C. W. Price

Memorandum of Talk with Price

It is a question if there ever would have been a National Safety movement--in anything like the proportions, at least, that we now have it, if it had not been for this man.

A very significant part in his fitting for this position was his own revolt against the sterility of the social reform effort. "I had been for a number of years in Hull House," he told me,"andI found that in the end all that it amounted to was talk, directed to putting a theory into a law or an ordinance where, as a rule, it was never much better than a dead letter. The whole attitude of mind and spirit was antagonistic to action. Things were to be done through legislation and systems, automatically. I could not stand it any longer, I had to get my hand on to a job where I really was doing something beside talking about things that should be done. And so I went into the National Harvester Company as a kind of welfare worker, though in those days we didn't use the term, and it was then my attention was turned to the matter of safety."

I think Mr. Price will have to give credit to the social reformer for furnishing the exhibit that turned his attention to the movement which has lately become his life, for it was under Miss Addams and Mrs. McDowell of Hull House and Mrs. Henrotin, President of the Women's Clubs of Chicago, that in 1908, an exhibit was arranged in Chicago, calling attention to the mechanical guards which Germany had developed for machinery.

Compared with what we have today there were not very many and not very effective, but they were something; and there

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It was the lack of any collected knowledge accessible to everybody that led the few men who saw the possibilities in the new undertaking and who had been fired with great enthusiasm for the idea, to decide that there must be some kind of a clearing house developed where experiences could be exchanged, where they could see one another's saw guards, criticize them, and, if possible, standardize them.

Price brought into Wisconsin the experience of the scattered plants over the country that were working on the problem. He had something like a thousand photographs, and it was these that he put into the hands of the manufacturers and which began at once to do the business.

On this experience, under his direction, the Commission, working with both labor and the employers, began a series of remarkable studies for developing safety devices. Ladders, elevators, ropes, boilers, pipes, rails, railroad crossings, every well-known danger point, was put into the hands of specially selected committees, and the problems attacked with an energy and directness which was a revelation in industry. It was the first time, as a matter of fact, that there had been anything like a real State attack on accidents. Standards were worked out, based on experience, which became models for manufacturers all over the country.

It was this practical man, anxious to do something and very impatient of the idea of talking about it, that seized on the work of the industrial commission, and slowly other commissions--slowly, because few of them had been able to rid themselves of politics--began to take up the work. And everywhere, with every application, Price insisted that there be carefully worked out the proof that the thing paid, in dollars and cents, that it was efficient.

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But as long ago as two years, the people that have been working with such persistency and intelligence began to say to themselves, "We are getting just about as far as we can in industrial safety, working inside the plants. If this thing is to go further we must do more, we must attack the question of public safety; that is, if industry is to be made safe, the public must be made safe, the community must be made safe. If industry was made safe, we must have, in addition to the mechanical guards in the plants,mechanical guards outside, and above all, in addition to education and organization inside the plant, we must have it without. That is, if we are to have a safe industry, the attention of the workman in the hours outside of the plant must be turned to the matter as well in the hours that he is inside the plant.

No doubt the men in the movement, engrossed as they were in saving life and limb, had become particularly sensitive to the horrible inroads on human life and happiness made by the indifference of communiti es everywhere to accidents. A new risk had grown up in modern life, and one which the public was grappling with in the same old ineffective way that it had grappled with industrial questions. It was trying by laws and prosecutions to make its streets safe, and it didn't work.

This new risk was that of the automobile. Its toll has been something barbarous and intolerable.

The Safety men began to say to one another, "What is going to be the effect upon the workmen and the spirit of caution and responsibility for others that we are building up in the plants, if when he goes into the street he sees those principles violated at every turn, if he knows that take what care he will to save himself and his fellow, outside his family, his wife

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and children, are constantly exposed, and nobody is attempting any such thorough going measures of protection as he is asked to put into effect.

And so they began to ask themselves, What is our responsibility as the guardian of industrial safety? Must we not go into the community and demand public safety? And this they have done, and done in just the same splendid, direct, practical way that they attacked the original problem.

Through the local safety councils which they had built up they began the undertaking. St. Louis is the pioneer in the work, and the will remain the typical city. The story of what they have done and they way they did it, working largely through the schools, has already been told in this magazine. The figures will bear repeating. The evidence of the officers of St. Louis will bear much repeating. What they started to do in St. Louis was to teach their children the meaning and the method of public safety. They expected, and the expectation has been realized, to reach through these children every mother. It has been almost like a fairy tale.

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When a community combines in the way that the National Safety Council is urging for what is variously called a Safety Week or No Accident Week, the results almost take one's breath away. They are a conclusive proof of what might be if safety education could be really carried out.

Safety education means, as I take it, from the Council's point of view, an instinct for danger, actual and potential--a caution, unconsciously--a natural caution--and a thoroughly developed sense of responsibility not only to keep one's self out of danger but to keep others out of danger.

One of the finest effects of the education indeed so far has been the sense of responsibility that it awakens in individuals, young and old, to look out for the other man.

The latest spectacular exhibit of what can be done was in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. In a strip perhaps 80 miles by 20, including a half million people scattered through some twenty towns and cities, seven days were set aside last May as a period in which everybody should combine to prevent all accidents.

Now, this Lehigh Valley is a storm centre for accidents for here as found all kinds of hazardous industries,--coal mines, always dangerous places; zinc and cement plants; the Bethlehem Steel Company. 90% of the world's steel and 60% of the world's cement is produced in this locality, and the people who do this work are a most hetereogeneous lot, nearly, if not 60, nationalities being represented.

Of course the work was begun by the most thorough and approved organization. Not only the industries but the various chambers of commerce, the women's clubs, the public schools, the churches, everything in fact in the Valley was inundated with a flood of literature. There was turned into

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the community safety talk, safety slogans, posters, sermons, lectures, movies, parades. It worked.

In the mines, No Accident Week showed a falling off of 92% in casualties; on the electric railroads, 80%. At the Bethlehem Steel Company, where there are some 15,000 employed, lost time due to accidents was cut 97.7% as compared with the week previous to the drive. It was unbelievable to the very safety experts themselves that such a thing could be done. And naturally enough, in a locality in which death and often very horrible mutilations are so common, No Accident Week has acted like a vision of a better world. For, if it can be done once, it can be done again; it can be made the way of doing things. And to make it the way of life, natural, instinctive and nothing else, that's the determination of this group of optimists. We have proved it can be done, therefore go to it and do it is their slogan.

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It was the War that proved and spread Safety as perhaps nothing else has done. When the war struck this country, to many of those who had been interested in the building up of better industrial practices there was a moment of despair. All would be lost. Under the awful necessity of meeting the demands, what time would there be for remember safety laws, safety guards, safety organizations? I heard this so often repeated that I finally wrote to Mr. Price. Hiw answer came swiftly back: "I want to report to you that my daily contact with factory managers in all of the big cities convinces me that there never was a time when they were so vitally interested in anything that made for the conserving of human life. I think that patriotism has something to do with this attitude. These men are everywhere swinging loose from their old moorings and are trying to do their little bit in the big game. I was never so optimistic regarding the future of industrial improvement as I am at this moment."

What made Mr. Price more sure at this writing--June of 1918--was the organization in the Government navy yards and arsenals. Throughout the ten previous years that American industry had been attacking the safety problem with such success and energy, the Government had practically done nothing. The Government is a slow experimenter, and to break through its crust of convention and unravel its labyrinth of red tape and really install the progressive new thing that individuals are constantly working out--well, everybody who has tried knows the result.

The modern safety had made little or no inroads in government works. But here was the war, and the prodigious scale on which work was to be carried on, the untrained men that must be called in, the thought of the havoc that would be wrought, worked upon Mr. Price and his associates--and they made an attack

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on Washington.

It took them just half an hour, so they say, to convince the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Roosevelt that the methods which had been worked out in private industry should be applied in the navy yards, and that it could only be done under the direction of the Council. "We will not touch it," said Mr' Price, "unless we can put in experts, men who really know the thing." And there, of course, as the Secretary warned them, they ran up against the Civil Service Commission. "You cannot do that unless you can get the approval of that body. One great advantage of the man who knows and has always worked freely is that he is not afraid of anybody. They were not afraid even of the Civil Service Commission, and it took them an hour to convince that body that the only way in which the work could be done was by allowing them free scope in choosing men to direct it.

"It was against all the rules." Nothing is so fatal to progress as rules, systems. But, fortunately, there is an emergency clause in the Civil Srvice rules, and so, with much trepidation, the safety men were given the benefit of it.

They went out to organize the government plants for safety. They didived the country into six districts. At the head of these districts they put the most experienced men, working under them 50 equally good engineers. Many of these men were taken from very highly paid positions to give their time to the Government for nothing. The results were such that the commandants and their staffs were amazed.

Out at Mare's Island, where in July, 1917, there were 4500 men and where 1/3 out of every hundred was injured losing three days' time, the number of workmen had jumped by July, 1918

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to 8700 and the number of injured, losing three days' time had been reduced to 3/10 of a man. This record was made in what I suppose everybody agrees was a time of the worst labor conditions we have ever had in this country, and where certainly the pressure from Washington for production has never been equalled, in private or public plant. There were shipyards in which eight months after the safety men took hold the reduction was 40%.

What had happened here was that private industry had broken into Government industry. It had broken down the inertia, the fear of the superior, done away with 'passing the buck', cut out the red tape, and saved the situation.

I have heard ardent advocates of government control quote the safety record in the Government yards as a proof of what can be done whe n a government gets to work. The only thing that the Government did in the war safety record was to keep its hands off.

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