

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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EIGHTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE

HOUSE

No. 253

House of Representatives, Mar. 3, 1925.

Tabled pending passage by Mr. Cummings of Portland. On motion of Mr. Wing of Auburn 1,000 copies ordered printed.

CLYDE R. CHAPMAN, Clerk.

Presented by Mr. Holmes of Lewiston.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND NINE
HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE

Ordered, the Senate concurring, that the Committee on Labor be, and is hereby authorized and directed to investigate the condition of labor in the textile industry of the state, and in pursuance thereof to hold hearings and conduct investigations in any part of the state and to summon and examine witnesses under oath or affirmation, and to compel the production of books, papers and records which they may deem pertinent to the inquiry, and to employ stenographers and other necessary clerical help. Subpoenas for witnesses and for the production of documents shall be signed by the chairman and shall issue upon the motion of any member; they shall be served in like manner as subpoenas in grand jury investigations, and by any qualified officer. Failure to obey such subpoena shall subject

the offender to the penalty of being summoned by the committee to the bar of the House of Representatives to answer to the charge of obstructing its proceedings. The committee shall proceed forthwith and conduct the inquiry expeditiously and report their findings to the Eighty-second Legislature as soon as possible, and they shall propose such remedial legislation, if any, as they shall deem wise, concerning the health of women textile workers and the public health, welfare, and safety; and such proposed legislation may be introduced notwithstanding any rule limiting the time for introduction of new measures now adopted or to be adopted. The expenses incurred by the committee shall be charged to the appropriation for legislative expense.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

The textile industry of Maine prospered during and after the war, but the profits, instead of being divided as regular dividends, in a considerable part of the industry were divided as stock dividends, thus greatly increasing the capitalization and forcing the mills to earn more, in some instances twice as much money, with substantially the same number of workers. The increase in the amount of work in the cotton industry is from thirty-three and one-third per cent to one hundred per cent, accompanied by a reduction in wages of ten per cent and a reduction in earning capacity from overwork which amounts to more than ten per cent. Women weavers who were running sixteen or seventeen looms have been required within the past few weeks to run thirty-eight and forty looms. Women workers have complained to public health officers that if they take one minute to get a drink of water it costs them the loss of one hour's wages to catch up with their work; that to run forty looms means walking one hundred and fifty feet back and forth all day. Many of these women are mothers and prospective mothers. The death rate of infants under one year of age in Lewiston in 1924 was the highest of any city in the United States. The rate in other cotton manufacturing centers in Maine is similarly significant. Many of the textile workers are sinking into a state of sullen despair. There are rumors that a general strike may break out spontaneously at any time. In the present condition of retail business in the cotton mill centers a general strike would be financially disastrous to the retail merchants and property owners. The Public Health Department and the Labor Department are without power to remedy the situation. The legislature alone has power to protect the health of women workers and the public health, welfare and safety.