

**Alfred & Mary Marshall,
The Economics of Industry
(1879)**

**Book III.
Chapter V.
Trades Unions.
(excerpt on double shifts)**

[...]

§ 11. Exactly the same three disadvantages are said to be inherent in long *hours of labour*. A man who labours habitually twelve or fourteen hours a day at work from which he gets no enjoyment might almost as well not live; it is better that he should work less and earn less. Unions desire that the Normal day's work should be short; and that when a man works overtime he should be paid at a higher rate than for his Normal day. This plan would contribute much to the moral and social progress of the world. But its general adoption is hindered by the fact that where it has been introduced, the best workmen often insist on working overtime in order to earn high wages; so that an employer who does not habitually work overtime, loses his best men. This is a case in which the collective will of the union is overridden by the individual wills of its members.

Another obstacle to its adoption is that a continually increasing part of the outlay of the employer consists of interest on Fixed capital, and a sinking fund to replace such machinery as is superseded by new inventions. This part of his outlay is independent of the number of hours in the day's work. It is to be feared that English workmen will not succeed in obtaining more rest and recreation without a great sacrifice of their incomes, unless they overcome their repugnance to one heroic remedy. That remedy is the gradual adoption of double shifts in trades in which much Fixed capital is employed. Many manufacturers admit that if they could get two sets of men to work their machinery for eight hours a day each, they could afford to pay the men as high daily wages for the eight hours work as they now pay for ten hours, and yet make a better profit. No doubt certain practical objections can be urged against the plan: for instance, a machine is not so well cared for when two men share the responsibility of keeping it in order as when one man has the whole management of it; again, there would be a little difficulty in readjusting the office arrangements to suit a day of sixteen hours. But employers and their foremen do not seem to regard these difficulties as insuperable; and experience shews that workmen soon overcome the repugnance which they feel at first to double shifts. One set might end its work at noon, and the other begin then; or what would perhaps be better, one shift might work, say, from 5 a. m. to 11 a. m. and from 1.30 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.) the second set working from 11.15 a.m. to 1.15 p.m. and from 3.45 p.m. to 9.45 p.m.; the two sets might change places at the end of each week or month. There is not enough labour in England to allow such a plan to be adopted at once in all the workshops and factories for which it is suited: but as machinery is gradually worn out or antiquated, it might be replaced on a smaller scale. On the other hand, much new machinery that cannot be profitably introduced for a ten hours' day, would be introduced for a sixteen hours' day: being once introduced it would be improved on: the art of production would progress more rapidly; the Wages-and-profits Fund would increase; working men would be able to earn higher wages without tempting capital to migrate to countries where wages are lower, and all classes of society would reap benefit from the change. [. . .]

Space for Notes

