

PRISON LABOR

A Special Committee of Toronto
T. and L. Council

INVESTIGATE AND REPORT ON THE MATTER.

Your committee respectfully submit as follows: Referring to the circumstances which called this committee into existence, we would remind the Council that at the annual meeting of the Dominion Trades and Labor Congress, held at Quebec August-September, 1891, the following resolution was passed, viz.: "That it is desirable in the interest of the working classes that all articles manufactured in prisons or reformatories should be exported and sold in foreign markets, instead of being brought into competition with the products of private industries in the Canadian market, and that the Federal and Provincial Governments be requested to so dispose of prison products."

It was felt at the time by this body that that resolution was somewhat crude and illogical, and that it did not properly voice the sentiments of organized labor on the important question of prison labor. And that, as a solution of the problem, it was, in fact, no solution at all. A further expression of opinion on the matter was felt to be desirable, and hence the formation of this committee. At the outset your committee fully realized that they had a formidable question to grapple with and one that has engaged the attention of thinking men and reformers for many years past. And even now no one would be bold enough to say that he had arrived at a final solution of the whole difficulty.

Therefore, in submitting this their report as the result of their labors in their attempt to find the path that will ultimately lead, as they hope, to a final and satisfactory solution of a difficult problem, your committee venture to bespeak the kind indulgence and due consideration from this body which the importance of the question demands.

A proper consideration of the whole question of prison labor involves a consideration of so many other questions, among which the labor question is but a part, though all are so intimately connected, that a proper understanding of one part is not complete without some knowledge of the others. It will be obvious, therefore, that in a report of this nature it is utterly impossible to enter fully into the many questions affecting this one of prison labor. To those who desire to go fully into the question and to investigate for themselves we cannot do better than refer them to the report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the prison and reformatory system of Ontario in 1891. In that report the searcher after facts will find abundance of such dealing with the causes of crime and the many systems of punishment and reformation, hereditary tendencies, juvenile crimes, drunkenness, idleness, punishment as a deterrent of crime, industrial and educational systems of reformation. These questions are all fully and comprehensively dealt with. And your committee have no hesitation in declaring that if organized labor desires to speak and to be heard on this important question, which affects not only themselves but the welfare of the whole community, it is the bounden duty of organized labor to honestly inform itself of all matters connected with the problem; and that it should be manly and independent enough to arrive at and present its conclusions, free of all party considerations or influences whatever. Among the systems of labor adopted in prisons are what are known as the "contract system," the "piece price system," and the "State or public account system."

Regarding the necessity of industrial employment of prisoners, there seems to be no difference of opinion among the most enlightened of those who have ever given the question their study, or of those who have had the management of prisons. Punishment and brutality as a deterrent to crime has become, or is fast becoming, among all enlightened nations, an exploded idea. Absolute idleness is so terrible and disastrous in its consequences that it is impossible to give it, as a system, a moment's consideration.

Inanity and death, both physically and morally, being the sure and speedy results of a system of enforced idleness and confinement.

Admitting, then, the necessity of labor in some form, it is our duty to find out in what way it will not be a menace to outside free labor. Of the three systems enumerated above, the contract system is the one most universally condemned. The contract system is that by which the labor of the convicts is hired out to the highest bidder.

A committee of Congress of the United States reports the following as among the evils of the contract system: The contract system is wholly adverse to reform, and, therefore, should be abrogated. The prisoners are treated as if they were so many

dumb beasts, being driven to their daily task by men whose aim is to get a certain amount of work out of them each day."

Dr. Wines says: "It places for the entire working day all the prisoners contracted for to a great extent under the control of men with no official responsibility; men who see in the convict only so much machinery for making money; men who only, or at any rate, whose chief recommendation to the positions they hold in the prison is that they are the highest bidders for the human beings hired by them. It introduces into the prisons agents of the contractors, who for the most part have not only no interest in aiding the reform of the convicts, but are too ready to oppose it by offering mischievous indulgences to the convicts as an inducement to further industrial efforts. The contract system works great injury to honest labor in many branches of industry. Investigations by committees of State Legislatures have shown this fact repeatedly. There is no room for doubt as to the evil effect of this system upon the interests of free labor."

The result of the investigations by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of New York is: "The contract system of prison labor is directly responsible to a great extent for the reduction of wages and loss of employment suffered by mechanics engaged in the same branches of industry which are carried on in the prisons."

By the "piece price system" is meant the system by which the State receives payment for the product of the labor of the prisoner upon materials and machinery furnished by the person making such payment, or furnished partly by such person and partly by the State.

This system is carried out in the Central Prison at Toronto. Mr. Massie states in his evidence before the commissioners that the Nelson find all the raw material and the superintendents, but that the machinery belongs to the Government absolutely. This system is but the contract system under another form.

The supervisor of the New Jersey State Prison, in which there are from 870 to 940 prisoners, said in his report for 1887: "The second year's experience in working the prisoners under the piece price plan seems to afford no element of hope that either as a revenue measure or as a preventive of undue competition with honest labor will it ever be even as potent as the contract system which it supplanted. In its practical working it is but a modification of the old system, possessing all its evils and none of its advantages."

Another expert says: "The piece price system does more injury to the laboring classes outside, because it enables the contractors to sell their products at lower prices."

Under the State or public account system, the State furnishes machinery and material for the labor of the prisoners and markets the product of such labor thereon. That is, the state sells its goods direct on the market without the intervention of any contractor whatever and reserves the profits to itself.

This system is preferred by most of the experts above all other systems as being less injurious to honest labor and best suited for reformatory purposes.

Mr. Carroll D. Wright, the commissioner of labor, speaks very highly of this system, but would have it worked without the use of power machinery, tools and hand machines only being allowed. He says: "With such a plan in vogue throughout the United States there could be no complaint as to the effect of convict labor upon the rates of wages or upon the sale of goods either in price or in quantity. The convicts would be constantly employed under the direction and supervision entirely of the prison officers. None of the objections or disadvantages arising under the contract system or the piece price modification thereof, or under the public account system with power machinery, can be raised against this plan. The adoption of it would leave the state free to undertake the very best and most harmless efforts for the reformation of prisoners."

The chief aggravation in the employment of convicts in productive labor arises from the use of power machinery.

While recognizing the high authority of Mr. Wright to speak on all matters concerning labor, your committee cannot endorse the suggestion as to limiting the industries to the use of tools or hand machinery.

Warden Brush, of Sing Sing, says: "When the contract system was abolished almost everyone was of opinion that the prisons would run into extravagance and corruption, and that it would be impossible to manage them honestly under the State account system. This theory is entirely contradicted by our experience here for the last twenty months."

After carefully considering the question fully your committee are unanimously of (1st) the opinion that the "Public Account System" is the best solution of the difficulty yet offered, so far as it goes, and would

strongly recommend that its general adoption be persistently urged upon both the Federal and Provincial Governments by all organized labor bodies.

2nd. That prisoners should be given an interest in the product of their labor. That a fair share of his earnings should be retained for the benefit of the prisoner, or be given to the families of prisoners, in if destitute circumstances.

Speaking of this phase of the question, Mr. T. V. Powderly says: "Keep what is given to the contractor of their (the prisoners') earnings and give it to themselves when they leave prison, or allow their earnings to go to their families, instead of throwing these families on the charities of the town, while the prison contractor reaps a reward from crime that causes him to wish that the crop of criminals may grow larger."

3rd. That where the establishment of any prison industry will in the least affect outside labor, or at most only affect a comparatively small number of wage-earners in that industry, that sufficient notice should be given of the Government's intention to start such an industry, and that after the expiration of such notice it shall be considered a Government industry and shall be pursued against all comers.

It has been objected to this suggestion that the men upon serving their term would have no knowledge of any other occupation that would be useful to them after they got out of prison. To this objection your committee submits that it might not be inconsistent with the general good of the community that where such an industry was of sufficiently large proportions, suitable arrangements might be made whereby a certain amount of free labor might be employed in the same institution. Such arrangements are even now made, we believe, under certain circumstances.

FLIES AND HUMAN BEINGS.

War to the Death has Been Waged for Centuries.

It is not generally known, except by those familiar with the literature of the fourteenth century, that the month of August is dedicated to Beelzebub, the interpretation of his name being Father of Flies. Flies appear earlier in the season, but it is in August that they take possession, says a writer in the New York Evening Sun. Bacon quotes King James as saying, "Have I not three kingdoms for you to expatiate in, and you must needs fly in my eye?" So it seems flies occupy the earth. There is but one known spot where flies are not found. That is Mount Carina, in Candia, where a honey is produced so abhorrent to flies that they avoid the place. The estimate of Spencer's imagination has been measured by his apostrophe to the silver winged possessors of the empire of the air. Flies, in fact, have no sense. There is scarcely an insect that has not at times been trained or shown intelligence. There is no such record of the fly.

The peculiarities of his structure, his machinery of locomotion, his unconsciousness of the laws of gravity have been of interest both to scientists and poets. Theodore Tilton's well known ode to the fly has been set to music, and is on countless lips in kindergartens and nurseries; of this nothing is owing to the fly himself.

The enmity between man and flies is historic, but the warfare continued through long ages is feeble, though unremitting. The Cape Colonists, it is reported by James Payn dip long wisps of straw in milk and hang them up; when the flies have settled down on them they draw a sack over the wisps. They often bag in this manner as much as a bushel of flies in a day. The fashion of poisoning flies with flypaper has gone out, the paper being too easily dissolved into a summer drink for one's enemies.

The flies, moreover, had an uncomfortable habit of leaving their corpses on the dishes and tablecloth. Farmers' wives pleasantly lure the fly into glass cisterns of sweetened waters, where it can die like a rose in aromatic pain. The latest method of fly catching is by means of pitch coated papers; lured by the resinous odor of the fly lights. Sheets of this paper, looking like huckleberry tarts, are shown in druggists' windows. But while the fly sticks to the paper the paper sticks to everything else, and unsuspecting members of the family are likely to serve as a walking morgue for flies.

Employments of Frenchwomen.

It is not at all unlikely that the jealousy or the downright aversion shown by the French medical students to female competition arises from that curious social conservatism which prevails among a nation who rarely miss an opportunity to proclaim themselves the most democratic people in Europe. There have always been a great many crafts and employments open to Frenchwomen from which Englishwomen were, until a very recent period, almost entirely debarred. From time immemorial in Paris and other large French towns the

shopkeeper's wife has officiated as his bookkeeper or cashier, and very often late at night, while monsieur is playing dominoes or billiards, or enjoying his cigar and his "hook" at his favorite cafe, madame is painfully balancing her books behind the counter of the deserted but still brilliantly lit shop.

Women, again, in France have an almost entire monopoly in selling newspapers at the kiosques, or in keeping "bureaux de tabac." They may also practice art, without let or hindrance, and they may attain, if they have the talent and the capacity, bright eminence as painters, sculptors, engravers or draftswomen in black and white; but the Academy of Fine Arts persistently sets its face against the admission of lady members, although, as Mme. Leon Bertaux, the president of the Union of Feminine Artists, has pointed out, there were in the last century two lady academicians—Mme. Terbursch and the renowned portrait painter, Mme. Vigee-Lebrun.—London Telegraph.

Fifty-five thousand tailors have been looked out in London owing to a dispute with the employers regarding piece work.

The Java Government, heretofore dependent upon compulsory labor in coffee growing, intends now to try paid labor by the contract system.

In Great Britain the yearly loss in wages through ill-health is about \$55,000,000, and it is estimated that 40 per cent of those who start in business fail, March being considered the slackest month for business.

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