

SONG OF THE SHIRT

By DR. CHARLES STELZLE
Executive Director, Good Neighbor League

There are few descriptions of poverty which have stirred me so deeply as the poem by Thomas Hood, entitled "The Song of the Shirt," which began a revolution among the English people, over a century ago. This poem is very real to me because when I was a small boy, I lived with my mother and three young sisters in two small rooms in a rear tenement on the lower East Side of New York, in a district which might properly be called a "slum" because of the poverty and filth among the poor who were my neighbors.

In order to support her family, my mother sewed wrappers for a nearby sweatshop, for which she was paid two dollars a dozen. It took her three days—and nights—to finish a dozen of these garments, often working until 3 o'clock in the morning. Needless

to say, we passed through all the sufferings encountered by the poor—hunger, sickness, lack of proper clothing, and finally being dispossessed because we could not pay even the three dollars a month required for the rent. Here are several stanzas of Hood's poem:

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat in unwomanly rags
Plying her needle and thread.

Stitch—Stitch—Stitch,
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sings the Song of the Shirt.

Work—Work—Work,
Till the brain begins to swim;
Work—Work—Work,
Till the eyes are heavy and dim.
Seam and gusset and band,
Band and gusset and band,
Band and gusset and seam,
Till lover the buttons I fall asleep
And sew them on in a dream.
Ah men with sisters dear,
Oh men with mothers and wives,
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creature's lives.
Stitch—Stitch—Stitch,
In poverty, hunger and dirt,

Sewing at once with a double thread
A shroud as well as a shirt.

Oh, but for one short hour
A respite however brief,
No blessed leisure for Love or Hope
But only time for Grief.
A little weeping would ease my heart,
But in their briny bed
The tears must stop, for every drop
Hinders needle and thread.

Many years later I lived in that rear tenement, I saw a great parade of thousands of women—sweatshop workers—who arose in their wrath

and marched up Fifth Avenue, headed by labor union leaders, in protest against the conditions under which they were working, because no one seemed to care.

The women won out—and they have been winning ever since through their labor organizations. This is one reason why I am for organized labor, and why, for over 30 years, I have been an active member of the International Association of Machinists, after having served a regular five-year apprenticeship.

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Wage and Hour Bill Settled By Manufacturers

WASHINGTON, D. C.—The National Association of Manufacturers is out to lick the proposed wage-hour bill, which the special session of Congress called by President Roosevelt for November 15, will be asked to enact.

Members and affiliated organizations are being urged to get busy and try to show by every possible means that nature of "burdens" the proposed measure might impose on workers' employment and in increased production costs.

The attitude of the association, voiced by its president, William B. Warner, is held to be no surprise to others, since it is contended the Association usually opposes with cunning vigor any legislation designed to benefit wage earners.

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NOTICE OF SERVICE BY PUBLICATION
State of North Carolina,
County of Mecklenburg.
IN THE SUPERIOR COURT
Annie Mae Mason,
Plaintiff,

vs.
Charles Henry Mason,
Defendant.
The defendant, above named, will take notice that an action entitled above have been commenced in the Superior Court of Mecklenburg County for an absolute divorce. And the defendant will further take notice that he is required to appear before the Clerk of Superior Court on the 3rd day of January, 1938, in the aforesaid County and State, and answer or demur to the complaint of said action, or the plaintiff will apply to the court for the relief demanded in said Complaint.
This the 9th day of Nov. 1937.
J. LESTER WOLFE,
Clerk of the Superior Court.

MERCER BLANKENSHIP,
Attorney for the Plaintiff,
Nov. 11, 18, 25; Dec. 1.

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