

When it was announced that the wages were to be cut down, great indignation was felt, and it was decided to strike or “turn out” en masse. This was done. The mills were shut down, and the girls went from their several corporations in procession to the grove on Chapel Hill, and listened to incendiary speeches from some early labor reformers.

One of the girls stood on a pump and gave vent to the feelings of her companions in a neat speech, declaring that it was their duty to resist all attempts at cutting down the wages. This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience.

It is hardly necessary to say that, so far as practical results are concerned, this strike did no good. The corporation would not come to terms. The girls were soon tired of holding out, and they went back to their work at the reduced rate of wages.

Harriet H. Robinson, 1885

*At this time, there were still no laws in place to protect workers and strikes were yet to be successful as a means of achieving fair wages and hours*

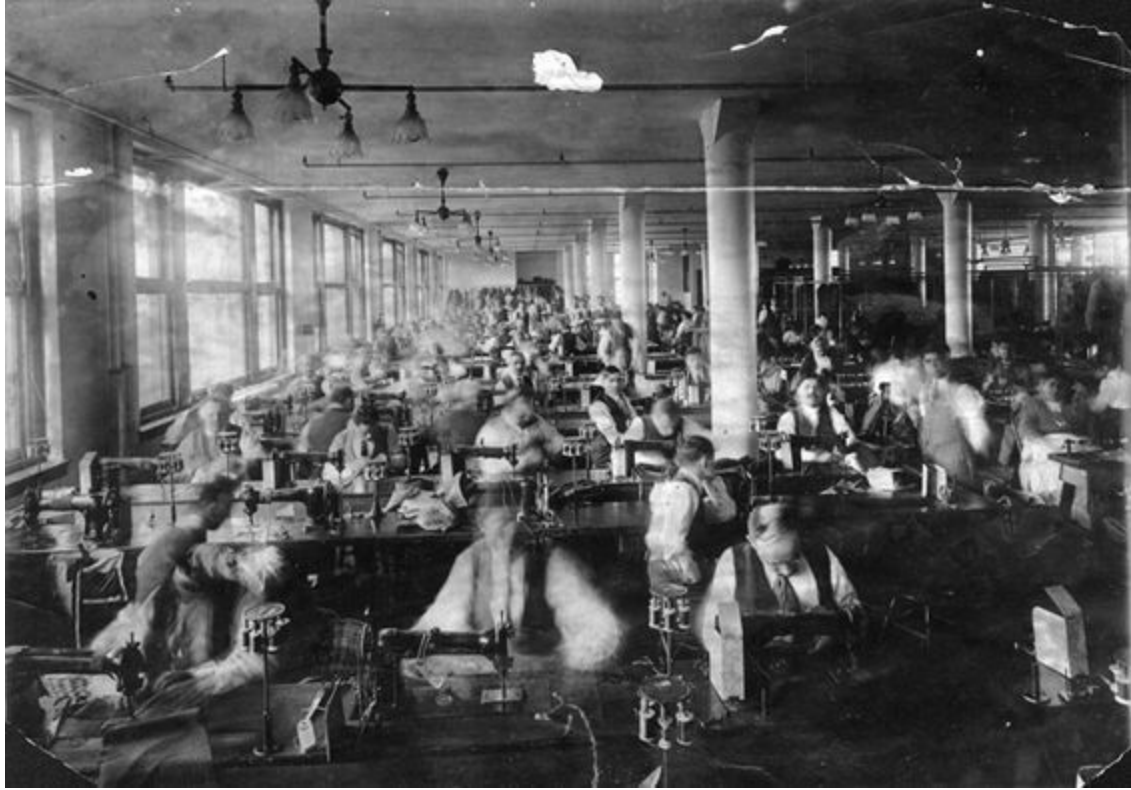
Now let us examine the nature of the labor itself, and the conditions under which it is performed. Enter with us into the large rooms, when the looms are at work. The largest that we saw . . . is four hundred feet long, and about seventy broad; there are five hundred looms, and twenty-one thousand spindles in it. The din and clatter of these five hundred looms under full operation, struck us on first entering as something frightful and infernal, for it seemed such an atrocious violation of one of the faculties of the human soul, the sense of hearing. .

. .

The young women sleep upon an average six in room; three beds to a room. There is no privacy, no retirement here; it is almost impossible to read or write alone, as the parlor is full and so many sleep in the same chamber. A young woman remarked to us, that if she had a letter to write, she did it on the head of a band-box, sitting on a trunk, as there was not space for a table. So live and toil the young women of our country in the boarding-houses and manufactories, which the rich and influential of our land have built for them.

1846

*For many poor young women during the Industrial Revolution, factory work was the best option. The hours were long and wages were low but these girls were making considerably more than in other jobs. Most poor women who worked in the factories worked to help support their families until they got married.*



*LABOR: The New York garment industry doubled between 1900 and 1910, making it increasingly lucrative to bring those who had worked in their Lower East Side tenement | garment sweatshop with moving men, c. 1900*



*This is a political cartoon depicting George Pullman's attempt to squeeze every penny out of his workers. In the 1860's, he lowered wages and raised rent for the workers. There were no laws at this time to stop him from doing so.*

*Source: <http://gildedagemonetarpolicy.weebly.com/labor-and-wages.html>*