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OUR LACK OF STATISTICS

BY MRS. FLORENCE KELLEY,
General Secretary, National Consumers' League, New York.

Ever since the death, some years ago, of a number of young girls in a factory in Market Street, here in Philadelphia, our honest and modest Commissioner of Labor, John Williams, has been warning us of the danger of such a holocaust in New York. The blood of those who perished in the fire in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, their average age, so far as it has been possible to identify them, only 19 years, is not upon the heads of the factory inspectors. They never lulled us into any false sense of security. That crime is on our heads, as a callous, reckless community.

Beginning on Sunday last,¹ I have spent much time in meetings of working people in New York, called to mourn the death of the 146 workers and to devise ways to prevent similar future sacrifice. The contrast is very strong to-night. I do not seem able to adjust myself to it. I have been looking into the grave faces of working people at Cooper Union and elsewhere, and I have seen just one smile. I walked on Wednesday four hours in the rain with those who mourned. A half million working people stood all those hours in the streets in the rain. I saw just one smile, and that on the face of a drunken man. I have never seen faces so filled with concern as those which lined miles of the streets of New York, faces of men, women and youth mourning the slaughter of their fellow-workers.

We Americans show that we do not care, because we do not punish those who take life. Ever since I spent that four hours among those half million silent mourners in that silent drenching rain, in that solemn, unrelieved gloom, I have been haunted by certain questions, and I wish to put everything in the rest of my speech in the interrogative form.

The questions are these: First, whether our statistics of the deaths of working people at their work would not move rapidly toward zero if we stopped extending Christian forgiveness to those

¹This address was delivered Friday, April 7, 1911.

who kill 146 young workers, who lock their doors for fear lest a cheap shirtwaist be stolen, and themselves steal 146 young lives, or if we went back to the old Jewish law, which gave an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. If we should apply that law in the case of the very small statistics now freshly at hand—here are 146 young lives destroyed by employers who were breaking the law in every way in which it was convenient to break the law—let us see just what lives would be called for if the working class really sent in their bill for a life for a life. Would there not come first the cruel and cowardly employers who found refuge and safety on the roof, while 146 of their young workers died like rats in the trap set for them? Harris and Blanck were the only employers in that building who refused to grant the Saturday half-holiday. If they had granted it their workrooms would have been closed and empty at the time of the fire. After the fire they moved their workrooms to another building exactly as unsafe. Again they locked the doors, placed heavy tables in front of their windows, and over-crowded the floors with machines!

Then would there not come the judges of the Court of Appeals, who two days before the fire gave leave to kill, when they announced in their decision, in the Ives case, that workmen's compensation under the new statute, would be property taken without due process of law—while life is taken as we have seen during the present month?

There is no compulsory fire drill in this country, and everyone, judges included, knows that there is none. Is it not, therefore, reasonable to suppose that sooner or later the working class will send in its bill for a life for a life, logically asking, first the lives of the employers, and then of the judges who virtually gave permission to take such risks? Would not the building inspector come next, who certified safe the top of the elevator, where a wooden beam dishonestly took the place of the required steel beam to sustain elevators which, as that building inspector knew, were the sole hope of escape in the absence of accessible fire escapes? Might he not suitably close the procession, followed only by the stockholders and bondholders of the Asch Building, who profited by the economy of that wooden beam, and the absence of fire escapes?

If the old Jewish retributive rule, a life for a life, were enforced throughout our country in this and all kindred cases, should we not have immediately the most compendious information about all deaths and all industrial causes leading to those deaths?

Some time ago a great banker of New York City was killed on a train of the New York Central Railroad. Without waiting to be sued, the company paid \$60,000 to his widow. As I walked through the rain, I thought of those deprived of their sons and daughters, mothers in the old country, patiently waiting for money to be sent to enable them to come to their children here; and I wondered on what statistical basis one could work out this problem: Charity has brought together \$81,000 for the survivors of 146 working people, who had on the morning of their death probability of life much greater than that of Mr. Spencer Trask (his actuarial expectation of life was extinct) who had no dependent children, who left his wife in such position that it was worth while for the New York Central Railroad to offer \$60,000, which she then bestowed in charity. What is the statistical ratio and the social ratio between the life of an elderly, childless banker, and the lives of 146 young workers, killed at their work? Between \$60,000, furnished by friendly agreement between the railroad and his estate, and \$81,000, furnished to the survivors of 146 young workers by charity?

A curious coincidence: It is two weeks since that fire, and there have been 26 Socialist mayors elected in these two weeks in the spring elections. I do not believe it is cause and effect, but I think it is a coincidence, a startling one. Rose Schneiderman, the cap-maker, speaking for the National Women's Trades Union League, stood last Sunday in the Metropolitan Opera House, filled with citizens of New York and working people, and said: "Citizens, the working class of New York has tried you for a long time, has looked to you for the safety of working people, and you have not succeeded, you have not made life safe for us. So I think the time is coming when the working people will have to be their own committee, and furnish their own inspectors, and carry on their own industries." In that great Metropolitan Opera House, without an empty seat, one could have heard a pin drop as she spoke. Is it not a coincidence when in the month of the annulment of the compensation law and of the holocaust, the immigrant working women who, except the children, are the most defenceless of all the workers, when they, through their spokesman, look such an audience in the face and say, "You have been tried and you have failed?"

I do not believe that we shall find much help in merely gathering statistics. I do not think that working people will continue pas-

sively to see young lives destroyed by hundreds. More women are sensitive every year to the appeal for clean and healthful, safe and good conditions of work. And with the ultimate consumer rests the fate of every industry.

As soon as the idea roots itself and spreads abroad in the land, which has expressed itself in every discussion by working people these last few weeks, that *there are no industrial accidents*, we shall begin to get full statistics of injuries. Working people speak of industrial injuries—they speak of murder. Men and women have been talking on the sidewalks as never before, not of accidents, but of industrial injuries, of manslaughter, of murder. Had this catastrophe occurred before Miss Eastman published her book, which she generously let me read in manuscript, I should have entreated her to change its title, because I believe the book to be an epoch-making discussion of industrial injuries.

Are we not as foolish to talk of industrial accidents in a world governed by law, we who are all servants of modern science, as we should be if we tried to propitiate evil spirits asking them not to injure people who are at work, or if we wore amulets to save us from the interference of evil spirits? There is one evil spirit, one figure which serves to symbolize the statistics of industrial injuries to working people—the symbolic figure of Greed.