

FRENCH EMPLOYERS BASE WAGES ON FAMILY NEEDS

New Plan of Family Allowances Already Applies to Half the Workers of France—Held to Be Solution of Many Social Problems

By WILLIAM McDOUGALL.

THERE is going on in Europe a revolution of which little has been heard in America, a revolution which promises results of the highest value to national life. The custom of paying wages for work done regardless of the responsibilities and needs of the workers is giving way to the custom of taking account of family responsibilities and needs of each worker in apportioning his pay.

This new plan of remuneration, as it is already operating in France, Germany, Belgium and other European countries, is described in some detail in a book, "The Disinherited Family," published last year by Arnold & Co., London. The author, Miss Eleanor Rathbone, a social worker of wide experience, not only describes the changes and effects of this new plan, as far as at present, discernible, but also discusses

Until very recent years all attempts to define such a wage have been based upon the assumption that each worker is responsible for the support of a family consisting of father, mother and three dependent children. The attempts of trade unionists and of many others in nearly all countries actually to secure a fair living wage have been based on this assumption. As Miss Rathbone very forcibly shows, however, it is grotesquely remote from the actual state of affairs. In England it is true of only some 9 per cent. of all workers. About 10 per cent. have more dependent children, and all the rest, or some 81 per cent., have fewer, 27 per cent. having no dependents and 24 per cent. being married persons without dependent children below 14 years of age. A similar distribution of family responsibilities may be assumed to hold good in most civilized peoples.

It follows, therefore, that, if the "fair living wage" based on this grotesque assumption could be universally instituted, a large proportion of the children of each nation would remain unprovided for; a proportion which in England, it is calculated, would be approximately 40 per cent. of the total number. Further it is shown that, if the whole national income of the English people were thrown into a common stock and distributed on the principle of the "fair living wage" calculated as the minimum wage necessary for the decent support of the "standard" family of five persons, it would not suffice to go round. And if it were large enough to go round—as in America it perhaps is—the result would be not only that 40 per cent. of the children of the nation would remain starved and stunted and ill-developed for lack of sufficient family resources, but also that 80 per cent. of the workers would be in receipt of wages considerably higher than are necessary for their maintenance according to the accepted standard of life of their class, place and calling.

It is expedient, then, in order that all children may have a fair chance of the minimum requirements of healthy development, that the distribution of the national income shall be made on a more rational principle, that wages and salaries shall be adjusted in relation to the family responsibilities of the workers. The outcome of the old custom was well summed up by Commissioner Piddington, Chairman of the Australian Minimum Wage Inquiry, when he said: "From the produced wealth of the country its children have less than enough in order that the unmarried and the childless may have more than enough."

The third ground on which the new plan is advocated is the eugenist's. The fact is now well known that at the present time in many, probably in all, civilized countries the chief increase in population comes mainly from the strata lowest in the social scale. The late Registrar General for England and Wales showed that in the year 1911—I cite Miss Rathbone—"the births per 1,000 married males aged under 55 years, including retired persons, in the different groups were as follows:

Upper and middle classes.....	119
Intermediate	132
Skilled workmen	153
Intermediate	158
Unskilled workmen	213

Would Check Births.

There are, of course, many persons, influenced by a variety of emotional factors which need not here be analyzed, who profess that the increasing prevalence of this tendency throughout the last half century is no matter for anxiety or grave consideration. But few impartial persons will refuse such consideration. "I do not believe," Miss Rathbone writes, "that any one who has been in touch with the facts can doubt that on the whole the elements in the working classes who are restricting their families, in whatever way they do it, represent the cream and those who are not practicing restriction represent the dregs. Of course, there are many individual exceptions, but they are a declining minority."

How, then, might the new plan of remuneration be expected to counteract in some measure the effects of this tendency of the population to renew itself chiefly from the least capable, the least prudent, the least self-controlled, and therefore the least successful elements within it?

"Our present experience," says Miss Rathbone, "gives no warrant for supposing that it would cause the lowest class of wage earners to have more children. All the facts show how little influenced they are by prudential considerations, and the probability is that they already have as many as nature permits." She cites evidence all of which points "irresistibly to the conclusion that direct provision paid to the mother would raise the standard of life of the poorer wage earners and that an orderly and self-respecting living is the best cure for indiscriminate and dysgenic breeding."

"But," she goes on, "what would its effect be on the classes who are already restricting their numbers? Would it cause them to have more children? So far as the motives that restrain them now are economic, it seems almost certain that it would tend that way." She sums up her argument as follows: "I conclude that, judging from the evidence as to the causes that affect the birth rate, direct provision for children, by raising the standard of life of the poorer wage-earning classes, will substantially lower their birth rate as a whole. It will probably raise, but not to a large extent, the birth rate of the artisan, lower middle and struggling professional classes. It will not affect the birth rate of the well-to-do, except that by raising the status of marriage and motherhood it may slightly increase the number of children born in these classes from the abler mothers."

The Tiller of Maternity.

"When society has taken upon itself the direct maintenance of children, whether it does it through the State or through the machinery of industry, it will have its hand for the first time on the tiller of maternity. Without any fussy interference or prying inquisitiveness into the privacy of individual families, through the impartial impersonal actions of the economic checks or the economic stimulus, it can do something at last to control the quality and quantity of population by methods less wasteful and ruthless than those of

starvation, war, pestilence and the struggle for survival. It can do this by manipulating the amount, incidence and conditions of family allowances."

In a paper read to the London Sociological Society in 1906 I urged the advantages of this new plan of remuneration. I pointed out that eugenic results of great value might be expected if it were applied to those classes of workers to which its application might easily and immediately be made—namely, all the workers in the Government services, and all those in the employ of corporations whose primary purpose is national service rather than the earning of profits. But in expressing the hope that the example of such public and quasi-public bodies might in time be followed by other employers, when the essential justice of the plan should have become generally appreciated, I was aware of a great difficulty. It was obvious that the plan might fail of its object if adopted by corporations whose primary aim is the earning of profits, because, in the competition for employment and advancement, the childless and the unmarried might be preferred by such corporations.

This was the one serious difficulty in the way of this much-needed reform. It was to meet this difficulty that I have urged the formation of a national fund to render possible the nation-wide adoption of the new plan. It is very pleasing to find that in the course of the last few years the ingenuity and patriotism of French industrialists have overcome this difficulty. Miss Rathbone says:

"M. Romanet hit on the device of pooling the cost of allowances among the employers joining in the agreement by the formation of a compensation fund for family allowances. The principle of this is quite simple, though there are many varieties in form and method. The allowances are paid monthly for the benefit of the dependent children below a certain age of all the employes of firms belonging to the Caisse, and the cost is divided up among these firms according to some agreed principle—usually either in proportion to the total number of their employes, men or women, married or single, or in proportion to the total amount of their wages bill."

Movement Spreads Rapidly.

Some of the *Caisse*s are organized on a regional, others on an occupational basis. Both systems seem to work satisfactorily. The first *Caisse* was initiated in 1918 and the movement spread rapidly. In 1923 it was calculated "that the system of family allowances already covers about half the industrial wage earners of France." Miss Rathbone shows that on the whole, and after some initial hesitation, the new plan has been well received by both employers and employed and that the only serious opposition comes from the advocates of the class warfare, irreconcilably opposed to all that makes for the welfare and contentment of the working classes.

In addition to the three principal grounds already indicated, there are other reasons hardly less important for the adoption of the new plan. I mention only two of these. The sufferings of multitudes of children inevitably entailed by the old plan of remuneration are creating a widespread demand for the State endowment of motherhood; legislation tending in that direction has already been begun, even in America, the land of individualism and high wages. Such endowment of motherhood would be a blow to that already much disintegrated institution, the family. Again, the new plan solves at one stroke a hitherto insoluble problem, the bitterly disputed problem of the relative rates of pay for men and women who do the same work. This problem appears in its direct and most acute form in the teaching profession, but there are few occupations in which it does not crop out as a breeder of discontent and sex warfare.

In this connection Miss Rathbone writes: "The most obvious and easily worked scheme, to begin with, happens to be both an occupational and a State scheme—viz., one applying to the civil service and the service of local authorities, including especially the teachers. I have already discussed very fully the conditions which make the introduction of family allowances among them really urgent as the only possible way, consistent with economy and efficiency, of putting an end to a serious conflict of interests between men and women teachers which is injuring the whole profession and the cause of education. The same reason exists in a lesser measure in other departments of the public services. In beginning with these we should be following the precedents of France, Germany and Australia."

HOW THE GOVERNMENT GETS WEATHER REPORTS

CANADIAN telegraphic weather reports from six points in the Province of Victoria have been added to those received during the past eight months at Seattle, Wash., and transferred thence to the Weather Bureau Circuit Station at Portland, Ore., to be transmitted from there twice a day to Washington, D. C.

Some 200 observing stations send telegraphic weather reports in code by means of twenty-three circuits to the central office of the Weather Bureau of the United States Department of Agriculture. The forecast work of the bureau is based on these code reports, so that speed and accuracy in telegraphic transmission are highly important. The circuits are set up at 8 A. M. and 8 P. M., 75th meridian time, and are used exclusively for sending weather reports at those hours. They are released as soon as all the reports have been transmitted. Reports from stations not directly connected with one of the circuits are forwarded by ordinary telegraph to some designated circuit station and there absorbed into the circuit system.

The circuits average about 750 miles in length, the longest being 1,340 miles and the shortest 231 miles. The largest number of stations attached to a single circuit is thirteen, the average being eight stations. Operators at each of the stations copy simultaneously all reports passing. The circuits are interlocking, so that reports from one station may be transferred to another. In this way a general distribution of the observations is accomplished.