

MAGAZINE SECTION OF THE NEW YORK SUNDAY CALL

The Groan and Fight at Youngstown

A Resume of the Report of the Committee on Industrial Relations.

By GEORGE P. WEST.

"The Youngstown strike was a sign to the owners and managers of the American steel industry that the end will come; that they cannot forever adhere to their present policy of depressing wages below a decent standard by maintaining a vast horde of helpless immigrants in a condition of economic subservience, throwing them on charity during times of depression, paying less than a living wage during times of prosperity, and during all times brutalizing them either by imposing excessive hours of employment or by imposing the enforced leisure that breeds fear and pauperization."

This is the conclusion contained in a report on the Youngstown strike and riot of January 7, just made public by the Committee on Industrial Relations. The author is George P. West, whose reports on the Colorado strike and the Bayonne strike were published by the United States Commission on Industrial Relations before that body expired on August 23, 1915.

The strike and riot at Youngstown, says the West report, marked the beginning of a rebellion that was about to spread throughout the steel industry, and that was checked only by the prompt action of Elbert H. Gary, chairman of the United States Steel Corporation, in announcing a 10 per cent increase for the 230,000 employees of that company.

The increase is asserted to have been directly instigated by the Youngstown strike, which began December 29, nine days before the riot, at the plant of the Republic Iron and Steel Company. The report says:

"Of all the significant facts disclosed by the investigation, the most important was the conclusive evidence that full responsibility for the situation there existing lies with the management of the United States Steel Corporation."

"Reports which received credence in responsible quarters came to the writer in Youngstown, to the effect that officials of the Republic Iron and Steel Company sought advice from Judge Gary immediately after the strike began, that he advised them to resist an advance in wages, and that later, realizing the danger of a general upheaval, he acted promptly to avert a strike and announced the 10 per cent increase, effective February 1."

Although neither the Republic Iron and Steel Company nor the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company is owned or controlled by the Steel Corporation, the report says, their highest officers made it clear that their wage policy is determined by that of the Steel Corporation, and that they conform substantially to the conditions of employment imposed by that company.

In an introduction to the report, B. M. Manly, director of the committee, and formerly director of research and investigation for the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, asserts that conditions at Youngstown among the employees of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company and the Republic Iron and Steel Company, bad as they are, are better than those prevailing in almost any other community where steel is manufactured, either by the Steel Corporation or by other independent companies. Mr. Manly in 1910 had charge of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics investigation into living and working conditions in the steel industry of the entire country.

Discussing the riot of January 7, in which three strikers were killed and twenty-five others wounded by armed company guards employed by the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, the report says:

"The riot was the natural outgrowth of a spontaneous, unorganized rebellion against an economic and industrial regime so oppressive and brutalizing as to overshadow the immediate provocation and render it comparatively insignificant."

"Not only is there likelihood of a repetition of the Youngstown riot at any one of the large steel plants that altogether employ nearly 300,000 men, but an investigation discloses that even such a disaster, shocking as it is, must be regarded as trifling when compared with the heavy toll of death and suffering that has been exacted day after day and year after year by what

corded to them in many years to register their protest against these conditions without danger of starving."

"They were about to make the most of the opportunity, not only in Youngstown, but throughout the industry, when the management of the United States Steel Corporation awoke to the danger. Whether the 10 per cent ad-

stantly replenished from Europe. So long as the corporation could maintain, with the aid of charity, two men for every job, discontent was smothered. It flared up the instant the steel workers became aware that they could quit their jobs without starving."

"The demand for unskilled labor has given the unorganized steel workers a new independence. At Youngstown they were eager to form organizations and affiliate with the American Federation of Labor, and there is reason to expect that through organization of this sort the entire steel industry will be rescued from the shameful regime heretofore imposed on hundreds of thousands of men, women and children by the Steel Corporation."

"In the eagerness of the unorganized strikers at Youngstown to form unions there is evidence that the workers in the steel industry have come to realize the necessity of organizing and acting together to protect themselves against the policy of exploitation established by the Steel Corporation, and made possible by the existence of a great surplus of organized immigrant workmen."

Discussing the cause of the riot, the report says:

"The killing of three striking workmen and the wounding of twenty-five others, and the pillage and destruction that followed, probably will be traced to the hasty action of company guards in opening fire on the crowd of strikers that surrounded the gates across the company bridge. Prosecuting Attorney Henderson, in charge of the Grand Jury investigation now in progress, told the writer that his investigation had convinced him of this. Mr. Henderson expressed belief that the company guards could have performed their legitimate function of guarding company property without firing at the strikers, and that the burning and pillaging of the business section would then have been avoided."

But the real cause of the disaster at East Youngstown, says the report, was the prevailing economic conditions. Many pages are devoted to living conditions among the steel workers.

"Forty-one per cent of all deaths in Youngstown in 1913," says the report, "were of infants under 5 years of age, according to the United States Census figures. General Secretary Hanson, of the Charity Organization Society of Youngstown, told your investigator that the infant mortality rate for Youngstown is abnormally high, being half again as great as the average rate for the United States."

"A government investigation, published in 1910, showed that 70.8 per cent of the steel workers at Youngstown were of foreign birth. In 330 typical families investigated by the government, the heads of families earned an average of \$440 a year. Forty per cent of these heads of families earned less than \$400 per year, and 14 per cent earned less than \$200 per year. In the year covered by the investigation only 48 per cent worked nine months or over. Sixty-five per cent of the families kept boarders, and an average of 3.34 persons occupied each sleeping room."

"Since 1910 wages have advanced about 12 per cent, while, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of living has gone up slightly more than 12 per cent. It is believed a conservative statement that at least 50 per cent of the Youngstown steel workers earned LESS THAN \$500 during the year 1915, including all bonuses, yet \$700 IS THE LOWEST WAGE THAT WILL MAINTAIN A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING."

J. M. Hanson, general secretary for the Charity Organization Society, is quoted to the effect that during nearly half the time during the past eight years the mills have given employment to workmen for only three or five days each week.

"To save their families from starvation," says the report, "the employees

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The approach to the North Bridge, where most of the shooting took place. On both sides are offices of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, which were burned down. The picture was taken shortly before the fatal shots were fired.

have come to be regarded as normal conditions in the steel industry.

"The prevailing demand for unskilled labor in many large industries has given the unorganized workers in the steel industry the first opportunity advance in wages effective February 1 will be sufficient to check the revolt remains to be seen."

"Evidence is conclusive that the wage policy of the Steel Corporation has been based on the existence of a huge surplus of unskilled labor con-

Facts About Youngstown

Babies of the workers die at an appalling rate. FORTY-ONE PER CENT of all deaths in Youngstown during 1913, according to United States Census figures, were of CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE.

The average head of a family among foreign-born steel workers, who constitute over 70 per cent of the entire force, earns LESS THAN \$500 A YEAR.

The workers and their families live in squalid, overcrowded houses. A trachoma epidemic at East Youngstown grew so menacing that the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, whose armed guards on January 7 killed three strikers and wounded twenty-five, had to take drastic measures to save the human part of its equipment.

Sanitary conditions in Youngstown in the districts where the steel workers live are frightful. The administration of the health laws is lax, and open garbage boxes and dry privies abound.

The Charity Organization Society has never tried to find out whether the steel workers get enough wages to live.

During times of depression, including nearly half of the time during the past eight years, the steel workers and their families have been KEPT ALIVE BY CHARITY. The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company doled out the privilege of working three days a week to men whose families were found to be destitute, after investigation, and besides distributed baskets of food. The cost of these baskets was later DEDUCTED FROM THE MEN'S PAY CHECKS, after they had been permitted to work three days a week.

The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company has paid for eight years 8 PER CENT DIVIDENDS on its \$10,000,000 of capital stock. In 1913 it cut a melon in the form of a 50 PER CENT STOCK DIVIDEND. In other words, the stock has paid 12 PER CENT DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS AND A HALF. Its value is \$285 a share.

For years, until the present demand for unskilled labor gave them a choice of jobs, the steel workers have been forced to accept whatever the Steel Corporation and its followers cared to give them, or to starve. This condition of helplessness and economic slavery was forced on them by a policy that kept, with the aid of charity, two men for every job and that ruthlessly CRUSHED ANY ATTEMPT OF THE EMPLOYEES TO ORGANIZE.