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Labour in Licensed Houses

An Investigation

Pamphlet

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Labour in Licensed Houses

AN INVESTIGATION

IN "The Observer" of the 31st of March, 1929, there appeared an article headed, "The Trade as an Employer"; it was an attack upon the owners of public houses as employers of Labour. The attack was of such a character that had it appeared—say on the leader page of "The Times"—the "Trade" would have had to take notice of it officially. "The Observer" is also a paper of rank and circulation; but those responsible for "Trade" publicity apparently took the view that the matter did not demand their attention, since it was only an item in the attack which is printed every week on one of the remoter pages of the paper—articles which are notorious for their extraordinary bias and their unnecessary and unfair onslaughts upon the Trade and all who dare to show any sympathy with the existence of alcoholic beverages. Nevertheless, the questions with which the Women's True Temperance Committee is concerned are so closely related to the conduct of public houses that the Committee regarded this particular attack as within its province; for a public service such as the provision of refreshment cannot be dissociated from the welfare of those who provide it. The Committee, therefore, thought that the charges brought by "The Observer's" Social Student ought to be probed to see what amount of truth there was in them, and for this purpose its Executive Committee appointed a special Committee* of Investigation.

* The members of the Committee were: Mrs. Arthur Shadwell, Chairman of the Women's True Temperance Committee, Mrs. M. S. Dalton, Vice-Chairman, Mrs. Ernest Williams and Mrs. H. W. Thomas of the Executive Committee, Mrs. G. Clark, of the Essex branch of the Women's True Temperance Committee, and Mrs. A. Rosenberg, herself a licensee.

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The members of this special Committee did not follow the methods of "The Observer's" writer, which consisted of general insinuations backed by unidentified hearsay reports; they used their own eyes in personal investigations. They visited thirty public houses in London, the suburbs and the home counties; houses of varying character, in different neighbourhoods and in different proprietors' ownership. The visits were not perfunctory calls, but thorough inspections by women who are at least acquainted with the domestic side of their enquiry. Their observations and their enquiries were first-hand.

Following is the report made by the Special Committee at the conclusion of their enquiry. "The Observer's" charges are set out seriatim, each one being followed by the Special Committee's comments.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE'S REPORT.

The method we adopted was to write to a number of public house owners in and near London to ask permission to visit some of their houses, stating that we did not want to see any specially "improved" houses but houses of the average type. They sent us long lists of houses from which we selected such as we had time to visit. Our comments follow the wording of "The Observer" article.

(A). THE GENERAL INDICTMENT.

"In the poorer parts of London and in the big provincial towns, public house employees work under conditions that no organised body would tolerate."

This is the general charge, as sweeping and injurious as it could well be made. Beyond disclosing the animus of the

attack it is not particularly helpful. Its validity depends upon the proof of the charge in detail. We may, therefore, leave it as it is at the moment and proceed to the more detailed charges.

(B). HOURS OF WORK.

"In view of the long hours worked for low wages in unwholesome surroundings, there is small cause for wonder that the Trade should prove unattractive to employees of a better type."

There are three charges here—long hours of work; low wages; and unwholesome surroundings; with an assertion that people of a "better type" avoid employment in licensed houses—a compliment to those who are in the employment which they will not fail to appreciate. In point of fact we found alike in large and small houses it was strikingly apparent that employees both on the domestic and on the public side were of a much higher type and far better mannered and better behaved than the usual run of domestic servants in private service. It proves that the better conditions of employment in licensed houses attract a better class of service. The second and third charges will be dealt with later.

As to the charge of long hours we took pains to get full and accurate information, both from licensees and the members of their staffs.

The note made by one of our members reads as follows:—

"Employees have one Sunday off in three and a half day a week which in most cases means a whole day off. Kitchen staffs start work at 7 a.m. as private domestics do, but their work is systematised and they do not work the long hours of private service. The Bar and Dining-room staff work 9 to 10.30, and then 11.30 to 3 p.m., and 5.30 till 11 p.m. They have an hour for dinner in the 11.0 to 3 shift and half an hour for supper

in the 5.30 till 11 shift. There is a week's holiday with pay and a bonus each year."

Another member reports in the following terms:—

"Hours for barmaids are 9-3 and 5.30-11. In all cases a half day a week and in some cases a whole day, also every other Sunday. In nearly all cases a fortnight's holiday is given, which is paid for, and in some cases a cheque is given at Christmas and when they go on holidays."

These notes apply to all the houses investigated. It will be seen there are one or two variations in the two reports, but one would expect this when two investigators make independent notes, referring to a large number of houses. The result of the detailed figures, is that, allowing for meal intervals, the actual work time of the barmaids is 9 hours.

(C). *WAGES.*

"Most of the barmen, barmaids, cellar-men and potmen live in and receive wages ranging from ten to thirty-five shillings per week."

We found that for most employees the figures set out by "The Observer" were approximately accurate. But the point of importance, which "The Observer's" writer ignores, is that public house work is largely of the nature of domestic service, and is chiefly remunerated by the provision of a home, food and laundry, and that, therefore, the money figures bear no relation to the wages paid in ordinary occupations. Moreover, in spite of the large increase in domestic servants' wages since the war, the wages in public houses still compare favourably with those in private houses. The ordinary wages offered in middle class households are £40 for a cook, £36-£40 for a parlourmaid and £36 for a housemaid. The wages offered in the advertisement columns of "The Times," which represent the best wages to be had in domestic

service, are £45-£80 for a cook, £40-£45 for a parlourmaid, £50 for a housemaid, and £30-52 for kitchen and between maids. These are the figures to compare with those given in public houses, which we found to be as follows:—

"Cooks receive £1 12s. 6d. a week (£84 10s. 0d. a year); vegetable cooks, £1 5s. 0d. (£65); housemaids, £1 (£52); waitresses, 9/- and tips (£23-8-0); Barmaids, £1 8s. 0d. (£74 16s. 0d.). These wages are paid along with all meals, sleeping accommodation and laundry. A cellarman or porter living out gets £2 15s. 0d. and all meals. In addition to all this there is a custom in the Trade to give a bonus at Christmas and holidays."

Another report says:—

"Managers receive £5 and £6 a week. A Potman sleeping out receives £2 8s. 6d. (£126 2s. 0d.); Barmaid, £1 8s. 0d; Cook £1 12s. 6d. a week, Vegetable cook, £1 5s. 0d.; Kitchen maid £1 2s. 0d. (£57 4s. 0d.); Housemaid, £1 a week, all living in. Waitress living in, 9s. a week and tips. These figures are average ones. In some houses a cheque is given at Christmas and when they go on their holidays. The licensee in a house at Peckham helped her staff to save by adding one shilling to every shilling they gave her each week to bank for them."

If "Social Student" had only thought before writing, and compared wages in the public house trade with analogous wages in other services, he would never have brought forward this ridiculous charge of low wages, and endeavour to substantiate it with figures which prove his own case to be nonsense.

(D). *LIVING CONDITIONS.*

"In some of the small public houses in slum areas the bedrooms are cramped and dirty."

The wording of this charge is its own refutation, though used to back up the general charge against the conditions of

public house employment. It will be noticed that "Social Student," though willing to wound, is afraid to strike hard. His charge, again, is only levelled against "some" public houses and "small" ones and "in slum areas" and, of course, as in all the other charges, there is no attempt at specification or identification.

Now it may very well be that here and there a house may be found with cramped and dirty bedrooms. Such exceptional conditions—for "The Observer" writer himself admits by implication they are exceptions—might be found in any houses, public or private, and, in olden days at any rate, the conditions would not even have been exceptional in the servants' quarters of private houses. But we did not, in the course of the thirty houses we inspected, find a single establishment in which the bedrooms were cramped or dirty. It is true that our investigations were not confined to small houses in slum areas, but some of those houses were in districts which approached the slummy in character, for instance, the Caledonian Road, Bow and the Borough. We also inspected houses in Berkshire which were small, though the districts were not slummy, and in any small house one would not expect to find rooms of ample dimensions. Nevertheless, whether poor or middle class neighbourhoods, in large or small houses, we found invariably that the bedrooms were airy, light and clean. Here are the notes on the subject made by some of our members.

"There is no comparison between the sleeping conditions provided by the Trade and that in private service. The invariable rule is a bed to yourself and generally a room to yourself except in very large rooms, where two employees slept in separate beds. The mattresses, bed linen and blankets were all in good condition, clean and comfortable, and would compare favourably with bed accommodation in well run hospitals. The rooms were noticeably airy and light, and good closet and press space was provided for employees' clothes. We saw wireless

in the bedrooms, electric light and good washing provision. Bathrooms were in every house and the staff had every facility for hot baths. In a large house mostly used as a commercial hotel there was an indoor staff of six; cook, waitress, chambermaids and barmaids. The staff bedrooms were at the top floor away from the rest of the house. The arrangement was very good considering the awkward plan of the building. The cook with a room to herself, separate beds for all the rest, two to a room. Electric light in bedrooms and ample room for clothes.

One house had a staff of five, who have their meals with the family. The bedrooms were airy and bright, and the staff we spoke to seemed well content. One house in Hertfordshire had a large, well-kept bathroom for the use of the staff only, and the bedrooms looked out on leads, which make for airiness and coolness in summer. Another house in this neighbourhood had staff bedrooms which were delightful, with large, open windows, comfortable clean beds, and cupboards. The kitchen was specially worthy of notice. Windows filled one wall, and the view was well worth looking at."

Another member of our Committee reports in the following terms:—

"A London house was very clean, with good bedrooms, light and airy. The kitchen was exceptionally clean. A firm of licensed caterers in London employ women inspectors, whose duty it is to supervise female staff, and be responsible for cleanliness of the houses. Cleanliness struck me as being the outstanding feature of this firm. They are very considerate to employees. A large house with a staff of fourteen was very clean with good rooms. Another was very clean with good bedrooms, good kitchen and bathroom."

The following is the report of a fourth member:—

"Every public house visited was very clean; bed and bedding were very good. The bed linen was changed weekly in one house. In another in London a room was provided for a barmaid who did not sleep in, so that she could lie down during her time off, if she did not care to go out. One country house had very nice bedrooms.

The sheets here were changed every week or rather top to bottom, and clean bath towels were provided every week. The staff were very keen on baths. The mattresses were hair. Everything here was very clean.

Another was very clean and had a bathroom. In a modern house in the centre of London there were delightful bedrooms for each person, perfectly decorated, most of them having two windows prettily curtained, and was well furnished. Everything was spotless. One Victorian house had large airy rooms. Two barmaids shared a room with separate beds, and the barmen shared one very large airy room in separate beds. The toilet ware and bedspreads matched in colour. The same conditions applied to a very old house belonging to the same firm. Everything matched in the bedrooms, some of which had two barmaids and some one, but each had a separate bed. The rooms were nicely decorated. Everything in this house was spotless in spite of its oldness."

Was it really fair of "Social Student" to bring forward this charge of cramped and dirty bedrooms?

(E). *FOOD.*

"The meals served to the staff are often indifferent in quality."

This charge, it will be seen, is more emphatic and general than the previous one, and therefore needs more support. But our investigations failed altogether to afford that support. It is rather extraordinary, if the staff's meals are "very often indifferent in quality," that our own enquiries and inspection should have revealed in all cases the exact opposite. We did not actually see the meals served in all cases, but we either saw the meals or made enquiries in every case. Here are a few of the impressions noted down by members of our Committee:—

"In a house in London we saw, haphazard, a staff dinner dished up, roast lamb, potatoes and greens, with a choice of sweets to follow, exactly the same as was served to customers in the dining room. In a house just outside

London, the licensee and his wife and a staff of five had their meals together. The licensee, tenant or manager, as the case might be, had exactly the same food as the staff."

Another member made the following comments about three London houses:—"Food in preparation very good . . . Food in preparation very good . . . Food given, same as employer."

Another Member noted that in a house near London, "the licensee and his wife always had their meals with the staff."

Another member noted that "In all cases the food seemed adequate and well cooked, and a typical staff lunch was stewed steak and vegetables, potatoes, rhubarb and custard. In a house in one of the home counties the licensee and his wife took a great interest in their staff of seven, and had all meals with them. At another not far away, where we lunched, the licensee told us that the staff had exactly the lunch which we had had. In one house in North London the staff were at lunch. The table was nicely laid and the food looked good."

(F). *MEAL HOURS.*

"Inadequate time allowed for meals."

In any business, particularly in any business where refreshments have to be served at rush hours to large numbers of people, it may well happen that on occasion those who serve others are at the time a bit hurried in the enjoyment of their own meals. "Social Student" may have found instances of this in the public house trade in the course of his investigations—if he ever made any. Our own investigations indicate that efforts are made to arrange for the staff to have adequate times for meals, and that these efforts are in the main successful. In all the circumstances the charge is not a very serious one and we dismiss it with one note made in the course of one day's visit to eight houses by one of our members:—

"We noticed that the staff had an hour for dinner

in the 11.30 to 3 shift, and half an hour for supper in the 5.30 to 11 shift, and that the staff enjoyed uninterrupted hot meals, while licensees ate when they could."

(G). *LENGTH OF SERVICE.*

"Public house workers seldom remain for long at one place and the demand always exceeds the supply."

If this charge had been made of private house workers of the present day every house mistress would endorse it. The remarkable thing is that it does not apply to public house workers. At least that is what our own investigations showed. This is the sort of thing we found:—

"No complaints from employees. In practically all places where asked the employees had been for years in the situation, and all seemed quite satisfied. In one house in the poorer parts of London, the staff were very satisfied. There were five maids, three boys and a char-woman. A youth had been there eighteen months, and his was the shortest time of any. All the others had been longer, and one had been there nine years. We found in one house near London that the staff stayed well, in another that the staff seemed well satisfied."

Another member writes as follows:—

"In one house in central London we were shown over the house by the manageress, who seemed extremely satisfied with her post and had been with the firm for years; the cook had had eight years service. One could tell at a glance that the staff was happy. Of two other houses in London we found that all the staff had been with the firm a number of years and two had been as long as sixteen years."

This is the report of a third member:—

"The infallible proof of satisfaction as regards wages and conditions is length of service. We found cooks seven-and-a-half years, eight years, six years, and sixteen years; barmaids and waitresses six years, four years, fourteen years. One hotel had a manager and manageress who

had been there eight years, two waiters fourteen years, cellarmen six years, barmaid four years. We found the staff we spoke to in a house in Hertfordshire well content, and in another house nearby we found a very pleasant contented staff ready to talk, answer questions and full of praise of the interest taken in their comfort by their mistress."

As to the demand exceeding the supply, we found on enquiry that the staffs of the houses had their full complements.

APPENDIX.

In the course of our visits we naturally noted other matters than those which belong to the special charges made by "Social Student," and without burdening this report with a mass of detail, it may be well for us to append a few notes of other matters which were made at the time of the visits.

This is the report of general conditions from one member of our Committee:—

"Practically all kitchens had a pipe from the gas stove to enable all steam to escape from the room and keep the air cool and healthy. A cook in one house in London said she had been in many places but had never had so pleasant a kitchen. One kitchen in the East End was beautifully tiled and was spotlessly clean, very airy and sunny. One house in Hertfordshire was very clean, with the exception of the kitchen, which badly wanted re-washing. But evidently a lot of the dirt was the fault of the maids, who took no pride in their kitchen. In Berkshire most of the houses were old, except for one large house, which was still being enlarged. On the whole the houses here were clean, although in one case the bath could have been cleaner. Only one of these houses had the staff sleeping in. One house had suffered from bugs, but the brewer had quickly got rid of them when his attention was drawn to them. The small houses had no baths, and one or two tenants said the owner would not put one in. One house had a first aid set in the bar for the use of the staff and the general public. The police always knew where to come in case of accidents."

Here is another report:—

“In one house in Hertfordshire we found a licensee and his wife with a staff of three and his family. Only one of the staff slept in, the other two lived next door, but were free to have all meals with the others, and a room was at their disposal as a staff room. Another house near had a very large comfortable kitchen which served as a sitting room for the staff. In another house not far from here all the staff slept out, and the public part of the building was very good, but neglect and carelessness which showed in the domestic part were not due to the house, but to an inefficient, sluttish staff, and lack of supervision. Another house in this neighbourhood had splendid supervision, and the lighting system was well schemed and ventilation was splendid. The kitchen was specially worthy of notice. Windows filled one wall and the view was well worth looking at. The kitchen opened out on to a kind of roof garden, and serving-hatches and pantries were well planned.”

A third report says:—

“This house (in Hertfordshire) had been reconstructed, and the kitchen was in a charming position with a flat roof outside, where the staff could sit and see the beautiful view. In a house a little further on we were not so fortunate. The kitchen was very dirty and the walls needed a lot of whitewash also, and the place was very dark. But we all came to the conclusion that it all depends on the people whether the place was fit to live in or not. Some folks are clean and others don't care. The owners insisted on showing us everything from top to bottom, and everywhere we found they were only too glad to have things pointed out to them.”

The above is our Special Committee's report, and though it was undertaken independently without any preconceived notion of what the result of first hand inspection would yield, as a fact it turned out to be a complete refutation of the charges and insinuations made by “Social Student,” who appears to be more a student of the arts of teetotal propaganda and

controversy by insinuation than of actual conditions pertaining in the industry concerning which he affects to instruct “The Observer's” readers. It might well have been that the conditions of public house service were bad or defective and needed attention, and if that were so, a good purpose would have been served in directing public notice to the matter. That is the way reforms come about. It may be that there are industries and services to-day, just as there were certainly a few years ago, where better conditions for the workers should be installed. The public house industry does not appear to be one in which reform is particularly needed, but is rather one which could usefully be employed as an example for social investigators in other fields to quote. Of course, it may be, though the Committee found no instances, that in places, the staff arrangements are not as satisfactory as can be desired, and this is the more likely to happen since it is practically impossible for owners to get rid of unsatisfactory tenants owing to the operation of the Rent Restriction Acts. But the rather platitudinous remark of one of the members of the Committee, “some folks are clean and others don't care,” sums up the whole matter.

For the Executive Committee,

ALICE SHADWELL, *Chairman.*

ELIZABETH HILL, *Secretary.*

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