
Labor in Pennsylvania

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LABOR IN PENNSYLVANIA.

III.

ONE of the most notable things in the industrial history of the mining regions of Pennsylvania of recent years has been the advent of a new class of the "pauper laborers of Europe." The Italians, who for some time past have been gradually making a "new Italy" of parts of Philadelphia once the strongholds of native Americanism, and have taken the place of Irishmen in railroad building and road work throughout the State, have also to some extent entered mining. The Poles are to be found in considerable numbers in Schuylkill and Luzerne counties, while the Hungarians, or "Huns," as they are popularly called—an appellation which includes, without nice distinctions, immigrants from various countries of continental Europe—have become a marked feature in both the anthracite and the bituminous coal-fields. Unused for the most part to mining, these immigrants cannot at once take the places of skilled miners, but they readily engage in underground work as laborers, and at the expense of more than their share of casualties learn the miner's trade, while the outside work to be done at all mines, and especially the strippings,* of the anthracite regions and the coke-making of the bituminous regions, afford large opportunities for their employment.

Coming not individually, but in squads and bodies; speaking strange languages; living, herded together, in a style much below even the not very high standard of the Pennsylvania miner; and

* "Stripping" consists in the removal by steam-shovels of the superincumbent earth from coal veins not too deeply buried. This done there is no necessity for leaving pillars of coal or timbering, and the entire body of coal can be taken out with little skilled labor and at a minimum of expense. Its effects upon the appearance of the country recall the destructive hydraulic mining of California, and suggest the Chinese prejudice against mining as the mutilation of mother earth.

believed to be imported, or at least induced to come, for the express purpose of reducing wages and making employers independent of their men, these new-comers have naturally been regarded with dislike and dread. This is especially true of the "Huns," whose numbers, habits, and the use made of them in breaking down strikes and compelling reductions have (until recently, at least) made them objects of special fear and aversion. The feeling against them has been like that which exists among the laboring population of the Pacific coast against the Chinese, and with the exception that they are not stigmatized as heathen or accused of leprosy, similar charges have been made against them—the willingness to work for any wages, the ability to live on almost nothing, filthy habits, the sending of their money out of the country, etc. And although that characteristic of non-assimilability which must make Chinese immigration so permanently dangerous in the eyes of every thoughtful man does not attach to the Hungarians, there is much in their manner of living which suggests the Chinese of the Pacific slope. They crowd together in the same way, from eighteen to twenty-four of them, of whom two or three may be women, frequently being found in a single small house, which has been fitted up with rude bunks, one above the other, after the style of an emigrant-ship, but with even more economy of space.* In these houses they seem to live in the fashion of the poorest class of London lodging-houses—paying to the house-master so much for the privilege of sleeping and the use of a common fire, and providing and cooking their own food. Whether, when straitened, they do make soup of offal, and cut up dead mine mules into steaks and roasts, as they have been charged with doing, it is evident from the festoons of ham and bacon which may be seen hanging about these houses that they do not deny themselves wholesome food when they can get it.

In the coke districts, the Hungarian women went to work with

* This crowding together, which is of course induced by poverty, is in some cases at least profitable to the companies, as the crowding of similar classes in the slums of cities is profitable to the owners of tenement-houses. For instance, one company house at a Jefferson County mine, of which I was told, rented formerly for \$5.75 per month. It is now occupied by Hungarians—twenty-four men and three women. The company now gets for it \$24 per month—charging \$1 per head for the men, but considerably taking no account of the women.

the men. They were not directly employed by the operators, but by their husbands, who were thus enabled to take charge of so many more ovens. The spectacle of half-naked women drawing coke-ovens was felt to be a public scandal, and, backed by the strong feeling against the "Huns" on the part of the laboring population, led to the enactment of a most stringent law at the last session of the Legislature. By this act it was made unlawful for any firm, company, corporation, or association, their clerks, agents, superintendents, officers or servants, to employ or permit to be employed any female laborer in or about a coal mine or manufactory of coal, and a penalty both of fine and imprisonment prescribed—one-half the fine to go to the informer and the other half to the school fund of the district. This act, which went into operation on the 1st of July, 1885, at once stopped the employment of Hungarian women, and perhaps in this way contributed to a strike which has done a great deal to lessen the prejudice of the miners against the Hungarians.

I have spoken of the feeling against the Hungarians in the past tense, because since the beginning of this year it has greatly lessened. Up to that time the Hungarians had been looked upon by employers as the most "docile" of laborers; and the miners, with their exaggerated notions about the "pauper labor of Europe," never dreamed of the "Huns" joining in a strike, but regarded them as a constant menace to any organized attempt to try conclusions with their employers. These opinions were greatly modified by the Connellsville strike, a strike in some respects so remarkable as to be worth noticing in something like detail.

Connellsville, in Fayette County, is one of the principal centers of the manufacture of coke from bituminous coal, an industry which has assumed great dimensions of recent years, it having been discovered that coke can be used to great advantage in smelting, even in the anthracite region—a furnace charged with one-half coke to one-half anthracite producing fifty per cent. more iron than if charged with coal alone.

The coal at Connellsville is mined with remarkable ease, owing to the thickness of the vein and the fractures that run through it, a common laborer being enabled frequently to knock down three bushels with one blow of his pick. The coal is run out of the mines on a track built over a line of ovens into which it is filled. When the gases have been driven off, the oven door is opened, a stream of water intro-

duced from a hose, the coke drawn, and the oven refilled, the heat remaining in the walls being sufficient to ignite the new charge. Comparatively little skill being required in these processes, Hungarian labor had been largely introduced, and the miners, whose organization has been broken by previous unsuccessful strikes, were reduced to a condition that made the Connellsville region from a miner's stand-point, perhaps, the worst in Pennsylvania, wages not only being very low, but company stores and all the other abuses of which miners complain, flourishing rankly. The production of coke in this region, it may be said, is closely controlled by a syndicate which operates the principal mines and buys the product of outside operators, who are also united in a "Producers' Association."

The Connellsville strike originated with one man, William Mullen, now Secretary of the Miners' and Laborers' Association of that district. The last reduction in wages had been made in 1884, when coke was selling at the ovens at eighty and ninety cents per ton; but though the price had advanced in the meantime to \$1.20 per ton, wages had not been increased; on the contrary, the miners say their wages had been still further reduced by the enlargement of cars, and by the requirement that they should not only be filled, but coal piled up so as to form what was called a "camel's hump," and also by increasing the charge of the ovens.

In December last, Mr. Mullen wrote to trustworthy men in the various sections of the district calling a private meeting on Christmas Day at Scottdale, to concert a plan of organization. Only one man responded, but the two found two other trusty acquaintances, and the four, agreeing to keep quiet as to their numbers, adjourned the "convention" to New Year's Day. In the meantime, other letters inclosing resolutions were sent out, and a paragraph, of the "numerously attended meeting" order, inserted in the Pittsburgh *Labor Tribune*. On New Year's Day some half-dozen delegates appeared, and the "convention" resolved to demand a restoration of the last ten-per-cent. cut in wages, and then adjourned to January 16th. A still stronger call was at once sent out, another letter published in the *Labor Tribune*, and in a few days the proposed demand was the talk of the district. The miners, however, were unorganized, poor, and dispirited, and whether any number of them would have had the heart to enter into a contest with the powerful syndicate which controls the pro-

duction of the district, may well be doubted. But the unexpected happened. The Hungarians, who had hitherto been regarded by the miners as perfectly "willing to work for eighty cents when they could not get a dollar," got wind of what was going on. Perhaps, as the miners say, they were more disposed to take part in the movement by the fact that their earnings had in many cases been cut down by the prohibition upon the employment of their women. At any rate, they did not stop to write letters or get newspaper paragraphs printed, but held a rousing meeting of their own, and without making any adjournments or waiting for the action of the "convention," struck at once. The effect was contagious; a strike was precipitated over the whole district, and when the 16th of January came, between ten and eleven thousand men and boys were already out, and the convention when it met had nothing to do but formally declare the strike, take steps for organizing the district into branches of the Miners' and Laborers' Association, and send out appeals for aid. The appeals were answered liberally. Such was the feeling which the depressed condition of labor in the district had excited, that even the farmers of the region who, as a rule, are anything but well disposed toward the miners and their strikes, gave provisions freely.

The "Huns" not only struck quickly but they struck hard. So far from showing themselves, as had been said of them by a mine official in an interview with a reporter of the *Pittsburgh Leader*, when they first came into the district so "mortally afraid of the law that the mere sight of an officer was enough to scare the wildest of them into submission," they went far beyond the other miners in their determination to let no one else go to work while the strike lasted, and though a considerable number of them were arrested and lodged in jail, it seemed to have no effect on the others. Efforts were made by the companies to get Hungarians from other quarters, and to procure immigrants from Castle Garden, but they proved failures; the men when they got on the ground and discovered the situation refusing to work. Some attempt was made to apply the coercion of eviction, and a few families were turned out of company houses. But the feeling thus aroused seemed too dangerous to provoke, and after holding out for about a month, the companies yielded, agreeing to restore wages to the point from which the ten-per-cent. reduction had been made in 1884. Gratified with what was to them a

great victory, the English-speaking miners went to work, but the Hungarians were not so easily satisfied, and refused to go to work until those of their number who had been lodged in jail were released. They were finally pacified by the promise that the companies would not press the cases, and of the Huns arrested only two were convicted, receiving sentences of sixty days imprisonment each. Thus ended the Connellsville strike, though when one of the companies, after taking their men back to work, endeavored to compel them to agree to a "cast-iron contract" by which they waived the benefit of certain legal provisions, a successful strike of a day or two in its works convinced the company of the new spirit of the men.

The strike was only for the advance of wages and that point alone was involved in the settlement, but this proof of strength seems to have convinced the companies of the expediency of treating liberally with the now organized men, and by their voluntary action since that time, not only has an additional advance of five per cent. in wages been granted, but the cars have been reduced to the proper size, the "camel's hump" (equivalent, it is said, to two bushels a car) has been taken off, the charging of the ovens has been equalized, the rent of the company houses has been reduced \$1.50 a month, and the prices of the company stores, which, according to the investigations of Pittsburgh reporters at the time of the strike, were on some articles from fifty to one hundred per cent. above ordinary prices, have been reduced not only to the level of individual stores, but even so far below that level as to lead to the suspicion in some quarters that the companies are trying to drive out all the individual store-keepers in the region in order to have better control when another strike comes.

One effect of the Connellsville strike has been to greatly lessen the feeling among the miners against the "Huns," and on the other hand to destroy the impression among employers that they had in them a supply of "docile" labor which would not form unions and go on strikes. This change in feeling has been confirmed by several cases which have since occurred in other districts, in which Hungarians, who had been brought to take the place of striking miners, have, as soon as the matter was explained to them, joined the strikers and refused to work.

But while the Pennsylvania miners are thus getting over their prejudices and learning that, in spite of a foreign tongue, "a man's

a man for a' that," the feeling that has been excited by the influx of unaccustomed foreign labor has had an effect of permanent importance in breaking down the notion that labor can be protected by a tariff on commodities. I do not mean to say that the workers of Pennsylvania as yet see the fallacies of the protective dogmas which have so long been dinned into their ears, but they are at least beginning to realize that a system which, while imposing taxes upon the produce of "pauper labor," admits the "pauper laborer" himself, is of no use to the workman, whatever it may be to the employer.

This changed feeling is shown in the efforts of protectionist politicians to placate it. Here, for instance, is a sample of the Republican platforms that have been adopted in the mining districts this year :

"*Resolved*, That we, the representatives of the Republican Party of Blair County, reiterate our unwavering confidence," etc.

"*Resolved*, That as the Democratic Party has for fifteen months been in power," etc.

"*Resolved*, That we are in favor of the labor interest and protective system, and protest against the importation of foreign paupers, who neither care for nor understand our principles or policy of government, and extend our sympathy to all labor organizations which favor protection to home industries as against the horizontal Morrison free-trade tariff bill, believing as we do that capital and labor will go hand in hand to prevent any confiscation of the one or the degrading impoverishment of the other.

"*Resolved*, That we favor the candidacy of the soldier and patriot," etc.

The question of the condition of working-men in Pennsylvania, as compared with that of British working-men, is of interest in view of the manner in which the depressed and degraded condition of labor in Great Britain has been held up to the Pennsylvania workman as a reason why he should be contented with his lot and vote for patriots who would keep up the tariff. Of course, all foreign labor is pauper labor in the protectionist vocabulary, but though wages in Great Britain are higher than elsewhere in Europe, it is still the country whose pauper-products Pennsylvanians have been taught to regard as the great danger to mankind on this side of the Atlantic. And thanks to the benevolence of the philanthropists who subscribe liberally to the funds of the Steel and Iron Association and kindred societies, even the miner, whose month's work has resulted in a "bob-tailed check," can get free of charge in his "pluck-me store" tracts in which observers like

Robert P. Porter paint dark pictures of British squalor and brutishness as the fruits of free-trade, and professors like Robert Ellis Thompson attribute the woes of Ireland to her lack of a protective tariff.

On the question of fact as to the relative condition of labor in Pennsylvania and Great Britain, the forthcoming report of the State Bureau of Industrial Statistics sheds some interesting light. Like most Pennsylvanians (who have been protectionists for the same reason that most Turks are Mohammedans), Joel B. McCamant, the present Chief of the Bureau, is a protectionist, but one who evidently deems it his duty to ascertain facts, no matter how they bear on theories, and finding it impossible to make any intelligent comparison of the condition of workmen in the two countries by aid of the figures furnished by our State Department, he has added this request to the questions sent out by the bureau to representative employés through the State :

“If for any extended period you were employed at wage labor in Europe, state where and what was your occupation, and how your condition then compared with your condition in this country.”

The answers to this request are very interesting. One man only attempts to reply without personal knowledge, and he may perhaps be excused for endeavoring to add something to his answers to the other questions, since these answers show that he has a wife and three children to support ; that his average earnings have been \$1 per day ; that he lost about 200 days during the year, and rent cost him \$7 per month. He seizes the opportunity to say :

“I am an American citizen and am happy to take this means of letting the public know the state of the miners employed under the Penn Gas Coal Company. The miners are not making a decent living by any means, nor could they do so if they were working full time at the price now paid, which is fifty cents per ton, over a three-quarter inch screen, 2,000 pounds to the ton. By this report, you can see that we do not get half a living at the wages we now receive. We are not paying our way, but going in debt every month. What few clothes we have are wearing out, our names for honesty and uprightness are getting tarnished, and yet it is not our fault, for we try to live within our income and cannot. The articles mentioned in the preceding table are not all that my family need by any means, but I cannot get them every month.”

Of those who answer from personal knowledge, only one says with emphasis that his condition is better here than it was in

Great Britain. He was a ticket agent in Staffordshire, earning, in 1878, twenty-eight shillings a week. Here he makes \$3 per day as an iron-worker in Pittsburgh. Another (a miner) says: "Comparing conditions in Wales and America, I should decide in favor of America." A third (a miner) says: "My condition in the county of Derby was not quite as good as in this country, but very nearly so." The rest of the replies range from statements that the conditions of working-men are about equal in the two countries, to statements that they are much better in Great Britain than in Pennsylvania. Here are samples of these answers:

A puddler, Pittsburgh.—"Wages in Wales were not so high as here; but, comparing the cost of living, it brings me to the same level. House-rent here, \$12; in Wales, \$2, and a better house. Clothing cheaper there, groceries nearly the same; flour cheaper here. I have been considering the condition of the working class in general in this country, and my candid opinion is that the working-man in England is as well off as he is here."

Miner, Somerset County.—"If we could have steady employment at reasonable wages, this country would be much superior to Great Britain; but the average work is one-half to two-thirds time."

Miner, Huntingdon County.—"Could make four shillings a day in England; \$1.25 here. We worked six hours per day there; here we work from ten to twelve."

Miner, Clearfield County.—"The difference is slightly in favor of this country so far as food and clothing go. England has the advantage in social enjoyments. There is more leisure for culture and better facilities for study."

Puddler, Williamsport.—"Have worked in England and Wales many years puddling. My wages were about one-third lower in that country; but my condition compared very favorably with my present. I attribute it to cheap rent and fuel, and the advantage of weekly pay."

Miner, Washington County.—"Wages in Scotland smaller than here, but constant work renders miners as comfortable. On the whole, I believe they are more contented."

Miner, Westmoreland County.—"Five years ago I worked in Durham, England, as a coal-miner. My average wages per day was six shillings and fourpence for six hours' work in the pit; that was a day's work there; house-rent and coal were furnished you by the company I worked for for threepence a week. All coal-diggers there charged the same. Our average working days per week were five days. My condition there was better than here for the last two years. Six hours was a day's work in the pits in the north of England; a day's work here in this country is from four in the morning to five o'clock at night for miners. To be honest with you, the miners in the north of England are better paid for hours worked than here. The first three years I was here I did well and made money; the fourth year, just about made both ends meet. Last year, gone to the bad about \$200."

Miner, Alleghany County.—"I was employed in the coal mines in the

County Durham, England, from 1852 to 1869, when I came to this country. I was better off there than I am here at the present time. The miner's lot is a very hard one; wages are very low and work unsteady. We have a company store here, and are expected to deal in it."

Miner, Washington County.—"Worked in Scotland until 1868, and emphatically say that I was better off then than I have ever been since I worked in the mines in that country. Eight hours constituted a day's work there—sometimes less. Here, I see men working fourteen, sixteen, and eighteen hours, and I know that some of them go into the mines on Sunday, trying to make a living and cannot."

Coal-Miner, Alleghany County.—"Have been employed as a coal-miner in England, county of Northumberland. For a number of years my condition was decidedly better. As proof, I will state that six years since I came to this country with wife and five children, or seven all told. I was able to pay their way over along with me, and had enough money left (when I had got to my destination in Westmoreland County) to purchase all necessaries for housekeeping, furniture, tools to work with, etc., but to-day (though some of my family have grown up to help me a little), were I to sell off everything, I am possessed of, I could not pay off the debts I owe, much less pay our way back to Europe.

"In England, I worked but six hours per day, averaging about two hundred and fifty days in the year, at the rate of one dollar and forty cents per day, with house, garden, and coal for twenty-four cents per month, with medical attendance and medicine, whenever needed, at the same rate, besides having no taxes to pay, as the coal company had to pay the tax on their houses we lived in.

"Here, a miner only gets an opportunity to work a few months in the year, and consequently has to work all the hours God sends—in fact, make a beast of himself or else starve.

"In England, operators build reading-rooms and lecture-halls for their employés, to which every one has free access at a merely nominal payment to keep up the stock. Here, he don't need them, for while working he can think of nothing else.

"Organization has done more to bring the English employer and employé in closer relationship than anything else I know of. For two years previous to my leaving, a sliding scale was adopted by the Northumberland miners, and strikes are things of the past. The operators throw open their books every three months, and the price realized by them fixes the price of mining for the next three months. Here, their motto is, 'take all you can.'"

The impressions given by these replies are confirmed by the personal inquiries I have made among Pennsylvania miners who have worked in Great Britain. The condition of the miner has for some years been growing worse in Pennsylvania and better in Great Britain. The British miner works less hours in the day, but more days in the year. He does not get as high wages in money, but he

does not pay high rent, nor is he swindled by pluck-me stores. The general fact is that the average of wages in the United States is higher than in Great Britain, and that the condition of the working class as a whole is better. But in the very occupations which we so tax ourselves to "protect," the English workman has as a rule the advantage.

As an evidence of the effect of any examination into the conditions of labor in Pennsylvania, as well as of the way in which a new light is breaking in that stronghold of protectionism, it may be mentioned that John L. Butler, Chief Assistant in the Bureau of Industrial Statistics, and well known throughout the State as a consistent and able advocate of working-men's interests, has recently made a speech at a gathering of labor associations, in which he came out as an absolute free-trader, declared all tariffs, either for revenue or protection, to be injurious to labor, and offered to debate the question with any protectionist before any labor association in the State; and this without any suspicion, on the part of working-men at least, that his pockets must be stuffed with British gold. There are many other indications of the same kind. The *Philadelphia Record*, which has for some time been steadily attacking the protectionist delusion, has reached a larger circulation than any other paper in Pennsylvania, and the recent State Democratic Convention took heart to declare for a tariff for revenue only—the half-way house to free-trade. The world is moving, even in Pennsylvania.

HENRY GEORGE.

(*To be continued.*)