

The Muckrakers' View of the Factories

Read the following accounts of muckrakers and answer the questions after each excerpt.

There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had trampled and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers put poisoned bread out for them, they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shovelled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit.¹

—Upton Sinclair

1. Find specific examples in the selection to illustrate each of the following ideas:
 - a. The corporation's lack of concern for public health
 - b. The corporation's apparent focus on profits
 - c. The corporation's lack of concern for public safety
2. Check your textbook to find what legislation was passed as a direct result of this novel.

When the American Institute of Social Service tells us that 536,165 Americans were killed or maimed every year in American industry, our minds are stunned. . . .

The forty-six men who were killed last year in the South Chicago plant of the United States Steel Corporation went to their deaths by a large number of different and divergent routes. Twelve of them were killed in the neighborhood of blast furnaces. One of them was hurled out of life by a stick of dynamite. Three of them were electrocuted. Three of them were killed by falls from high places. Four of them were struck on their heads by falling objects. Four of them were burned to death by hot metal in the Bessemer Converter Department. . . . Three of them were crushed to death. One of them was suffocated by the gas from a gas-producer. One of them was thrown from an ore-bridge by a high wind. One of them was hit by a red-hot rail. One of them, Ora Allen, was scorched to death by slag. And then ten of them were killed by railroad cars or by railroad locomotives. . . .

Today they have a fiendish institution at the South Chicago plant called the twenty-four-hour shift. Eighteen hundred men in that plant work for twenty-four hours without stopping, on every alternate Sunday. They begin work on Sunday morning and work through without a pause till Monday morning at seven o'clock. . . . It is a frightful stretch of time. . . .

The men do get careless and, under our outdated but unrepealed laws, the carelessness of a ladleman, resulting in the death of a fellow ladleman, will relieve the company from all money liability for that ladleman's death. It is impossible that men in steel mills should not grow careless. . . . But suppose, just suppose, that instead of being relieved from all money liability by the carelessness of a ladleman toward a fellow ladleman, suppose, just suppose, that the company had to pay a flat fine of \$20,000 every time a ladleman was killed.²

—William Hard

¹Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Cambridge, MA: Robert Bentley, Inc., 1906), 135.

²William Hard, "Making Steel and Killing Men" in *The Muckrakers*, ed. by Arthur and Lella Weinberg (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), 344–52.

1. Find specific examples in the selection to illustrate each of the following ideas:
 - a. The corporation's apparent focus on profits
 - b. The corporation's lack of concern for worker safety
 - c. The corporation's lack of concern for the families of workers killed or injured on the job
2. What impact did the muckrakers' use of sensational journalism have on public opinion?
3. Check your textbook to find what legislation was passed during the Progressive era to help the families of workers who were injured or killed at work.
4. Finally, write a sentence to explain the role of the muckrakers in improving American society during the Progressive era.
