

The Question of a Maximum Wage

Not long ago The Outlook sent to a number of representative labor leaders and officers of labor organizations the following questions: (1) Do trades-unions fix a maximum wage, so that more than average merit cannot earn more than average wages? and (2) Do they fix a maximum output, so that a wage-earner of more than average ability is not permitted to produce more than the product of the average worker? We print below the answers received, and in our editorial columns we comment on the bearing of the facts thus ascertained upon the labor question.—THE EDITORS.

I.

FROM JOHN MITCHELL

President of the United Mine Workers of America

The United Mine Workers of America does not fix a maximum rate. It does fix a minimum scale. If a workman develops an unusual degree of skill, the employer is at perfect liberty to pay him or any other workman a higher rate than the rate fixed in our agreements with such employer. What we seek to do is to fix a reasonably fair rate of wages for all men who work in the mining industry, so as to give them a wage that will enable them to live in a manner conformable to American standards, and put something away for old age or infirmity.

In the mining industry fully seventy per cent. of the workers are employed on piece-work, and their earnings are of course regulated wholly by the amount of work they do, excepting that we fix a certain price per ton in our agreements with the operators, and the workman who performs the most labor makes the highest wages. We do not place any restrictions upon the amount of labor that shall be performed.

II.

FROM HENRY WHITE

General Secretary of the United Garment Workers of America

(1) Trade-unions do aim to establish a minimum wage, which does not, however, prevent those having more than the average ability from getting an increased wage.

(2) The maximum output is usually enforced for the purpose of preventing rush work.

I desire to say, in addition, that the effect of such rules is to eliminate the least competent workman. If the employer is given the option of choosing his men, he will naturally select the more com-

petent, and the others will, in time, leave the trade for other occupations more suited to their abilities. Such is the case in the cutting trade in this city, which accounts for the efficiency of the New York cutters in comparison with those of other cities.

III.

FROM JAMES M. LYNCH

President of the International Typographical Union

The subordinate unions of the International Typographical Union fix a minimum wage, and not a maximum wage. The minimum wage is believed to be in accordance with the earning powers of the average printer, and there is nothing to prevent a firm or employer from recognizing more than average merit if it or he desires to do so.

The International Typographical Union does not fix a minimum or maximum output. Our members working by the piece and on time, both at hand and machine work, are expected to perform a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

The International Typographical Union has been in existence for more than fifty years, having been organized in May, 1852, and the above has been its policy during all that time.

IV.

FROM JAMES DUNCAN

National Secretary of the Granite Cutters' National Union

The Granite Cutters' National Union does not fix a maximum wage. What it does is to fix a minimum wage for those employed under what is called the day-work system. Thus, in as far as day work is concerned, wages are graded upwards, and men of more than ordinary ability can receive the full value of their services, by mutual agreement with the employer. Those who are employed by the piece, in that they receive so much

per foot instead of so much per diem, also receive the full value of their labor, in accordance with the scale prepared; so the whole tendency of our National Union, which has a first-class system of agreements with employers, is and has been to fix a minimum, and grade upwards according to ability, instead of fixing a maximum, which we would consider retrogression of the most objectionable kind.

To your second question, I answer that the reply to your first question suggests what may be said to the second. There is no maximum output contemplated by our laws or any of our agreements, for inasmuch as our wage rate is established upon a minimum, the more a man produces the better chance there is for his increased day-wage rate, and if he is employed by the piece, his increased output would give him in comparison increased compensation.

v.

FROM JAMES O'CONNELL

International President of the International Association of Machinists

(1) Organizations do not fix a maximum wage. On the contrary, a minimum wage is established which places the mechanic with the greatest skill or merit in a position to advance himself to the highest wages paid in his trade or calling.

(2) The maximum wage is not set by any trades organization, in so far as I am acquainted. The organization that I represent requires its members to perform a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, and we recognize that one man is capable of producing more than another, because we are not all mentally or physically constructed alike.

I quote from the Constitution, Art. I., Sec. 4:

Each lodge (or lodges) shall establish a minimum scale of wages in its locality, and no machinist who is a member of the organization shall work under that scale in that locality; nor shall an applicant for membership be considered eligible unless he receives the minimum scale of wages in his locality.

VI.

FROM E. E. CLARK

Grand Chief Conductor of the Order of Railway Conductors of America

I consider the subject of your questions a very important one. It does not, how-

ever, apply to the class of employment in which the members of our Order are engaged as it would in the industrial trades or in manufacturing lines.

The general basis of pay for our members is a certain rate per mile run or trip made. This full amount is paid, no matter how quickly the trip or run may be made, but if they are delayed beyond a certain maximum time, they are paid for the additional hours required of them; as, for instance, if a division of a road is 100 miles in length, a freight conductor would receive, say, \$3 per trip over the district, and if on any trip he is required to work longer than ten hours, he is paid additional at the rate of ten miles per hour for the extra hours. On some roads the rate per mile or per trip is different for different classes of trains, dependent upon the nature of the work which the trains are required to do.

The only limit we put upon the amount of work a man shall perform or the amount of his earnings is the proviso which obtains in all of our working agreements, that after a man has been continuously on duty, say, sixteen hours, he shall be entitled to eight hours' rest before being required to again start on a trip, it being understood that this rest is to be taken at a terminal, and that the rule does not permit the men to abandon their work between terminals.

Our general rule for promotion of men is, that if merit, ability, and qualifications are equal, the man longest in the service will have preference for promotion and the more desirable runs, but we make no rule which contemplates the promotion of incompetent or indifferent men.

We aim to gather into membership the thoroughly competent and reliable train conductors. We aim to protect them against injustice, and to secure the highest rates of pay, the shortest hours of labor, and the most favorable conditions of employment which can be secured within the limits of justice, right, and reason.

I have heard the claim made that some trades-unions did fix a maximum wage and a maximum output for their members. Personally, I think such action is a mistake. I think that we should make every effort to secure for all industrious men a