

PAID HOLIDAYS

HOLIDAYS with pay is an idea which performs the almost impossible—it pleases everybody. The only people who really ought to object to it, on their own principles, are a few Catholic Distributists who display an excessive veneration for work and thrift and a rather puritanical hatred of the very words “leisure” and “plenty.” But even these, I feel sure, will not have the heart to be too consistent in this case.

We who preach the new economics naturally welcome the holidays-for-all-with-pay movement as a sort of miracle that confirms the truth of what we say. It is not consumer-credit, to be sure; essentially it is no more than an increase of wages with a shortening of hours. But it does prepare the way for consumer credit, and it does mean more purchasing-power in the pockets of the consumer as such. It does distribute money through some channel that is not exactly production. Above all it does make a beginning of a psychological break between the idea of work and the idea of a living or income. Or (to put it another way) it educates people towards the idea that work is something to be desired for its own sake, not because a living has to be earned by some drudgery or other.

Roll on, therefore, by all means, holidays with pay! It is just one more of those little English revolutions that make the big Revolution in England so inconceivable.

But while on the subject, let us improve the shining hour by observing one or two odd things about this movement.

Observe, first, with what suddenness the idea of paid holidays for all has rushed into prominence and become practical politics. Such ideas are not usually taken up by English Governments till after years of discussion and agitation. One can easily think of several measures much more urgent—increase of old-age pensions, family allowances, spinsters’ pensions, etc., etc., not to mention the derelict unemployed. All such causes still get nothing but cold water from the Government, while suddenly this excellent but not specially urgent idea of paid-holidays leaps into the headlines, fills the newspapers day after day, a Government Committee to consider it gets a favourable

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report, and in barely a week or two the whole nation is getting ready to make the most drastic changes in its ways of life, affecting industry, schooling traditions, holiday-resorts, and nearly everything else.

Don't imagine I am objecting to this little-earthquake way of doing things. I think it's grand, and would like to see it extended in other directions where it is much overdue.

But what does it mean? The only possible explanation of it is that our money-lords have decided it is time for some suitable "concession" to be thrown to the ordinary citizen to keep him quiet, something that will raise his standard of living without disturbing the industrial profit-and-money-lending system.

Holidays with pay was a real inspiration for them, though probably the inspiration came via Germany, for our own rulers find it easier to borrow ideas than to get ideas themselves. Before the War we imitated Germany's Labour Exchanges and social insurance; to-day it looks as if Hitler's "Strength through joy" movement is being translated into English as "Keep Fit" and "Holidays with Pay."

Observe secondly, that the unemployed also (if the semi-official forecasts are correct) are going to share somehow in holidays-with-pay. That of course would be an even greater stride towards breaking the connection between income and work, as well as a dawning recognition that the unemployed are of the same family as ourselves. From letting the unemployed and their wives and children go on holidays-with-pay it would be only a short step to letting them all have enough to eat when they were at home.

Observe thirdly, that nobody ever refers to the question of how the paid holidays will be paid for. Nobody suggests that the extra wage-cost will be put into prices, so that the price of everything (including holidays) would go up. Still less does anybody dream of suggesting that paid holidays will reduce the profits and dividends of the employing classes. The only thing certain, I suppose, is that the extra money will somehow be produced by the banking system out of its hat, perhaps in the form of easy loans to the "investing public" to replace the lost profits that would have been re-invested except for holidays-with-pay.

My point is that if the money-lords *want* to supply money

BLACKFRIARS

for some purpose, however "uneconomical" it may be, they always know how to do it without any difficulty.

Meanwhile I almost hesitate to mention the case of Mr. Robinson (but that is not the real name) of Ladywood in Birmingham, aged 52, who was found gassed one day last week. His wife, though their married life was broken some time ago, spoke up for him at the inquest, and she said, "When he lost his job last July he seemed to lose all hope and became depressed. I saw him last Monday. He was in a bad state, almost starving." The Coroner reminded her that he could have had relief.

"He was not a man like that," she said. "He didn't want charity. He wanted a job. He was grieved because he couldn't get a job."

According to the medical evidence he wasn't fit for a job, but there are a million or more men who are fit enough and yet are in the same position as he was.

"He was grieved because he couldn't get a job." Permanent holiday, without pay. First of all you instil into a man from childhood, by every kind of inculcation until it is part of his very mind, the (erroneous) dogma that only work gives him a right to a living. And then you take away his work from him for good, because it isn't going to bring you any profit.

That is your financial system, dear reader, which you say is too complicated for you to understand, so you have to leave it to those who are experts in it. Don't you see that these "experts" are the very men who, in this case of "High Finance v. God and Mr. Robinson," are standing in the dock!

Once in a blue moon we find in some newspaper a sentence that sums up a situation in just the right words, so I will end up this article with some words from the editorial column of the *Daily Express*. I don't think the *Daily Express*, or any other big daily, ever gets so far as to put its finger on the real cause of our troubles, but it is not bad at describing symptoms. Here you are:

"How long before we wake up and end the scandal of our distressed areas, our derelict land, our half-deserted Empire?"

How long, oh Lord Beaverbrook, how long?

F. H. DRINKWATER.