

FACTORY
LEGISLATION
AND ITS
ADMINISTRATION

H. A. MESS

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**FACTORY LEGISLATION AND ITS
ADMINISTRATION**

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AND
ITS ADMINISTRATION
1891-1924

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BY
H. A. MESS, B.A.
Author of "Casual Labour at the Docks," etc.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

If I were to mention by name all those who have given me help in the preparation of this book it would be a very long catalogue indeed; the majority of them must accept this general but very sincere expression of gratitude.

But there are some to whom my debt is specially great, and whose names cannot be omitted. Miss B. L. Hutchins gave me help with Chapter I, Mr. B. G. Bannington with Chapters VII and XIII, Mr. Clifton Robbins with Chapter XI, and Professor Henry Clay with Chapter XV. Mr. C. M. Lloyd and Mr. R. H. Tawney read the whole book in typescript and made many valuable suggestions and corrections. My greatest debt is to Miss Constance Smith and Professor F. Tillyard, both of whom allowed me to draw freely on their intimate knowledge and wide experience.

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The Labour Research Department very generously allowed me access to their unique collection of trade union reports and magazines.

An article which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* has been incorporated in Chapters XI and XII.

H. A. MESS.

GATESHEAD-ON-TYNE,
November, 1925.

PREFATORY

THE last thirty years or so have seen a great deal attempted and a good deal accomplished in the matter of factory legislation and its administration. It is the purpose of this book to give a history of those efforts, to record the achievements, and to point out and to comment on some omissions and some failures of the period.

The year 1891 has seemed for a number of reasons a convenient starting point. There did begin undoubtedly somewhere about that time a new era in industrial legislation, marked both by a growth of compunction and a growing sense of justice, and also by increasing efficiency in obtaining ends desired. A few outstanding events round about that date indicate the new elements which were coming into British thought and practice.

In the first place the year 1891 would be of importance in the annals of industrial legislation if only because the Factory Act of that year gave to the Home Secretary power to make special rules for factories in which dangerous trades were carried on. On the clause conferring this power there has been built up a number of remarkable codes which have revolutionized conditions in many industries.

About the same time Charles Booth was publishing his comprehensive, descriptive and statistical survey of Life and Labour in London, which not only stirred sympathetic natures but also convinced the sceptically minded of the reality and scale of evils which had long been the subject of denunciation and of controversy. Public opinion was therefore prepared to deal with proved abuses.

The work done privately by Charles Booth and his band of investigators was supplemented and confirmed by two important Government inquiries. The House of Lords Select Committee on Sweating published its reports between 1888 and 1890, and the Royal Commission on Labour published its series of reports between 1892 and 1894.

Moreover these same years round about 1891 witnessed a great revival of trade union activity and an advance of trade unionism in quarters where hitherto it had been unknown. The famous Dock Strike of 1889 was only one of a series of industrial struggles in which the unskilled labourers showed their capacity to organize. And developments in trade unionism were paralleled by important developments in the sphere of politics. It was in 1892 that Keir Hardie was first returned to Parliament, the herald of a new party, the Labour Party.

These years saw also some recognition of the claims of women to a voice in industrial matters. The first of a series of strikes which marked the coming of the New Unionism was a strike of match girls. In the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1890 there is a reference to a new phenomenon, the existence of one or two women's trade unions. In 1893 the first women factory inspectors were appointed.

And, finally, it was in 1890 that there was held at Berlin the first official International Labour Conference. Small though its immediate effects were, it yet marked definitely the beginning of an attempt by the nations of Europe to work out a common policy in industrial legislation.

The years from 1888 to 1893 may therefore for a number of reasons be regarded as a turning point in the history of factory legislation. From that time onwards organized labour has to be reckoned with as a strong and increasingly stronger power. Women enter into the story in other rôles than that of mere victims to be helped or to be pitied. Concerted action with other countries begins to play a part, slight at first but of growing importance. And modern science, especially medical and chemical science, is brought to bear upon industrial conditions in the interests of the health and safety of the worker. This last factor was brought into play very largely by the section of the Factory Act of 1891 which gave the Home Secretary power to make special rules for dangerous trades. If a single year must be fixed upon as our starting point, we may well for that reason make it 1891.

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