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Interview: Ida Tarbell with William Trench

Tarbell, Ida M.

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Labor:

Talking of Labor in the G. E. Trench tells me that when they first began selling stock to the employees, he and a radical worker — he calls him an anarchist, Ripley by name — said that more facts should be put before the men, that is facts concerning the financial operations of the G. E. They should be told what it all meant. They began to analyze the balance sheet, to check up its profits, show where many went, and to publish the results in the shop paper. There was some doubt about the wisdom of this on the Board. Jealousy shows but I suppose that it was none of the workers business — that they were stockholders. There seems to have been an objection not unlike that of Gary’s Board to his first publishing of the analysis of the Steel Corporation’s report. Trench went to Young to ask if there were any objections and he made this remark, must have been about 1920, Trench says. "If the facts hurt us it ought to hurt us."

Trench called my attention to Young’s picture in his Harvard speech of the hardships of people from one place to another and not insuring them steady work. He says that just before a period of depression, I do not know when this was, they brought a number of people from Brooklyn, others from Philadelphia — I suppose that was really the development of the radio business — and that the decrease of business caused lay-offs I understand and hardship, but Young spoke of it particularly in the Harvard speech. His whole attitude seems to have been in these matters, according to Trench, to put things on the table and examine them.