

Compensation for Loom Fixers

By JAMES CHITTICK*

Loom fixers and other section hands are key men in any textile mill. They should always be handled in such a way as to promote a feeling of goodwill toward the organization. The best way to create and foster this goodwill is to give them fair treatment and fair wages, both in good times and in periods of depression. This can be done by a bonus system which gives loom fixers and overseers a personal interest in securing the highest possible production for the machinery employed. Such a system is described by the author of this article.

In reference to this subject, it must be remarked that, apart from specific rates of earnings, the methods of allotting proper compensation for work of this kind will often vary materially in different mills. The various branches of the textile industry approach the subject differently, and so there are established customs to consider which are difficult to set aside, apart from those well settled and standardized arrangements that may have been worked out between certain operators and their employers. At the same time, different customs may prevail in different parts of the country, and in districts not so very far apart at that, and individual mills in the same city, or section, will often have their own special methods of payment.

Needless to say, as a foundation for any workable and satisfactory plan, the interest of the employe must be sedulously regarded, quite as much as that of the employer, and any "sweating" methods are more than objectionable.

Regarding the suggestions herein made, what is sought is to present a method that will give the loom fixers, and their foremen, a personal interest in securing the highest output possible for the machinery employed, and for every minute it is in operation.

Under the practice which very largely exists, a section of looms is assigned to each fixer, the number of looms varying according to their type, and to the simplicity, or complexity, of the product. It is his duty to keep them in continuously good operative condition, and to mount the warps as they are needed. For this work, he receives a stated weekly wage, based on a certain number of hours of work per week. Beyond that, it usually would matter little to him if, from one cause or another, but outside of his control, many looms might be standing, which, naturally, would mean a serious loss of production to the concern. Of course, if business were very slow, the mill would either have to run on part time, or, if running on full time, would have a great many looms standing. In the first instance, the pay of each fixer might be reduced to

correspond with the less running time, or, in the second instance, some of the fixers might be laid off, while some would be kept employed.

To meet these conditions, and to give to the loom fixers and their foremen a personal interest in keeping the production up to the highest mark, the following method was devised by the writer, though, doubtless, very many other manufacturers may have employed the same principle, or even the same exact method.

Payment of Loom Fixers

We will leave out any exact rates of pay, but will deal with percentages, and we will consider the normal rate of pay which is earned by an average loom fixer, properly competent and diligent, as 100%. We will also allow, as a reasonable premise, that the machinery of the mill is of a standard character and in good condition; that the mill is well organized in all its departments; and that the materials of manufacture, warp and fillings, are of suitably good quality. The records of the mill, when taken over considerable periods of so-called "full operation," will show what has been the average yardage produced in the different sections and for different classes of goods, taken care of by the loom fixers. This yardage, by the way, will generally be considerably less than what it might have been.

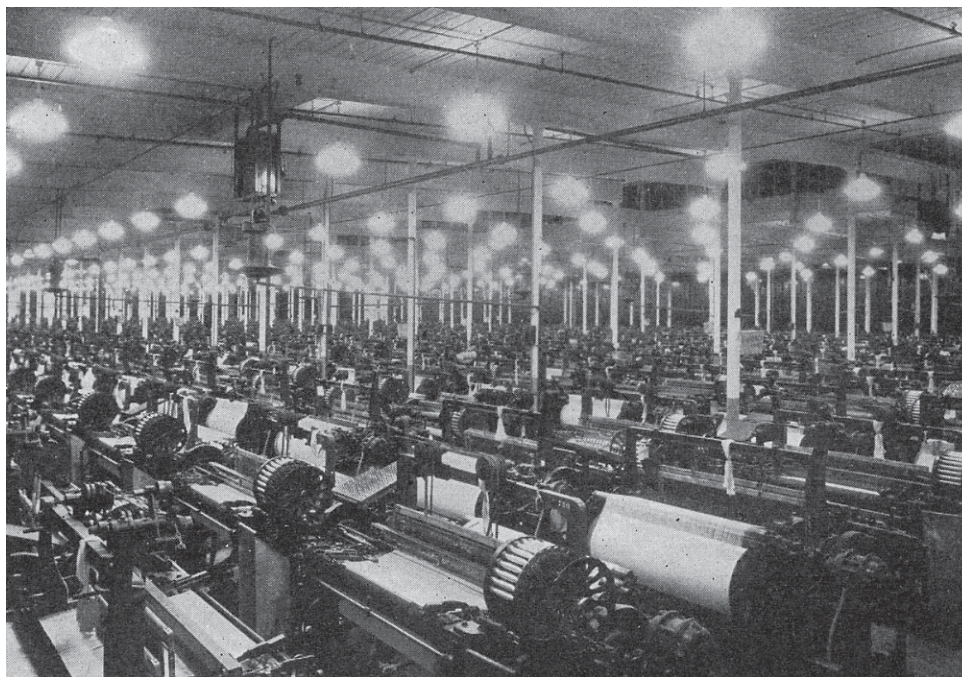
A flat weekly rate of pay for the fixers, say of 10% less than the existing rate, will be adopted. Then there will be allotted a bonus of so much per 100 yards on the cloth turned out by each section, which, under the ordinary average conditions referred to, would give the fixer a little more money than he had been regularly receiving—not over 5% more. But, with the production rising to what it might be, or should be, beyond this calculated yardage, and the bonus rate still continuing, the wages of the fixer, according to his efficiency, might rise to, say, 15% above his previous ordinary compensation. He is then pecuniarily interested in seeing that his looms are producing every yard that they can, and that, too, without any urging on the part of his foreman.

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With this inducement, the fixer, knowing exactly how many looms will be weaving down, not only in the following day or two but for many days ahead, will be keenly on the alert to see that sufficient warps are being brought forward on the floor for remounting the looms that will be running out, and this, too, several days before there would be an immediate need of them. Every day, he will make a check-up and will furnish his foreman a list of what warps seem to be lacking.

forward. This would be done several days in advance of the actual needs of the weave room. The warping foreman would then be required to hurry along the wanted warps, even if it were necessary to run his department overtime in order to catch up with the requirements. A close following up of this procedure will result in none of the looms being kept waiting for warps, which is a very common cause of decreased loom production.

Similar methods will be employed by the weave



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Payment of Overseers

The compensation of the foreman, whose ordinary pay, of course, would be substantially in excess of that of the ordinary fixers, would be arranged in a similar way to that of the fixers; that is, on a reduced flat rate, and a percentage bonus. His bonus would be based on so much per thousand yards of the product of the weave room, and he, therefore, would be just as much interested in increasing the output as the individual fixer would be. Every day he would receive the reports of the individual fixers as to their warp requirements, wherever there seemed to be an insufficient number of warps coming forward, and these lists he would take into the office of the superintendent, and ask about them. The superintendent would then take the matter up promptly with the foreman of the warping department, and would want to know what was the reason for the short supply of warps that was coming

room management in following up the supplies of filling yarn. Both as regards warps and fillings, it all too frequently happens that a weave room will be supplied with an over-plus of materials for certain looms, while there is a shortage of material for other looms, and this early pressure from the weave room, coming back on the other departments, will correct this condition.

Along the same lines of pecuniary interest, the fixer will be certain to use much more diligence than would ordinarily be the case in seeing that all the looms in his section are kept in good running condition, and that no time is lost in remounting looms that have woven down. Therefore, instead of the fixer saying to a weaver who has finished his last cut at, say ten o'clock in the morning, "Come back tomorrow morning, Henry, and your loom will be ready for you," he will say to him, "Come back at eleven o'clock" or "Come back

after luncheon time, and your loom will be ready for you." The loss of production from this easy going way is generally quite substantial.

As to the figure which may be set as a fair normal production per loom, when working on such a basis as referred to, it may be necessary, in the case of sections of looms in which fabrics of a widely different character are being woven, with different rates of production to make due allowance for such differences; but the principle involved in fixing the rates will be the same.

In the writer's experience, in the operation of a silk mill with 500 looms, this method worked out extremely well in practice, and was more than satisfactory to the fixers, who under it, regularly earned about 10% more than they otherwise would have done, and with a corresponding advantage to the mill.

Periods of Curtailed Production

When business is slack, it is highly undesirable to lay off good fixers, for they may drift elsewhere in search of work, and, when wanted again, may not be available. Under those conditions, if a lot of looms were shut down, and there was only work for half the ordinary force of fixers, the number which, under such circumstances, would ordinarily have to be laid off, are put to work on weaving, their rate of pay being the flat low limit of their pay as loom fixers. Then, each week, or each two weeks, or at whatever period would be most convenient, the fixers who have been working as weavers will go back as fixers again, and the fixers whom they thus replace will go on as weavers. Thus the work will be equitably distributed between them, and this was how it was done.

There are mills which pay their fixers on an hourly basis instead of by the week, but this method the writer does not favor, as the fixer who, of course, has his living expenses to look after, will feel much more comfortable in his mind when paid by the week than when paid by the hour. He will be able to do very much

better work than if he did not know from day to day just how much employment he would have.

Payment for Overtime

As to a little overtime work, and under ordinary conditions, it is undesirable to allot any extra pay, allowing that it occurs only occasionally. Otherwise fixers may create the necessity for overtime. Of course, if the mill were running overtime, say, for substantial periods, the fixers should be compensated proportionately to their regular earnings, but with no excess rate beyond that. Where work has to be done on Sundays or legal holidays, which, of course, is only of exceptional occurrence, they should also be paid for this proportionately, but without any excess rate. If the overtime, or excess work, is of a kind which does not reflect itself in the measured production of cloth, the rate of pay might properly be based on the previous normal prevailing loom fixer's rate. Such work as is here referred to would be, for instance, the installation of new looms, the lining of them up, and what not; the changing of belts and pulleys; the moving of machinery from one place to another; or matters of that kind.

Good loom fixers are really important men, and it is highly desirable that the mill should not only receive from them properly satisfactory work, but, also, that there will be a spirit of goodwill existing toward the organization on their part. This would naturally follow from continuity of employment, fair treatment, and a method of payment which, if they do their part, will give them a substantial increase in their earnings above the normal price paid for their class of work, when the mill is running full time. Of course, when the mill is running slack, they would then have slightly less compensation, sharing a very little in the losses of their employers. With carefully worked-out rates in the matter of these bonuses, etc., there will be increased earnings of the fixers from their own efforts, and the mill will be correspondingly benefited from the increased production that will be secured.
