

# IN A LABOR UTOPIA

## The Experiences of a Company that Sought to Furnish its Workmen with Comfortable Surroundings.

### Pleasant Relations Broken up by the Tyranny of the Walking Delegate and the Union Committee.

The following description of labor conditions at Dayton, Ohio, appeared in the columns of the New York Sun:

Dayton, Ohio, May 25.—It is now some seven or eight years since J. H. Patterson, President of the National Cash Register Company, began the task which has resulted in giving for his workshop here a world-wide reputation as a factory worker's paradise. It was not a plan conceived in its full scope and worked out in all its details in advance. It was an evolution from a small beginning.

Mr. Patterson himself had said from the start that it was not with him a question of philanthropy but of cold business. He believed that the better conditions with which you surround a man or woman, the better physically and morally a man or woman is, the better work he or she will turn out.

That was one thing. Then it was his idea to add to this betterment of body and mind such stimulus as would result in exciting a personal internal interest in the work itself and in the welfare of the concern that gave the work. He believed that taking humanly by and large there is a good sound basis of fairness on which to build a substantial purpose to reciprocate favors received, and which would not permit the recipient to go on forever taking without giving something in return.

"These men and women who work for me," he said to himself, "shall have not merely the full limit of wages for their toil. That is the hard and fast factory line which results in mere factory work. Under this principle the workman says: 'There is your work done, now give me my money,' and the employer says: 'There is your money; go to the devil.' 'I will not put the relations of employer and employee on these lines.' Mr. Patterson, 'I will give not only the full limit of pay, but I will give more than that. I will give a place to work in that is as perfect in a sanitary point of view as money and scientific skill can make it. I will relieve the people in my employ of as many of the petty annoyances and exactions of factory life as is reasonably possible. They shall have short recesses to relieve the dull monotony of their toil and enable them to sit down and rest or get up and walk about and stretch their legs occasionally. I will shorten their pay. I will furnish them with baths in the shop with towels and soap free of cost and the privilege, within certain limits, of using the same on the company's time, and of using them on their own time as often as they choose.

"For their wives and children I will furnish libraries and schools and free entertainments and lectures. I will employ instructors to teach the women and the grown-up girls the art of cooking, so that they may know how to prepare good and wholesome food for their husbands and brothers when they return home tired from their work. I will make the factory itself and its grounds an object lesson of what can be done to make a home and its surrounding yard bright and cheerful with the radiance of flowers and the green of shrubbery and lawn. I will even go farther in the same direction. I will employ a skilled gardener whose duty shall be to go from home to home and teach them how to lay out their grounds and to decorate and plant their gardens to the best advantage. To stimulate them further in this ambition for attractive homes I will offer prizes for those who produce the best results.

"In order to identify as much as possible every individual with the work of the factory I will invite from everybody suggestions as to improvements in the work we are producing, or business changes that will be of advantage to the company. These suggestions shall be carefully read and considered, due weight given to each one, and to those whose suggestions are good and valuable I will give liberal prizes. To those who suggest what may not be available, but yet show conscientious thought, I will award diplomas of honorable mention. There shall be frequent sessions and gatherings to bring our people in close touch with the other fact, which I wish them all to feel, that we are one community striving to promote the success of the business in which we are engaged, and with that to advance the material prosperity which is to the advantage of all in due proportion."

#### MR. PATTERSON'S UTOPIA.

All this Mr. Patterson undertook to do, not from any spirit of abstract benevolence to humanity but on the cold business principles above mentioned, that it would produce results that would be a paying return on the investment. As mentioned before, he did not have his plan fully mapped out in his mind when he began the work. He began with the minor gift of better conditions and more comfortable surroundings. As he watched the result he became convinced more and more that his theory

was the correct one, and he went on giving and still giving, and still more and more satisfied with the responses and the returns which came to him.

Step by step he advanced until the little paradise of labor which he had created began to attract attention throughout this great manufacturing State of Ohio and then through the country at large. Visitors began to come to the works from all parts. Writers upon social economics came and studied them from a business standpoint. Their fame spread from America to Great Britain, France and Germany, and visitors from those countries who were interested in industrial matters and were in America on their travels managed to take in Dayton and the National Cash Register Company's plant in their itineraries. Letters of inquiry from all parts of the world poured in in such increasing volume that it became necessary to establish something in the nature of a correspondence bureau to answer them.

There were scoffers at first and for a long time after Mr. Patterson's plans began to be unfolded. The failure of similar efforts in various places was pointed out and it was predicted that the Dayton labor Arcadia would come down with a crash as the others had done. Mr. Patterson went on his way unaffected in the slightest degree by these croakers. Instead of stopping in his plans for the betterment of the surroundings of his working people or keeping them contracted to what he had really achieved he expanded them. The results convinced him more and more that he was right. Even some of the doubting Thomases began to think that maybe after all there was something more in this Dayton undertaking than they had taken into account.

It began to be a question of whether the great problem of the harmonizing of labor and capital might not have been solved right here in this Ohio city. The newspaper writers and the magazine writers, who came and studied the subject at its highest stages of development were convinced, and they put themselves on record with the flat-footed assertion that the problem had been solved and that here at last was a labor Utopia that was not a dream but a solid accomplished fact. On the strength of these witnesses it became pretty much a matter of faith throughout the country that there had come here in Dayton a veritable labor-capital millennium.

#### LABOR UNIONS GET AT WORK.

With this conviction fully settled in the public mind and with all that Mr. Patterson had done for his working people proclaimed throughout the entire country as a model which other employers might well follow, it came with something like a shock to learn that the employees themselves for whom all this had been done thought they were a pretty badly used lot of men and women; that they had taken the position that they had endured the thing just about as long as they could; that at last they had taken a firm stand, and that when their specific demand for what they held to be their just rights was refused they had struck work and that the entire factory was shut down.

It was not until about a year and a half ago, when the labor unions got a full grip upon the concern, that the employees began to find out how shabby they were being treated. To be sure there was no complaint about wages. There had never been any since the factory opened and there is none even now, when the strike is fully on and the factory closed. The ill-usage was in other directions. The walking delegates were among the first to discover it. And then shop committees found out things that even the walking delegates overlooked.

From the moment of the complete unionization of the factory a very large proportion of the time of the general manager and of the superintendents and foremen of the different departments was taken up receiving committees and walking delegates and discussing grievances to which the workmen were being subjected. For instance, it was never suspected, until a walking delegate exposed the fact, that in the very gift of the free baths and the company's time in which to take them, there was a latent capitalistic snare for the laboring man.

The workmen, until the union came into control had taken the baths and used the free towels and the free soap at the company's expense, and had regarded it as rather an advantage than otherwise, never suspecting that in so doing they were making themselves a club in the hands of capital with which to strike a blow at honest toil. A keen-eyed walking delegate discovered that there were thousands of these towels and that they had to be washed and washed very often and that the company was paying out every large sum of money for that purpose. Now, to whom were these large sums of money paid? That was the question the walking delegates quietly asked themselves, and to which they quickly found an answer that laid bare the whole nefarious trick upon labor. Tracing this dirty linen like sleuths from the factory to the place where it was carried for cleansing,

they discovered that the management had distributed it among a number of poor women with families to support, who lived in the neighborhood of the shop, and that not a single one of these women was a member of any labor union.

#### THE FREE TOWEL OUTRAGE.

The unions and the walking delegates had long had a suspicion that there was something lurking under all this outward show of benevolence to the employees: they knew there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere and now they had located him. The poor, blinded workmen themselves, before the scales were lifted from their eyes by the union, had never particularly cared where the towels were washed.

They only knew that they were washed and that they were well washed, and that there were plenty of them, and that a good bath with fresh clean towels to rub down with was not a bad thing to take after a hot summer day's work in the shop. Such of them as actually knew that the washing of these towels went to poor women of the neighborhood were so heedless of the rights of labor as to think it was a very good thing for women with a number of children to look after to have a steady income of this kind. But the walking delegates and the shop committees brought these heedless ones to their senses with a round turn.

The great question of towels became a matter of union and shop action. A Committee on Clean Towel Outrages was appointed. It waited upon the general manager of the works. He received its members with the usual capitalistic show of urbanity, and their spokesman laid the towel question before him courteously but with many firmness. In a few incisive words he unmasked the entire towel conspiracy against labor. He did not ask, he demanded, that henceforth the towels be taken from the poor women and handed over as the property of able bodied employes in a union laundry.

But even before this exposure of the towel outrage it had been discovered, noted and commented upon that the towels themselves were deficient in quality. It had been observed that they were of a coarse, shaggy texture and the explanation that they were Turkish bath towels was received with the amused contempt that such a subterfuge deserved. Yet in their demands upon the general manager the quality of the towels was not touched upon. This was nothing small about the union shop committee, if there was about the employers. The position that they took, and from which they asserted they would not recede, was that either the towels go to a union laundry or that they should not be used. The general manager saw at once with this exposure the position of the factory was absolutely untenable. He attempted to save his face, as the Chinese say, and cover his defeat by a capitalistic subterfuge. He announced that thereafter the towels would be thrown but altogether.

And thus it was that the union won its first signal victory. It had forced the employers to give up the practice of spending some hundreds of dollars a month to keep up the supply of free towels and soap, and had restored to the workmen the boon of liberty—the liberty of paying for their own bathing supplies.

#### NON-UNION SPRINGS.

It was not very long after this triumph before still another scheme to undermine union labor was exposed. A lynx-eyed member of the shop committee noticed one day that to the doors of the polishing department room there were attached compressed air springs to close them gently when they were swung open. They were nothing in that that was in itself suspicious. The alert committee man examined the springs more closely and discovered the fact that they were manufactured by a concern in Connecticut which was not managed by any labor union, a concern, in fact, which had firmly said it was in a position that it would manage its own business, and in support of that position had gone through two bitter strikes with the result that it defeated union labor, continued to administer its own affairs and was at that very moment and is now doing the largest business that it has ever done in its history.

It did not require very great perspicacity to see that in attaching those springs to the doors of the union shop the Dayton company was inflicting a deliberate and cynical insult upon labor. There was a union meeting on the subject of door springs. A committee was appointed to lay the door spring grievance before the general manager. Its spokesman announced that the polishing department demanded that those springs be removed from the doors forthwith. The general manager actually pretended that he did not know there were any springs on the doors, and, if there were that the fact was not intended to be insulting. If, however, the finer feelings of the employes were trampled upon by the presence of the springs he had no doubt there would be no objections whatever to tearing them off and even to making an ignominious end of them by throwing them on the scrap heap. He treated the entire complaint with levity and seemed to regard it in the light of an amusing joke. But at the same time he officially condemned the springs, and thus another triumph for the union was won. The employes of the polishing room had full authority to enjoy springless doors to their shops from that time forth.

#### UNIONS THEMSELVES AT ODDS.

The very grave questions of the towels and the springs had hardly been well disposed of by another and somewhat more difficult problem arose. It was a question about carpenters. There were three carpenters about whose status the union could not reach a satisfactory decision. If they belonged to the group of cabinetmakers they were entitled to a certain salary; if they belonged to the group of plain carpenters they were entitled to another rate of wages. The line of demarcation between these two groups, from a union standpoint, it seems to be somewhat vague and uncertain. The unions themselves were unable to determine on which side of the line the

three carpenters should go. They debated the matter among themselves for some considerable time and at last reached the decision that it properly came under the category of a grievance. There was evidently some dark capitalistic work back of the fact that there were three carpenters who didn't know themselves precisely where they were at, and whose position was so complicated that the united wisdom of the two unions could not settle it. A Committee on Unclassified Carpenters was appointed and went before the general manager with the demand that he at once decide to which group the three estrays belonged. The dilemma before him was that if he assigned them to the group of the straightaway carpenters the cabinetmakers would strike. And there you are. It was up to the general manager to get out of the hash the best way he could. After carefully considering the case he decided that, in the present status of work, the factory could, for the time being, dispense better with the services of the straightaway carpenters, so he assigned the three to the cabinetmakers and the straightaway carpenters struck.

Now, these are a few, and only a few of the matters which walking delegates and shop committees from the moment the factory was unionized, were constantly bringing up to the management of the works for settlement. Some of them could not be at once settled offhand by the general manager. There is a factory committee consisting of four superintendents at the head of the various departments to which matters which the general manager does not decide may be referred. This committee of four was kept pretty busy with grievances, most of them in general character like those above cited. Questions of detail in the matter of wages now and then were brought up among the mass of petty complications. An instance of this arose after a change in the form of the machines manufactured. Instead of a metal it was decided to use a wood base for the machine. The metal polishers received a certain piece rate for each machine. The substitution of wood reduced the amount of material that had to be polished. This being the case, and after a number of experiments to reach a just basis, the foreman of the metal polishers' shop decided that the metal polishers should receive five cents less on each machine than they had received before. The shop committee waited upon him. He stuck to his decision.

The matter was carried to the local union. A committee from the local union waited upon the management. The management agreed to drop the question of the five cents difference on each machine, and to put the men on day work rates instead of piece work. The union day rate of polishers is \$2.50. That is the rate paid by all other shops here in the city. The committee accepted the management's proposition in this respect with a rather important condition, and that was that instead of \$2.50 a day, the union rate paid in the other shops to polishers, the company should pay \$3.50. This proposition was made as a broad liberal recognition of the company's efforts to put its employes in better surroundings than other shops provided. In other words, if the company proposed to be liberal, there was nothing mean about the committee. They would be liberal, too, and permit the company to pay \$1 a day more for work than the union demanded of any other concern for the same work.

The company was rather overwhelmed by this outburst of generosity. It decided that it would not take advantage of so free hearted an impulse. It answered that it would waive the whole question and go back to first principles, paying the men the same rates for polishing a part of a machine that heretofore it had paid for polishing a whole one. The committee took this under advisement and unanimously decided to accept the proposition without demanding any general increase of pay as an offset to having had the question precipitated.

#### TROUBLE WITH THE POLISHERS

It has been said that the complete unionization of the shop and with that the beginning of the labor troubles date back to only about a year and a half ago. By unionization in this case is meant the formal recognition of the union by the shop management. Prior to that the company had kept what is termed an open shop. That is to say that while it did not recognize the union it did not bar union men from employment in its work. As a matter of fact, the metal polishing department was from the first practically a solid union shop. Up to three years ago a half ago its foreman was a union man. He was discharged for cause and A. C. Horne was put in his place. Mr. Horne is not a union man and he has not been very long in his new place before the trouble with the union began. It was, in fact, from his shop that the union movement in the works radiated until at last it involved a sufficient number of employes to precipitate the series of troubles which have resulted in the present crisis.

The first proceedings began with what seemed to be a set effort to drive Horne out. He had been in his new place only a few days, or in fact a few hours, when the movement against him began. The first demonstration was in slovenly work turned out by a man who was abundantly able to do better. This work was rejected; Horne ordered the man to do it over again; he sulked and would not comply until threatened with instant discharge; he afterward continued to sulk and be insubordinant until he was discharged. Then there was a shop row and committees and delegations. Then one day Horne gave employment to a man who it turned out did not belong to the union. The shop struck work on the spot. The men would not even give the newcomer the ordinary union privilege of paying his dues then and there and going on with his work until formally admitted to the union. This the man offered to do, but his offer was refused. The shop committee insisted upon his derogatory discharge. The matter was referred to the factory committee of head of departments, the factory committee yielded and the union scored heavily in this round.

#### MORE WORK AND LESS PAY.

But that increase of plant and equipment was precisely what the union desired. Its aim was to give work to a larger number of men. Owing to strikes and union troubles of one sort and another there are always more or less idle men in the works. The union insisted that the company take its share of this burden by increasing the number of its employes in the foundry. The result of this was that numbers of the molders who were skilled in their business finished their \$4.50 limit by noon or 1 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon. The union rules compelled them to remain at the foundry. The company on its part did not care to give them a half day's avowed idleness and the result was that the foundry became for a number of employes a sort of afternoon lounging and smoking room. This condition was intolerable. There was a new adjustment of work arranged by Foreman McTaggart, which resulted in the men's doing a full day's work for the \$4.50. In

other words, with the advent of the union the sum total of gain to the employes was more work and less pay.

Then when the change in the construction of the register came and the wooden was substituted for the metal base, the demand for castings from the foundry was diminished. As a result of this Foreman McTaggart laid off three men, having no work for them to do. This was last January. The usual series of committees and conferences and hearings, references to the local union and local union committee visits to the company followed. The company supported its foreman. It refused to reinstate the three men who were suspended. The local union sent for its international committee man. He came, one Duffy from Chicago. Duffy heard both sides of the question, but gave no Delphic utterance. He went back to Chicago, by letter laid the situation before other international committeemen, and, presumably received responses which supported the company in its not altogether unreasonable position that when it had no work for men to do it did not feel itself called upon to support supernumeraries as pensioners. The fact was that the company had had a rather pronounced experience in the line of pensioners and it did not care to renew it.

#### THE SHUT-DOWN.

Then in March, the work still being slack, two more men were laid off in the foundry and in April still another—this last one for cause. This action brought on the usual series of committee calls and conferences. The company refused to reinstate any of the six men discharged. One of the six had put himself out of the controversy by going off and getting employment elsewhere. This reduced the number of outs to five. After a week's consideration a committee of four men, all of them employed in shops about the city that had no connection with the company, made formal demand that all these five men for whom the company had no work be restored to their places at once. This was in the latter part of April last. The management of the company met this demand with a flat refusal, explaining to the committeemen that the reason for the refusal was there was no work for the men to do. This it was that precipitated the crisis now on.

#### WORK PAY, BUT DID NO WORK.

While this state of affairs was developing in the polishing department the union was getting in its work in the foundry. The foundrymen were just evenly divided—16 union and 16 non-union. The foreman, James McTaggart, was particularly objectionable to the union. He had been foreman of the Yale & Towne Company of Stamford, Conn., at the time of its strike some 11 years ago, and it was very largely through his efforts that the strike was defeated. The union was as anxious to throw him out of his job as it was to have Horne removed. A year and a half ago McTaggart discharged two men, both of them for lying and drinking and staying away from their work. A committee of union men demanded their restoration. The company refused to take the men back.

The union sent for their international officers, who came here and day after day renewed the discussion of the restoration of these men. The result was that the company again weakened. It agreed for one thing to run a union foundry. It refused to take back the two discharged men into the foundry, but it agreed to the preposterous proposition to pay each of them \$15 a week for doing nothing. For three months this absurd arrangement was carried out faithfully by both parties. Every pay day the company gave each of these two men \$15. The men on their part conscientiously carried out their proposition to refrain from labor of any sort. They were two pensioned tramps about the streets of Dayton and about the city barrooms for three consecutive months. Dayton by this time had become quite a mecca for students of the labor question. And these two endowed Wandering Willies were one of the labor spectacles of the town.

At the end of the three months, the pensioners, in the meantime not having made the slightest effort to get employment, the company respectfully submitted that it had done about its share. It refused to hand out the \$30 a week to the Weary Two any longer. This of course was made a union matter. There were more committees, more hearings; the international committeemen were again summoned. They came. The facts were submissively laid before them. They decided that on the whole the company probably had done all that was necessary and the pensions were discontinued, by authority of the unions.

But one great point had been gained. The foundry was unionized—the union was formally recognized by the company, and from that moment the discoveries of the afflictions under which the employes of the company were laboring came fast and thick. The first thing the union did with the foundry after getting full control was to announce that no man employed there should earn more than \$4.50 a day. Prior to that some of the men had been earning \$5, \$6, \$6.50, \$7 and even in one instance \$8 a day. The company was perfectly willing, even desirous, that employes in the foundry should continue to earn these larger amounts. It was piece work and the company preferred a larger output from each individual to an increase in plant and equipment.

#### MORE WORK AND LESS PAY.

But that increase of plant and equipment was precisely what the union desired. Its aim was to give work to a larger number of men. Owing to strikes and union troubles of one sort and another there are always more or less idle men in the works. The union insisted that the company take its share of this burden by increasing the number of its employes in the foundry. The result of this was that numbers of the molders who were skilled in their business finished their \$4.50 limit by noon or 1 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon. The union rules compelled them to remain at the foundry. The company on its part did not care to give them a half day's avowed idleness and the result was that the foundry became for a number of employes a sort of afternoon lounging and smoking room. This condition was intolerable. There was a new adjustment of work arranged by Foreman McTaggart, which resulted in the men's doing a full day's work for the \$4.50. In

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On April 29 all the molders quit work. The 16 who originally had been non-union men had been subjected to severe pressure and practically were forced into the union. A few days after this a committee from the polishing department called upon the managers of the company and demanded the restoration of the five molders. It was in the morning about 11 o'clock when it made this demand. It gave the company until 2 o'clock to decide whether to accede to it. The ultimatum was that if it did not accede the polishers would quit work.

The general manager of the company replied that he would not yield to the demand but that he was willing to submit the matter to arbitration by a committee of five—two selected by the company, two by the polishers and one by those four. To this the polishers made no reply whatever. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon they quit their benches and were on strike. Immediately afterward the company posted a notice to the effect that certain employes of the company having quit work it would be necessary for the entire factory to shut down indefinitely. It was not a lock-out. With the molders and the polishers both on strike it was impossible to go on.

Two vital links in the chain were broken and the whole mechanism of the factory was thrown out of gear. In other words, it was the employes of the company themselves and not the company that closed down the works.

#### FACTORY GIRLS IN LUXURY.

Of all the 2,300 people who are by this action thrown out of employment, probably none at the present stage of the game feels more regret than the 300 girls. The surroundings which these girls have had in their work is without doubt unparalleled anywhere else in the world where women are employed. The deserted shops where they worked as they stand today exactly as they were left when the girls walked out after the shut-down, have an appearance so utterly at variance with the popular idea of a factory, or, for that matter, of the actual fact of factory surroundings, that the contrast seems almost absurd. The lag, light, airy rooms in which they work, with their wax-like cleanliness and their dainty little touches of feminine decoration here and there, suggest rather more a sort of combination of summer resort and girls' boarding school than a place where young women are engaged in the serious occupation of earning a living.

If ever the struggle of life was done up in cotton and downy cushions for the strugglers, surely it is here. The very bones of work themselves as contrasted with those that prevail in most factories which are not even considered hard, seem almost grotesque in their generosity. Eight o'clock in the morning is the hour when they must report. Twenty minutes after five in the afternoon is the time when they quit. In the interval there is a full hour for luncheon. In addition to this there is a recess in the morning of ten minutes and another in the afternoon of the same interval.

#### MORE WORK AND LESS PAY.

The luncheon is served in a bright, very gayly decorated room at the top of the building. It is fairly radiant, this working girls' refectory. Over in one side there is a cosy alcove with easy chairs. Over in another corner is a piano. In still another is a bookcase, with near it a long table covered with all the latest magazines. The ceiling is hung from one end to the other with clusters of artificial flowers—the same which served as the Easter decoration of one of New York's large mercantile concerns, and were purchased and brought here by Mr. Patterson at no very light expense, considering that it was a mere whim to furnish something bright and cheerful for the eyes of a factory girl to rest upon during her non-day hour of rest and refreshment.

Not one of the girls in the factory has to climb a foot of stairway to reach this cosy resort at the top of the building. For ten minutes after the ringing of

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