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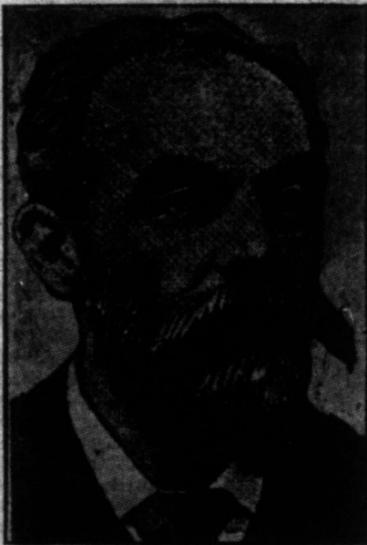
THE TRIBUNE

106-108 ADELAIDE ST. W.



The Short and Simple Annals of the Poor

As told to the Imperial Parliament by John Burns, M.P., L.L.C.



Too often the efforts of labor men in the House of Commons are insufficiently recognized and reported. The following speech was made by one of the labor members, and we consider it sufficiently important to reproduce it:—

Speaking in the House of Commons on August 4th, 1904, Mr. John Burns said he wished to join with the hon. member who had spoken in a respectful protest to the Home Secretary against the manner in which this vote had been brought forward at this late period of the session. It seemed to him that no adequate discussion could be secured on this vote on August 4th, which ought to have been brought on in March or April. He considered that this was one of the most important votes on the estimates. It referred to the most productive army of the people of the British Empire. He noticed that when they were considering the position of the army they could get not only one, but several, days to discuss the position of field marshals, or whether there should be three buttons on the right shoulder of a uniform or two on the left. But when it came to the Home Office votes there was not that interest in them which there ought to be. In fact, the Home Office had not that self-respect and confidence in itself which it ought to have. It certainly lacked consideration for the vital interests of the great army of civilian workers committed to its care. That was a department which was responsible for the safety, health, and well-being of 16,500,000 of the people of this country, who produced and earned the taxes by which the country had been made what it is. In these days, when they were told to think imperially, and not parochially, it should be remembered that this empire was made by commerce and sustained by industry, and our place amongst the nations of the world depended upon the efficiency, physique, and well-being of our workers in workshop, mine, and factory. It was sad to realize, as figures proved, that such position could only be secured by the sacrifice of thousands of lives. Every year 150,000 men, women, and children were injured or killed in earning their

living. If that were so, they ought to appeal to the right hon. the Home Secretary, who was the guardian of these 16,000,000 of industrials in the country, to bring in this vote at a period of the session when they could discuss the sweating and brutal overwork to which the hon. member had referred, and the conditions under which workers labored in dangerous trades. Having said that, he would get to the best side of his criticism. He wished to give his humble testimony to the excellent manner in which the Home Office inspectorate performed their work. The gratitude of the workers of this country was due to them for the excellent way they had discharged their duties. He had read with interest the extraordinary document produced by that staff in regard to hoists and teagles, on the strength of which so many men's livelihood, and even their lives, depended. Another interesting report was that relating to explosives. The reports on docks and mines were also equally interesting, and he suggested to hon. members that they should take these reports, and that dealing with the physical deterioration of the people, with them to read during the holiday recess, and they would find them better reading than the articles in the *Daily Mail*, on which some hon. gentlemen had been living too long. For the last five or six years a number of members had been saying, "Was not this practical administration going too far?" In some particulars they were. But he was one of those Britons who would like to place his country before any other in the world for the moralization of capital and the humanization of industry. It was now thirteen years since they had had an International Conference on industrial subjects in Berlin. He would suggest to the right hon. the Home Secretary that he might co-operate with the other powers of Europe and America, to have another such conference, so that they could bring up to date the discussion of such questions as child labor, women labor, employment in dangerous trades, night work, ventilation, etc. Extraordinary good work might be done by such a conference. Having

made that suggestion, he wanted to support the right hon. member for the Forest of Dean, in his plea in regard to insufficiency of the factory inspectorate. There were 250,000 factories and workshops in this country; and notwithstanding what the Jeremiahs said as to the decline of British industry, these factories were increasing and multiplying. Nothing was more satisfactory to a real Briton than to see that these factories were improved as regarded health conditions. For these 250,000 workshops and factories we had 116 inspectors and 36 assistants, or in all 152 inspectors who had to overlook 16,500,000 of people. He insisted that the committee would be wise to insist on increasing the male inspectorate from 152 to at least 200; and that they should increase the lady inspectors by between 20 and 30 between now and next year. He declared that, measured by value to the community over whom the male and female inspectors had jurisdiction, the services of the twelve female inspectors were disproportionate. Relatively, the female inspectors did infinitely better work than the male inspectors, because their work had to do with matters which no average man could understand. He could not understand why these lady inspectors had not been increased. Something had been said about the cost, but the cost of all the inspectors was only £73,000, which was a small sum—a mere flea-bite—in an expenditure of £140,000,000 which was voted every year. The hon. member for Clitheroe very rightly congratulated the Government on the diminution of accidents in the textile industry. That was also true of mines and shipping, but was it altogether due to increased inspection? It was due largely to mechanical causes, and to improved mines and improved ships. The diminution of accidents which had occurred in the textile trade was not altogether true of other trades. There were increases in the number of accidents in various other trades. The Home Office might say that that was due to better notification; but he could not reconcile that statement with the figures. In 1897, 63,000 persons were injured; that number increased to 112,000 in 1903. Making all allowances for improved notification, that was a great and serious increase. As regarded the number killed, the increase was also very large. In 1896 it was 596; and in 1902 it was 1,107. If hon. members heard of a battalion of soldiers being wiped out, they would be properly sympathetic, and they would be naturally indignant if that loss were preventable. At least equal sympathy should be shown to the soldiers of industry. Some of these accidents and deaths had taken place in certain industries to which he wished to call the attention of the Home Secretary. A process of Americanizing had been going on for some years in this country, especially in connection with certain industries. The result was shown in the greater number of men who were killed or injured. The Americanization of British industry meant the brutalization of work, and their business was to stop it as far as the law allowed. He should like to know the number of men killed or injured on the Savoy Hotel buildings in West London. It would be interesting to compare these two works with two buildings by British firms under British conditions. The comparison would be interesting. They could not allow an increase of accidents in docks and on buildings while accidents were being diminished in mines and on the sea. The abstract of labor statistics for last year presented this grizzly fact—4,622 men, women and children engaged in British industry were killed, as compared