

PROSPERITY SEEN AS WORKERS BUY AND WAGES FLY

J. G. Shedd Tells of Business Stimulation and Universal Employment at High Pay

By JOHN G. SHEDD
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In giving you my opinion that this country is to enjoy unparalleled prosperity during the next few months it would be advisable to recite some facts regarding the effects of the war on the retail business of England and France.

At the outbreak of the war, retail business of all kinds had a tremendous slump, stocks were reduced and purchases were limited due to the apprehension that the consuming and spending power of the public would be curtailed.

Merchants were utterly amazed, however, when the Christmas business experienced by the various stores during the month of December, 1914, was larger than had ever taken place. They were still further confounded when business during the year 1915 was more than 10 per cent. larger than that of 1914, and in 1916 more than 20 per cent. larger than that of 1915. As a matter of fact, retail business in England up to January 1, 1917, showed a phenomenal increase over any previous business.

People Buying Freely
People were buying freely and the purchase of luxuries was extensive. There was a large demand for silk underwear, silk hosiery, jewelry, pianos, furs, expensive lingerie—things of higher quality and finer grades, whatever the price.

This was made possible by the fact that labor enjoyed more constant employment and had very much higher wages. The effect of this was to cause extravagance, many for the first time enjoying a taste of luxury. So general were the purchases of luxuries in England that a serious effort has been made to curb them by import laws.

The prices of all merchandise made tremendous advances. In England in the first year of the war 20 per cent. of the total productive capacity of manufacturing plants for civilian use was devoted to manufacturing materials for war purposes. The English director of commerce has recently said that 75 per cent. of the goods manufactured at present are for war use. The result of this heavy drain on factories and machinery was a large reduction in the quantity of goods manufactured for civilian use.

Prices and Wages Up
This condition immediately increased prices. Wages increased because of the efforts of civilian manufacturers to maintain in a partial degree the volume of their production. While this situation was the primary cause of advances in prices, a shortage of labor and materials contributed some share. The extraordinary advances in retail prices did not seem to affect the phenomenal buying of the people.

Notwithstanding wonderful prosperity, retail distributors were forced to adopt severe measures in economy in order to offset the great loss in men. Paper, string and boxes were sparingly used. The "return goods" privilege at present is limited to thirty-six hours from delivery; its entire abandonment has been under consideration. Deliveries were concentrated on three alternate days of the week.

While we all appreciate that war means destruction, at the same time, from the experience of England and France since August, 1914, war has meant sustained business.

What War Means to Us
In our own country people have not waked to the full realization of what the war means for us. We can prize in our civilian life by knowing and heeding the experience of France and England. The release of men will be the great need of this country, and everybody here must sacrifice as England and France have done.

War expenditures in this country by our own government and by the allies will release a huge volume of money. This money will go in the main to wage-earners, many of whom have not been in the habit of possessing such wealth before, and this money will be spent. This will greatly stimulate retail selling, although retail merchants may be hampered to more or less extent not only in securing merchandise but in the necessary readjustments which will be involved in the turning over of men to the government.

Women Can Do Much
Women can do much right now to relieve the strain of conditions confronting retail merchants and obviate the necessity of the government passing stringent laws that will vitally affect the many privileges extended by retail distributors. One of the most necessary and immediate steps that women should take is to discontinue the extravagant and wasteful habit of having merchandise sent home and then returning it. They should make their selections in the store, carry their purchase home if possible, and unless the merchandise is damaged, it should be kept—not returned. They should bring their children to the store instead of having the goods sent to the children.

The adoption of this plan by every woman throughout the country would effect great economies for all retail distributors, enabling them to release a large number of men at once, and would not make necessary drastic government laws of the forcing of retailers to make extra charges for the service of deliveries and calls for return goods.

Prices of all merchandise have already made heavy advances, and it is not at all unlikely that they will go higher, and largely for the same reasons that made the heavy advances in England and France. Labor will be more fully employed, however, and at high wages, so that I believe that this country is entering on a period of prosperity that has not yet been equaled.

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