

# OUR WARTIME 'JAZZ ERA': WORKERS WITH MONEY TO BURN

Increase of Drinking and Vice  
as Arms Makers Take 'Time Off'

**The effect of high pay and  
upset homes in boosting  
absenteeism at factories**

*(Absenteeism from war plants is causing a clamor over the country. Numerous governmental and private agencies report that drinking and vice are increasing. What relationship does the one bear to the other? One of the editors of The United States News visited several war production areas to find the answer. Here is what he learned.)*

High wages and upset homes have started some war workers off on a spree. They are a small minority of the workers, their actions resented by serious-minded fellow workers. But there are enough of them to endanger production schedules.

In war plant areas, bars and honky-tonks are jammed with eager spenders. Women with invitation in their eyes are plentiful. Drunkenness and venereal diseases are on the increase. So is absenteeism. And by the same token, the productive capacity of the war worker is slipping.

Around Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore and other areas of the Eastern Seaboard, many a war worker goes swaying homeward in the early morning hours. Sometimes he, or she, goes to work the next day; sometimes not. If not, that is another absentee worker, added to those who are unavoidably absent for legitimate reasons. The men who are running the war plants say that, if the joy hunters could be excluded from the absentees, the percentage of absentees would be brought down to an endurable level.

Even if the wobbly worker manages to get to the plant the next day, his, or her, production is not likely to be up to its normal level. A slip of the hand, failure to see a moving machine and get out of the way quickly enough, adds another industrial accident to the list. These accidents are climbing steadily. And one of the keenest industrial analysts in the East says the man-hour of 1943 turns out only 70 per cent as much material as did the man-hour just before Pearl Harbor.

"Absenteeism from the plant is not hurting us nearly as much as absenteeism from the job while inside the plant," he says.

**Absenteeism** is rooted in a wide variety of causes. Many cases are unavoidable. Workers do get sick. They are overtired



TAXI DANCE HALL

... jammed with eager spenders

from long hours and have to rest. They have family troubles. They have to get to banks and stores and ration boards. Many of them live long distances from their work and have transportation troubles. And working mothers are worried about their children. But added to these are the thoughtlessly thirsty. No one knows how many of these there are.

Personnel and industrial relations men in Eastern war plants say that invariably the excuse the worker gives for failing to show up is one that makes it seem unavoidable. They say this trait was not born with the war; it goes back to the days when an office boy said his grandmother had died so he could go to a baseball game. All of this makes more difficult the job of measuring the effect of America's new jazz age upon its output of war goods.

But, without exception, officials of about 40 plants pointed out these facts: There is almost no absenteeism on paydays. And it is highest on the day after payday and on Mondays. Around the war plants they call it "Monday sickness." Monday sickness claimed 10 per cent of the workers of a shipyard in Philadelphia last week.

*Monday sickness* comes in several different types. It covers what three women workers in a tank factory in Detroit had at 8 a.m. They had told their sailor friends good-by at 3 a.m. in a taproom. One of the women already had had a



**PAYDAY BAR: "Monday sickness" doesn't show up on personnel records**

sudden seizure of its first pangs. And Monday sickness covers what dozens of men and women workers for shipyards and aircraft plants had in Baltimore on Wednesday morning. They were due at work on the 8 a.m. shift and were still going strong in a night club at 3 a.m. Many of them wore their identification badges.

This does not show up on personnel records, however. Invariably the worker has another story for the plant, often a doctor's certificate to explain the absence.

**Young workers** are more often addicted to Monday sickness than older ones. Many young men, figuring that it will not be long before they are called into the armed services, go out for a fling. Often, too, they are making more money than they know how to handle.

Two young war workers showed up in a dozen cards picked at random from the files of the Philadelphia Crime Prevention Bureau. They were among the arrests for one day. One was earning \$55 a week as an electrician's helper in a war plant. He had been arrested for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. The other was making \$52.50 a week as a helper in another war plant. His regular haunt was a tavern, where he had been picked up on a charge of automobile theft.

**Juvenile delinquency** has a bearing upon the absentee problem, both directly and indirectly. Half again as many girls under 21 were arrested in the United States in 1942 as were in 1941; 17 per cent more boys. In industrial areas, some of these delinquents were war workers, others had parents who were war workers.

Some cities are resorting to curfews to deal with this problem. Camden, N. J., is planning a 10 o'clock curfew for girls of 16 or under. Philadelphia already has an 11 o'clock one for teen-age girls. They are arrested if found on the streets after that hour. Quite a few war workers have shown up among these teen-age arrests.

One of 17 made \$40 a week in a war plant. She was arrested on the street at 1 a.m. and said she wanted to kill herself because her parents would not let her keep any of the money she earned. Two

## Wildtimes

girls, 16 and 17, making good money in war plants, were picked up in taprooms. They had come down-town to spend the money on a sailor.

**High wages** have a definite place in the picture. Many workers, not just youngsters, are making more money than they ever made before in their lives. Pay in shipyards runs from \$75 to \$110 a week. Aircraft novices get from \$30 to \$50 a week. For high skills, the pay is larger. Workers who have not developed habits of thrift want to spend this money. And there are fewer substantial articles for them to buy than there ever have been. But they are spending it.

In New York, a roughly dressed shipyard worker called at the box office of a theater housing a musical comedy hit. "How much for tickets for next Tuesday night?" he asked. The box office man quoted balcony prices. "Are those the best seats?" the worker inquired. "Orchestra seats are \$6.60," said the box office man. "I'll take six," the worker told him.

Most plants report, however, that the sales of War Bonds are running high among their workers, in spite of the wasteful minority. But a few plant officials feel that, in the sales talks for bonds, more emphasis should be placed on the opportunity that the bonds offer workers to build up a backlog of personal savings to guard against a depression in the future.

The workers give as generously to charities as they do to pleasures. In the Glenn Martin plant at Baltimore, they gave to community chest funds twice as much as was set for their quota. There, and elsewhere, they are running ahead of quotas for the Red Cross and other charities. The Council of Social Agencies in Philadelphia finds itself with plenty of money, but with a definite shortage of trained workers to deal with the problems that have been thrust upon a city upset by war and filled with thousands of soldiers and sailors, hundreds of thousands of war workers.

**Upset homes** are providing the most acute problems. Many of the juvenile delinquents come from homes that have, in one way or another, been torn apart by the war. One 15-year-old girl was picked up in a taproom after curfew with a sailor. Her 25-year-old sister had been taking the youngster out at night, without the mother's knowledge, to show her a good time on money the elder sister's sailor husband sent home from his pay. Many of the youngsters picked up on Philadelphia's streets come from homes where the father is in the service, or where both the father and the mother work. And worry over youngsters at home ranks high among the contributory causes for the absenteeism of working mothers.

Almost a score of nurseries have been set up in and around Philadelphia by welfare organizations in an effort to deal with this problem. Baltimore and other cities

## Wildtimes

in the Eastern area are doing likewise as more and more women are called into industries to take the place of men.

**To deal with absenteeism**, there are almost as many remedies proposed as there are plants. One group argues that the problem is one with which individual plants should deal. Another feels that it can best be handled by a nationwide program that makes allowances for the specific problems of each community and permits each plant to cut the program to fit its own needs. One group would point the finger of scorn at the delinquent worker and try to shame him into going to his job. Another would hold the regular worker up as an example and try to show the delinquent the importance of his work.

At the Baldwin Locomotive Works, they are holding down absenteeism through a close working arrangement with the Labor-Management Committee. Company officials say they have few instances of failure of workers to show up for other than legitimate reasons.

**A deficiency in adrenalin** is blamed by Dr. Edward H. McIlvain, director of industrial relations for the Edward G. Budd Manufacturing Co., for one phase of absenteeism. He says the worker who is slow in getting started in the morning but who quickens his pace as the day lengthens is deficient in adrenalin. Dr. McIlvain puts such workers on the swing or late-night shifts, rather than on day shifts, and says they work better that way.

Dr. McIlvain says that much trouble can be prevented from the outset by putting the worker into the right kind of job and explaining to him how important the job is. Quite a few employers feel that the answer lies in this direction.

**At the Martin plant**, they held a homecoming day, put on a program of music, with plant officials and workers on hand to outline their own ideas of the importance of their jobs. Martin planes put on an air show. A plane with wing and fuselage pulled apart so that the interior could be studied was on exhibit. Families of the workers were invited; 150,000 came. Each worker could point out to his family the particular part of the plane he had helped to make, and how important that part was to the functioning of the plane.

Absenteeism dropped off to almost nothing afterward. A former plant worker who had flown Martin planes in the South Pacific was brought to the plant to tell how badly they were needed. And absenteeism decreased again.

This appeals to the thoughtful workers—who are in the majority. Fewer than one of each 12 workers in such a plant are listed as irregulars. And the identity of these irregulars changes from month to month. It is even a smaller minority that comprises the band of joy hunters who head for the bars with a pocketful of money right after payday.