

Working Conditions Of The Industrial Age Factories

By:
Sloan Derk

On corporations: "Our aim is not to do away with corporations; on the contrary, these big aggregations are an inevitable development of modern industrialism.... We are not hostile to them; we are merely determined that they shall be so handled as to subserve the public good. We draw the line against misconduct, not against wealth."

~Theodore Roosevelt



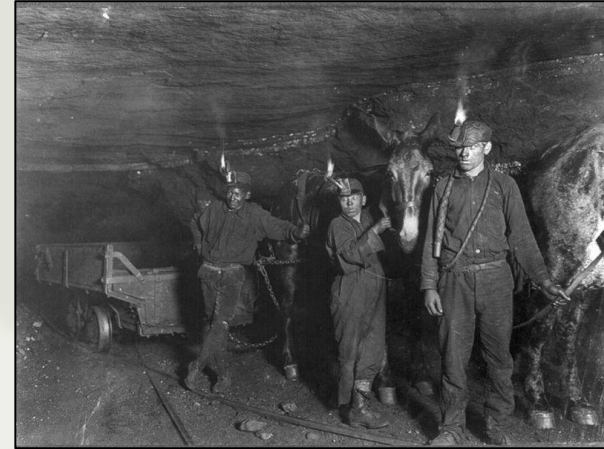
The Working Conditions For The Average Worker During The Industrial Age

- To not go into Extreme detail, (As there is plenty to go over) workers had far worse conditions than we do today.
- To name a few more commonly known issues:
 - Child Labor was common, as the theory was at the time: *“Why should I pay these fully grown workers an actual living wage when I can just underpay them and have their underage children work for me for even less, since they don’t know anything about making a living wage?”* (Children from ages 7+ commonly worked in mines, textile factories, coffin plants, etc.)
 - Extreme working hazards and worksite negligence meant that you would have some very clear dangers present, but the owners saw this as a waste of money, or would convince their workers that if they spent the money to create a safe working environment, it would be coming out of their pay.



The Working Conditions For The Average Worker During The Industrial Age Cont.

- You would also have the factory owners having a monopoly over everything in the surrounding area, enabling them to charge you however much they want to, sending you further into debt.
- Remember that you, and however many kids you have, must also pay for the following (*Not all apply to the children):
 - When moving in, you don't have enough money to pay for your house because it is way too overpriced, putting you further into debt.
 - When buying your groceries, they are all supplied by the factory owner, who is overpricing the products, putting you further into debt.
 - When going to work, (Say you worked in a coal mine) you would have to pay for your gear to go down in the mine, which is provided by the factory owner, who again, has largely overpriced it, sending you further into debt.
 - Not to mention all of this applies to you by yourself, but if you have your kids working with you as well, then they have to pay for all the same things you do, all at the same price.



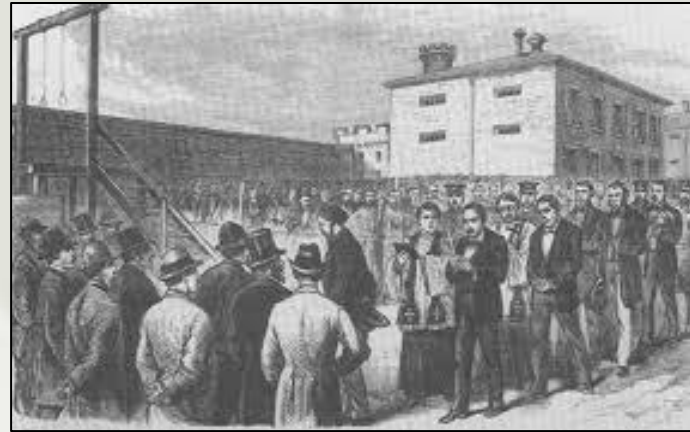
The Rise Of Union Worker Strikes And The Need For Workplace Safety Reforms

- With the poor treatment and all of your debt, your family is dying from disease and starving because you can't afford food. You're left with the thought of wanting a better workplace, and wishing that you could live a better life and actually have your kids go to school and be educated.
- But it isn't just you, hundreds of other workers, with all different jobs are enduring these similar conditions, and want something to change, thus the formation of workers unions.
- The purpose of a union was to have one loud, unified voice to speak out against the government for not doing anything about these corrupt factory owners.
- The idea was to have legal regulations put in place for the workplace, ensuring safety so that going to work doesn't mean your possible death, keep your kids out of the workforce so that they can be educated and have a good chance to get out of the debt and poverty their parents are in, and to ensure that the small monopolies and corruption of the factory owners would be abolished.



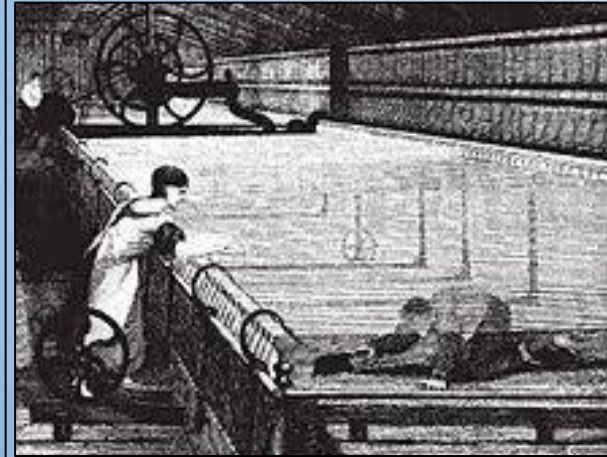
What The Government And Factory Owners Actually Did

- You could probably guess (or maybe know already) what happened after the strikes from the union workers ensued.
- The factory owners were losing production efficiency and couldn't stand the dropping income, so they would hire strikebreakers to literally beat and hunt striking workers until they returned to the workplace.
- You would later have the local police force (also owned by the factory owner) hiring and sending out private “pinkerton police” to spy on rebellious workers and force them to return to work.
- This fueled groups like the *Molly Maguires* to just end up beating and murdering the factory floor boss' and sometimes the factory owners themselves, but would almost always later be hunted down and sentenced to death by the unfair local court (also under rule by the, you guessed it, factory owner).



Worker Stories And Accounts Of Death/Harm

- Unsurprisingly, due to the poor regulations and the attitudes the factory owners had towards the workers lives, many cases of brutal maiming, death, and some things considered worse than that happened extremely often.
- For example: In mines it's common knowledge that you have fans blowing out dangerous gases and such, otherwise the workers inside could suffocate due to lack of real oxygen. In reality, the miners often went down and worked like normal without masks or fans, as the factory owners deemed them unnecessary commodities.
- In steel plants and mills, you would think rails would be a simple addition to ensure safety, but not back then. The mills would have no rails or anything, leading to many men losing their lives by falling into machinery, hot furnaces, etc.
- Some of you might listen to these accounts and think that they are something out of a horror movie, but they are real cases, and very real people had died in these fashions.



Steel Mill In Butler, PA.

- At a steel mill in Butler, Pennsylvania, a heavy pot of hot metal spilled molten steel onto wet sand, causing a huge explosion which destroyed a large section of the plant (almost 25%).
- Streams of hot metal poured down on the workmen, engulfing and literally **cooking** some of them. Four men died and 30 more were injured.
 - Nick Dorna: Disemboweled.
 - Nicholas BLotar: Burned to a crisp.
 - John Vereck: Skull Crushed.
 - Unknown man (Due to horrible mutilation via explosion + fire) Totally dismembered.
 - Conditions of many of the injured men were classified in the reports as “pitiable”, as many of them were still alive but mutilated beyond recognition.
- The explosion shook buildings in the town and caused panic among the populace. Thousands turned out to watch the huge fire that ensued.



Steel Plant In Youngstown, OH.

- In a steel plant in Youngstown Ohio, two men were sent out to clean the dust from under a large furnace.
- Suddenly, for unknown reasons, inside said furnace there was slippage of tons of molten fuel and ore, causing large amounts of extremely hot dust to burst out and land on them.
- One man was wholly and completely buried in the large amount of dust, being literally cooked alive and dying “in great agony”. The other man had managed to get away from it but was left with severe burns over his entire body. When his wife had later seen him, it was reported that she had not immediately known it was him.



Various Cases And Investigations Throughout The U.S. (Variety Of Industries)

- A machinist had his arm jerked violently from its socket when it got caught in a moving belt, throwing him off the platform he was on and falling ~50 feet (many of his coworkers had fled the factory floor due to the horror of hearing the mans pained screaming).
- A young boy (~9-12) was working in a coffin plant and had gotten caught on a shaft rotating at 300 RPM, leading to both his legs and arms being torn off, as well as his decapitation (In that order).
- A man working in a brick making factory had gotten caught on a moving belt. This resulted in him having most of his clothes and skin being torn off his body, but leaving him alive.
- A sawmill worker had lost his balance and fell onto a large, unguided circular saw, splitting him into two.
- When a worker got caught in the large flywheel of the main steam power plant of a navy yard, his arms and legs were torn clean off of his body. The lifeless trunk that was his body was hurled against a wall ~50 feet away.

Famous Disasters Because Of Poor Regulations

- There are no shortages of brutal deaths in the factories during the industrial period, but that does not exclude something possibly worse: Mass incidents.
- Every now and then you get massive incidents that will just appall people
- These disasters, as they are most commonly known as, are almost always caused by the negligence of the factory owners and their inability to care for the workers.



The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

- March 25th, 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in NYC had caught fire, believed to be the result of a lit cigarette being carelessly tossed into a rag bin, catching fire.
- The managers had only trusted few people with keys to the exits, which were locked during work hours.
- The fire had killed 145 workers, and the managers faced virtually no repercussions for almost literally leaving these poor young women to burn in the building.
- This had marked the turning point for massive work regulations such as:
 - Designated fire exits
 - Designated rules against smoking
 - Fire extinguishers in specific places throughout the workplace
 - Fire drill and safety protocols



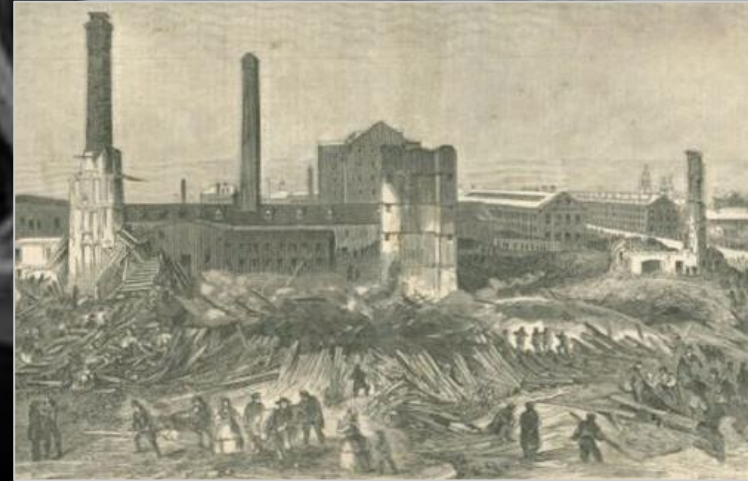
The Granite Mountain - Speculator Mine Disaster

- Just before midnight on June 8th, 1917, a fire broke out in the Granite Mountain Mine, billowing smoke out into the main shaft as well as all of the adjacent ones connected to it.
- The irony of the tragedy was that a crew of men were working on installing a massive 7 ton cable as part of a fire alarm system, but when men were trying to escape the smoke and flames, the cable had strained too much and broke, plummeting the workers down back into the mine.
- In the end, when miners had to navigate the maze of fire and smoke inside of the mineshafts:
 - Almost 250 miners had managed to escape
 - 155 had met their end inside the mine by either asphyxiation, exhaustion from trying to escape, or had burned alive.
 - 13 others succumbed to death after reaching the surface



The Pemberton Mill Disaster

- In January 10, 1860, textile workers reported hearing weird sounds within the mills walls when all of a sudden there was an ear-splitting crash, following was one of the mills walls bulging and exploding, followed then by most of the mill collapsing down.
- The factories emergency bells had almost immediately rung out, and mixed with the groans and yells of the workers trapped under the 50 ft. high pyramid of rubble, had brung most of the surrounding town to the scene to investigate.
 - Between 90-145 people had died due to the accident
 - Roughly 166 more were injured



Importance of safety regulations

- It should go as no surprise that after a while, the outcry for safety had gained too much volume to ignore.
- Specifically after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory incident, things were much too tense to ignore.
- Regulations are what keep you out of accidents like that, or even trivial things like having a medical kit in your building so that you don't get an infection if you cut yourself.
- It's what ensures that you can go home to your family, instead of coming home maimed or severely injured. To the most tame jobs, to the most extreme and dangerous, safety regulations, no matter how tedious, are the result of generations of people fighting for their safety as well as the safety of those after them.



Conclusion

I found this an interesting topic and wanted to talk about it with all of you in project form. It's important to pay attention to any safety regulations and to not take them for granted. They are there purely to protect you and keep you safe. Always keep that in mind when walking under a forklift, or walking across a wet floor with a wet floor sign clearly next to it. In terms of the stories and accounts I have shared with you, do keep in mind that documentation of individual cases was not always precise or detailed, as accidents such as would happen more often than you think, so specifics were almost always overlooked. If you don't believe me I highly recommend you go to the Department of Labor's website (link in citations) and read the accounts for yourself, as well as the journalists accounts of seeing how the workers and actually worked and survived in these conditions.

Citations

U.S. Department of Labor

<https://www.britannica.com/>

<https://www.pbs.org/>

<https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/pemberton-mill-disaster/>

<https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/triangle-shirtwaist-fire>

<https://bigskyjournal.com/granite-mountain-speculator-mine-disaster/>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/>

<http://www.gendisasters.com/>