

Working Conditions in Chicago in the Early 20th Century

Testimony before the Illinois Senatorial Vice Committee, 1913

edited by DANIEL J. ELAZAR

The years preceding America's entry into World War I saw simplistic notions of easy human progress toward the millennium reach their climax in the Progressive movement. Linking the traditional American dream of an agrarian paradise with the problems of urbanization that already plagued the country, the Progressives turned their attention to the amelioration of working conditions for those who were new to the big city, whether they came from rural America or from the Old World. Among other urban institutions of exploitation, Progressive investigators from respectable middle-class backgrounds discovered the sweatshop and the brothel. Animated as they were by an oversimple sociological view that bad environment was the single cause of crime, vice, and corruption, the Progressives did not take long to trace an ostensible connection between the two.

In 1912, the Democrats of Illinois elected their first Governor in twenty years. Edward F. Dunne, the successful candidate, was the first and only resident of Chicago ever to be elected Governor of Illinois. Elected with him was another young Chicagoan, Barrett O'Hara, who won the office of Lieutenant Governor in part because he was a veteran of the Spanish-American War. Both these men, O'Hara in particular, were concerned with the Progressive aims of urban reform. With a sympathetic legislature behind them, they were able to establish a committee of inquiry into the problems of vice in Illinois and in particular into the connections between prostitution and poor working conditions. The Illinois senatorial vice committee chaired by Lieutenant Governor O'Hara held hearings for two years in all corners of the state. While these hearings focused public attention on the problems explored, hearings

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alone could not combat the situation which came to light — not the least because the investigators' oversimplified assessments of the problem could not point the direction to real amelioration.

Today, the published report of the committee's hearings remains as an example of American reformist thinking from the last "salad days" of nineteenth-century optimism.* Barrett O'Hara was subsequently elected to the United States Congress from a South Side Chicago district, one which has always been a bastion of the city's Progressivist and reformist instincts. It was only in 1968 that this sprightly survivor of an earlier America retired from Congress.

The major portion of Chicago Jewry in the years before World War I was primarily an immigrant group living in the city's oldest ethnic neighborhoods and making its living from the same processes of industrialism which called down the condemnation of the Progressives. Yet, as an exceptional group, it had its share of "bosses" as well as workers — men of the same immigrant background who were on their way upward toward business success. The O'Hara committee, seeking a full picture of the situation in Chicago, naturally had to take testimony from Jewish women working in the sweatshops of the Near West Side and from Jewish men who employed them. The record of their testimony presented below in verbatim selections from the published transcripts gives us a fascinating glimpse into the realities of social conditions among the settlers of the third wave of Jewish immigration and the problems they faced.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of those problems is the way in which the new immigrants were not simply victims of exploitation by the existing establishment in the United States, but were victimized by their "own kind." Their employers were marginal operators who had come to these shores not long before and whose success depended upon the exploitation of their brethren perhaps to an even greater extent than did the success of businessmen from groups better established on the American scene. Like most employers of their day, they endorsed the system's laissez-faire principles, but the testimony indicates that — perhaps because

* Report of the Senate Vice Committee, State of Illinois, 48th General Assembly (Springfield, 1916). The selections used here represent only a small portion of the testimony taken from the Jewish principals involved in Chicago's garment industry. A copy of the full transcript is available in the American Jewish Archives.

they were Jews — they could be stirred by the committee's challenge to the morality of that system.

No attempt has been made to identify the people involved in the hearings. Their identity as individuals is of little concern. Rather, it is the role that they played in an emergent industrial society which is of interest to us today.

One further note of interest: running as a minor key throughout the testimony is an implicit acknowledgement of the changing patterns of Jewish life in the New World. Yiddish was the mother tongue of all the women. Some had to be questioned through interpreters, while others, who had been in the country longer, could more or less accommodate the committee in English. Some of the women who worked in the garment factories were Sabbath observers; most were not. The former even sacrificed a portion of their meagre wages to maintain something of a traditional Jewish life, while the latter tried to adjust themselves to a new environment.

The ILLINOIS SENATORIAL VICE COMMITTEE convened at the Hotel La Salle, Chicago, Illinois, March 31st, [1913] at 10:00 A.M. Present: Chairman O'Hara, Senator [Niels] Juul, Senator [Edmond] Beall, Senator [F. Jeff] Tossey, Senator [D. T.] Woodard. Thereupon the following proceedings were had:

E. B. testified through an interpreter, as follows:

SENATOR JUUL:

Q. What is your nationality — what count[r]y were you born in? A. In Russia.

INTERPRETER: She is a Russian Jewess.

Q. You are married? A. Yes, sir.

Q. How many children have you? A. Three children.

Q. Who are you working for?

INTERPRETER: She does not know . . . she is working in the shop.

Q. Who owns the shop? A. She does not know. She works on Jefferson Street.

Q. Ask her if she knows how much money she brings home

Saturday night for the work she does. *A.* Three dollars and forty cents a week.

Q. Does she get that all at once? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. How many hours a day do you work? *A.* From 7:30 till 6 o'clock.

Q. All the week? *A.* She does not work on Saturday.

Q. This \$3.40 represents five days' work? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. What line of work do you do? *A.* She is cleaning coats.

Q. How many coats do you clean a day? *A.* She doesn't know; they all work together.

Q. How old are you? *A.* Thirty-six years.

Q. What does your husband earn a week? *A.* Nine dollars a week.

Q. There are three children; do any of the children work?
A. One child began to work, a very young child. She is written down as sixteen.

Q. Are you afraid to tell this Committee who you are working for? *A.* She says she doesn't know.

Q. Is she afraid of telling us who she is working for for fear of losing her job? *A.* No, she swears she doesn't know.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Sergeant, call Mr. M. R. of the firm of R & W.

THE SERGEANT: I have already been there twice and they claim they are both out of town.

SENATOR JUUL: Is there a member of the firm of R & W in this room?

THE SERGEANT: No, sir; they are not subpoenaed.

SENATOR JUUL: I was told he was here without being subpoenaed. If he is, he will please come to the front and be sworn. Is there a member of the firm in the room? — ask the witness. I think these witnesses are afraid to testify.

THE SERGEANT: Here is a woman that will testify.

M. D. testified as follows:

SENATOR JUUL: Can you talk Russian? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. You live south of Twelfth Street? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. Are you married? *A.* Yes, she is married, but her husband left her.

Q. How long since he left her? *A.* Three years.

Q. What firm are you working for? *A.* She doesn't know.

Q. Where do you work? *A.* Jefferson and Twelfth Place.

Q. Is that R & W's factory? *A.* She doesn't know.

Q. Is she afraid to tell us? *A.* She is not afraid; she said there is nothing to be afraid of, but she doesn't know.

Q. How much do you make a week? *A.* Four dollars.

Q. When do you start to work in the morning on Monday?

A. From 7:30 to 6 o'clock.

Q. You work how many days in a week? *A.* She works all the week from Monday until Saturday in the afternoon.

Q. You work on Saturday for the same \$4.00? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. Do you ever get paid anything for overtime? *A.* Twenty-cents for three hours.

Q. Do they pay you supper money besides? *A.* No, sir.

Q. How long have you worked for them? *A.* Three months.

Q. Did you ever make any more or any less than you are making now? *A.* No, she never got any more than that.

Q. Did she ever get any less? *A.* Never got any less.

Q. What kind of work do you do? *A.* She is cleaning coats.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Has this woman any children? *A.* She has no children.

Q. She supports herself on this \$4.00 a week? *A.* She boards.

Q. How much does her board cost her? *A.* She pays \$6.00 for room and then she makes her meals herself.

Q. Six dollars a month? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. And she gets \$16.00 and pays \$6.00 for her room. That leaves \$10.00. What does she eat — how much does the food cost her?

A. Well, she doesn't know exactly; she says when she has more money she eats better and if she has less she eats less.

Q. Let us find out what she generally has for breakfast. *A.* Half a pound of meat and coffee and bread.

Q. What does she pay for that half a pound of meat? *A.* Eight cents for half a pound.

Q. What kind of meat is it? *A.* Chop.

Q. Will she be docked for the time she is here before this Committee now? *A.* She doesn't know.

SENATOR JUUL: Before we go any further with the summoning

here of these people, to whom \$1.00 is a fortune, I suggest that the Committee pay each of these witnesses \$1.00, and if the State of Illinois will not pay it, we will pay it individually, because it will be a hardship for these people to lose \$1.00 in coming here. A dollar to them means a fortune. I do not think they ought to be permitted to go away from this Committee without being paid the \$1.00. People that will make a human being work that way will dock them . . . I think they would dock them for a minute.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Give them \$1.00 an hour. And if any of these women are discharged because of the evidence they give here, the Committee will make it known, the name of the employer who discharged them for that reason.

Q. How much do your clothes cost you a month? A. She says she don't know exactly.

Q. How often does she buy a new dress? A. She wears one until she cannot wear it, and then she gets another one.

Q. How much does she pay for a dress? A. She paid for suits \$15.00.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Well, I am afraid this line of questioning will prove unprofitable because of the element of pride that enters into it. These people have pride the same as everybody.

SENATOR JUUL: They go to a second-hand place to buy their clothes.

H. M. G. testified as follows:

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Q. With what concern are you connected?
A. With myself.

Q. How many stores have you? A. Two.

Q. Where are they located? A. West Twelfth Street.

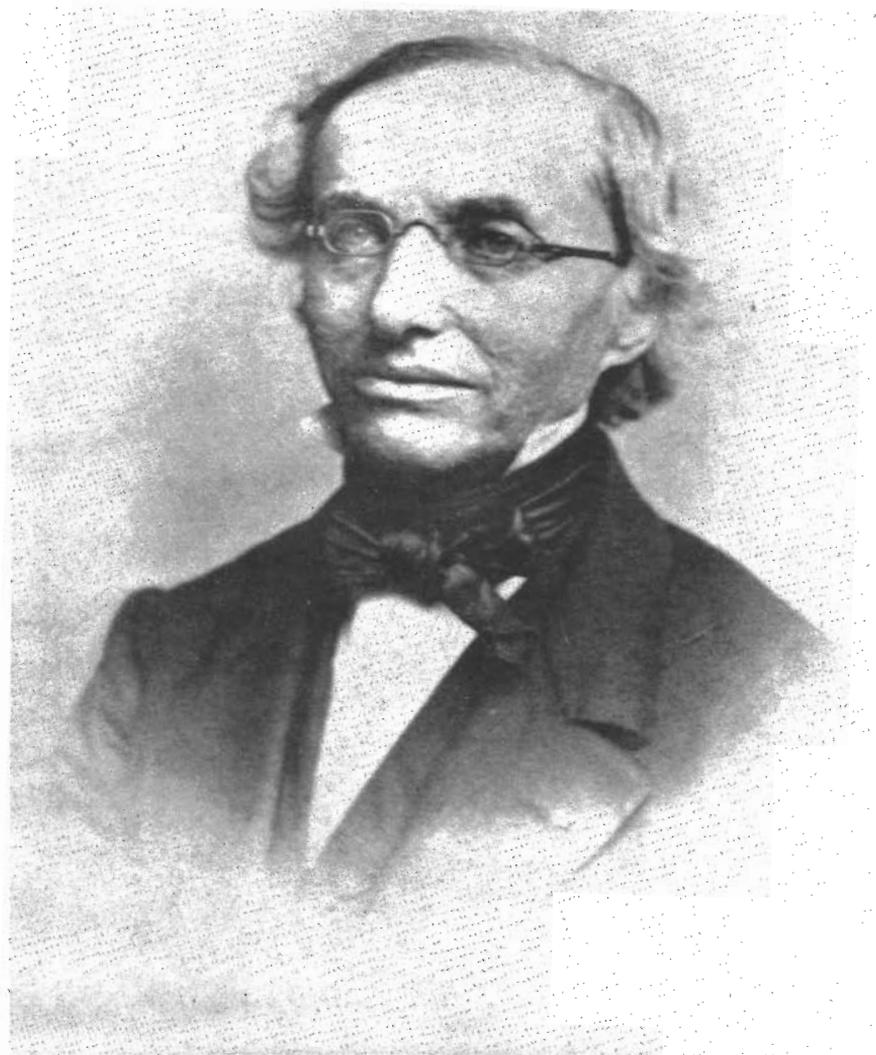
Q. You hire and discharge your own employees? A. Yes, sir.

Q. How many girls do you employ? A. Twenty-six.

Q. What is the least that you pay any of these girls? A. Nine fifty a week.

Q. Do any of those twenty-six receive less than \$9.50 a week?
A. The apprentices.

Q. How much do they get? A. Two get \$4.50 and one gets \$5.50.



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Q. With the exception of those three, all of your girls get \$9.50 a week or more? *A.* Only two get \$9.50, the rest is more.

Q. They get so much a week, depending on the number of hours they work? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. Have you the piece system in your place? *A.* No, sir; the ten-hour system.

Q. Ten hours a day? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. How many hours a week is that? *A.* Sixty hours.

Q. They work full time on Saturday? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. Do you know of any time during the last two years when you have paid any girl, not an apprentice, less than \$9.50 a week? *A.* Well, I guess so.

Q. Have you during the last two years paid any girl but an apprentice less than \$4.50 a week? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. What is the lowest you have paid any girl? *A.* Well, the apprentices, when they first start in, when the father or mother bring them down there, they come in my place and I always start them in with their carfare and lunch.

Q. How many of these apprentices have you got in your employ now? *A.* Three of those.

Q. You say you do take some apprentices and give them carfare and their lunch? *A.* No, sir; I give them money, \$3.00 a week to cover carfare and lunch.

Q. Coming down to dollars and cents, what is the least amount you have paid any one of the apprentices during the last year or so? *A.* The least is \$3.00.

Q. During the last two years? *A.* The last two years I could not exactly remember; I can remember the last year.

Q. Have you ever paid any of these girls \$1.50 a week? *A.* No, sir.

Q. Never in your life? *A.* No, sir.

Q. You would not do that? *A.* No, sir.

Q. Did you pay some \$6.00 or \$7.00? *A.* Those were girls that worked extra evenings.

Q. How many girls have you? *A.* I have more than twenty-six girls.

Q. How many girls have you, all told? *A.* I could not figure

out exactly; I have girls that work evenings for me, stenographers that work there.

Q. They come down at 7 o'clock? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. How long do they work? *A.* Half-past nine, two and a half hours.

Q. How many of these girls come down in the evening?

A. Well, I could not tell just exactly, but I think there is ten of them.

Q. How old are those girls? *A.* All big girls.

Q. What do you call big girls? *A.* Well, they are all over twenty.

Q. Some of them are stenographers during the daytime? *A.* Yes, two or three of them; some of them are salesladies in the downtown stores.

Q. You take care of one place, and a [fore]woman takes care of the other place? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. These girls go out every night? *A.* No, sir; three nights a week.

Q. What do you pay them for their services? *A.* Well, the lowest I pay them is \$1.00 for the two and a half hours. Some get as high as \$1.50.

Q. You never have paid any of these girls less than \$1.00 for the night's work? *A.* No, I am paying as high as \$2.00.

Q. You would not pay less than \$1.00? *A.* They would not come for less than \$1.00.

Q. If they would come for 25 cents, how much would you pay them? *A.* I never had any experience; I could not tell you. Those girls I pay some as high as \$2.00.

Q. In other words, you are a good businessman, and you buy these women as cheap as you can? *A.* No, sir; if I get good girls I do not care for the money. When a girl comes to me for a job I tell her if she will make good she can name her own price.

Q. You tell them that when they come to work for you? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. That is what we call taking them up on the mountains and showing them the green valleys. I once worked for \$9.00 a week and that is the way they treated me. *A.* It is different times now.

Q. Now, when these girls leave the place, where do they go? Do they go directly home under escort? *A.* Yes, I know them all nearly, and they have parents.

Q. You never had any men around the place there trying to entice these girls away? *A.* No, sir; I would not have it.

SENATOR JUUL: Are you doing a pretty good business? *A.* Well, pretty fair; yes, sir.

Q. Your business is an office business, isn't it? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. And an evening business. The fact that you have evening business would not excuse you from treating the girls that work evenings any different than any other merchant would treat girls working in the daytime, would it? *A.* Well, I don't think so.

Q. Well, if your business necessitates the working of girls evenings, do you know of any reason why those girls should not be paid on a good living basis the same as girls working in the daytime? *A.* No, sir. But they have steady jobs and only work nights for extra money.

Q. You don't give them a chance to take steady jobs? *A.* I do; but they would not do it.

Q. Would you hire those girls all the week and work them the legal number of nine hours a day and pay them a full week's wages? *A.* I would if they would come.

Q. Have you tried them to see? *A.* Many times.

Q. How much have you offered them? *A.* I offered them, if they would work six evenings, I would pay them \$9.00 a week.

Q. How many hours would they work in three evenings? *A.* Three hours a night, eighteen hours a week, but that would be only in the season.

Q. When is your season? *A.* This year it began the 15th of March, but it usually begins in April to the 1st of July and from the 1st of September to the 1st of December. Of course, I could not keep them steady during the dull season; I have not got any work at all.

Q. You drop them when you are through with them? *A.* I do except some I keep steady the whole year.

Q. Do you know all the girls you employ in the evening, all of the girls that have employment in the daytime? *A.* Yes, pretty nearly all.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: How do you know them? *A.* I know them personally, most of them. They are neighbors of mine; pretty near all of them live in the same neighborhood.

Q. In order to live in your line of business, it is necessary for the girls to work at two jobs? *A.* Only a few. Some of the girls work all the year around.

Q. The work they do for you at night, the pay they receive from you, would it enable those girls to live out of what they get from you? *A.* I don't think so; no, sir.

Q. They have got to take a chance on finding other jobs? *A.* They come to me when they have other jobs in other places.

Q. If they didn't have another job? *A.* I would take them steady.

Q. Have you any that are working now for \$9.00 a week? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. How many? *A.* There are three girls.

Q. How many have you that get less than \$9.00? *A.* None with the exception of that three.

Q. And those girls work for you three nights a week? *A.* No, sir; those three only work in the day, three apprentice girls.

Q. You make hats? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. And sell them at retail? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. Have you any girl clerks? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. You pay none of those clerks less than \$9.00? *A.* Two of them \$22.50 and one \$18.00 a week.

Q. You are able to compete with some of the State Street stores in prices? *A.* I don't think so; if I should do it, I would make more money than I do, a good deal.

SENATOR BEALL: You say you pay your girls from \$9.00 to \$22.00 a week as salesladies selling goods? *A.* In the store.

Q. We have found stores in this part of town that pay a great deal less than that. Now, I am told you have the name of selling the cheapest millinery in the city, and these shop girls come to your place to buy. Is that correct? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. If you can pay \$9.00 to \$20.00 a week, why cannot these high-priced stores down here, why cannot they afford it, too? *A.* Because I am satisfied if I make \$5,000 in my two stores; I feel perfectly happy.

Q. That is exactly what we have been trying to find out for weeks.

SENATOR TOSSEY: What were your profits last year, do you care to tell? *A.* No, sir; I could not tell you. What I have left in the bank is for myself. I have made in the last three years, besides my living, \$15,000 to \$20,000.

SENATOR BEALL: You can manufacture hats and sell them to these shop girls cheaper than these stores in this part of town who pay them \$5.00 a week, while you pay \$9.00 to twenty? *A.* Yes, and I pay one lady \$35.00, and one young lady \$27.50, and one \$25.00.

Q. Do you belong to the Manufacturers' Association? *A.* No, sir.

Q. Why not? *A.* Well, not because I don't like them, but I have not got the facilities. I do not see any necessity for it.

R. S. was examined through an interpreter, and testified as follows:

Q. Do you understand English? *A.* No.

Q. What language do you speak? What is your nationality?
A. Jewish.

Q. How old are you? *A.* Seventeen years.

Q. Are you sure you are not fifteen? *A.* No, I am seventeen.

Q. What year were you born in? *A.* I don't know, but I know I am seventeen years old.

SENATOR JUUL: You are seventeen, but you look like fifteen.

Q. How long have you been in this country? *A.* Nine months.

Q. What are you doing for a living? *A.* I baste coats.

Q. In what place of business? For whom are you working?
A. I don't know the name; I am not working long there so I don't know the name of my employer.

Q. If you knew it, would you be afraid of telling it? *A.* No, I would not be afraid.

Q. How much do you make a week? *A.* Four dollars.

Q. That is, if you work all week? *A.* Yes.

Q. Do you work out of the shop too? *A.* Yes.

Q. Do you work on Saturdays? *A.* Yes, but I don't work on Sunday.

Q. You go to work at what time in the morning? *A.* At seven-thirty.

- Q.* And you quit when? *A.* At six.
- Q.* How much time for lunch, for dinner, do you have?
A. Three-quarters of an hour.
- Q.* Is that R & W? *A.* Yes.
- Q.* Have you seen any of the bosses since last Saturday? *A.* Yes.
- Q.* How many are there in your family? *A.* I am all alone here; I have no family here.
- Q.* How did you come here? *A.* My brother brought me here.
- Q.* Where did you come from? *A.* Russia.
- Q.* What part of Russia? *A.* Vilna.
- Q.* You are not talking Russian now? *A.* No, I speak Yiddish.
- Q.* Is your brother married? *A.* No, me and my brother both stop with strangers.
- Q.* What do you have, one room there? *A.* No.
- Q.* Well, you have to have a room apiece? *A.* Sure, we have both separate rooms.
- Q.* What do you have to pay for your room? *A.* I pay three and a half a week for room and board.
- Q.* That leaves you fifty cents a week for shoes, clothing and other necessities? *A.* Yes, sir, that is all.
- CHAIRMAN O'HARA:* When did you buy your last dress? *A.* I didn't buy a dress here; when my brother brought me to this country nine months ago, he bought everything for me. Ever since then I haven't bought anything; I haven't money enough to buy any clothes.
- Q.* How long have you been working there? *A.* Six weeks.
- Q.* Out of the four dollars a week that you get, you pay out three dollars and a half for board and room. How much of those four dollars do you have left? *A.* I have the three dollars.
- Q.* You have been working six weeks and you have saved the entire three dollars? *A.* Yes; I have it.
- Q.* What are you going to do with that? What are you saving it for? *A.* I don't know; I think I will buy a dress with it, but I don't know.
- Q.* Where is your washing done? *A.* I am doing it all by myself.
- Q.* Have you had any amusement of any sort? *A.* I go sometimes to a theatre.

Q. Who takes you? *A.* My brother sometimes takes me.

Q. Do you also do your brother's washing? *A.* No, the Mrs. washes for him.

Q. Will they dock you for the time that you are absent today?

A. Surely they will do it.

Q. How did you happen to get this job? *A.* My brother got it for me.

Q. What does your brother do? *A.* He is a tailor.

Q. When you went to get your position, what member of the firm, or what official of the firm, asked your age? *A.* Why, the boss, the foreman.

Q. Did he give you a position immediately? *A.* He told me to wait.

S. S., called as a witness before the committee, testified as follows:

SENATOR JUUL: You speak English? *A.* Yes.

Q. How old are you? *A.* Seventeen.

Q. Where do you work? *A.* N & Company.

Q. Near what place? *A.* Twelfth and Jefferson.

Q. What kind of work do you do there? *A.* Make dresses and dressing sacks.

Q. Do you operate a machine? *A.* Yes.

Q. How do you get paid, by the piece? *A.* Yes.

Q. How much did you make last week? *A.* Ten dollars.

Q. How much did you make the week before? *A.* Nine dollars.

Q. What is the least that you have made the last year in any one week's work? *A.* We had a new foreman there. Before he came we used to get good prices, then he came and cut the prices down on our work there. I used to make eight and nine dollars a week, but all of a sudden I had two and a half and three, and three and a half dollars, and I could not make a living out of that, and I says to him, "I am going to quit," and he says, "Quit if you want to, you are welcome to quit." Then I went away from there, and I went back to a place on Market Street where I had worked once before and they gave me seven dollars a week. I worked there three months and then that foreman there they fired, and they sent over

and asked me to come back, so I went back to the old place, and now we get good wages.

Q. How long ago was that? *A.* About six months ago, something like that.

Q. How long have you been on this kind of work? *A.* Oh, I worked there about four or five months, and then I left for two or two and a half months, and then I came back there; it will be three weeks, now the fourth week.

Q. How many years have you been working now? *A.* About three years, I think; since fourteen years I went to work.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: What time do you go to work in the morning? *A.* Seven-thirty.

Q. And what time do you have for lunch? *A.* Half an hour.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: How much are some of the other girls, some of the new girls, making? *A.* Oh, there is a friend of mine to work last week. She worked about seven days and she had about five dollars; she worked all week and she made around three and a half.

Q. How many girls do you think there are there working for three and a half? *A.* I don't know; we don't look much at each other's pay.

SENATOR GORMAN: How long before that girl that is earning three and a half now will be able to earn as much as you are? *A.* I can't tell you.

Q. How long did it take you to get where you could earn as much as you are earning now? *A.* It took me a couple of months until I got used to the work.

Q. During the time you were only earning two and a half, did the amount of work that you were doing or the class of work that you were doing remain the same as you are doing now? *A.* Yes, but they changed the prices a little, not very much; the same work, but I was not used to it; it was a different kind of work, and there was a foreman before I left, and I says to him, "Have I got any money coming?" every Saturday. We don't keep any books, and we never knew anything about it; we don't know how much is coming to us; he used to write it on his own book, and one Saturday I thought I ought to have five dollars and something, and I come

for my pay and I seen that I was short of money. I says, "I am short of money," and he says, "Can you prove it to me? Of course you can't remember what you made all week," and I says, "No, I can't, but I am short."

Q. How much was short in the envelope that week? *A.* About a dollar and sixty-nine cents.

SENATOR JUUL: How much was in the envelope for the whole week? *A.* Something about five dollars.

Q. And you thought you were a dollar and sixty-nine cents short? *A.* Yes, so I told him that I was short, and I says, "I will quit." And he says, "You can quit if you want to," and after that my boss told some friends of mine, he says I have got some money coming, so I thought I would go down and see, so I went down there and the boss gave me back a dollar and sixty-nine cents, something like that.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Who was your boss? *A.* N.

SENATOR TOSSEY: How do you keep track of your piece work? *A.* I got a book and he marks the price down every week.

Q. What did they pay? *A.* Sometimes eighty cents a dozen and some more than that.

SENATOR JUUL: Eighty cents for a dozen waists? *A.* All according to the waists.

Q. Have you any idea for what these waists are usually sold? *A.* No.

Q. You don't know what you would have to pay for a waist of that kind if you went down to buy one? *A.* No, I can't tell.

Q. Are you living with your parents? *A.* Yes.

SENATOR TOSSEY: Did you have to pay for any waists that you spoiled? *A.* When the old foreman was there.

SENATOR JUUL: Where were you born? *A.* In Russia.

Q. What town? *A.* You would not know the name — Kabrink.

SENATOR WOODARD: Have you ever spoiled any goods under this foreman? *A.* I, no.

Q. Do you know of anybody that has? *A.* I know one girl that spoiled a waist and she had to pay for it.

SENATOR JUUL: How much did he charge for it? *A.* I don't know.

Q. They never charged you for anything you spoiled? A. No, sir, I didn't spoil anything.

SENATOR TOSSEY: Did this old foreman ever swear at the girls? A. Yes, he used to call them funny names.

Q. What do you mean by funny names? A. I don't know as I can call it in English. He used to call us, we are all Jewish, he used to call us "Lousy Jews." Every girl had a name back there.

Q. A nickname? A. Yes.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: What name did he give you? A. He used to tell me, but it is just a funny name; I don't think it is nice for me to pronounce it.

Q. Do you mean vile names? Names that you would not call decent? A. Yes, that is what I mean.

Q. Who do you get your pay from? A. The foreman brings it up to us every Saturday.

Q. I want to get this clear; I judge from your testimony that this is the practice there, that the girl, if she finds that she has been wronged, as in your case where you were a dollar and sixty-nine cents short in your envelope of that amount, and as in the case of the girl who was fined for spoiling a piece of work; in both of those cases you both quit or threatened to quit? A. Yes, sir.

Q. Up to that point the employee admitted that the employer was always right? A. Yes.

Q. But when you quit or threatened to quit, then they came through with your demands? A. Yes.

Q. That is the system? That is what happens there? A. Yes.

SENATOR JUUL: Do you think they will discharge you for coming down here and testifying? A. No.

L. N. testified as follows:

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: Have you a system by which you sweat out, which is the English term, work to girls? Do you employ men who send the work out at a less figure than is done by your employees? A. No, sir.

Q. Your firm pays whatever they earn without any middle men getting any profit out of it? A. Yes.

Q. How many employees have you? *A.* About twenty-four or twenty-five.

Q. Girls? *A.* Girls, yes, sir.

Q. What is the best salary you pay to any girl? *A.* Last week there was something like fifteen dollars and some cents; that is, that was the highest pay.

Q. Do you consider piece work is a good way of working women? *A.* I think it is. I think the most efficient ought to make the most money.

Q. Yes, that is right. But do you think that the weak, least efficient ought to make enough to sleep in a bed and to buy clothing to cover her? *A.* I do.

Q. And sufficient food to eat? *A.* I do, indeed.

Q. What is the least paid employee in your concern receiving? *A.* Well, for the first two weeks they earn from three to four dollars a week until they get experience.

Q. How long does it take them to get experience? *A.* That is up to the individual.

Q. What is the average time before they commence to be self-sustaining? *A.* Some of them never do.

Q. Those that never do keep on at three or four dollars a week? *A.* No, we would rather discharge them.

Q. How many girls have you now earning three or four dollars a week? *A.* I haven't got the records with me, but I don't think any more than two. They are learners; possibly they came in a week ago or so.

Q. How many girls have you earning less than five dollars a week? *A.* About two or three.

Q. All together? *A.* Yes.

Q. How many are earning less than eight dollars a week? *A.* Seven or eight.

Q. How many above eight dollars? *A.* The balance.

Q. About sixteen? *A.* Yes.

Q. Do you consider that a girl earning less than eight dollars a week in the city of Chicago is equipped so that she can resist temptation if it comes to her? *A.* That is up to the individual.

Q. Would you consider the fact that she is not earning enough to pay the necessary expenses of life would make her an easier victim? *A.* I do, in some cases.

Q. Do you think it is good morals or good policy for the State of Illinois to have less than the minimum amount of wage that it takes to keep a girl? *A.* No.

Q. But you pay about eight women less than it takes to keep them; thirty-three per cent of all your women earn less than it takes to keep them? *A.* It all depends on the individual. Some girls could not live on eight dollars and some could not live on twelve.

Q. What do you think a young woman can live on? *A.* Six dollars.

Q. If you were to die, would you think that would be a sufficient amount for either your sister or your wife to live on in case she had to go out and earn a living? *A.* No, but I think if they had to do it they could.

SENATOR JUUL: Could you make a list for the Committee showing the absolute necessities that a girl would have to have and which you could get out of eight dollars a week? Could you make a figure for this Committee showing that a girl could exist for less than eight dollars a week? *A.* Not offhand.

Q. Are you basing your wages on that idea? *A.* No. You can see it — for the girls make fifteen, sixteen and seventeen dollars — that I don't base my wages on it. I would much rather pay a girl eighteen to twenty-two dollars than the other, because a girl would naturally turn out better work, but I would not base my wage scale on that.

Q. So there is 33 per cent of your employees that are below the bread-line? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. Is it necessary for the success of your business that they should be kept below the bread-line? *A.* In piece work alone, if I should advance them, I would have to advance all along the line, because there [are] so many inefficient; to give them more money would be an injustice to the others.

Q. When you have a young girl come there on Monday morning, you take all of her time until Saturday night, take all that is in her, all she can give you. Don't you consider that in return for that you owe her enough to eat? *A.* I do.

Q. Enough to live on and sufficient raiment to come to your place of business? *A.* Yes, sir.

Q. You consider, then, the girl who does less for you ought to have that much out of your business? If she does not get that out of your business, ought you to employ her? *A.* No, I should think I should not employ her.

Q. And taking the other alternative you should pay her enough so that she could do it? *A.* No.

Q. You don't think that is an alternative? *A.* No, not to meet the competition.

CHAIRMAN O'HARA: How much did you make this last year, Mr. N.? *A.* I prefer not to disclose that.

Q. I ask you, Mr. N., what was the net profit of your business during the last fiscal year? *A.* Must I give that?

Q. Yes. *A.* About \$2,000.

Q. What is your investment? *A.* About \$14,000.

Q. About how much was paid out during the last fiscal year in salaries to executive officers of your company? *A.* We just organized about a month ago as a corporation.

Q. We were talking about the last fiscal year. You made \$2,000 net profit. You were president then, were you? *A.* We just organized a month ago. It is a corporation now.

Q. But this last fiscal year you say you made \$2,000? *A.* Yes.

Q. You were the sole owner? *A.* Yes.

Q. How much was your salary that year? *A.* Thirty dollars a week.

Q. Was there any money spent in salaries to other executive officers of your company? *A.* No.

Q. Next to your \$30.00 a week, what was your next highest salary paid to anyone connected with your business? *A.* The bookkeeper \$10.00, the shipping clerk \$9.50, the designer \$22.00, one helper \$10.00, and we have a helper for \$9.00.

Q. What was the total amount of business done during the last fiscal year? *A.* Fifty thousand dollars.

Q. Fifty thousand dollars gross? *A.* Yes, sir.

SENATOR JUUL: Now, Mr. N., you say that \$50,000 business yielded \$2,000 worth of profit. How far did you increase the size of your business last year? *A.* We did not increase it at all.

Q. You did not buy any new machines? *A.* No.

Q. In other words, your business was of the same size at the end of last year that it was at the end of the preceding year?

A. Approximately; I put in one or two machines.

Q. You didn't put in much improvement actually out of the earnings? *A.* No.

Q. Yet that business yielded only a profit of a couple of thousand dollars? *A.* Yes.

Q. You don't think it is possible for you to compete with other men in your line of business and pay the 33 per cent of your employees a wage which would enable the girls to look at the men and women in your office and say that the money that they got from you was sufficient to keep them? *A.* No, I don't think I could.

Q. Then it is not possible to conduct your kind of business and have the people that manufacture your merchandise make a living independently of what they might have on the outside? *A.* This is skilled help.

Q. You don't call it skilled help until they can produce a certain number of any design? *A.* No, no, they just produce one item.

Q. They can produce that item, but they cannot produce it fast enough? *A.* Some can't produce it at all on the start; that is the idea.

Q. How long a period do you consider that they are unable to produce the merchandise at all? *A.* An average of about three weeks.

Q. If, then, for three weeks, they learn to do it when they have been with you three weeks, do you then elevate them up to a point where they are self-supporting? *A.* They usually, if they stay, make enough to come up to \$7.00. I might quote an instance where a girl came over from abroad and never saw a power machine in her life and she made \$7.21 the first week, I think.

Q. She was unusually speedy? *A.* She was.

Q. Isn't it a fact that the majority of your girls get from \$4.00 to \$6.00 a week? *A.* Oh, no.

SENATOR WOODARD: How long does a girl have to work with you before she can become skilled? *A.* With that degree of skill she ought to make a living at \$8.00 by working three or four weeks.

Q. What becomes of goods that are spoiled in the making? Are they charged up to these girls? *A.* Sometimes, and sometimes not.

Q. What becomes of the goods? *A.* It is given to them or sold, if they wanted it sold, for what it would bring and the difference they paid; the difference between that and what it cost.

SENATOR JUUL: Suppose the State of Illinois were to establish a minimum wage law at which you would be compelled to pay, say, at least \$8.00 or \$9.00 a week to a girl that you pay less than that in the case of piece work. You would simply start her in from that and up? *A.* I should say that we would not employ a girl that could not make \$8.00 a week.

Q. You would have to recruit your force from somewhere, wouldn't you? *A.* Yes.

Q. Then how would you get your new girls? *A.* That is a thing that time would have to solve for itself; I don't say this is a fact, understand, but that is my idea.

Q. Do you think it would be in the business if all men engaged in the same line of business that you are engaged in would be in the same fix you would be put in? *A.* I think so.

Q. Then you think it would be a pleasant thing for you if they were all put on the same basis and you were to pay the girl the minimum living wage as long as they are treated all alike? *A.* If they are treated all alike, yes.

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