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Asbestos Mill Head Attacks Expose of Labor Conditions; Author Cites Facts in Proof

Equipment Guards Against Dust Malady, Executive
Asserts—Insurance Report Quoted in
Reply by Spivak.

EDITOR'S NOTE: John L. Spivak, noted liberal writer, in a series of articles entitled, "I Interview America," completed in yesterday's Record, told of the suffering of workers in Southern asbestos mills. Today The Record prints a defense of the mills by George S. Fabel, president of the Southern Asbestos Company, and a rebuttal by Spivak.

By **GEORGE S. FABEL**
Editor of The Record:

Dear Sir:
I have in my hands a copy of your August 19 edition and refer to an article by John L. Spivak. To say that we are surprised that a paper with your reputation published such obviously unconfirmed dramatized testimony would be putting it mildly. If each one of Mr. Spivak's articles is as far from the facts as Article No. 1, on the asbestos mill evils, then you should not lend your columns and certainly not place the editor's note preceding his article which morally approves the facts to your reading public.

Getting to the facts, the only asbestos mill he can refer to in Charlotte, N. C., is ours. We are affiliated with the Thermoid Company in Trenton, N. J., which also has a textile mill and undoubtedly the article referred to has come to the attention of their employees as well—unrest will be a consequence.

Taking his article in sequence and trying to answer it without emotion (although that tear jerking style of Spivak's increases our fury), in recent insurance examinations and court trials it has been testified by competent doctors that no one has been known to contract asbestosis, or what is known as the dust malady, in textile mills within 13 months, as is alleged by Mr. Spivak.

Bared by X-ray.

In one or two isolated instances it was found that asbestosis had been contracted by employees after

By **JOHN L. SPIVAK**
Editor of The Record:

Sir:—I am very grateful for your courtesy in sending me George S. Fabel's letter and granting me the privilege of answering it.

Mr. Fabel's assertion that "in recent insurance examinations and court trials it has been testified by competent doctors that no one has been known to contract asbestosis, or what is known as the dust malady, in textile mills within 13 months, as is alleged by Mr. Spivak," is quite important.

I do not know where Mr. Fabel got the 13-month period. What I said was, quoting Dr. Ray, the city health officer: "They (asbestos mill workers) can't last more than five to seven years if they're white."

Obviously, if such testimony was given at court trials, then persons suffering from asbestosis were seeking compensation which had been denied them, for injuries they claimed resulted from their work. It is to be regretted that Mr. Fabel did not see fit to tell for which side the competent doctors he mentions gave their testimony. Were they not doctors paid by the asbestos mill to defend the claims against it?

Insurance Paper.

S. G. Hopkins and L. E. Ludwig, of the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company, prepared a paper on "Asbestos Mills" covering conditions in the United States. The paper was read at the Fifth Informal Inter-company Occupational Rating Conference at the home office of the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company, Boston, May 22, 1927.

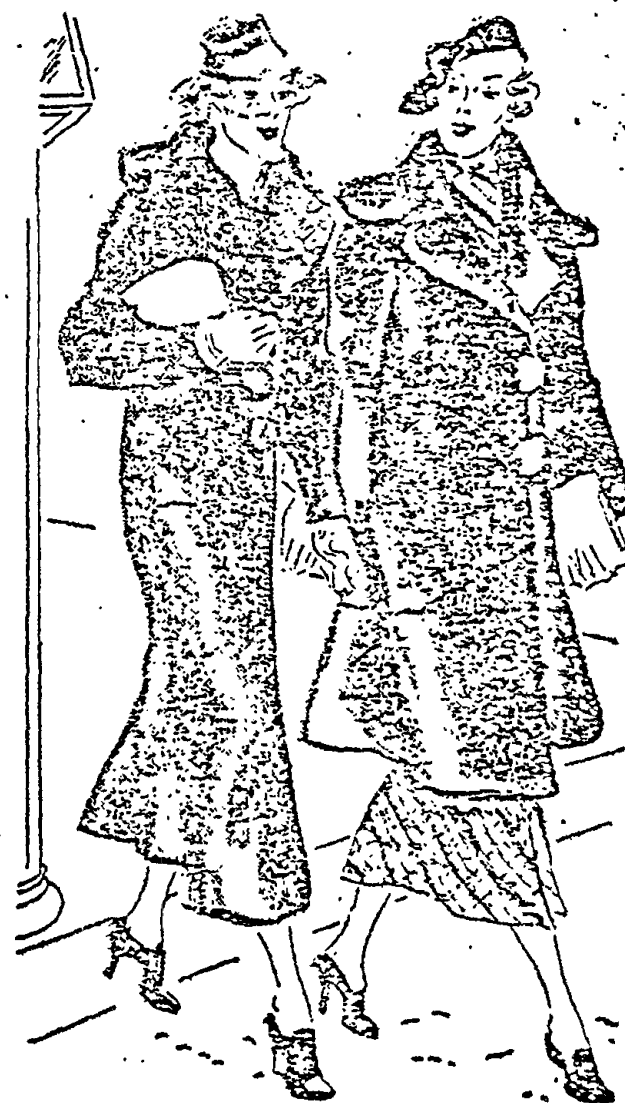
quoted from three papers dealing with Pulmonary Asbestosis which appeared in the British Medical Journal of December 3, 1927, prepared by Dr. Cook, Dr. McDonald and Mr. Thomas Oliver as follows: "The modern conditions in the United States under which the average employee works, along with such protective devices as dust elimination systems, moisture-laden atmosphere, well-lighted, well-ventilated buildings, present a decidedly more favorable picture than in former years.

"We do, however, feel that until we have the benefit of our experience with this class of workers we should continue to look upon those who may be exposed to large quantities of dust, such as employees engaged in the opening, picking, screening and carding, as risks to

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their health before equipment and even then it was not apparent from coughing or any outward signs but was only discovered in a primary stage by the use of X-rays and the fluoroscope.

This court testimony (if Spivak were the reporter you claim he would have found this available or otherwise) also revealed that employees removed from the asbestos mill exposure after contracting it were not further affected. In other words the disease is not progressive.

We have employees in our mill who started with us over 15 years ago and have worked under the conditions that Spivak attacks. They have passed the most careful examinations to which it was possible to subject them. Preceding

capacitated working in our asbestos plant for so short a period as Spivak claims.

Records Quoted.

Spivak quotes the testimony of a Negro about "lint from asbestos in your lungs." If Spivak actually got that testimony then that same Negro also probably believes in voodooism. He evidently doesn't know Negroes. When they refer to lint in asbestos they mean the large particles of asbestos which is not injurious to workers' health.

Competent medical authorities are on record that workers will not contract asbestosis from lint and can only become afflicted when they have a weakened lung condition to begin with, and then after exposure over long periods of time to dust containing particles less than ten microns in size.

With respect to his statements about the stretch-out system, that is pure unadulterated hokum since the article refers largely to colored workers or at least relies on their testimony. No stretch-out system in our asbestos mill has ever been attempted in any sense of the word with respect to colored workers. Approximately a year ago in our twisting department, where white help is employed, due to lack of experienced twister help, we did give operators more spindles to get greater production but in so doing the operators earned more money and not less money.

Clean Bill of Health.

In 1929 a twister made \$18 per week for 60 hours. After the code twisters earned \$15.74 per week for 40 hours. It is true that N. R. A. investigators, because of such agitators as Spivak, did make an investigation of the complaint against our company known as the stretch-out system and the result of their investigation is a matter of public record. It gave the Southern Asbestos Company a clean bill of health.

The statements made by Mr. Spivak involving Doctor G. T. Rey are absolutely denied by Doctor Rey. We are receiving a letter to that effect both as to any knowledge in connection with the information given in the article or that he knows of the colored fellow referred to by Mr. Spivak.

We supply each and every worker in our plant with a respirator free of charge, including a mask which is approved by the Government Bureau of Standards. No employee can start work with us unless he has signed up and agrees to use the respirator and every one of our employees has received one.

No Railroad Near.

As further evidence of the lack of truth or understanding in these alleged reportorial qualities of Spivak, please be advised that the section of Charlotte called "Blue Heaven" is far away from any railroad, although he talks about "We sat for a long time talking and a freight train load with textiles and asbestos rattled past."

As to the help being colored to the extent of 89 per cent, only 22 per cent of our employees today are colored and they are used as unskilled laborers in receiving, shipping and power house departments.

You undoubtedly have heard from the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, who have taken exception to the article. Now, out of fairness, we ask you to reprint this in reasonably prominent space.

Called Misleading.

We have felt certain heretofore that the Philadelphia Record was one of the finest journals. How can you print such misleading propaganda? We have had incalculable expense this first half (evidence our statement) because of "walking delegates" like Spivak agitating and instilling unfounded fear in the poor Negroes' minds. Fair play and your obligation to constructive industry in your vicinity should require you to print this.

Very truly yours,

be granted.

Inquiry Supported.

"Our personal inspection of plants . . . convinces us that all those who are engaged in operations prior to the spinning and weaving of asbestos are subjected to extremely large quantities of dust that must, from its natural chemical form, contain a high percentage of injurious materials. Our conversation and correspondence with physicians in these towns bear out to some extent the unfavorable findings of our honored investigators abroad."

Dr. Rey's denial that he said precisely what I quoted strikes me as rather sad. I can account for it only as an incident in the life of a city official who recants what he said because of the influence, if not control, of mill manufacturers over the city's political life. It is particularly sad to me because Dr. Rey's letters regarding masks for workers are on file at the United States Department of Health in Washington.

Now, as to Mr. Fabel's vehement denial of the stretch-out system. Of course he would deny it; employers always do. But, possibly Mr. Fabel can give us a statement from A. F. of L. headquarters in Charlotte, or from Mr. Jackson, whom I quoted and who was a member of the N. R. A. board, that there was no stretch-out system? I am afraid a simple denial from a manufacturer is not enough. Workers told me otherwise and though Mr. Fabel casts aspersions on the pathetic tales told by Negro workers, I, who have seen them coming from the mills after a day on the stretch-out, believe them. Mr. Fabel might also look up the complaints in the local N. R. A. compliance board in Charlotte against his company. I saw several of them.

Free Respirators.

Mr. Fabel says that he supplies all his workers with respirators free of charge. Granted that that is true, it would be interesting to know since when these respirators have been supplied and how many compensation actions have been brought against the company for injuries to health as a result of the absence of these masks or with the use of these masks.

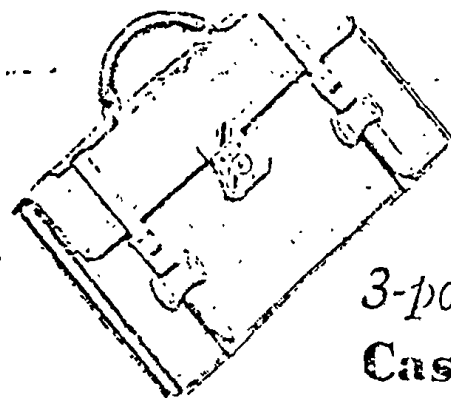
It is very significant that Mr. Fabel's company compels each worker to sign to use the respirator. Mr. Fabel knows as well as I that you make a worker sign to use a certain object only for the legal defense of the employer. It is of no value to the worker except to make it difficult or impossible to collect compensation should he become ill despite the respirator.

Lastly, Mr. Fabel denies that there is a railroad running near Blue Heaven as I described it. Unfortunately, I do not have a picture in my possession, but if Mr. Fabel will visit Blue Heaven, he will be short-sighted indeed if he does not see the railroad.

Agitation Denied.

Mr. Fabel harps on the belief that my report of what I saw and heard will "cause unrest" that "because of such agitators as Spivak, N. R. A. investigators did make an investigation of the complaint against our company about the stretch-out system" and that I am "a walking delegate agitating and instilling unfounded fear in the poor Negroes' minds."

No, Mr. Fabel, I am not the agitator. The agitator is the mill owner who forces his workers to labor under conditions which are a shame to this country and to humanity. All the agitation in the world cannot take root where workers are contented. When mill owners will eliminate the conditions that I saw and which the workers so tragically described to me, then you will have no fear of such reports of unrest.



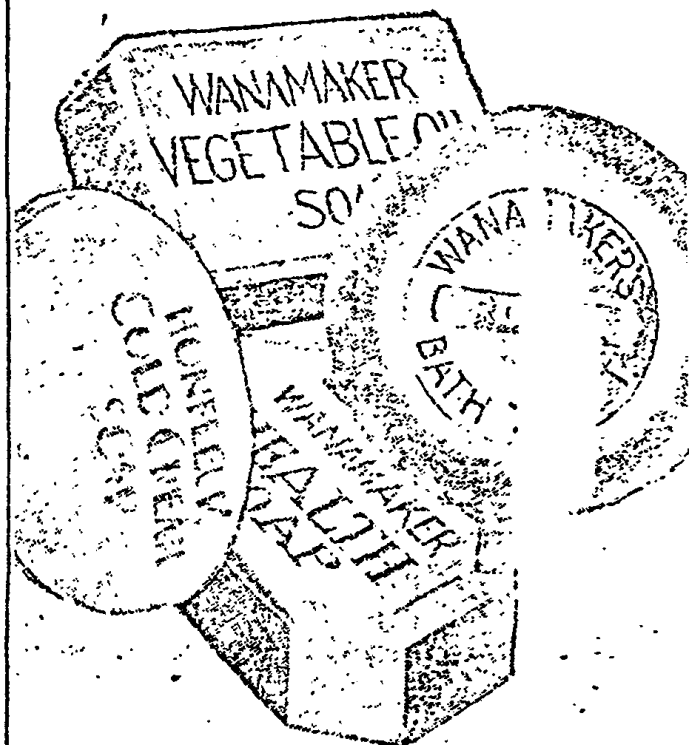
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