

THE GENERAL SHOE COMPANY

In a plant of the General Shoe Company it has come to the attention of the chief executive that many of the piece workers throughout the plant are in the habit of discontinuing their work three-quarters of an hour before closing time, both at noon and at night. This seriously interferes with production since the processes are continuous and the production of each department depends on a steady flow of material from the preceding department. The condition has become acute at the present time, April 1919, because the company has more orders than it can fill. Commodity prices are beginning to advance again and there is general unrest among working men because of the cost of living which has increased 95% since 1914.

Wages have not been correspondingly increased, being only 90% higher than in 1914. The earning of the piece workers are being held up to standard with difficulty. The average earnings of the employees for last month, March 1919, were \$18 - \$20 per week.

The rule of the shop is that all piece workers are to remain at work until 10 minutes before quitting time. A whistle is blown at this time and the employees are allowed to leave their work to wash up. The foremen report difficulty in enforcing this rule. It is observed by about 30% of the employees who did not wash up before going out. Others take 45 minutes or less from their working time. They argue that unless they are in the washrooms they have to wait their turns and are unable to leave the shop promptly at 12 o'clock or at 5 o'clock. Frequently attempts on the part of the foremen to enforce the rule have caused temporary improvement but eventually there is a relapse to the old way.

There are 700 employees in the shop, of whom 650 are piece workers. 60% of the employees are men and 40% are women. The washrooms are small rooms containing troughs with a few faucets at intervals. This makes it necessary for the employees to wash in running water. The clothing of the employees is not kept in the washrooms but is hung on nails near the machines of the operators. The plant is five stories high and has machines in every available space. Room cannot be made in the building as it stands for a new washroom because it would involve a rearrangement of all the machinery and change in routing, the cost of which would be prohibitive. The cost of building additional floor space, however, is about \$4 per square foot.

What factors should be developed in the investigation on the part of the management? What are the general policies in accordance with which these conditions should be remedied?