

MONTREAL, February 27th, 1888.

To the members of the Labor Commission :

GENTLEMEN,—

Before closing your examination into the condition of affairs as pertaining to the position of wage-earners in the City of Montreal, I would respectfully ask your careful attention to the evident discrepancy that exists between the income of our bread-winners, in every sphere of life, and the cost of living in this community, particularly in reference to the item of rents.

I do not know if you have visited the dwellings of the poorer classes in our midst, but if you have done so, you must have seen that many of the houses they occupy are scarcely fit for human being to live in, and their whole surroundings are equally deplorable.

From practical experience I find that the chief causes for this state of affairs are owing to the high value placed upon land in localities convenient to the centre of the city, or not too far removed from where the wage-earners are employed, and the high cost of building operations, when even a plain but substantial class of dwellings are put up, capable of resisting the extreme changes of climate to which we are subjected to in this locality.

I do not wish to trouble you with figures in this communication; but am prepared to show that with the simple introduction of ordinary modern conveniences a comfortable home of four and five rooms, in a clean and healthy part of the city, cannot be provided by anyone willing to invest capital at the rate of six per cent. per annum for less than \$12 to \$15 per month, or say \$144 to \$180 per annum, to which must be added municipal taxes and water rates.

This being the case you can readily see the necessity of an increase of wages and salaries, all round, before there can be any general improvement in the dwellings of those living under limited incomes.

To be well housed is an important factor in raising the social status of our fellow beings, and I feel it a duty to call your attention to this fact, as the greater portion of the population are earning not over \$1.50 per day, equal to say \$450 per year (barring illness or lack of employment), out of which *not more than one-sixth*, say \$.75, or \$6.25 per month, should be used for rent in order that other necessities may be furnished for the family, and that it should be a small family of not more than four children.

You will therefore see that under the present state of things, overcrowding is inevitable, and only the cheapest and most inferior class of rookeries, can be paid for out of the current rate of wages.

An experiment has recently been tried here in the direction of constructing an improved class of dwellings for artisans, and the results are as stated above. I enclose a copy of the rules and regulations of the company referred to.

Permit me to say further that I very much regret to find that the Commissioners have not investigated the question of salaries paid to the lady and gentlemen teachers in our common schools, no class of wage-earners are so poorly paid and when we consider the importance of their profession it is simply disgraceful to expect efficient services for a remuneration that yields but a bare subsistence, especially so, when the duties to be performed demand considerable self-sacrifice and much responsibility, with very little prospect of attaining a position where one can accumulate a competence for the closing years of life; and upon whom, to some extent depends the formation of character and habits in the rising generation.

You will observe that the two points I wish to especially impress upon the minds of the Commissioners, are the need of better dwellings for the working classes and an increased income for all wage-earners in the city, and throughout the Province of Quebec.

Yours faithfully,

WM. T. COSTIGAN.