in our direction because of any seeming grim or grisly implication to be read in or between these lines. What is being read is merely a deduction from or reduction of the significant report submitted by the lily white and not ruby red—by the highly placed and not by the lowly poor we have always with us—by the nationally important members of Hoover's million-and-a-half-dollar Research Committee on Social Trends.

Dark Picture

For three years the commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Wesley C. Mitchell of Columbia has studied and worked. Hidden away in 1568 pages are to be found many strong statements. Here is one of them:

"Unless there can be a more impressive integration of social skills and fusing of social purposes than is revealed by recent trends there can be no assurance that these alternatives, with their accompaniments of violent revolution, dark periods of serious repression of libertarian and democratic forms, the proscription and loss of many useful elements in the present productive system, can be averted."

All of which means in plain language something must be done about things or trouble will follow.

President William Green of the American Federation of Labor told the Senate judiciary committee last month that organized labor is so firmly convinced the six-hour and five-day schedule is necessary that the reform will be established by strikes if other methods of securing it fail.

Incidentally and in spite of statements we are over the depression hill figures released by the American Federation of Labor indicate the number of jobless in November was 130,000 over the previous peak, the total at that time being 11,590,000. Partial reports for December show still greater increases.

G. B.