

**STUDIES IN ECONOMIC RELATIONS OF  
WOMEN, VOL. VII: INDUSTRIAL HOME  
WORK IN  
MASSACHUSETTS BY THE DEPARTMENT  
OF RESEARCH WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL  
AND INDUSTRIAL UNION, BOSTON**

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**MASSACHUSETTS BUREAU OF STATISTICS & AMY HEWES**

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**VOLUME VII**

**INDUSTRIAL HOME WORK  
IN MASSACHUSETTS**

**BY  
THE DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH  
WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL AND INDUSTRIAL UNION  
BOSTON**

**PREPARED UNDER THE JOINT DIRECTION OF  
THE MASSACHUSETTS BUREAU OF STATISTICS  
AND  
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DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH**

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## PREFACE

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Is industrial home work a survival of the domestic system of production?

Is it a return to the domestic system whereby the tendency of production to escape from the home may be checked and women may evade economic parasitism with its resultant social, economic and moral slavery?

Or is it a phase of modern industrialism bearing an intimate relation to every feature and problem of modern production?

The first intimation of the widespread custom of so-called home work came to the Department of Research in 1910-1911, while pursuing a study of the manufacture of machine-made clothing. At that time our social experts confidently asserted that there were in Massachusetts no sweated industries. And indeed the sentiment prevailed that whatever of home work existed was either a very small, well-regulated system, applicable only to wearing apparel, or was a survival of the domestic system of production, and appeared in the form of products sold through women's exchanges or directly to the consumer.

Now, there is without doubt a group of workers, we do not know how large or how important, who carry over the eighteenth century custom of production in the home. These appear as "home milliners," "home dressmakers," "home bakers" and laundresses, who employ less than five workers and do not therefore form "shops," according to Massachusetts law. But the workers who had commanded our attention and aroused our interest formed a far larger and very different group. They did not provide their own materials. They did not produce a completed article. Many of them did not perform a skilled operation. They did not sell to whom and where they wished, but they received from a factory a certain amount of material which they were to fashion into a specified form and send back to the factory for a specified wage, or they received a partially completed article or part of an article together with material upon which they were to perform a specified process, partially or fully completing its manufacture. None of the handicraft stage with all its inspiration for creation remained. The market was no longer open to them, in which they could sell their product, including their labor, to the highest bidder,

knowing exactly what part of the total production was due to their skill. They could sell only their labor, and this must be in a much more restricted market, and therefore at a much more unsatisfactory bargain. Industrial home work, so called, existent in Massachusetts is therefore not a *survival* of the handicraft nor even of the domestic system of production.

Some of us saw, or thought we saw, herein the glorious possibility of a *return* to domestic production, if not the domestic system of production. Here a woman could spend idle days or hours, or the hours when other domestic processes were under way and not requiring close attention, in earning the dollars which her mother and grandmother saved by spinning and weaving and baking and candle making. But this extended investigation has brought conclusive evidence and leaves no vestige of a doubt. The present system is in no sense a return to the domestic system, nor does it show any tendency to rehabilitate production in the home whereby women may evade economic parasitism.

Industrial home work is distinctly a *phase of modern industrialism* bearing an intimate relation to every other phase of modern industrialism. In it we see exemplified in its highest development, (1) subdivision of labor; (2) reduction of activities of the workers from those of a trade to that of a process; (3) imposition upon the worker of the burden of charges for waste, inefficiency and transportation; (4) irregularity of employment due to the seasons, to shortage of work, or to rush of work, whereby the burden of unemployment is thrown entirely upon the worker; (5) piece payment whereby hourly earnings can be given only at the maximum amount possible to secure, and actual earnings or even rate of earnings are most difficult to discover; (6) uncertainty of contract; and (7), most noticeable of all, the number of hands through which the work passes from producer to consumer, as seen in the increasing employment of sub-contractors, agents, workers and subworkers. The attendant evils of child labor, of overstrain, of long hours of labor for women, of unsanitary conditions for the worker, of extension of disease to consumers are in danger of being present to a more marked degree than in regular factory life.

The home has become, then, an annex to the shop, whereas under the earlier system, even when conditions were most distant from the pure handicraft system, the shop was an annex to the home. Under the present order of things the home is a part of the shop from the point of view of manufacturer, from the point of view of employee,—in fact from every point of view except that of the responsibility of the State to

regulate conditions of employment. The late Hon. Carroll D. Wright declared that in a factory the work is carried on under one roof, the processes are performed by machinery, and the article of manufacture passes from hand to hand for completion. According to this definition the kitchens or the living rooms or the bedrooms of at least 20,000 homes in Massachusetts are factories in every sense of the term, except that all the processes of the work are not performed under one roof. The work passes from hand to hand and is often performed by machinery in the home factory as well as in the parent factory.

Is this development desirable? Does it make for the best interests of the home and of the community? As it increases in extent and in amount will it result in educational advancement for our children, higher standards for our homes and a strengthening of the family unit?

To-day laws applying to the factories do not apply to the annex to the factory which has been established in the home. If the State decides to allow the home to evolve into a factory, is this right? Is it fair to the worker? Is it fair to the consumer? Is it fair to industry? Is it fair to the public? Ought not the factory in the home to be regulated equally with the factory out of the home? That is, should not the State institute a system of regulation and inspection whereby every home shop should be visited regularly and the laws be enforced as to child labor, sanitation, disease, light, cleanliness, hours of labor, contract for pay, proper accommodations for work?

But is this feasible? Is it possible? And even if possible, would extension of regulation and inspection be commensurate with the profit to the worker in the home? Would such extension of regulation and inspection be commensurate with the return in productivity to the State? Would such extension of regulation and inspection be commensurate with the return to the employer?

This report is an endeavor to arrive at facts which should enable the public to come to some conclusion with regard to these vital questions. In the fall of 1914, after this report had been issued as Labor Bulletin No. 101 by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics, a conference representing agencies in Massachusetts which are concerned with social welfare met to consider the need for legislative action with regard to the subject. It immediately sent a committee to confer with the State Board of Labor and Industries. The Board, finding itself embarrassed because of the enforced disorganization of its Department of Home Work Inspection, decided to analyze its current records respecting licensed home workers, and secured the services of the Department of Research of the Women's