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ON COMMON GROUND.

By THÉO CHOPARD.

The first social laws which were intended to correct the excesses of the industrial revolution which occurred at the beginning of the last century, were aimed at the prevention of over-fatigue, and the exploitation of women and young persons employed in factories. In most of the industrial countries, these two categories of workers continue to enjoy special protection, also provided for by means of international conventions. In Switzerland, this protection is assured by a Law which, so to speak, is made up of "bits and pieces": the Factory Law, the Law governing the minimum age for workers, the Law on technical training, the Law on the employment of women and young persons in the various arts and crafts, etc., etc. The Draft Bill of the Federal Law on the protection of labour, which we have already had occasion to mention, strives to co-ordinate all these scattered regulations into one sole Law applicable to women and young persons belonging to all branches of economy. Under the heading "young persons" the Law classes all workers of both sexes under 18 years of age, whether they be apprentices or labourers. This is progress. Thus, *all* young persons, *including labourers* will be able to have 18 days holidays, whereas, at present, under the Law on technical training, only apprentices have the right to 6 days holidays. It is true that in certain Cantons the Law already grants holidays to all young persons. However, as the minimum age for starting work is fixed at 15 years, one may ask oneself if 18 days are sufficient for growing boy and girls, who already find the transition between school and regular employment a very trying period. That is why Youth Organisations are asking that the protection assured to young people should be extended to 20 years of age and that holidays should be increased from 18 to 24 days for adolescents under 18 years, and to 18 days for those between 18 and twenty. The employer is under the obligation to demand a medical certificate showing that the young worker is in good health and is capable of undertaking the duties required of him. Young people, however, are sensitive to fatigue and they are often menaced by tuberculosis. It should therefore appear desirable that they should undergo a medical examination every two years. The Law strictly prohibits young persons being employed in carrying out any work which might offer any serious danger to their life, their health or their morals. It would seem to us that the stress laid — quite rightly — by the legislators on morality, is an argument in favour of those who are urging that the protection of the Law should be extended to all young workers under 20 years of age. As regards working hours, including all accessory labour, these should in no case exceed 9 hours per day. The time taken up by obligatory schooling should be included in the maximum length of the working day. On this point, the Law would appear to be too conservative at a time when a reduction in working hours is on the agenda of the international plan. It would be desirable, above all for reasons of a medical order, that the working week of young persons under eighteen should be limited to 40 hours. To impose on young people the same number of working hours as those applicable to adults, is to render very difficult the transition from school to

regular employment and to strike a blow against normal joy of living. The Law prohibits all night work, and work on Sundays, and fixes the number of hours required for sleep by young people at 11 hours. Twelve hours would be preferable, and this is the form provided for by one of the conventions of the International Labour Organisation. On the whole, the Swiss Law provides a relatively effective protection for young people — as effective, anyway, as those provided by foreign legislation. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the adults and legislators who draw up these laws are too apt to forget their own youth. Generally speaking, there exists too great a tendency to assimilate, on the professional plane, young persons with fully-grown men. Those of us who regret the passing of those fine and difficult years of growing up, when the conquest of the world seemed easy, who would like to prolong and to preserve, in so far as is possible, the youth of the rising generation, must do their utmost in order to obtain a modification of this far too utilitarian point of view.

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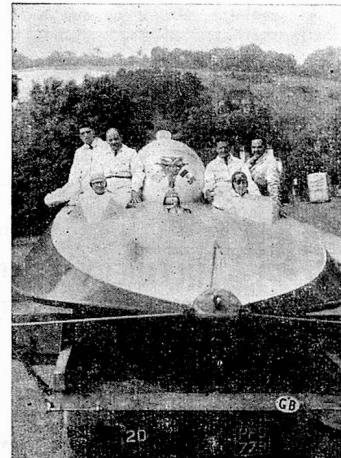
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