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LABOR AND CAPITAL IN THE GILDED AGE

Testimony taken by the Senate Committee upon the Relations between Labor and Capital — 1883

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1880, and Willkinson Call of Florida (1834–1910), another Confederate veteran and a Senator since 1879, also avoided partisanship and participated actively in the questioning of witnesses.

But the significance of the testimony and the behavior of both the witnesses and the investigators is amply revealed in the following selections. It is time to examine the evidence.

1 WORKING CONDITIONS

Testimony of Robert D. Layton

Robert D. Layton, an axe-maker by trade, was in 1883 Grand Secretary of the Knights of Labor, at that time the largest and fastest growing labor organization in the nation. The Knights advocated industry-wide, rather than trade-oriented labor unions, and were noted for their willingness to admit women, Negroes, and unskilled agricultural workers into their ranks. Many leaders of the Knights opposed strikes, but at least by 1883, Layton did not belong to this faction. He also favored permitting trade-union groups to join the Knights of Labor without surrendering their identity.

Sen. George: Can you tell us anything in regard to the physical conditions and surroundings of the working people, their food, their clothing, and whatever occurs to you pertaining to their mode of living? — A. There are differences, of course, in those respects, depending upon the amount of wages paid. The daily laborer perhaps lives more poorly than any of the others, has the least house room and the most illy-ventilated rooms, the least means of educating his children, and the least opportunity for society and other advantages. Then comes the coal miner, who receives more wages, but who generally lives in a little two-room house. These houses are built in long rows, not painted, with no grounds and no fences about the houses, and the men deal in the companies' stores, who tax them about all they can earn for their goods. . . .

Sen. Blair: Have you visited the homes of those people? — A. I have.

Q. In what places? — A. In Pennsylvania principally. I have left the subject of the laborer now, however, and gone to the miner.

Q. Don't you consider him a laborer? — A. Well, more skill enters into his occupation. A "laborer" is not supposed to be a miner or to be able to dig coal. A man must have been taught the business before he can be regarded as a miner, and the business is more intricate and difficult to learn in some places than in others.

Sen. Blair: As I am using the term laborer, it applies to all classes who perform manual work.

The Witness: It is all labor; but we usually divide it into skilled and unskilled labor. The work of the miner is skilled labor to a certain extent.

I have seen the laborers along the Monongahela and the Allegheny Rivers, and down the Pan-Handle Railroad toward Wheeling, and in fact at all points on the roads leading out of Pittsburgh. The houses of those men as a rule consist, as I have said, of two rooms — one upstairs and the other downstairs. The houses are built in long rows without paint on the outside. The kitchen furniture consists generally of a stove and some dishes, a few chairs and a table. They have no carpets on the floors so far as I have seen. I am speaking now about the lower parts of the houses; I don't know about upstairs.

Sen. George: Is the kitchen in the lower room of the house or is it separate? — A. In the lower room. In many instances there are no cellars under the houses. If there were cellars the miners would be enabled to lay in a stock of supplies.

Sen. Blair: Of what material are the houses usually built? — A. They are always frame houses. I cannot recall an instance of one being built of any other material than wood.

Sen. George: Are they plastered inside? — A. In some instances they are and in others they are not.

Sen. Blair: How are they as to warmth? — A. Living as these people do in the coal regions, the children can run out and gather enough fuel to keep the houses warm, and I never knew any of them to suffer from cold.

Sen. George: Can you describe the furniture a little more fully? — A. I think I have given you pretty nearly all the articles of furniture that they have in their house — a stove and the utensils that go with it.

Q. The sleeping apartment is upstairs I suppose? — A. Yes, sir; but in some instances where the family is large it is downstairs in the kitchen.

Sen. Blair: What kind of beds do the miners have? — A. I never slept among them and do not know.

Sen. George: Is the kitchen also the sitting room of the family? — A. Yes, sir; it is the sitting room, kitchen, and parlor.

Q. And library? — A. And library. Sometimes they have some little pictures on the walls.

Sen. Blair: What kind of pictures? — A. Oh, some little chromos or prints.

Q. Does the miner usually have a newspaper? — A. Yes, sir; wherever he can afford it.

Q. He is usually an intelligent man? — A. Yes; he generally can read.

Q. How are they supplied as to clothing? — A. Well, it is absolutely necessary for a miner to have two suits. The one that he wears when working in the mine is of the poorest quality, and usually very black and dirty, and then he has an ordinary suit of clothes besides.

Q. How are his wife and children clothed? — A. They are clad in the plainest possible garments, as a rule.

Q. What wages does the miner get generally? — A. The wages may average $2.00 or $2.50 a day; but, dealing in these truck-stores, when the end of the month comes around he generally has very little left. I have known some of them to receive in actual money at the end of the month $.35 after the rent was taken out.

Sen. George: Are they charged rent for those houses? — A. Oh, yes.

Sen. Blair: What amount of rent? — A. All the way from $4 up to $8 or $9 a month. Some of the houses have more rooms than two, but in the majority of cases they have only two rooms. If the upper floors are partitioned I don't know the fact.

Sen. George: What is the usual size of the lower room? — A. About 15 by 18 feet, or 18 by 20 feet, or something of that kind. I have no distinct recollection of ever seeing one of those houses with a cellar under it.

Q. How are they usually warmed, with a stove or with a fireplace? — A. Usually by a cook-stove.

Q. Is that the only heating apparatus they have? — A. Generally, I think. I don't know whether they have any upstairs or not, for I have never been upstairs in any of the houses, but that is the whole of the heating apparatus downstairs.

Sen. Blair: How are those people situated as to school privileges? — A. Usually the miner in the soft-coal regions, and I think in our hard-coal regions, too, puts his boys to work in the mine very young. I have observed boys of from eight to fourteen years of age working in the hard-coal region, and in the soft-coal mines boys of ten or twelve years of age are able to assist their parents materially in the mine, and unless the miner has a large number of them his boys are usually employed in that way helping their father. If there are only one or two boys in the family the father generally takes them into the mine with him. They go to school some, but their means of education is very limited.

Q. Is that because the father prefers that the boys should assist him in his work or because of a lack of school privileges? — A. The school privileges are generally good enough, but absolute necessity compels the father in many instances to take the child into the mine with him to assist in winning bread for the family.

Q. There is no compulsory school law in Pennsylvania, is there? — A. No, sir. . . .

Q. Do any of those miners ever accumulate any money? — A. There are some instances of that, exceptional cases — as there are in almost every occupation — cases where miners have accumulated a little funds.

Q. What are the personal habits of the miner generally as to economy or a disposition to save his wages? — A. He gets so very little to save from that he rarely saves anything. His desire may be to economize, but his opportunities for it are so poor that he seldom is able to accumulate any savings, let his desire for economy be ever so great.

Q. You call the miner a skilled laborer to some extent. Is there any

other class of laborers in or about the mine whose wages are still lower than those of the miner? — A. Yes; but such work is usually done by young boys. Such work as driving the mules in the pit is done generally by the children of the miners. I am speaking of places where they use mules. Some places they do not use them, but dip the coal and permit the miner to push the car along. . . .

When you leave the miner and go to the iron-worker, the man who works in the iron-mills, you find the social condition and surroundings somewhat improved — more home comforts, more of the little things that go to make a home comfortable and pleasant. The iron-worker has usually more room and better furniture, carpets, and so on, and his children are better clothed, in garments neater and of better quality. The iron-workers have the advantages of the markets in the large centers of industry, the cities, so that they can get a greater variety of food and are not confined, like the miners in isolated situations, to perhaps a visit from the butcher once or twice a week. They eat more fresh beef as a general thing, and as I have said; have usually more living room and that more comfortably furnished. But if you go among the laborers employed in the iron-mills you will find them huddled together in tenement houses and no more comfortable than the miners.

Sen. George: Please state the distinction between the iron-worker and the laborer in the iron mills. — A. The laborer there performs the heavy work, the unskilled work, and waits upon the skilled worker, the iron-worker. The laborers receive from $1.00 to $1.25, or perhaps sometimes $1.75, a day. When we speak of a "laborer" in the iron-works, it is understood that we do not mean a man who performs any skilled labor. When you get above the laborer the men are designated by the character of the particular work in which they are engaged; they are called "rollers," "finishers," etc., and are skilled laborers. . . .

Q. To go back to the houses, you have described them as being in very close juxtaposition and very near the works. What grounds have they around them, what shade, what grass, what opportunities for the children of the family to have outdoor recreation? — A. If there is any grass on the south side of Pittsburgh attached to a tenement house it is in a little box sitting on the windowsill. I do not know of any existing on the earth. They would have to take up a brick to sow the grass, if they had any. I know numbers of houses where the backyard of each is not more than 8 feet by 10, and that is allowing more territory than many of the landlords do.

Q. What opportunities have the children under ten or twelve years of age, who are too small to work in the factories, for outdoor recreation? What playgrounds have they? — A. They have to play right on the street.

Q. They are street children? — A. They are compelled to play on the streets. They have no other place. For outdoor exercise they take the pavement in the middle of the street. What little ball-playing they indulge in is done on the streets at the risk of breaking windows and being stopped summarily by the police.

Q. They are exposed to danger, too, from carriages, wagons, and drays, I suppose? — A. Yes, sir; and there are occasional accidents. Usually, though, the little shavers are on the look-out for anything of that kind and contrive to avoid it.

Q. Playing in the street is common? — A. Yes, sir; there is no place else to play. When they go to school they have a large yard to play in during the recess.

Q. What opportunities have men who live in these tenement houses and their families for recreation on Sundays and holidays? What resorts have they? Where do they go to? Do they stay in their houses, or do they go out into the country, or into the parks? . . . I want to know what they usually do? — A. Well, usually they are tired and they stay at home. They may walk around sometimes on Sunday to see a friend, or they may go to church, but if they don't do that they stay at home and rest. . . .

Q. I have an idea that the life of a coal miner is very disagreeable. Now, why do men go into that business? Is it because of the high wages paid, or what is the reason? — A. Well, some person has to dig our coal, and the only way to get it out is to go down into the bowels of the earth after it.

Q. Then it is the exceptionally high wages that induce men to engage in the business? — A. No; men are born to it; their fathers worked in the mines, and they began life in that way and never did anything else; they inherited it, as you may say.

Sen. Blair: Really, then, they are an utterly helpless class so far as they are themselves concerned; they must remain in their present position unless others lift them out? — A. I do not know how you can lift them out of the dirt of the businesss. I do not know how coal can be got out cleanly.

Sen. George: I had the idea that men were seduced into that sort of employment by extraordinarily remunerative wages? — A. The average miner's earnings, as I think will be shown to you, do not amount to more than $350 a year. That is the seductive compensation given to the miner for spending the greater portion of his life in utter darkness. In Pennsylvania the miners and other citizens had a law enacted at the last session of our general assembly prohibiting these truck stores of which I have been speaking — "pluck-me" stores, as the operatives call them; they are known universally by that name in the mining regions — we had a law passed, I say, to prohibit such stores, but our able constitutional lawyers, I believe, found holes in it, and the institutions continue. . . .

Sen. Blair: The effect of these "pluck-me" stores is, I suppose, to

largely decrease the actual rate of wages received by the men, by reason of the higher prices that they are compelled to pay for everything they buy? — A. Yes, sir. I know a miner who told me that when flour was selling for $2.00 a sack in the city he was paying at one of these stores, eight miles from the city, $2.50 a sack.

Q. How many pounds are in a sack? — A. Fifty.

Q. That was a difference of 25 percent? — A. Yes, sir.

Q. The transportation that distance could scarcely amount to anything? — A. No, sir; the cost of it must have been very slight.

Q. I suppose that the meats and provisions of all kinds, the clothing and the material for clothing, and all the necessaries of life are subject to the same rule? — A. Yes.

Q. Do the operators furnish everything? — A. Yes, sir; everything that the miners may need, their groceries, boots and shoes, calicoes, and everything of that kind. The "pluck-me" store is a general store. . . .

Q. Can you give us some instances of the obnoxious rules of which you speak? — A. Yes; one instance was on the part of a large firm of carriage manufacturers at Rochester, N.Y. — James Cunningham, Sons & Co. Just a year ago this month their men rebelled against certain rules that they had established in their works — rules degrading to human nature. For instance, the faucets in the water sinks were locked up, and when an employee wanted a drink of water he had to go to the foreman of his department and ask for a drink; the foreman went and unlocked the faucet and gave him a cupful of water, and whether that was enough to satisfy his thirst or not, it was all he got. When the men entered in the morning they were numbered by checks. A man lost his identity as a man and took a number like a prisoner in a penitentiary. The checks ran up to five hundred and something. If a man worked in the third or fourth story of the building (it was a large, high building), and if he was an old man — for they had a good many old men doing light work — when the bell rang for dinner he was obliged to walk down several pairs of stairs, take off his check and then walk up stairs again to eat his dinner, and when he got done he had to walk down again and put on the check before the bell rang for afternoon work. In that way they knew just when a man came in or went out. Then, if a man was a pieceworker there, and got through his work at half past two or three o'clock, he was not permitted to leave the building until the regular time — six o'clock. No matter when he got through with his work, he had to stay there in dirt and discomfort, and could not go home or go out until six o'clock in the evening. Another obnoxious rule was that if a man was half or even quarter of a minute late he was shut out. They had a gate and it would be shut down upon a man even when he was going in, sometimes so quickly that he would hardly have time to draw his foot back to keep it from being crushed by the gate, and that man would be kept out until nine o'clock, so that he would make only three-quarters of a day's work. The rule was that the men had to be *in* the works before the whistle blew. . . .

Our miners almost universally complain of being cheated in the amount of coal that they take out. That is another cause of great aggravation and disturbance. In some mines, they dig and get pay for the "run of the bank" — that is, slack and lump and nut coal all go in together at so much a ton. In other mines the miners are paid for simply the lump coal; and all the rest is deducted. The men have to dig the other kinds for nothing, getting so much a bushel for the lump coal only — coal that is not large enough to go through the screen. The size of the screen is regulated by law in Pennsylvania, but as you proceed in this investigation we will produce witnesses who will prove that the screens are often half an inch larger than the size the law prescribes. The screen is made of long bars of iron, and the coal runs down, over, and between them. . . .

Q. Go on and give us the "true inwardness" of the thing, so far as you can, in your own way. — A. As to wages, I presume there always has been, and to a certain extent always will be, a difference as long as self-interest controls. . . . But so far as we can understand our wants, and describe them, as I learn from gentlemen with whom I am in communication, there is a large lack of confidence existing between the employers and the employed. It is a truth so self-evident that there is no hiding it at all, that as a rule the employed can never get an advance in wages without either entering upon a strike, of longer or shorter duration, or at least threatening a strike. That I believe would be the universal testimony of all who have ever been connected with labor organizations. We have known the employers to go on prospering, to grow richer and richer, to live in larger residences and travel more extensively, with their family expenditures constantly increasing, yet all the time, when approached for an increase of wages, they would declare that they were making nothing. That one fact alone destroys the confidence that should exist between employer and employed and causes many of the strikes in this country.

Sen. George: The employee thinks, as I understand you, that his prosperity ought to increase with that of his employer? — A. He not only thinks so, but he absolutely knows that it should. That thought, however, is never realized except by either striking or threatening to strike. The great majority of cases are controlled in that way. . . .

Testimony of Samuel Gompers

Samuel Gompers, who was soon (1886) to become one of the founders and the first president of the American Federation of Labor, was a cigar-maker. English by birth, he migrated to the

United States in 1863, settling in New York City. He was much influenced by the writings of Karl Marx and other socialists, but after taking part in a bitter but unsuccessful strike in 1877, which had been called in an attempt to force the abolition of sweatshops, he decided that workers could best improve their lot not by seeking broad social reforms but by organizing into strong trade unions. By creating such organizations, he believed, workers could force their employers to raise wages, reduce hours, and otherwise improve working conditions. Although for a time a member of the Knights of Labor, Gompers insisted that effective unionization could only be achieved on the basis of individual skilled trades.

The Witness: . . . I will not start with the organizations. I would rather speak first of the general condition of labor as I find it, as I know it and believe it to be.

Sen. Blair: Well, take up the subject in your own way, but before you get through I would like you to answer the question I have put with regard to the extent and the actual objects and results of these organizations. — A. Oh, certainly; I shall endeavor to give you that to the best of my ability. The condition of the working people appears to be coming to what may rightly be termed a focus. On the one hand it would be well to note the underlying motives that frequently break out in what are generally termed strikes. Strikes are the result of a condition, and are not, as is generally or frequently understood, the cause. For instance, in the State of Massachusetts they have a ten-hour law, intended to benefit the female and child operatives there, yet the employers (and the same is true in Cohoes, in this State, and other places where the hours of labor are recognized as settled) or their agents start up the mills several minutes, sometimes seven, eight, nine, or ten minutes, before the time for commencing to work according to rule and law. In other instances they close them at "noon" several minutes after twelve o'clock and open them again several minutes before the hour, or half hour rather, has elapsed, closing again for the day several minutes after the rule requires. These employers are pretty well described by some of the English economists and labor advocates — not labor advocates, but men who have made economic questions a study; they call them "minute thieves." . . .

In the branch of industry in which I work we have a bane to contend with, a curse, known as the manufacturing of cigars in tenement houses, in which the employer hires a row of tenements four or fives stories high, with two, three, or four families living on each floor, occupying a room and bedroom, or a room, bedroom, and an apology for a kitchen. The tobacco for the work is given out by the manufacturer or his superintendent to the operatives who work there, the husband and wife, and they seldom work without one or more of their children, if they have any. Even their parents, if they have any, work also in the room, and any indigent relative that may live with them also helps along. I myself made an investigation of these houses about two years ago; went through them and made measurements of them, and found that however clean the people might desire to be they could not be so. The bedroom is generally dark, and contains all the wet tobacco that is not intended for immediate use, but perhaps for use on the following day; while in the front room (or back room, as the case may be) the husband and wife and child, or any friend or relative that works with them, three or four or five persons, are to be found. Each has a table at which to work. The tobacco which they work and the clippings or cuttings, as they are termed, are lying around the floor, while the scrap or clip that is intended to be used immediately for the making of cigars is lying about to dry. Children are playing about, as well as their puny health will permit them, in the tobacco. I have found, I believe, the most miserable conditions prevailing in those houses that I have seen at any time in my life.

Q. How many families are thus engaged in the manufacture of cigars in this city? — A. Between 1,900 and 2,000. The lowest ascertained number was 1,920 families. That was about five or six months ago.

Q. About 10,000 people, taking the average to a family of five? — A. Probably. These rooms I found to be, the main room, in which they work, about 12 feet by 8 or 9; the height of ceiling generally about 7 feet 6 inches to 8 feet 2 inches. It may probably be in order for me to state how I ascertained the height of these places. If I had gone in my true character as an investigator of the conditions pervading these houses I would not have been admitted into them. I, however, assumed the character of a book agent, and endeavored to sell Charles Dickens's works; and, by a practice of calculating the dimensions of small rooms, that I had undertaken and continued for several weeks, I found that the rooms in those tenements varied so very little that the differences between the different rooms could easily be estimated.

Sen. George: What was the size of the bedrooms? — A. The bedrooms were generally 6 feet by 8, or, in some instances, less. The kitchen was generally what is known in New York tenements as "dark" — an intermediate room. There is, first, the front or back room, as the case may be, then the kitchen, which has no light, and then another room in the back, which has no ventilation whatever except an aperture about 2 feet square in the side, and leading into a hall which leads into the street or the yard.

Q. The kitchen is not so large as the front room? — A. Not so long; it is as wide, generally.

Q. There is a narrow hall, making four families on each floor? — A. Four families on each floor.

Q. In what condition were the yards? — A. I made an investigation into that also, and found that the yards were all dirty. The halls were kept

very dirty with tobacco stems and refuse that accumulates from the tobacco. In one instance it bordered on the ludicrous. There was a sign, "Keep off the grass!" The only "grass" that I could see was the green paint on the walls and the tobacco stems lying around by the hundred weight. The water closets are all vaults, in very few places connected with sewers, vaults in the backyard, around which a few boards have been nailed and the places termed "water closets." The water supply is very meager indeed.

Q. How many stories high are the buildings? — A. Four, generally; sometimes higher.

Q. Is there a water closet for each family? — A. No; there are generally two or three private closets, which are locked and keys given to, probably, one closet for two, three, or four families, there being not more than three or four water closets for all the families in the building. On the lower floor or basement generally in those houses there are stores, sometimes grocery stores or lager-beer saloons, or second-hand furniture stores, or Chinese laundries.

Q. Do you mean to say that about 1,900 families, engaged in the manufacture of cigars, live in the manner which you have just described? — A. Four-fifths of them, I think. Within this last year one of the manufacturers has endeavored to build a row of houses that are an improvement upon the old ones; but notwithstanding all attempts to keep these places clean, that is impossible, in consequence of the long hours of toil and the fact that all of the family are employed right at the work of cigar-making. . . .

The Cigar-makers' International Union adopted a system of agitation against the tenement-house cigar manufacture some years ago, believing that it was a public nuisance, and the press of the city of New York, together with that of the entire country, took this matter in hand, discussed it ably, exposed the iniquity of the system and the greed and avarice to which many men will resort in unfair competition, even with their fairer rivals in the trade. The opinions of the press, several of them, were extracted and printed by us and spread broadcast. I do not know that they may be of any importance, but this one from the *New York Sun* says, speaking of certain of these tenements:

> From cellar to attic the business carried on is the stripping of tobacco or the manufacture of cigars; women as well as men, girls as well as boys, toiling for life in an atmosphere thick with tobacco dust and reeking with odors too foul to be described. All this illustrates how one may start an extensive cigar and tobacco factory without investing in buildings and appliances.

The New York *Staats Zeitung* said:

> The manufacture of cigars is one of the most important industries in our city, and tens of thousands of our working population make, directly or indirectly, their living in the tobacco industry. Circumstances impeding this industry must therefore affect also the prosperity of the city in general.
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> That the manufacturer in tenement houses can underbid other tobacco manufacturers is in the first place possible by compelling their workmen to pay the rent for factory rooms. Every other manufacturer has to pay high rents, taxes, etc., for his factory rooms; while the manufacturer in tenement houses not only pays nothing therefor, but the subletting of the rooms yields him perhaps a surplus income. In addition to saving his expense he makes additional extra profits by means of low wages. He is not, like other manufacturers, confined to certain working hours; the law against the employment of children under fourteen years of age is a dead letter for his tenement-house factories; the workingman, whose landlord he is at the same time, is much more dependent upon him. The workingman cannot quit work without being thrown into the street; when he is refractory, the manufacturer raises the rent, or assigns him to poorer rooms; in short, he has a great many more means to oppress the workingman. The wages are so regulated that the whole family must assist in working; that women, young girls, and children, without regard to age, bodily development, mental education, must year after year, on Sunday and weekday, work hard in an atmosphere pestered by poisonous tobacco dust to earn the money necessary for the high rent and the direct necessities of life.
>
> The manufacturer is getting rich, though he sells cheaper than his competitors. But he obtains his favorable position at the expense of the health, morals, and manliness of his workingmen, and the system thereby becomes an aggravated nuisance. The system is not only a pecuniary injury to a great many; to enrich a few it is a social as well as an economical evil. Hundreds of medical testimonials prove the injurious effects which the work has in ill-ventilated factories upon workingmen, and all these consequences are much stronger in tenement houses where the working room is at the same time used for dwelling purposes. This kind of work is especially injurious to the health of women. Out of 100 girls of the age of twelve to sixteen years, 72 in the average become sick after six months' work. In tenement houses where cigars are manufactured there are only 1.09 to 1.63 children to every married couple, and the mortality is about twenty per cent. greater than in other tenement houses. Surely this evil ought to be remedied. It endangers the whole society, inasmuch as infectious diseases, as scarlet fever, etc., when occurring in such houses, may be spread all over the city by means of cigars manufactured in the room of sick cigar-makers. One physician states from his own experience that in the same room where persons were suffering from small-pox the manufacture of cigars was continued until the board of health interfered. Other physicians have seen that persons suffering from diphtheria continue to make cigars. This is a direct danger to all citizens.
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> Furthermore, the children in such houses grow up without sufficient education; the dense population, the working in dwelling rooms, the unreasonable extension of the working hours, the working on Sundays, endangers the morals and the education of adult persons. Low wages and insufficient control induces to smaller or greater embezzlements and evasions of the revenue laws.
>
> Continually dirty surroundings prove also in this case to be detrimental to good morals. These evils are so apparent that, as the House-owners' Association has demonstrated, a tenement house in which cigars are manufactured decreases the value of the adjoining real estate. . . .

Q. What is your personal observation as compared with that state-

ment? — A. I think there are a larger number of children to a family, and that this is rather an underestimate. . . .

I visited Cohoes, N.Y., during the strike there, about a year ago. That strike was organized against a proposed reduction of 10 percent in the operatives' wages. There were certain conditions surrounding the people in Cohoes that struck me very forcibly. On meeting the committee who received me (as I had been invited to attend), I made inquiries as to an immense building which I saw in the town, that being the first time I had visited Cohoes, and upon all hands was I informed, "That belongs to the Harmony Mills." Inquiring further as to another building, I was told, "That belongs to the Harmony Company." Everything belonged to the Harmony Company. The hotel was the Harmony Hotel. The boardinghouses were Harmony boardinghouses; the tenements in which the people lived belonged to the Harmony Company. The water is controlled by the Harmony Company. The waterpower by which the mills are run, the water which the people drink, the water which the other manufacturers are compelled to use, all is under the control of the Harmony Company.

Sen. Pugh: How many persons are there in the employ of that company? — A. Over 5,000.

Q. Where is Cohoes? — A. It is within an hour's travel from Albany, on the Mohawk River. As to the church there, I am informed that the minister in that church is a brother-in-law of the superintendent of the Harmony Mills. When the Harmony Company are in want of water to run their mills, and the people want water to drink, they have to go thirsty and the mills are run.

Sen. Blair: Is the water supply of the town taken from the river? — A. From the river; supplied through works first constructed by the Harmony Company.

Q. Are the city and the Harmony Company substantially identical? Does the company own the city pretty much? — A. Pretty much.

Q. Has not the city, the municipality, any reasonable opportunity of freeing itself of this dependence for water upon the Harmony Company? Can they not get a supply of water elsewhere? — A. Not very easily. I think it would require a great outlay, more than the people of Cohoes would be able to bear, outside of the interest of the Harmony Company. I was informed while there that several attempts had been made to start competitive mills in Cohoes, but that in consequence of the ownership by the Harmony Company, and their control of the water supply of Cohoes, competition was strangled at once; and while I have not traveled very extensively, I have seen some mills, and I am of opinion that no greater water facilities exist in this country than in Cohoes for the running of mills.

Q. I interrupted your statement to draw closer attention to your assertion that when water was scarce the people went thirsty in order that the mills might run. You, perhaps, were never thirsty in that city yourself, but you may know of the complaints of people who reside there. I would like to know what your information is on that point. — A. The complaints were general. Of course scarcity of water in a place of so few inhabitants is not apt to occur very frequently, but when it does occur, and it has occurred several times, then complaint is general.

Q. Then the dearth is of water for purposes of cleanliness and ablution, rather than for drinking? — A. Sometimes it is.

Q. But still you do understand that the corporation restricts the people in the necessary amount of water for sanitary purposes? — A. No, sir, I do not; but I say that when there is a natural drought or scarcity of water they do. I do not wish to be understood as saying that the Harmony Company are willfully depriving the people of water, but that when there is a natural scarcity of water they first run the mills, even though the people have to go dirty and thirsty.

Q. That you understand from common conversation and from complaints that you have heard yourself? — A. Yes, sir.

Q. Complaints that you have heard on the ground? — A. Yes, sir; during my visit there.

Q. Was that a time of scarcity of water or not? — A. I could not answer that question.

Q. Do you believe that statement? — A. If I did not believe it, if I did not place some credit in it, I would not mention it.

Q. You think it is a fact? — A. Yes, sir.

Q. It satisfies your own judgment as a true statement? — A. Yes, sir; I believe it to be a truth; I have no reason to doubt it; I made inquiries after the persons told me that, and the statements were verified. I will say, by the way, that so much was I impressed with the information continually given that this and that and the other thing belonged to Harmony Mills, that although I am not on a poetical turn of mind I paraphrased Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade," so that instead of "cannon to right of them, cannon to left of them," it was "Harmony to right of them, Harmony to left of them." The operatives there were striking against a reduction of 10 percent in wages which was proposed, notwithstanding the fact that during that period we had had the greatest era of prosperity that this country had known. . . .

I will proceed now to another branch of inquiry, in reference to one of the most hardworked class of people under the sun, the freight-handlers of the city of New York. They are a body of men, very sinewy, working for $.17 an hour for the railroad corporations. Last year they had the hardihood to ask for three cents more an hour, making $.20 an hour, when the railroads informed them that they would not pay it. The freight-handlers were, after a struggle, starved into submission, and are working now for $.17 an hour.

Q. Now, you are here and see these people: what sort of life does a

freight-handler have on $.17 an hour? — A. He generally lives in very poor quarters; his home is but scantily furnished; he can eat only of the coarsest food; his children, like too many others, are frequently brought into the factories at a very tender age; in some instances his wife takes in sewing and does chores for other people, while in other instances that I know of they work in a few of the remaining laundries where women are still engaged, the work not having been absorbed by the Chinese. By this means the home, of course, is broken up; indeed there is hardly the semblance of a home, and in these instances where the wife goes out to work no meal is cooked. Many of the stores have for sale dried meats or herrings, cheese, or some other article which does not require any cooking. Of course, when the wife is at home although the living is very poor, it is cooked; she cooks what can be purchased with the portion of the $.17 per hour remaining after the payment of rent, and the cost of light, fuel, etc. . . .

The car-drivers of the city of New York are working from fourteen to sixteen hours a day in all weathers, and receive $1.75 a day.

Q. Now, why is not that enough? — A. Because it will not purchase the commonest necessaries of life.

Q. You understand, of course, that my question is designed to draw you out fully in regard to that class of workmen, their condition, etc. I understand your assertion to be that it is not enough; it does not seem to me, either, that it is enough; but I want to know from you what chance a man has to live on $1.75 a day? — A. He has this chance: his meals are served to him by his wife or friend or child, as the case may be, in a kettle, while he is driving his team, and at the end of the route he may possibly have two or three minutes to swallow his food. It is nothing more than swallowing it, and when he comes home he is probably too tired or perhaps too hungry to eat.

Q. There is no cessation in his work during the day of any consequence, then? — A. If there is, that which is termed relays or switches, he has still the same number of hours to work.

Q. Do you mean that that is deducted from his fourteen or sixteen hours? — A. Yes, sir.

Q. Then, if the relays amounted to an hour, he would be absent from his home seventeen hours? — A. Yes, sir.

Q. And if two hours, eighteen? — A. Yes, sir. And in the matter of these relays, in some instances men who do not and cannot live, on account of the meagerness of their wages, on the route of the railroad, are compelled to live at some distance, and when they have these relays or switches it takes them sometimes twenty or thirty minutes to reach their homes, and to return again takes another half or three-quarters of an hour.

Q. Then, do I understand you that these relays and the time occupied morning and evening going to and returning from their work are to be added to the fourteen or sixteen hours of actual service required? — A. The actual service is from fourteen to fifteen hours. Then there is the looking after their horses and cleaning the car besides.

Q. From the time that a car-driver leaves home in the morning until he returns for the night how much of the twenty-four hours will ordinarily be consumed? — A. I cannot tell you exactly as to how long a time they have at home, for the reason that it depends to some extent upon how far they live from the route of travel.

Q. State it approximately as near as you can. — A. Well, I do not believe that they have more than seven and a half hours out of the twenty-four.

Sen. Call: At what hour in the morning do they commence ordinarily, and what time do they quit? — A. Several of the street railroads of this city run all day and night; and on those, of course, the men commence at various hours. During the day the traffic on some routes is not so much as on others, and then they will be relayed; and, although they may go on to work at five o'clock in the morning, they probably would not get off before eleven or twelve o'clock at night, or probably later still. I would not say later still positively, but I think in some instances later.

Sen. Pugh: Have they ever been paid higher wages? — A. Yes, sir. About two years ago they were on a strike to obtain, I think, $2.00 a day, but were starved into submission.

Q. What do they get now? — A. One dollar and seventy-five cents.

Sen. George: Does the conductor get the same wages, or more? — A. I think he gets $.25 more, by reason of his position of trust.

Sen. Blair: Have you any knowledge with regard to those who operate the elevated railways? — A. The men who work at ticket collecting or at the boxes where the tickets are deposited receive $1.25 a day, I think. I would rather wait until I can give you information definitely. I think I can do so now, but I prefer to wait.

Sen. George: Are the car-drivers allowed to have seats? — A. They are not. They have to stand all the time.

Sen. Call: How many hours do they stand? — A. Fourteen or fifteen.

Q. Do you mean fourteen hours' standing without intermission? — A. Very little intermission. They sometimes rest back against the door of the car for a while. They also, in some instances, have to act as conductors; that is, give change, count the passengers, and register the number of passengers on an indicator. And then they are sometimes held responsible when somebody is run over on account, perhaps, of their having to perform two men's work. The greed of the horse-railroad companies has been such that they have introduced on several lines what is known as the bobtailed car, and have dispensed with the services of a conductor.

Sen. Blair: Don't you think that is because they cannot afford to pay any more? — A. I hardly believe that. Judging from the traffic, they are capable of paying it, and judging from what is currently reported as their

dividends, they are more than capable of paying it. I must acknowledge, though, that so far as their dividends are concerned, I am personally uninformed. I take merely current rumor and the appearance of the traffic, the number of passengers I see on the cars.

Among some of the tailoresses in the city I have made a personal investigation. They make a regular heavy pantaloon, working pants, for $.07 a pair. They are capable of making ten pairs per day of twelve hours. Boys' pantaloons they make for $.05 to $.06 per pair, making fourteen to sixteen pairs per day of twelve hours. They work mostly seven full days in the week; sometimes they will stop on Sunday afternoon, but all work on Sunday, and their average weekly wages is about $3.81, providing no time is lost.

They are compelled to provide their own cotton out of this, and their own needles and thimbles, and other small things that are necessary in the work. Overalls and jumpers (a kind of calico jacket used by laborers in warm weather sometimes, to prevent the dirt getting to the shirt or underclothing) they make for $.30 to $.35 per dozen. They generally work in "teams" of two, and they make about three dozen per day, or in a working day of thirteen to fifteen hours they earn from $.45 to $.52½ each. They work generally in the shop, but usually finish some work at home on Sunday.

In the manufacture of cigars in shops there is a branch termed "stripping." I am not sure as to these statistics that I am going to give you, but I believe them to be correct. Nine-tenths of these strippers, or about that proportion, are females. Their average hours of labor are ten per day. Their wages range between $3 and $7 a week when at work. About one-half of these girls are employed at the former wage, but two-thirds at $5 a week, and the remaining third at a higher wage.

They lose days and weeks' work frequently, or have lost them in the past more than at present, and in very rare instances are they paid for loss of time, even when it is caused by national or other holidays. In the shops, more especially the larger ones, they are prohibited from holding any conversation under pain of fine or dismissal. Even if they were disposed to converse they could not. The very positions in which they work, or are placed to work (which are not necessary to the work), in long rows, in which each faces the back of the girl in front of her, precludes them from holding conversation. They suffer in every way the disciplinary measures of imprisonment at hard labor. They cannot hold conversation. One sits with her face to the back of the other, and that is the rule in almost all the factories. Where there are only a few of them of course it makes very little difference. It is believed that this plan of placing them gets more work out of them. . . .

Q. Now, about the newsboys and the other little fellows that we see around the streets, the bootblacks. Those little waifs seem to be pretty busy doing something all the time. What pay do they get out of their labors — how do they live? — A. Well, the newsboys earn very small sums. I do not believe more than one-half of them live at home with their parents. The others, out of the papers they sell or earn, try to purchase a ticket for some variety show, and buy cigarettes, of course, and keep just sufficient to get a meal in a five-cent restaurant and to pay their lodging in a newsboys' lodging-house, which costs about half a dollar a week.

Q. What chance is there of their attending school? — A. Without answering that question I would like to make a statement that I read in one of the papers (and the paper said that the superintendent of the Newsboys' Home acknowledged it to be true) that the newsboys were required to pay for one week's lodging in advance; that one boy was taken sick while in the lodging-house, and sent to the hospital after the second night of the week for which he had paid, and when he came out of the hospital he thought that he had five nights good yet to sleep in the lodging-house, but when he came there he was informed that he had forfeited that money by not sleeping in the lodging-house during the week. . . .

Q. Are the newsboys employed by the newspapers, or do they just get so much for every paper they sell? — A. They get so much for every paper they sell, and sometimes a man can buy two-cent papers for a penny. Some will offer you two papers for a cent.

Q. When they have a supply left which they do not sell what becomes of it? — A. It is their own loss.

Sen. George: They buy the papers themselves and make what they can? — A. Yes, sir; and it is quite a sight to see some of the boys running after the wagons that contain the papers, the evening papers more especially; to see one hundred or two hundred of them, and as one drops off that has been served with his papers another one takes his place, the others coming up continually and keeping up the crowd. If the poor boys were on the point of starvation and their only hope of life was in that wagon I do not believe they could run much faster or risk their lives much more than they do sometimes.

Q. How about the bootblacks? — A. How the bootblacks do I cannot say, any more than their position in life is very hard.

Q. Does the newsboy get a chance for school at all? — A. I do not see where that comes in, except that possibly one here and there may have an opportunity of going to a night school, and that, I think, is not generally taken advantage of by them. The boy fails to see the importance of an education himself, and there are very few who are willing to lend a hand to guide him. . . .

Sen. Pugh: What is your opinion as to whether that idea of regarding the laborer as a machine exists more now than it has existed in the past?