

International typographical union
of North America. Columbia union,
no. 101, Washington, D.C.

To the Members of the House of Representatives:

The printers members of Washington Typographical Union, representing but themselves, desire to express to Congress their views on so much of the majority report of the Committee on Printing as relates to the wages paid compositors in the Government Printing Office; and at the outset are constrained to say that the committee lacked adequate knowledge of the details of the trade to extract from experts the facts necessary to a proper understanding of the nature of the work in its various departments and the relation of prices to cost of living. We think we may confidently appeal to the experience of every member of the House, as well house-keepers as those not, that the cost of living here is greater than in the places of their residence. This truth has been recognized in the past legislation of Congress in fixing the pay of its own members and in adjusting the salaries of all civil employees of Government. The principle recognized is that salaries be proportioned to the cost of maintaining one's self and family comfortably, and no man need be told that the rule permeates all trades and employments throughout the country. At the present time, when the efforts of statesmen are directed to adapt expenditures to resources, restore soundness to currency, re-open the workshops and employ labor now idle, it is not attempted to retrench on salaries simply adequate to decent support, so that salaries of civil employees at a minimum of \$1,200 are left untouched, while all above are reduced by about 10 per cent.

This brings us to that portion of the report vitally affecting printers and skilled labor everywhere throughout the country, inasmuch as it is proposed to Congress to legislate the wages workingmen shall receive for their labor, thus throwing the power of a great Government in the scale of capital, and reducing labor to a dependence on generosity as abject and but one remove from that system of unrequited toil which God and sympathizing Christendom enabled this Government to destroy.

We assert and maintain it is no function of this Government to regulate wages of mechanics employed by it, but it shall go into the market and buy labor, as it does other supplies, at the current rate. For these purposes two modes are of universal resort, namely, either to advertise for contracts or buy in open market. Labor is bought in this way by the Navy and War Departments in accordance with law, the prices prevailing in each vicinity in private shops doing the same classes of work regulating the pay of mechanics in public employment. Even the high and patriotic purpose of retrenchment of public expenditures will not justify a departure from this rule without manifest injustice and widespread popular indignation. If the cost of the public printing is in excess of the ability of the Government, let it do as would a private individual—reduce the volume of the work, not attack the cost of its production and rob the workman of his proper reward and his family of support. It is proposed by the Committee on Printing that after the passage of the law they propose, "the Government Printer" shall "pay no greater price for labor performed by printers and binders and other employees in his office for each hour's work or piece-work than the average price paid for an hour's work or for piece-work of the same description in the cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore."

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This proposition is not novel. Private interest and cupidity have heretofore sought recognition of this rule of compensation by Federal enactment, and met defeat. It was embodied in the sundry civil bill of the Forty-third Congress, but was stricken out by decisive votes both in Committee of the Whole and in the House. The injustice of this basis of prices was made apparent by the debate as found in the Congressional Record of June 12, 1874.

Inasmuch as combination of employers in Washington has inaugurated hours of labor and rates of compensation different from those established by the printer's union, the chronic complaints of the latter could no longer be utilized in a raid upon the Government Office, to cripple and ultimately destroy which is their objective point. Hence the management is assailed, and attempt made to show charges in excess of private offices, the chief alleged cause being dear labor. A main factor in the apparent high price of labor is reduced hours, under a law of the land, assimilating the mechanic in Government employ to the clerk in Government employ. The wisdom of this legislation is sanctioned by the popular judgment, and operates no more upon private interests or Government expenditures here than elsewhere throughout the country in the neighborhoods of navy-yards, dock-yards, arsenals, or public buildings where Government employs mechanics; and no complaints come up to Congress from these vicinages like those heard from the employing printers here. As these employers are no longer affected by the prices paid in the Government Office, it is but fair criticism to impute a motive, and an adequate one is found in their interest to destroy that office and farm the work out by contract, fondly hoping to participate in its distribution, as its volume is so great that all the present private offices of the city could not execute it.

To aid the general purpose, Mr. Theodore L. De Vinne, of New York, was summoned to testify as an expert to relative cost. Knowing him, we do not doubt his capacity to calculate work, *all factors given*; but with these absent, his judgment ceases to be reliable, and is entitled to no more weight than that of a tyro. Dismissing his calculations of work done in Washington based on facts existing in New York, without knowing the quality of MS., the author's corrections, number of proofs furnished, and other elements of cost, such as freights on materials, &c., come we to the character of composition here, very different to that known to the trade in his city, and done under different conditions and circumstances. Perhaps one-half the current work of Congress is tabular, to compose which properly (as required here) demands years of experience. The average compositor who has never been on this class of work can no more do it than the average Washington printer could make such a book as De Vinne's Price-List. Yet it is easy in appearance, and really so when once acquired. Another large portion of the work is scientific, interlarded with technical terms peculiar to astronomy, geology, ornithology, herpetology, zoology, conchology, ichthyology, botany, metallurgy, &c., *ad infinitum*, each perhaps having a style of its own as to spelling, capitalization, &c., according to the taste or caprice of the author—mostly European scientists in the Departments. Treaty-work and diplomatic correspondence are replete with French, Spanish, and other languages; while even the plainest matter has a style impenetrably mysterious to those not educated to it. It is not said that all these intricacies cannot be

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mastered, but it is asserted that the average compositor of New York does not encounter them as every-day matters as here. Even the general job-work of the Government Office differs essentially from the classes met with in New York, while the Congressional Record, in the care bestowed upon its composition, assimilates fine book-work, and this result evolved out of MS. often as illegible as the chirography of Horace Greeley, besides being faulty in penmanship and the four divisions of grammar.

Then as to the time of execution. The range is in the twenty-four hours of each day. Ordinarily, during sessions of Congress, working time is from 8 a. m. to 12 midnight; and often in the case of bills to 3 and 4 in the morning. On the Record during the first session of the Forty-third Congress the hours of labor ranged from 3½ p. m. to sunrise, and often several hours beyond. And yet, with no knowledge of these conditions, Mr. De Vinne comes before a committee of Congress as ignorant as himself of the true circumstances and characteristics of the work of the Government Office, and measures its value by the New York standard, where the work generally met with is newspaper, "lean" book, or commercial and job printing, and where the employer filches every morsel of "fat" he can from piece to give to time hands; and the work, as a rule, only done in regular hours.

Mr. De Vinne, in his Manual, or Price-List for master-printers, pages 54 and 55, speaking of composition in making estimates, says:

Three columns, with or without headings, one-half extra.

Four columns or more, with or without headings, double the price of common matter.

Occasional tables in plain matter should be paid for on time or at treble price.

On page 320 of the same book, he says:

While it may sometimes be necessary to insist on more than ordinary rates for work of unusual trouble, there are cases in which it is necessary or judicious to depart from some traditional rules and rates of the trade. The classification and prices of table work and rule-and-figure work as given on pages 53 and 54 are notable illustrations. There are kinds of tabular work rated by this rule at price-and-a-half and double price that can be done at a profit at single price. To insist on these higher prices would often prohibit the work. For this and all other work of other like nature the only fair method of making price is to compute the performance of the average workman at established rates and make price per page in accordance.

Now, notwithstanding these directions to his fellow-employers as to estimates for doing work, in answer to the question—

Q. Is the classification of single and double priced matter observed by the master-printers throughout the country, or * * * accepted by customers and master-printers as well as journeymen,

He unblushingly answers,

A. It is not.

Now we affirm, without fear of contradiction, that the classification of price-and-a-half and two-price matter is not only recognized by journeymen in every scale of prices where printers are in sufficient force to have an organization, but that these distinctions are carried to and operate where no society exists, not only in this country, but in Europe and all the Americas. The employers' scale of prices in Washington, as testified by Mr. Judd on pages 29 and 30 of the printing committee's testimony, recognizes the classification in great part, though differing in some particulars, as do some society scales in different parts of the country, and they enforce it upon their customers

whenever they can. Even Mr. De Vinne, when asked whether, if pamphlet marked "X" were offered to master-printers in New York, they would classify the matter as double price, qualifies his negative by saying—

A. They would not, in dealing with a customer.

And fully admits the force of the classification by saying :

A. They would have it done on time."

But at an advance on time charges of 40 or 50 per cent., perhaps more.

We have only further to add that a principle so universally recognized in the art must be "founded in reason and justice," whatever interested employers may say to the contrary, and however they may, in the face of sharp competition, *finesse*, by construction and fleecing the compositor, under duress of necessity, either to set such matter at less than established rates or on time. Washington employers substitute time for piece work on such matter whenever they can coerce their hands into so doing, but it is not recognized as square dealing; and we know the same thing is done elsewhere—even in New York—but full piece rates are charged to customers whenever practicable, notwithstanding the contrary is asserted by Mr. De Vinne in his answer, "always for time consumed," although he had previously stated that nearly all that class of work was driven from the city by the high prices demanded for it, as follows :

Q. What are the average earnings of book compositors in New York when in employ ?

A. They will earn from \$12 to \$15 a week. *I may state that the high price of labor has driven nearly all of what we call the fat work out of the city.* The effect of high prices is to send it where it can be done cheapest; and the only book work now done in New York is of such a nature that a man can hardly earn a living at it,
* * * getting 50 cents a thousand ems.

But he fails to qualify this before the committee as he does in his book at page 61, where he specifies time charges at from 60 cents to \$1 per hour; hurried work, extra; and night work up to 1 o'clock, \$1; after that hour, \$1.50—the compositor getting but 34 cents per hour, except on night-time work, \$1.

Being asked what rate of profit the master-printer expects on established rates, he answers :

A. Not more than 10 per cent. profit. That is the intended profit, but they do not get it.

His Price-List, page 56, says :

The highest charge * * * for composition from MS., solid common matter, made up, is 53 cents per 1,000 ems. The cost of a careful reading of two proofs, with proper superintendence, may be stated at 18 cents. When an office is crowded with work to its full capacity, or if reading is slighted, it may not cost so much; when business is dull, it will cost much more. Contingent expenses * * * on a year's labor, not less than 10 cents. Total cost, 81 cents. Employer's charge, 90 cents per 1,000 ems. The English method of calculation allows only 13½ for reading.

And yet Mr. De Vinne asserts the employer's profit as less than 10 per cent., when he is contradicted by his own book, to say nothing of the excessive charge of 18 cents per 1,000 ems for not exceeding ten minutes' reading of proof, which is 4¾ cents above the English estimate.

Two facts occur to us just here bearing upon New York charges as compared with Washington under circumstances relatively the same as now existing.

In 1838-'39 a committee of nine was appointed to investigate the

New York custom-house, at the head of which was Hon. James Harlan, of Kentucky, with authority to appoint a printer there. They did so, and had the journal and testimony daily laid on their tables. What was the result? Although serious complaints were then made by New York houses against excessive charges for the public printing here, the bills of this committee's printer were 50 per cent. higher in every instance than the prices paid for current Congress work, and the explanation was that the work was done hurriedly and outside ordinary working hours! Precisely the case here.

Take a more recent instance.

J. H. Saville, chief clerk Treasury Department, (Senate Report No. 267, 43d Congress, 1st session, page 7.) in reply to the Congressional Printer of date January 13, 1873, says:

From a statement furnished me by the Commissioner of Customs, it appears that the cost of stationery and printing at the port of New York during the year ended June 30, 1867, was \$38,367.23; year ended June 30, 1868, was \$41,578.52; year ended June 30, 1869, was \$48,409; showing an average increase each year of about \$5,000. This increase is to be attributed to the increase in the business of the port. At the same rate, the cost of stationery and printing at New York, if the old arrangement had been continued, would be, for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1872, \$63,409.

No account of the money-value of books and blanks prepared at the Government Printing Office, and sent to customs-officers, was kept in the Department until recently. On the 1st of July last books for this purpose were opened, and the value of books sent out, according to estimated prices furnished by you, has been kept. During the six months ended January 31, 1872—

The value of books and blanks supplied to the custom-house, New York, was.....	\$20,786 66
The value of same sent to all other ports.....	16,762 14

Total for six months.....	37,548 80
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As a large proportion of this amount was for books and blanks to be used during the present year, I think it will be fair to estimate that not more than \$10,000 more will be required to keep the custom-houses supplied during the next six months.

In estimating the advantage to the Government of the present system of furnishing books and blanks, it should be borne in mind that the quality of the work done at the Government Printing Office is at least 50 per cent. better than that done at private establishments.

If practice is more valuable than theory, we suppose the above will squarely rebut Mr. De Vinne's supposititious cases. The bill department is run on time, and shows large saving to the Government, notwithstanding much is done after regular hours and late in the night.

Mr. De Vinne states to the committee that he knows of no office in the country in which book and pamphlet compositors are paid by the day except the Government Office, and that a time workman does less than a piece-worker. He subsequently stated, in answer to question 51, that the earnings of men on time were, "as a rule," "always higher" than those of piece-hands, which is readily explained by the next question and answer, namely:

Q. In private printing establishments, where printers are employed both by the piece and by the day, is it customary to give fat tabular matter to the piece-hands?

A. It is not.

This shows the reason of the thing, as already stated, to filch from the men in every conceivable way that to which they are clearly entitled by the customs of the trade to enhance the profits of the proprietor; and the impression is sought to be made that the Government

Office is not run on this *correct* business principle! It is not supposed that the Government desires this to the extent suggested by this expert; but he and the committee know little of the principle on which the Government Office is managed if they suppose "fat" work is done by the piece as well as "lean." At no time within the experience of one of the signers of this paper has congressional or other "fat" work been done by the piece in Washington. On the contrary, all congressional work, since the seat of Government has been in this city, whether by contract or otherwise, has been done by the week, with extra pay for extra hours proportioned to or in excess of day pay. The same system obtained in the document-room of the Government Office until 1864, when Mr. Defrees caused a piece department to be organized, to which was intrusted such plain work as was deemed suitable to the capacity of the hands. This division of the office exists to-day. Hereit is the policy to print the records of the Supreme Court, the Court of Claims, and a portion of the plain document work at 60 cents per 1,000 ems, while the current congressional work, ranging plain and "fat," or solid and tabular, is executed on time, greatly to the advantage of the Government. The job department, where a peculiarly "fat" class of work is done, is also on time, as is the Patent Office division on specifications, the compositors on which being rigorously required to earn \$4 per day at piece prices.

Of course the Record is a piece-department, of the "leanest" description of work known to congressional printing. It is simply a daily paper, the composition in particularity conforming to book-work, falling almost wholly in the night, averaging twelve to thirteen hours case-work per diem. Outside the official reporters the penmanship is diverse as individuality of members, and speeches if original, and emendations by revision, are often so badly prepared as to operate serious loss to the piece compositor and tax intelligence of foreman and readers to the utmost, as may be readily understood when the range of subjects in congressional debates is considered.

From this brief statement of the system that now obtains at the Government Office it is hard to conceive where criticism will justly lie. The assertion is ventured that at no time in its history, relation being had to prices of labor and material common to the great business centers, has work been more economically or better executed than now, or the product of labor more rigidly exacted. We say this not in defense of the present management, but primarily in our own interest, the former being but incident.

It is easy for a committee, as already said, not understanding the work or the difficulties attending its doing, to find fault and make out a *prima facie* case to convince the equally ignorant; it is easy for a New York master-printer, under the sharp competition of a great city, and running his office on "rat" principles, to say he can do work much cheaper than the Government Office when he is informed of all the conditions there and ignorant of those here; it is easy for Washington employers to say the same thing when the incentive is the destruction of the office, that the great works there done may be distributed to hungry expectants, by which they may amass fortunes, as have contractors in the past—swindling the Government out of thousands of dollars by constructive charges which no expert clerk or accountant can demonstrate to be fraudulent, as charged in the extract from Senator Anthony's remarks as quoted by Mr. Vance in his speech on

page 9, No. 115, of the Record; it is easy to bring against the Congressional Printer a charge of paying excessive prices for labor; but it falls when it is remembered that Congress, by public law, itself reduced the hours of labor for all mechanics in public employ from ten to eight without reduction of pay, and the House of the Forty-third Congress, by two decisive votes, refused to reduce the rates which then ruled in the private offices of this city, and which have remained unchanged since 1864, except by reduction from 70 to 60 cents per 1,000 ems on the Congressional Globe.

It is not perceived how the Government Printing Office has a demoralizing effect upon the printing and binding of the country, unless by absorbing work out of the hands of private offices and binderies, which "brought no small gain unto the craftsmen," and producing work which gives character to the Government abroad, as is evidenced by the following from the French commissioner's report of the Vienna Exposition of 1873. Speaking of publications of Lippincott, Wilsen, and Brewer, he says:

The execution is in general good, although not elegant, but still suitable to this class of work. * * * The exhibition of great works of natural history and of official publications of statistics, made at the cost of the Government, shows that there are employed for this class of work very able workmen.

The works here spoken of were printed at the Government Office.

We are aware of great diversity of opinion as to the policy of Government engaging in private employments. In this department of industry it was an experiment to which it was driven by the outrages of the contract system. If that shall be restored, the same result will follow, with the added disadvantage of inferior work in every respect, lacking uniformity of paper, press-work, spelling, arrangement, binding, &c. If this is doubted, conviction of its truth will follow comparison of old with recent work.

It may be objected that this office attempts too much—essays too many operations. They are only such as are absolutely necessary for its ordinary business, none of which are supplied by private enterprise in the city.

Much is said of trade-combination. What is it but weakness uniting against strength? If the individual can say what his labor shall command, surely an aggregate may. Government is combination; capital combines in every conceivable form of company, by authority of law, until the country is corporation ridden, without denunciation. The lawyer who draws a legal paper and the physician who writes a prescription or sets a fracture charge for their knowledge, not for the mere labor. All professions require preparation, and preparation costs time and money. It is so with us as well as others, and for this we seek reasonable reward as well as for the labor performed. The justice of this is recognized in the higher rates commanded by skilled over unskilled labor. Forestalling and regrating may be practiced to starvation of people and damage of trade, yet no prosecuting officer sends the culprit to the grand jury and no court denounces the penalty of the law. Let a body of mechanics, however, follow these examples, and, presto! the press, the pulpit, and the bench thunder forth direful maledictions.

When this question of printers' wages was before the Forty-third Congress, in the debate Hon. Benj. F. Butler, of Massachusetts, said, and forcibly:

I am somewhat surprised at this special legislation against a body of citizens. Whenever Congress goes to work to fix the rate of interest which bonds of the Government shall bear, those bonds having been bought at thirty-eight cents in gold on the dollar, and Congress by intervening legislation having raised the value of those bonds to 116—when Congress shall establish a lower rate of interest to be paid on these bonds, then I shall be more willing to fix the wages of the printers and the other laborers of the country at a lower rate than is now paid here. But when it is permitted to capitalists to come together and organize for the purpose of protecting their own capital, and they can come to Congress and obtain the passage of laws for that purpose, I for one can see no objection to the printers, and the binders, and the carpenters, and the shoemakers, and all the other different classes of workmen, organizing together for their own protection against capital. And I was sorry to hear my friend the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations say that this law meant that these men should not organize for their own protection.

Trade-unions seem to be specially obnoxious to the Committee on Printing of the House and its several experts. Mr. De Vinne says, "printers' unions always had a large control in this city, and their example has been pernicious to the trade in other cities." It is known to this gentleman, and equally well to Mr. Vance and Mr. Ballou, if not to Mr. Singleton, that no considerable city or town in the country is without its printers' union, and that prices are as variant as localities, ranging for piece-work from 30 to 65 cents per 1,000 ems, and for week work from \$15 to \$30. Mr. De Vinne further knows that the existing scale in New York was the result of compromise, the joint work of employers and journeymen, and that when trade grew slack the employers endeavored to violate the agreement, having enjoyed its advantages, and reduce prices, but were defeated by the journeymen, and some employers who valued principle above mere gain.

If necessity is to be the measure of pay by Government and individuals for services, by all means let it ramify everywhere. Open the industries as well as the offices to the cheapening process of competition, and probably even the positions of members of Congress might be filled with labor costing not one-fifth that now paid with no disadvantage to the legislation of the country.

If Congress, in the interest of economy, or from policy, wishes to produce its work at less rates, let it organize the Government Office into a regular bureau, prescribe it head and subordinate officers, classify its printers, binders, pressmen, &c., and affix to each such salary as it may deem just, appropriate annual compensation, make the positions reasonably permanent, and we have no word of objection as individuals or as a society. If it acts otherwise; if it ignores property in labor, and arbitrarily exerts the power of Government to regulate its price instead of by the law of supply and demand, we protest against the meditated outrage, and invoke indignant rebuke from our fellow-workingmen throughout the country as against a scheme fraught with mischief to us and to them wherever employed, now or in the future. The Imperial Parliament of Great Britain recognizes and protects by law trade-organizations; democratic America proposes to crush them out as conspiracies against capital, and democrats *par excellence* are the first to set the wedge, and wish a preponderating majority of that party to drive it home on the eve of a presidential conflict. Dare it do what a republican Congress shrank from? We shall see.

Respectfully,

A. T. CAVIS,
ALLEN COFFIN,
WM. R. MCLEAN, } Committee.