

1 Chartism was dying out. The revival of commercial prosperity, natural after the revulsion of 1847 had spent itself, was put down altogether to the credit of Free Trade. Both these circumstances had turned the English working-class, politically, into the tail of the "great Liberal Party," the party led by the manufacturers. This advantage, once gained, had to be
5 perpetuated. And the manufacturing capitalists, from the Chartist opposition, not to Free Trade, but to the transformation of Free Trade into the one vital national question, had learnt, and were learning more and more, that the middle-class can never obtain full social and political power over the nation except by the help of the working-class. Thus a gradual change came over the relations between both classes. The Factory Acts, once the bugbear of all manufacturers, were
10 not only willingly submitted to, but their expansion into acts regulating almost all trades was tolerated. Trades' Unions, hitherto considered inventions of the devil himself, were now petted and patronised as perfectly legitimate institutions, and as useful means of spreading sound economical doctrines amongst the workers. Even strikes, than which nothing had been more nefarious up to 1848, were now gradually found out to be occasionally very useful, especially
15 when provoked by the masters themselves, at their own time. Of the legal enactments, placing the workman at a lower level or at a disadvantage with regard to the master, at least the most revolting were repealed. ...

And the condition of the working-class during this period? There was temporary improvement even for the great mass. But this improvement always was reduced to the old level by the influx
20 of the great body of the unemployed reserve, by the constant superseding of hands by new machinery, by the immigration of the agricultural population, now, too, more and more superseded by machines.

A permanent improvement can be recognised for two "protected" sections only of the working-class. Firstly, the factory-hands. The fixing by Act of Parliament of their working-day within
25 relatively rational limits has restored their physical constitution and endowed them with a moral superiority, enhanced by their local concentration. They are undoubtedly better off than before 1848. The best proof is that, out of ten strikes they make, nine are provoked by the manufacturers in their own interests, as the only means of securing a reduced production. You can never get the masters to agree to work "short time," let manufactured goods be ever so
30 unsaleable; but get the work-people to strike, and the masters shut their factories to a man.

Secondly, the great Trades' Unions. They are the organisations of those trades in which the labour of *grown-up men* predominates, or is alone applicable. Here the competition neither of women and children nor of machinery has so far weakened their organised strength. The engineers, the carpenters and joiners, the bricklayers, are each of them a power, to that extent
35 that, as in the case of the bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers, they can even successfully resist the introduction of machinery. That their condition has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt, and the best proof of this is in the fact that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. (...)

40 But as to the great mass of working-people, the state of misery and insecurity in which they live now is as low as ever, if not lower. The East End of London is an ever-spreading pool of stagnant misery and desolation, of starvation when out of work, and degradation, physical and moral, when in work. (...) And that is the reason why, since the dying-out of Owenism, there has been no Socialism in England.

Friedrich Engels, "England in 1845 and 1885", 1 March 1885.

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My friends, we have met here today to celebrate the idea that has prompted the thousands of working-people of Louisville and New Albany to parade the streets of y[our city]; that prompts the toilers of Chicago to turn out by their fifty thousand or hundred thousand of men; that prompts the vast army of wage-workers in New York to demonstrate their enthusiasm and appreciation of the importance of this idea; that prompts the toilers of England, Ireland, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Austria to defy the manifestos of the autocrats of the world and say that on May the first, 1890, the wage-workers of the world will lay down their tools in sympathy with the wageworkers of America, to establish a principle of limitation of hours of labor to eight hours for sleep, eight hours for work, and eight hours for what we will.

10 It has been charged time and again that were we to have more hours of leisure we would merely devote it to debauchery, to the cultivation of vicious habits—in other words, that we would get drunk. I desire to say this in answer to that charge: As a rule, there are two classes in society who get drunk. One is that class who has no work to do in consequence of too much money; the other class, who also has no work to do, because it can't get any, and gets drunk on its face.

15 I maintain that that class in our social life that exhibits the greatest degree of sobriety is that class who are able, by a fair number of hours of day's work to earn fair wages—not overworked. The man who works twelve, fourteen, and sixteen hours a day requires some artificial stimulant to restore the life ground out of him in the drudgery of the day. (...)

20 Now, I don't want to see drunkenness on the part of any one, nor is it my intention to make a temperance speech, but we have outlived the charge made against us that we have devoted our leisure time to drunkenness and debauchery. I ask you where you find your tradesmen and mechanics and other workmen working more hours a day, is it not a fact that there is a larger degree of drunkenness in the community than where they work nine, ten or eight hours? And where the shorter hours have ruled, you find there is a greater degree of sobriety, far surpassing anything that has ever been seen before.

We ought to be able to discuss this question on a higher ground, and I am pleased to say that the movement in which we are engaged will stimulate us to it. They tell us that the eight-hour movement cannot be enforced, for the reason that it must check industrial and commercial progress. I say that the history of this country, in its industrial and commercial relations, shows the reverse. I say that is the plane on which this question ought to be discussed—that is the social question. As long as they make this question an economic one, I am willing to discuss it with them. I would retrace every step I have taken to advance this movement did it mean industrial and commercial stagnation. But it does not mean that. It means greater prosperity; it means a greater degree of progress for the whole people; it means more advancement and intelligence, and a nobler race of people. I would not unsay one word that I have said, except to make it stronger. I would not retrace one step I have taken in my connection with this movement for the eight-hour law. I call on the wage-workers of Louisville and New Albany and the whole world to enforce it.

Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, "What Does the Working Man Want?", Louisville, Kentucky, May 1, 1890