

The Sweated Trades

Mr. Jury – “What the Commissioner should do to satisfy himself is to walk up and down Bay Street for a few hours any day in the week and see the great number of women staggering up and down with great bundles of clothing, some of the poor creatures hardly able to walk.”

Mr. Gurofsky – “There are shops in which gas-irons are burning all the time. There are no attempts at proper ventilation morning and night, from twelve to fifteen gas-lights are burning for about two hours, and the stove is going all the time. I have not heard of any establishment being ordered to be properly ventilated. The inspectors look over the closets and do not see the establishments themselves.”

Mr Strachan – “There are 140 men and 50 women out on strike at this moment. Why are they there? Because the 19 employers – good men, too, apparently – told us that they wanted the power over the pant and vest hands to do as they like. They found it so convenient that instead of paying two dollars for custom made pants they were getting them for 68 cents or one dollar. Eight years ago I knew a shop where they paid two dollars per pair for pants. We have struck to support these people because the contractors are just grinding them down. We want as a union to control this labour, and to aid the girls in the pants and vest departments.

The employers said we will pay \$1.50 and \$1.25 for vests and you not interfere, but if we did not interfere these girls would soon be doing the work for 50 cents. We will fight this thing. The only way to prevent it is to make employers of labour do away with back shops and employ a – contract. This system of spreading the work all over the city and putting one human being against another is wrong.”

Source: Evidence, Toronto, January 8 and 9, “Report on the Sweating System in Canada.” *Canada Sessional Papers*, 29, No. 11, 1896, No. 4:23, 29, 42–43.