

**OUR INDUSTRIAL LAWS:
WORKING WOMEN IN
FACTORIES, WORKSHOPS, SHOPS
AND LAUNDRIES, AND HOW TO
HELP THEM**

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Our Industrial Laws: Working Women in Factories, Workshops, Shops and Laundries, and
How to Help Them by Mona Wilson

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WORKING WOMEN IN FACTORIES,
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HOW TO HELP THEM

By MONA WILSON

EDITED, WITH A PREFACE, BY

Mrs. H. J. TENNANT



[ISSUED BY THE INDUSTRIAL LAW COMMITTEE.]

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PREFACE.

Although it is hoped that this book may be of use to any one interested in our Industrial Laws, it is principally designed to meet the needs and answer the questions of persons who are in a position to make the administration of these laws effective. Prominent among those so qualified by their position are District Visitors, Deaconesses, Mission Workers, Residents in Settlements, Helpers in Friendly Societies and Working Girls' Clubs; and it is in answer to a desire widely expressed to the Industrial Law Committee that the book has been written: in answer to a desire for a fuller knowledge of the laws which govern the industrial conditions of our workers in factories and workshops, that by the aid of such knowledge practical service may be given to them in some of the most pressing and directive circumstances of their life. For the conditions in the factory or workshop are often governing elements in the conditions of the home, which they serve to guide and mould even when they do not directly control. The work-place claims most of the waking hours of the day; there is little time left when the day's work is done for leisure and its uses of recreation and improvement; there is little time left

in which to counteract the influence, if it be a bad influence, of the factory day.

It, therefore, is matter with grave bearing upon the work of all whose concern is the welfare of working women and girls that the conditions of their working life are those ordained by the law. It is intended in the Factory and Workshop Acts, in the Public Health Acts, and in the Truck Acts, to provide for safety, health and morals, for the just discharge of wages contracts, and to give general protection from oppression by unjust fines or deductions. In the Employers' Liability, Act, and by the Workmen's Compensation Act, it is intended to supplement the Common Law and provide compensation in cases of injury or death by accident, to the injured worker or his family. And upon the administration of these laws which touch and control their working life, depends in great measure the economic, social and moral welfare of the nation's workers.

The social workers to whom I have referred, who are in intimate relationship with the conditions which cry out for relief, are those who can most easily judge of the depth and extent of the injury, and who can most easily apply the remedy. On the one hand they can see the injury to health if excessive hours are worked; if meal times are not observed; if the workplace be ill-warmed or ill-ventilated, or otherwise insanitary; or if a "dangerous" trade be carried on

without due precaution; the cruel injury to limb and life if dangerous machinery be unguarded; the injustice to children and to their future if health or education be stunted by employment at too early an age or by neglect of the legal educational requirements; the degrading influence upon the moral tone in a factory if the sanitary accommodation offend against the decencies of life; the injustice of fraudulent miscalculation and the consequent reduction of the wages agreed upon, and its effect upon the wage-earning power of the household; the constant injustice—again bearing the same harmful effect, of fines and deductions; and the hardship of the sudden withdrawal of a wage-earner, killed or injured at his employment, without even compensation in money to those who were dependent upon him for their daily bread. On the other hand, there is the law, and a body of Inspectors to enforce it. The task of bringing the law to bear upon the wrong, of bringing the Inspectors to the relief of those who are oppressed, is one of justice and of mercy; that it may be made simple is the object of this book and of the Industrial Law Committee, and that this object may be the better fulfilled, I venture to suggest the following matters as points it is well to keep in view when noting conditions of work:—

1. The information should be as detailed and as accurate as possible.
2. The name and address of the work-place

should be clearly given ; the address should include, where possible, the number or name of the building which contains the work-place, and when it is one of others in a common building the floor should be stated.

3. The name and address of the person who forwards the information should be stated (*not for publication in any form*) either to the Industrial Law Committee or to the Authorities. This is very necessary in order to facilitate further enquiry, and it is often desirable, though not perhaps necessary, that the Inspector should be in possession of the name of the original informant or of the worker on whose behalf representation is made. As the degree of desirability and usefulness varies according to the nature of the matter complained of, and as, in some cases, the possession of such knowledge may be wholly unnecessary, it is advisable if the workers be at all reluctant, not to disclose their names, though it is most desirable to inspire them generally with confidence in the discretion and good faith of the Inspectors.

4. When representation is made about cases of overwork or breach of meal hours it is especially important to give careful details of the situation of the room or department complained of, if it be one of others in the same building. Alarm may



be spread and detection therefore evaded by the Inspector's entry of a room on the first floor in search of work which is proceeding perhaps on the fifth floor, and which is speedily discontinued at the note of alarm. By aid of the detailed information which I have indicated such a case can be made impossible. Everything should be stated for the benefit of the Inspector, which will facilitate, 1st, rapid entry of the premises, and 2nd, rapid entry of the special room. In those workshops where a system of signals prevails for the evasion of the Factory Inspector, measures to ensure rapid entry are absolutely essential to success. Where also the system prevails of concealing workers in bedrooms, or when it has been threatened or is suspected, the Inspector should be informed.

5. It is important to ascertain if the Abstract of the Factory and Workshop Acts be exhibited, if it contain the proper entries of meal times, times of starting and leaving off work, &c., &c., and if it be hung up in a suitable place *where it can be easily read*. It must not be defaced, or concealed by other papers or by patterns.

6. It is also of importance to ascertain whether in places where overtime is worked the conditions are properly observed; whether entry is duly made