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Study Leaflet Series, No. 1

The Shorter Working Day for Women Workers

Pamphlet

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WOMEN IN INDUSTRY COMMITTEE
of the
NATIONAL LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
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THE SHORTER WORKING DAY FOR WOMEN WORKERS*

I. REASONS FOR THE ENACTMENTS OF "SHORT HOUR" LAWS:

1. The disastrous effect of the long day on the health of women and girls.
2. Women are expected to perform home duties as well as their wage-paid work.
3. It is difficult for women to organize in trade unions, through which men obtain their shorter hours.
4. Women and girls are not such shrewd bargainers when they are hunting a job.
5. Industry is becoming more highly organized every day, and the strain is, therefore, always becoming greater.
6. Industry would really gain from a shorter day, for, when the day is too long, the out-put is lowered, there is more lost time, and greater irregularity.

II. THE REASONS SUPPORTING CONSTITUTIONALITY OF SUCH LEGISLATION FOR WOMEN ARE:

1. Women are not able to enter as many kinds of work as men enter, and are at an industrial disadvantage.
2. Many working women are young. Others have domestic responsibilities. They can, therefore, not organize so effectively as men can.
3. Their physiological structure makes them susceptible to fatigue, and excessive fatigue affects disastrously their health and the health of their children.

III. "SHORT HOUR" LAWS IN THE UNITED STATES.

The first effective legislation in the United States was passed in Massachusetts in 1874 and provided for a ten-hour day for women in certain occupations. Since that time all but five states have passed laws regulating in some way the length of the working day for women wage-earners. Some have very weak and unsatisfactory laws, but eight states have passed eight-hour laws.

(See U. S. Women's Bureau Bulletin No. 16, "State Laws Affecting Women Workers.")

IV. THE ENFORCEMENT OF LABOR LAWS.

A. Labor laws are generally enforced through a division of the state labor department. Sometimes there is a separate factory inspection department.

*The Committee on Women in Industry is under obligations to Miss Breckinridge, of the University of Chicago, and Miss Dewson, of the National Consumers' League, for assistance in preparing this leaflet.

B. The features of an effective law in the matter of enforcements are

1. Provision for an adequate staff of high-grade inspectors, among whom are some women.
2. Provision for effective prosecution of violations.

V. THE ENGLISH "FACTORY ACTS."

The first "factory act" which limited the hours of work for women was passed in England in 1844. This act applied to textile mills only and limited the working day of young persons and of women to twelve hours. The hours were reduced in 1847 to ten, and since that time the working day has been regulated in most other occupations. Not only was the number of hours in any one day limited, meal-times were likewise regulated, Saturday half-holiday and Sunday rest was prescribed, and night work forbidden. Similar legislation has been enacted in most civilized states.

(See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Article on "Labour Legislation." See also articles on Richard Oastler, Michael Sadler, and Lord Shaftesbury [7th Earl].)

VI. FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY.

A. Outline the law in your own state and ask

1. Are the hours as short as in other states of the same industrial development as yours?
2. Is night work prohibited?
3. Are meal hours regulated?
4. Is a Saturday half-holiday provided?
5. Do the workers have one day's rest in seven?

B. Write to your Labor Department at your state capital and ask for the last Annual Report, and ask as you read it

1. Is the work of the department of factory inspection vigorous and adequate?
2. Are violations prosecuted?
3. What changes are recommended?

C. SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR CLUB PAPERS:

1. "The Life and Work of Lord Shaftesbury." Material can be found in any good encyclopaedia, especially the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. A good recent volume on the subject is *Lord Shaftesbury*, by J. L. and Barbara Hammond (1923).
2. A review of *Efficiency and Fatigue*, by Josephine Goldmark. This book is published by the Russell Sage Foundation (price \$2.00).
3. "The Short Working Day Sustained by the United States Supreme Court."

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The decision of the court will be found in U. S. Supreme Court Reports, Vol. 208, p. 412, *Muller vs. Oregon*, and this volume is likely to be found in any lawyer's office. Do not be afraid of this because it is a "law book." "Law books" are not so formidable as they look. Some lawyer in your community may be willing to review this case and the Consumers' League Brief and address the study class on "Legal Aspects of the Shorter Work Day."

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1. Mason, Lucy Randolph. *The Shorter Day and Women Workers*. (Virginia League of Women Voters, 1104 R. R. and Power Building, Richmond, Virginia.) 10 cents.
2. U. S. Women's Bureau. Bulletin No. 5, "The Eight Hour Day in Federal and State Legislation;" No. 14, "A Physiological Basis for the Shorter Working Day for Women;" No. 15, "Some Effects of Legislation Limiting Hours of Work for Women;" No. 16, "State Laws Affecting Working Women." (These valuable reports may be obtained free by writing to the U. S. Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.)
3. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Article on "Labour Legislation."
4. Goldmark, Josephine. *Efficiency and Fatigue. A Study in Industry*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1912). \$2.00.
5. Andrews, John B. *Labor Problems and Labor Legislation*. (From the National Committee on Women in Industry, 308 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago). 25 cents.
6. *The Case for the Shorter Day*. (A Brief prepared and distributed by the National Consumers' League. A copy of this important document may be obtained free of charge for any public or school library or may be purchased by individuals at \$1 a copy from National Consumers' League, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City.)