

Ida Tarbell

History of Standard Oil – Excerpt

Note: This excerpt is taken from pages 168-178 of the original work, which was originally published in McClure's magazine and has been edited;

Tarbell's devastating work provides a vivid account of the rough-and-tumble nature of business around the turn of the century. This excerpt highlights struggles involving John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, independent oil men, and railroads. Note in particular that during the late 19th century, government at all levels, rather than being an instrument to control big business, was instead used by big businesses as a tool with which to bludgeon their opponents. It is worth noting that Standard Oil, not feeling they were doing anything wrong, opened their records to Tarbell's investigation, a decision they no doubt came to regret. The Company was broken up in 1911, though its descendants are alive and well today as the Exxon Corporation.

With Congress in such a temper the oil men felt that there might be some hope of securing the regulation of interstate commerce they had asked for in 1872. The agitation resulted in the presentation in the House of Representatives of the first Interstate Commerce Bill which promised to be effective. The bill was presented by James H. Hopkins of Pittsburgh. In aid of his bill a House investigation was asked. It was soon evident that the Standard was an enemy of this investigation. Now what Mr. Hopkins wanted was to compel the railroads to present their contracts with the Standard Oil Company. The Committee summoned the proper railroad officers and the treasurer of the Standard Oil Company. Of the railroad men, only one appeared, and he refused to answer the questions asked or to furnish the documents demanded. The Standard treasurer refused also to furnish the committee with information. The two principal witnesses of the oil men were E. G. Patterson of Titusville and Frank Rockefeller of Cleveland, a brother of John D. Rockefeller. Mr. Patterson sketched the history of the oil business since the South Improvement Company identified the Standard Oil Company with that organization, and framed the specific complaint of the oil men, as follows: "The railroad companies have combined with an organization of individuals known as the Standard Ring; they give to that party the sole and entire control of all the petroleum refining interest and petroleum shipping interest in the United States, and consequently place the whole producing interest entirely at their mercy. If they succeed they place the price of refined oil as high as they please. It is simply optional with them how much to give us for what we produce."

Frank Rockefeller gave a pretty complete story of the trials of an independent refiner. He declared that at the moment, his concern, the Pioneer Oil Company, was unable to get the same rates as the Standard; the freight agent frankly told him that unless he could give the road the same amount of oil to transport that the Standard did, he could not give the rate the Standard enjoyed. Mr. Rockefeller said that in his belief there was a pooling arrangement between the railroads and the Standard and that the rebate given was "divided up between the Standard Oil Company and the railroad officials." He repeatedly declared to the committee that he did not know this to be a positive fact, that he had no

proof, but that he believed such was the truth. ...

Of course after this controversy the railroads were more obdurate than ever. The railroad men were active in securing the suppression of the investigations, and they soon succeeded not only in doing that but in pigeon-holing for the time Mr. Hopkins's Interstate Commerce Bill...

...In the meantime the Pennsylvania Transportation Company made the most strenuous efforts to secure the right of way. A large number of men were sent out to talk over the farmers into signing the leases. Hand bills were distributed with an appeal to be generous and to free the oil business from a monopoly that was crushing it. These same circulars told the farmers that a monopoly had hired agents all along the route misrepresenting the facts about their intentions. Mr. Harley, under the excitement of the enterprise and the opposition it aroused, became a public figure, and in October the *New York Graphic* gave a long interview with him. In this interview Mr. Harley claimed that the pipe-line scheme was gotten up to escape the Standard Oil monopoly. Litigation, he declared, was all his scheme had to fear. "John D. Rockefeller, president of the Standard monopoly," he said, "is working against us in the country newspapers, prejudicing the farmers and raising issues in the courts, and seeking also to embroil us with other carrying lines."

<http://www.academicamerican.com/progressive/docs/tarbellSO.html>

Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911)

Frederick W. Taylor was so influential in the early stages of scientific management that the word "Taylorism" was coined to describe his theories. Taylor was concerned with making work more efficient, a valuable idea as U.S. manufacturers came to rely more heavily on machinery and the factory system. Applying scientific principles, Taylor studied how people worked. Perhaps his most famous tool was the time study, which he used to determine the optimum output of a worker under optimum conditions. Taylor maintained that by eliminating unnecessary movement, adjusting tools, and streamlining the relationship between workers and managers, manufacturers could not only increase but predict workers' output. Understandably, Taylor was not always admired by the workers he studied. Nevertheless, his ideas ranked him among the most important mechanical and managerial innovators in the history of U.S. business.

The principal object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee. . . .

In the same way maximum prosperity for each employee means not only higher wages than are usually received by men of his class, but, of more importance still, it also means the development of each man to his state of maximum efficiency, so that he may be able to do, generally speaking, the highest grade of work for which his natural abilities fit him, and it further means giving him, when possible, this class of work to do.

It would seem to be so self-evident that maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with maximum prosperity for the employee, ought to be the two leading objects of management, that even to state this fact should be unnecessary. And yet there is no question that, throughout the industrial world, a large part of the organization of employers, as well as employees, is for war rather than for peace, and that perhaps the majority on either side do not believe that it is possible so to arrange their mutual relations that their interests become identical.

The majority of these men believe that the fundamental interests of employees and employers are necessarily antagonistic. Scientific management, on the contrary, has for its very foundation the firm conviction that the true interests of the two are one and the same; that prosperity for the employer cannot exist through a long term of years unless it is accompanied by prosperity for the employee and vice versa; and that it is possible to give the workman what he most wants--high wages--and the employer what he wants--a low labor cost--for his manufactures. . . .

Why is it, then, in the face of the self-evident fact that maximum prosperity can exist only as the result of the determined effort of each workman to turn out each day his largest possible day's work, that the great majority of our men are deliberately doing just the opposite, and that even when the men have the best of intentions their work is in most cases far from efficient?

There are three causes for this condition, which may be briefly summarized as:

First. The fallacy, which has from time immemorial been almost universal among workmen, that a material increase in the output of each man or each machine in the trade would result in the end in throwing a large number of men out of work.

Second. The defective systems of management which are in common use, and which make it necessary for each workman to soldier, or work slowly, in order that he may protect his own best interests.

Third. The inefficient rule-of-thumb methods, which are still almost universal in all trades, and in practicing which our workmen waste a large part of their effort. . . .

The body of this paper will make it clear that, to work according to scientific laws, the management must take over and perform much of the work which is now left to the men; almost every act of the workman should be preceded by one or more preparatory acts of the management which enable him to do his work better and quicker than he otherwise could. And each man should daily be taught by and receive the most friendly help from those who are over him, instead of being, at the one extreme, driven or coerced by his bosses, and at the other left to his own unaided devices.

This close, intimate, personal cooperation between the management and the men is of the essence of modern scientific or task management.

It will be shown by a series of practical illustrations that, through this friendly cooperation, namely, through sharing equally in every day's burden, all of the great obstacles (above described) to obtaining the maximum output for each man and each machine in the establishment are swept away. The 30 per cent. to 100 per cent. increase in wages which the workmen are able to earn beyond what they receive under the old type of management, coupled with the daily intimate shoulder to shoulder contact with the management, entirely removes all cause for soldiering. And in a few years, under this system, the workmen have before them the object lesson of seeing that a great increase in the output per man results in giving employment to more men, instead of throwing men out of work, thus completely eradicating the fallacy that a larger output for each man will throw other men out of work. . . .

It is not here claimed that any single panacea exists for all of the troubles of the working-people or of employers. As long as some people are born lazy or inefficient, and others are born greedy and brutal, as long as vice and crime are with us, just so long will a certain amount of poverty, misery, and unhappiness be with us also. No system of management, no single expedient within the control of any man or any set of men can insure continuous prosperity to either workmen or employers. Prosperity depends upon so many factors entirely beyond the control of any one set of men, any state, or even any one country, that certain periods will inevitably come when both sides must suffer, more or less. It is claimed, however, that under scientific management the intermediate periods will be far more prosperous, far happier, and more free from discord and dissension. And also, that the periods will be fewer, shorter and the suffering less. And this will be particularly true in any one town, any one section of the country, or any one state which first substitutes the principles of scientific management for the rule of thumb.

That these principles are certain to come into general use practically throughout the civilized world, sooner or later, the writer is profoundly convinced, and the sooner they come the better for all the people.

Document Analysis

1. How does Taylor describe the ways in which managers and workers interacted under the old system? How would these interactions change under his system?
2. In your opinion, are Taylor's scientific principles designed primarily to benefit managers or workers?
3. How does Taylor answer the charge, common at the time, that improving the efficiency of each worker would lower the overall need for workers, thereby increasing unemployment?

Eugene V. Debs, from "The Outlook for Socialism in the United States" (1900)

Eugene Debs is perhaps the most famous socialist in U.S. history. Labor leader, activist, orator, and writer, Debs tirelessly campaigned throughout his life for a change in the nation's political leadership. In this excerpt, he explains that both the Democratic and Republican parties were simply offering the electorate a choice between two versions of capitalism. In his estimation, socialism was the obvious alternative for working people.

The sun of the passing century is setting upon scenes of extraordinary activity in almost every part of our capitalistic old planet. Wars and rumors of wars are of universal prevalence. In the Philippines our soldiers are civilizing and Christianizing the natives in the latest and most approved styles of the art, and at prices (\$13 per month) which commend the blessing to the prayerful consideration of the lowly and oppressed everywhere. . . .

The picture, lurid as a chamber of horrors, becomes complete in its gruesome ghastliness when robed ministers of Christ solemnly declare that it is all for the glory of God and the advancement of Christian civilization. . . .

The campaign this year will be unusually spectacular. The Republican Party "points with pride" to the "prosperity" of the country, the beneficent results of the "gold standard" and the "war record" of the administration. The Democratic Party declares that "imperialism" is the "paramount" issue, and that the country is certain to go to the "demnition bow-wows" if Democratic officeholders are not elected instead of the Republicans. The Democratic slogan is "The Republic vs. the Empire," accompanied in a very minor key by 16 to 1 and "direct legislation where practical."

Both these capitalist parties are fiercely opposed to trusts, though what they propose to do with them is not of sufficient importance to require even a hint in their platforms.

Needless is it for me to say to the thinking workingman that he has no choice between these two capitalist parties, that they are both pledged to the same system and that whether the one or the other succeeds, he will still remain the wage-working slave he is today.

What but meaningless phrases are "imperialism," "expansion," "free silver," "gold standard," etc., to the wage worker? The large capitalists represented by Mr. McKinley and the small capitalists represented by Mr. Bryan are interested in these "issues," but they do not concern the working class.

What the workingmen of the country are profoundly interested in is the private ownership of the means of production and distribution, the enslaving and degrading wage system in which they toil for a pittance at the pleasure of their masters and are bludgeoned, jailed or shot when they protest-this is the central, controlling, vital issue of the hour, and neither of the old party platforms has a word or even a hint about it.

As a rule, large capitalists are Republicans and small capitalists are Democrats, but workingmen must remember that they are all capitalists, and that the many small ones, like the fewer large

ones, are all politically supporting their class interests, and this is always and everywhere the capitalist class.

Whether the means of production-that is to say, the land, mines, factories, machinery, etc.-are owned by a few large Republican capitalists, who organize a trust, or whether they be owned by a lot of small Democratic capitalists, who are opposed to the trust, is all the same to the working class. Let the capitalists, large and small, fight this out among themselves.

The working class must get rid of the whole brood of masters and exploiters, and put themselves in possession and control of the means of production, that they may have steady employment without consulting a capitalist employer, large or small, and that they may get the wealth their labor produces, all of it, and enjoy with their families the fruits of their industry in comfortable and happy homes, abundant and wholesome food, proper clothing and all other things necessary to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It is therefore a question not of "reform," the mask of fraud, but of revolution. The capitalist system must be overthrown, class rule abolished and wage slavery supplanted by cooperative industry.

We hear it frequently urged that the Democratic Party is the "poor man's party," "the friend of labor." There is but one way to relieve poverty and to free labor, and that is by making common property of the tools of labor. . . .

What has the Democratic Party to say about the "property and educational qualifications" in North Carolina and Louisiana, and the proposed general disfranchisement of the Negro race in the Southern states?

The differences between the Republican and Democratic parties involve no issue, no principle in which the working class has any interest. . . .

Between these parties socialists have no choice, no preference. They are one in their opposition to socialism, that is to say, the emancipation of the working class from wage slavery, and every workingman who has intelligence enough to understand the interest of his class and the nature of the struggle in which it is involved will once and for all time sever his relations with them both; and recognizing the class struggle which is being waged between producing workers and nonproducing capitalists, cast his lot with the class-conscious, revolutionary Socialist Party, which is pledged to abolish the capitalist system, class rule and wage slavery-a party which does not compromise or fuse, but, preserving inviolate the principles which quickened it into life and now give it vitality and force, moves forward with dauntless determination to the goal of economic freedom.

The political trend is steadily toward socialism. The old parties are held together only by the cohesive power of spoils, and in spite of this they are steadily disintegrating. Again and again they have been tried with the same results, and thousands upon thousands, awake to their duplicity, are deserting them and turning toward socialism as the only refuge and security. Republicans, Democrats, Populists, Prohibitionists, Single Taxers are having their eyes opened to the true nature of the struggle and they are beginning to

Come as the winds come, when Forests are reuded; Come as the waves come, when Navies are stranded. For a time the Populist Party had a mission, but it is practically ended. The Democratic Party has "fused" it out of existence. The "middle-of-the-road" element will be sorely disappointed when the votes are counted, and they will probably never figure in another national campaign. Not many of them will go back to the old parties. Many of them have already come to socialism, and the rest are sure to follow.

There is no longer any room for a Populist Party, and progressive Populists realize it, and hence the "strongholds" of Populism are becoming the "hotbeds" of Socialism.

It is simply a question of capitalism or socialism, of despotism or democracy, and they who are not wholly with us are wholly against us.

Document Analysis

1. What did Debs see as the future of Populism?
2. To whom would Debs's arguments appeal?
3. Do Debs's criticisms of the two major parties sound familiar? Does this debate continue in contemporary politics? If so, in what way?

The American Labor Movement: Its Makeup, Achievements and Aspirations, by Samuel Gompers (1914)

Samuel Gompers co-founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL, or A.F. of L. below) in 1886, and he served as its president for most of the period until 1924. He composed this document at a time when the AFL was prospering, claiming almost 2 million members. World War I would soon begin in Europe, although the United States would not formally declare war until 1917.

The Federation covers practically the whole field of industry. There are no limitations as to membership. The only requirement, so far as the A. F. of L. is concerned, is that the organization desiring affiliation shall be composed of wage-earners. . . .

The affiliated organizations are held together by moral obligation, a spirit of camaraderie, a spirit of group patriotism, a spirit of mutual assistance.

There are no coercive methods used by the A. F. of L. to prevent the withdrawal or secession of any affiliated organization. . . .

Similarly, no coercion is used in regard to national organizations which are not affiliated to the A. F. of L. We feel that it is the duty of every wage-worker to belong to the union of his trade or calling; that it is the duty of the local union of a trade or calling to belong to the national or international union of that trade or calling; and that it is equally the moral duty of every national or international organization of bona fide workmen to belong to the A. F. of L. But coercive methods are never employed. . . .

Recognizing the fact that associated effort is of greater influence and power to secure a given object than is individual effort the first purpose toward which the A. F. of L. directs its efforts is the encouragement of trade and labor unions and the closer federation of such unions. . . . They aim at the protection of the rights and the interests of the members and of all working people, the promotion and the advancement of their economic, political, and social rights. They aim to make life better worth living in our day. . . . In a word, the organizations leave no effort untried by which the working people may find betterment in any field of human activity. . . .

The A. F. of L. is in favor of a shorter workday, and a progressive decrease of working hours in keeping with the development of machinery and the use of productive forces. The Federation has recognized the need for greater opportunities and more time for rest, leisure and cultivation among the workers. . . . We insist upon one entire day of rest in each week. . . .

The Federation favors securing more effective inspection of workshops, factories, and mines, and has worked for the accomplishment of that purpose.

The Federation does not favor the employment of children under 16 years of age and has endeavored to forbid such employment.

It favors forbidding interstate transportation of the products of convict labor and the products of all uninspected factories and mines. . . .

There is now a current movement to increase wages by a proposal to determine a minimum wage by political authorities. It is a maxim in law that once a court is given jurisdiction over an individual it has the power, the field, and authority to exercise that jurisdiction. . . . An attempt to entrap the American workmen into a species of slavery, under guise of an offer of this character is resented by the men and women of the American trade union movement.

When the question of fixing, by legal enactment, minimum wages for women was before the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. for investigation and discussion, and subsequently before the convention of the A. F. of L., there was

a great diversion of views. . . . In my judgment the proposal to establish by law a minimum wage for women, though well meant, is a curb upon the rights, the natural development, and the opportunity for development of the women employed in the industries of our country. . . .

The A. F. of L. encourages the practice of its various affiliated organizations in endeavoring to secure a shorter workday by means of collective agreements with employers in the various industries, but it opposes reaching the same result by means of a law binding upon all employers in a given state, or throughout the union. If there were a movement and a possibility of establishing an eight-hour workday and a minimum wage by legal enactment throughout the land, the Federation would oppose such policies, because it has in a large measure accomplished the same purposes and will accomplish them by the initiative of the associations or the organizations and by the grit and courage of the manhood and womanhood of the men and women of the A. F. of L. That these results have been accomplished through the initiative and voluntary association of the workers precludes the question of having legal enactment for the same purpose. In addition, the giving of jurisdiction to government and to governmental agencies is always dangerous when it comes to governing the working people. . . .

The A. F. of L. encourages and stimulates the workmen in their efforts to secure a constantly increasing share in the products of labor, an increasing share in the consumption and use of things produced, thereby giving employment to the unemployed, the only effective way by which that can be done. . . .

In improving conditions from day to day the organized labor movement has no "fixed program" for human progress. If you start out with a program everything must conform to it. With theorists, if facts do not conform to their theories, then so much the worse for the facts. Their declarations of theories and actions refuse to be hampered by facts. We do not set any particular standard, but work for the best possible conditions immediately obtainable for the workers. When they are obtained then we strive for better.

It does not require any elaborate social philosophy or great discernment to know that a wage of \$3 a day and a workday of eight hours in sanitary workshops are better than \$2.50 a day and a workday of twelve hours under perilous conditions. The working people will not stop when any particular point is reached; they will never stop in their efforts to obtain a better life for themselves, for their wives, for their children, and for all humanity. The object is to attain complete social justice.

The Socialist party has for its purpose the abolition of the present system of wages. Many employers agree with that purpose--the abolition of wages. But the A. F. of L. goes beyond the system which those dreamers have conceived.

The movement of the working people, whether under the A. F. of L. or not, will simply follow the human impulse for improvement in conditions wherever that may lead, and wherever that may lead they will go without aiming at any theoretical goal. Human impulse for self-betterment will lead constantly to the material, physical, social, and moral betterment of the people. We decline to commit our labor movement to any species of speculative philosophy. . . .

Document Analysis

1. Though Gompers lists the positive "achievements and aspirations" of the AFL, he also describes what the Federation will not do. Whom might he be criticizing in these oblique references?
2. What is the position of the AFL on the minimum wage?
3. What goals does Gompers specifically list? From this short document, can you find enough information to outline the general AFL program? If so, then what would you include?

New York Times, March 26, 1911, p. 1.

141 MEN AND GIRLS DIE IN WAIST FACTORY FIRE; TRAPPED HIGH UP IN WASHINGTON PLACE BUILDING; STREET STREWN WITH BODIES; PILES OF DEAD INSIDE

Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women at least 125 of them mere girls were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below.

The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever so are the floors, nothing is the worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 of the 600 men and girls that were employed in its upper three stories.

Most of the victims were suffocated or burned to death within the building, but some who fought their way to the windows and leaped met death as surely, but perhaps more quickly, on the pavements below.

All Over in Half an Hour.

Nothing like it has been seen in New York since the burning of the General Slocum. The fire was practically all over in half an hour. It was confined to three floors the eighth, ninth, and tenth of the building. But it was the most murderous fire that New York had seen in many years.

The victims who are now lying at the Morgue waiting for some one to identify them by a tooth or the remains of a burned shoe were mostly girls from 16 to 23 years of age. They were employed at making shirtwaist by the Triangle Waist Company, the principal owners of which are Isaac Harris and Max Blanck. Most of them could barely speak English. Many of them came from Brooklyn. Almost all were the main support of their hard-working families.

There is just one fire escape in the building. That one is an interior fire escape. In Greene Street, where the terrified unfortunates crowded before they began to make their mad leaps to death, the whole big front of the building is guiltless of one. Nor is there a fire escape in the back.

The building was fireproof and the owners had put their trust in that. In fact, after the flames had done their worst last night, the building hardly showed a sign. Only the stock within it and the girl employees were burned.

A heap of corpses lay on the sidewalk for more than an hour. The firemen were too busy dealing with the fire to pay any attention to people whom they supposed beyond their aid. When the excitement had subsided to such an extent that some of the firemen and policemen could pay attention to this mass of the supposedly dead they found about half way down in the pack a girl who was still breathing. She died two minutes after she was found.

The Triangle Waist Company was the only sufferer by the disaster. There are other concerns in the building, but it was Saturday and the other companies had let their people go home. Messrs. Harris and Blanck, however, were busy and ?? their girls and some stayed.

Leaped Out of the Flames.

At 4:40 o'clock, nearly five hours after the employees in the rest of the building had gone home, the fire broke out. The one little fire escape in the interior was resorted to by any of the doomed victims. Some of them escaped by running down the stairs, but in a moment or two this avenue was cut off by flame. The girls rushed to the windows and looked down at Greene Street, 100 feet below them. Then one poor, little

creature jumped. There was a plate glass protection over part of the sidewalk, but she crashed through it, wrecking it and breaking her body into a thousand pieces.

Then they all began to drop. The crowd yelled "Don't jump!" but it was jump or be burned the proof of which is found in the fact that fifty burned bodies were taken from the ninth floor alone.

They jumped, they crashed through broken glass, they crushed themselves to death on the sidewalk. Of those who stayed behind it is better to say nothing except what a veteran policeman said as he gazed at a headless and charred trunk on the Greene Street sidewalk hours after the worst cases had been taken out:

"I saw the Slocum disaster, but it was nothing to this."

"Is it a man or a woman?" asked the reporter.

"It's human, that's all you can tell," answered the policeman.

It was just a mass of ashes, with blood congealed on what had probably been the neck.

Messrs. Harris and Blanck were in the building, but they escaped. They carried with the Mr. Blanck's children and a governess, and they fled over the roofs. Their employees did not know the way, because they had been in the habit of using the two freight elevators, and one of these elevators was not in service when the fire broke out.

Found Alive After the Fire.

The first living victims, Hyman Meshel of 322 East Fifteenth Street, was taken from the ruins four hours after the fire was discovered. He was found paralyzed with fear and whimpering like a wounded animal in the basement, immersed in water to his neck, crouched on the top of a cable drum and with his head just below the floor of the elevator.

Meantime the remains of the dead it is hardly possible to call them bodies, because that would suggest something human, and there was nothing human about most of these were being taken in a steady stream to the Morgue for identification. First Avenue was lined with the usual curious east side crowd. Twenty-sixth Street was impassable. But in the Morgue they received the charred remnants with no more emotion than they ever display over anything.

Back in Greene Street there was another crowd. At midnight it had not decreased in the least. The police were holding it back to the fire lines, and discussing the tragedy in a tone which those seasoned witnesses of death seldom use.

"It's the worst thing I ever saw," said one old policeman.

Chief Croker said it was an outrage. He spoke bitterly of the way in which the Manufacturers' Association had called a meeting in Wall Street to take measures against his proposal for enforcing better methods of protection for employes in cases of fire.

No Chance to Save Victims.

Four alarms were rung in fifteen minutes. The first five girls who jumped did go before the first engine could respond. That fact may not convey much of a picture to the mind of an unimaginative man, but anybody who has ever seen a fire can get from it some idea of the terrific rapidity with which the flames spread.

It may convey some idea too, to say that thirty bodies clogged the elevator shaft. These dead were all girls. They had made their rush their blindly when they discovered that there was no chance to get out by the fire escape. Then they found that the elevator was as hopeless as anything else, and they fell there in their tracks and died.

The Triangle Waist Company employed about 600 women and less than 100 men. One of the saddest features of the thing is the fact that they had almost finished for the day. In five minutes more, if the fire had started then, probably not a life would have been lost.

Last night District Attorney Whitman started an investigation not of this disaster alone but of the whole condition which makes it possible for a firetrap of such a kind to exist. Mr. Whitman's intention is to find out if the present laws cover such cases, and if they do not to frame laws that will.

Girls Jump To Sure Death.

Fire Nets Prove Useless Firemen Helpless to Save Life.

The fire which was first discovered at 4:40 o'clock on the eighth floor of the ten-story building at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street, leaped through the three upper stories occupied by the Triangle Waist Company with a sudden rush that left the Fire Department helpless.

How the fire started no one knows. On the three upper floors of the building were 600 employes of the waist company, 500 of whom were girls. The victims mostly Italians, Russians, Hungarians, and Germans were girls and men who had been employed by the firm of Harris & Blanck, owners of the Triangle Waist Company, after the strike in which the Jewish girls, formerly employed, had been become unionized and had demanded better working conditions. The building had experienced four recent fires and had been reported by the Fire Department to the Building Department as unsafe in account of the insufficiency of its exits.

The building itself was of the most modern construction and classed as fireproof. What burned so quickly and disastrously for the victims were shirtwaists, hanging on lines above tiers of workers, sewing machines placed so closely together that there was hardly aisle room for the girls between them, and shirtwaist trimmings and cuttings which littered the floors above the eighth and ninth stories.

Girls had begun leaping from the eighth story windows before firemen arrived. The firemen had trouble bringing their apparatus into position because of the bodies which strewed the pavement and sidewalks. While more bodies crashed down among them, they worked with desperation to run their ladders into position and to spread firenets.

One fireman running ahead of a hose wagon, which halted to avoid running over a body spread a firenet, and two more seized hold of it. A girl's body, coming end over end, struck on the side of it, and there was hope that she would be the first one of the score who had jumped to be saved.

Thousands of people who had crushed in from Broadway and Washington Square and were screaming with horror at what they saw watched closely the work with the firenet. Three other girls who had leaped for it a moment after the first one, struck it on top of her, and all four rolled out and lay still upon the pavement.

Five girls who stood together at a window close the Greene Street corner held their place while a fire ladder was worked toward them, but which stopped at its full length two stories lower down. They leaped together, clinging to each other, with fire streaming back from their hair and dresses. They struck a glass

sidewalk cover and it to the basement. There was no time to aid them. With water pouring in upon them from a dozen hose nozzles the bodies lay for two hours where they struck, as did the many others who leaped to their deaths.

One girl, who waved a handkerchief at the crowd, leaped from a window adjoining the New York University Building on the westward. Her dress caught on a wire, and the crowd watched her hang there till her dress burned free and she came toppling down.

Many jumped whom the firemen believe they could have saved. A girl who saw the glass roof of a sidewalk cover at the first-story level of the New York University Building leaped for it, and her body crashed through to the sidewalk.

On Greene Street, running along the eastern face of the building more people leaped to the pavement than on Washington Place to the south. Fire nets proved just as useless to catch them and the ladders to reach them. None waited for the firemen to attempt to reach them with the scaling ladders.

All Would Soon Have Been Out. Strewn about as the firemen worked, the bodies indicated clearly the preponderance of women workers. Here and there was a man, but almost always they were women. One wore furs and a muss, and had a purse hanging from her arm. Nearly all were dressed for the street. The fire had flashed through their workroom just as they were expecting the signal to leave the building. In ten minutes more all would have been out, as many had stopped work in advance of the signal and had started to put on their wraps.

What happened inside there were few who could tell with any definiteness. All that those escaped seemed to remember was that there was a flash of flames, leaping first among the girls in the southeast corner of the eighth floor and then suddenly over the entire room, spreading through the linens and cottons with which the girls were working. The girls on the ninth floor caught sight of the flames through the window up the stairway, and up the elevator shaft.

On the tenth floor they got them a moment later, but most of those on that floor escaped by rushing to the roof and then on to the roof of the New York University Building, with the assistance of 100 university students who had been dismissed from a tenth story classroom.

There were in the building, according to the estimate of Fire Chief Croker, about 600 girls and 100 men.