

1901 Factory and Workshop Act: exemption for Magdalene laundries

1. As mentioned by F. Hugh O'Donnell in his book, in 1901, John Redmond, John Dillon and other Irish MPs managed to secure the Magdalene Laundries' exemption from the Factory and Workshop Act:

“I note however Mr Redmond and his merry men recently secured the consent of the British Government to a renewed exemption of convent laundries – one of the most exhausting forms of employment – from all real control or examination.”

2. The exemption is found at section 103 of the Factory and Workshop Act 1901, as follows:

103(4) Nothing in this section shall apply to any laundry in which the only persons employed are –
(a) inmates of any prison, reformatory, or industrial school, or other institution for the time being subject to inspection under any Act other than this Act; or
(b) inmates of an institution conducted in good faith for religious or charitable purposes; or
(c) members of the same family dwelling there,
or in which not more than two persons dwelling elsewhere are employed.

3. There is an excellent post on Human Rights in Ireland on the debate surrounding the 1901 Act exemption [REDACTED]

<http://www.humanrights.ie/index.php/2011/08/13/today-in-irish-legal-history-nationalisms-founding-fathers-labour-law-and-the-magdalene-laundries/> which led me to the records of the House of Commons debates in 1901 in the Hansard database online.

4. Here is an excerpt from John Redmond's argument for the Magdalene Laundries' exemption in the House of Commons on 11 June 1901 (full record of 11 June 1901 debate here

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1901/jun/11/factory-and-workshop-acts-amendment-bill>):

MR. JOHN REDMOND (Waterford) ... We desire to make a claim for the exemption from the operation of this Bill of a certain limited class of charitable institutions in Great Britain and Ireland... We are not putting forward a claim simply on behalf of Catholics or convents, and, in the second place, we are not making this claim because they are conventual institutions. The claim we put forward is of an entirely different character, and it is based upon entirely different grounds. It is based entirely upon the character of the labour employed.

... The claim we make is confined to those institutions, reformatory in their character, in which the labour employed is the labour of fallen women who have been taken by these charitable ladies, who have brought them into these institutions and provided them with work and with means of salvation from continuing in their evil courses ... I am sure that it is quite unnecessary for me to emphasise the fact that the kind of charity which is exercised by the ladies in these institutions is probably the noblest charity which anybody could possibly engage in. I do not think it is necessary for me to go another 135step further and say that this particular charity is not only the noblest that the wit of man can conceive, but it is also the most difficult of all charities to conduct. The great object of these ladies is to keep these girls in those institutions. The organisations I refer to are great societies like the Society of the Good Shepherd, which exists in every country in the world, has been employed for years and generations, and perhaps centuries, in carrying on this work, and it has, therefore, the most experience in the carrying on of this work.

The members of this Society of the Good Shepherd are unanimously of opinion that the introduction into their institutions of an outside authority in the shape of Government inspectors would completely destroy the discipline of their institutions, and make their already almost impossible task absolutely impossible. When that is remembered, I think the House ought to hesitate before it forces upon these institutions provisions which, however necessary they may be in ordinary factories, are not suitable for, and ought not to be forced upon institutions of this kind. It is not as if any case had ever been made out in support of the inspection of these institutions. No one urges that they are insanitary, or that an improper number of hours is imposed upon the inmates. We all know that in these institutions there is inspection, although not Government inspection. There is an inspection by the superiors of the religious orders to which they belong, which makes it impossible either for insanitary arrangements to exist or improper hours of labour to be enforced...

***MR. RITCHIE** I understand the hon. Member is referring only to laundries connected with charitable institutions.

MR. JOHN REDMOND I am speaking entirely of that class of laundry, conducted as a charitable institution, which is, so to speak, reformatory in its character. It is very hard to get a word to describe exactly what I mean. **They are Magdalene asylums, such as those which are conducted by the Order of the Good Shepherd in Ireland, and other orders in this country.** If you exempt these refuge laundries I believe you will have dealt with every case of a laundry conducted by a charitable institution except those connected with industrial schools, where you have already inspection.

5. The House of Commons record from 13 August 1901 shows that certain English MPs were reluctant to accede to the Irish MPs' request, because systematic abuse had already been uncovered by inspectors of the Good Shepherds' orphanages and industrial schools in France and there were reports in English newspapers of abuse in Good Shepherd convents in England (full record of 13 August 1901 debate here http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1901/aug/13/factory-and-workshop-acts-amendment-and#S4V0099P0_19010813_HOC_313):

***MR. TENNANT (Berwickshire)**

It might be urged that nothing could be said against the convent laundries of Ireland, but a great deal of fault had justly been found with the convent laundries in France. Great scandals had been brought to light in connection with these laundries owing to an application to them of the law; and he desired to know what guarantee the House had that like institutions in this country were not being carried on in an equally disadvantageous way as were those in France. There was no guarantee, and if there was any great eagerness to avoid inspection, such keenness to avoid inspection must inevitably give rise to the suspicion that there was something to conceal. The greater the keenness the greater the suspicion that [661](#) must arise.

What happened in France? He would quote from the report of M. Laporte, the divisional inspector of the first district for the year 1886. That gentleman said—To-day I will cite particularly the orphanage of the Good Shepherd, where children from seven to eight years old work from 5 a.m. till 4 p.m., having only one hour of instruction after the day's labour. He further said— There has been brought to my notice a convent where little girls of four years old have to hem with the greatest care half a dozen house-cloths each, i.e., to make about nine or ten yards. In his report for the year 1887, M. Giroud, divisional inspector, expressed himself in the following terms on the subject of the establishment entitled "The Good Shepherd," at Cholet— This establishment, which I have twice visited...with its staff of seventy sisters and novices, living on the proceeds of the work done there, unites all the characteristics of an industrial enterprise..... They receive at the Good Shepherd little girls from the age of four years; they make these miserable children work the same number of hours as young girls of sixteen to twenty-one. The same inspector expresses himself also on the subject of "The Good Shepherd" of Poitiers— The staff employed in this establishment is composed of forty-six children from four to twelve years old, thirty-three from twelve to fifteen, and thirty from sixteen to twenty-one: that is, seventy-nine children from four to

sixteen years old, and thirty young girls. The length of the work is the same for the children of four as for the young girls. Three of the sisters, not certificated, hold a class for the youngest children for three-quarters of an hour a day. When he read that report he thought it his duty to make inquiries as to whether such practices were still going on. He ascertained from the annual Reports on the application during 1899 of the laws regulating work that 4,429 breaches of the law had taken place in industrial religious establishments. Of these 924 related to the duration of work. They had no knowledge or guarantee that similar abuses were not now going on in similar institutions here, and that great hardships were not being suffered by young children. It would be to the advantage of those institutions themselves that they should [662](#) be placed under inspection.

The convents of the Good Shepherd may be subject to precisely the same abuses in England as in Franco. He would point out to the House what happened in Sheffield only four years ago. He wished to quote this instance in reply to the hon. Member for East Clare, who had stated that it was quite easy for the girls to come and go in these institutions— Two girls, named [REDACTED] aged fifteen, and [REDACTED], aged sixteen, made their escape from the convent of the Good Shepherd at midnight last night. They dropped twenty feet from a window on the fourth storey to the roof of another building, and then scaled the convent walls, from which they descended to the street. Hober sprained both her ankles, and the girls, being unable to run away, were arrested. The girls tell stories of starvation, hard work, and cruel treatment, and threaten to kill themselves if they are sent back.

6. Irish MP John Dillon was outraged by these accusations and also pointed out that the Magdalene Laundries were different to Industrial Schools (and Industrial Schools were already subject to inspection). During the debate on 13 August, John Dillon and Edmund Leamy repeated John Redmond's sentiments that inspection of Magdalene Laundries would interfere with discipline, and that there couldn't possibly be anything untoward happening in the Magdalene laundries given that 'ladies' visited every day and they were subject to inspection by the church hierarchy, etc. It would seem from the full debates that the Irish MPs were threatening to bring down the whole Act if the exemption for convent laundries wasn't passed (full record [here http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1901/aug/13/factory-and-workshop-acts-amendment-and#S4V0099P0_19010813_HOC_313](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1901/aug/13/factory-and-workshop-acts-amendment-and#S4V0099P0_19010813_HOC_313)):

MR. DILLON The hon. Member did not give a single particular or detail in support of his charge against the French convents. But that is not the question with which we have to deal. I do not attach any weight to these charges, and as uttered against the convents of France I do not believe them. I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Oxford University gives the weight of his authority to the misconception that we are asking for the exemption of Catholic institutions because they are Catholic. Nothing was further from the truth or more at variance with the facts. I have heard repeated charges that we are striving to shelter establishments where young children are employed. What are the facts? All the convents in Ireland to which children are sent under the Industrial Schools Acts are inspected by Government inspectors. In my own constituency in East Mayo there are two large convents, and in connection with one of them an important woollen factory is carried on. Both are inspected by Government inspectors, and the nuns never dream of objecting. As a matter of fact, half the convents in Ireland are thus inspected, and therefore I will ask hon. Members to dismiss from their minds the idea—which I believe has been deliberately circulated by people who know it to be false—that we are asking for the exemption of Catholic convents as such.

We are asking exemption for a certain class of institutions in which, on account of the character of the inmates, inspection would interfere with discipline. We are assured by those experienced in the working of these institutions that the intrusion of the inspector—and I say it frankly, I think the female inspector is the worst—would be detrimental to the discipline of these institutions. It was said that the whole thing could be remedied by substituting the female for the male inspector. Well, I had a letter the other day from the superioress of one of these institutions, in which she said, "For God's sake save us from inspection if you can, but if we are to be inspected at all, let us

have a male Government inspector." We are assured that the enormous difficulty of maintaining discipline in these institutions would be vastly increased by a system of hard and fast inspection, and for that reason alone we claim this exemption. **I hold in my hand a communication I received some time ago from the Association of Reformatory and Refuge Unions of the United Kingdom in which laundry work is carried on. It is signed by no less than 150 representatives of these institutions, of which I believe not more than twenty are Catholic, and in that communication they say that if the factory rules were introduced, the object for which these homes were founded would be entirely defeated.** These Protestant institutions most of them appeal to us for help, and I myself have received many letters begging me to persevere and save them from the intrusion of inspection. That is the first ground on which we claim the exemption of these institutions.

The inmates of these institutions are as free to leave them if they wish as any Member of this House is to leave this Chamber to-night. The discipline which is maintained is the discipline of a private family—that is, by affection and influence and not by fear of punishment or fear of restraint. Everybody knows that the girls, owing to the unfortunate circumstances of their lives, are extremely unwilling to subject themselves to outside inspection. It is cruel to force it upon them. The whole conditions of life are entirely different to what prevail in outside places. When they are sick they are not dismissed. Many of them are unwell coming into the convents, and have to be subjected to a long course of medical treatment. They have no home to go to, and they are all treated as members of the one family, and if they are at any time invalidated they are attended to and treated within the convent. The work they perform, although no doubt it is an assistance towards maintaining the institution, is mainly intended as a means of distracting the minds and occupying the time of the inmates. These are the grounds, and the only grounds, upon which we claim this exemption.

... The Government to-day have nothing to be ashamed of in this matter. Their action is not a "base surrender." It is a reasonable concession to a body of people who have been of enormous service to humanity, and whose feelings and opinions are entitled to a due and fair consideration. Whatever the future prospect may be—and I may say the Home Secretary was most anxious to meet everybody—so long as the discipline of those institutions is not broken or interfered with, I venture to say that the Home Secretary and the present Tory Government have nothing to be ashamed of in this transaction. There has been no surrender. There has been a fair exchange of opinion, a square fight upon the merits of the case, and, for my part, I thank the Home Secretary for the action he has taken to-night, although I regret that the whole clause will be lost to the Bill. That is not due to the action of the Irish party. It is the fault of some men—I cast no blame, nor make any question of their sincerity—who are so narrow-minded or misled in their opinion that they are prepared to lose the clause and wreck the whole Bill rather than let these conventual and charitable institutions conduct their own work. Sir, in dealing with great measures like this, in which the interests of millions of the working classes are concerned, it is a narrow, bigoted, and stupid policy to risk a fight on so great and beneficent a measure for the sake of breaking in the doors of a few convents, against which no man, except the hon. Member for Berwickshire, dared to utter a word, and against which I challenge any Member of this House to bring a well-founded Complaint.

7. It would seem from the 1901 record and later debates in the House of Lords in 1907 (below) that the Irish MPs were allowed have their way because of the damage that they were threatening to all factory workers' welfare by the possibility that they would bring down the entire Act, which was a consolidation of previous Factories legislation and a huge piece of legislation. However, the government appears to have vowed to amend the 1901 Act as soon as possible to bring all laundries, including convent laundries, within its remit.

1905-6 rumblings RE: amending 1901 Act to include convent laundries

8. From 1905 to 1907, a Thomas Lorimer Corbett, MP for North Down (whom Wikipedia describes as having "somewhat extreme Protestant opinions") appears

at pains to achieve an amendment to the 1901 Act so as to include Magdalene laundries. He caused a list of convent laundries to be laid before Parliament in 1905 (I am hoping to find this list, perhaps in Westminster Reference Library). And it appears from his PQs and House of Lords debates in 1907 that despite institutional laundries' exemption from the 1901 Act, many of the laundries volunteered for inspection (under a 1902 Home Office circular), although Corbett stated that this system had 'failed'.

9. According to the Parliamentary Record, the list of religious and charitable laundries was laid during the Easter(?) recess of 1905 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1905/may/02/parliamentary-papers-recess#S4V0145P0_19050502_HOC_19):

PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS (RECESS)

HC Deb 02 May 1905 vol 145 cc671-2671

§The following Papers, presented by Command of His Majesty during the Easter Recess, were delivered to the Librarian of the House of Commons during the Recess, pursuant to the Standing Order of the 14th August, 1896:—

...4. Factory and Workshop (Laundries). Copy of List of Religious and Charitable Institutions in which Laundries are carried on.

...§Ordered, That the said Papers do lie upon the Table

10. See the following PQ from TL Corbett MP on 16 March 1905 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/feb/26/laundry-workers#S4V0152P0_19060226_HOC_82):

Laundry Work in Religious Institutions— Powers of Inspection

HC Deb 16 March 1905 vol 143 cc192-3192

§**MR. T. L. CORBETT** (Down, N.)

I beg to ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there is any official list of establishments belonging to various religious societies where laundry work is carried on; and whether the Government propose to introduce legislation to make such laundries subject to the ordinary law.

§***MR. AKERS-DOUGLAS**

Yes, Sir, there is such a list. It was prepared after the passing of the **Factory Act** of 1901, in fulfilment of the promise made by my predecessor at the time. I do not contemplate introducing legislation such as the hon. Member suggests. I may add that about half these laundries have consented to be inspected, and are, at the present time, regularly inspected by His Majesty's Inspectors of Factories and Workshops. † See (4) Debates, cii., 28.

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§**MR. T. L. CORBETT**

Including those belonging to the Roman Catholic Church?

§***MR. AKERS-DOUGLAS**

Certainly; that is the whole point.

§**MR. T. L. CORBETT**

No, it is not the whole point.

§**MR. SLOAN** (Belfast, S.)

Will the right hon. Gentleman give a list of the institutions inspected?

§***MR. AKERS-DOUGLAS**

I do not think there will be any objection to that; but if the hon. Member will put down a Question I will consider it.

§**MR. T. L. CORBETT**

Also of those that refuse to allow inspection?

§MR. PATRICK O'BRIEN (Kilkenny)

Is it not a fact that when proposals were before the House for inspecting these institutions, many Protestant institutions objected to inspection on the same ground as Catholics did?

11. See also the following PQ from TL Corbett MP on 26 February 1906 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/feb/26/laundry-workers#column_780):

Laundry Workers.

HC Deb 26 February 1906 vol 152 cc779-80779

§MR. T. L. CORBETT (Down, N.)

I beg to ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his attention has been called to the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories in which it is stated that 144,038 women and girls are working in laundries not regulated by the Factory Acts; and whether he proposes to take any steps to remedy their condition.

§MR. HERBERT GLADSTONE

I have had before me the Report to which the hon. Member refers. I must point out, however, that it is not quite correct to say that 144,038 women and girls are working in "unregulated laundries." The heading in the census returns from which the figure in the question is obtained is "laundry and washing service" and out of the 122,463 women in England and Wales alone who are engaged in this service but are not under the Factory Act over 73,000 are returned as "working at home." The question of legislation for unregulated laundries, i.e., laundries where not more than two persons from outside are employed, will have my careful consideration.

§MR. H. J. TENNANT (Berwickshire)

asked if the right hon. Gentleman would give a Return showing the number of persons engaged in regulated and unregulated laundries.

§MR. HERBERT GLADSTONE

asked for notice.

12. See further the PQ from TL Corbett MP on 5 March 1906 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/mar/05/revenue-departments#S4V0153P0_19060305_HOC_267):

REVENUE DEPARTMENTS.

HC Deb 05 March 1906 vol 153 cc111-72

MR. T. L. CORBETT (Down, N.)

said he desired very earnestly to draw attention to an official paper issued in 1905 relating to factory inspection—the more earnestly because the Home Secretary had given a most unsympathetic reply to Questions addressed to him on the subject.

§MR. GLADSTONE

When?

§MR. T. L. CORBETT

Ten days ago. The figures in that Report, which was issued by the right hon. Gentleman's own Department, were very striking. They showed that 82,652 women and girls were under the protection of the regulations of the Factory Act, whilst 144,132 were shut out from the protection for want of legislation, for the reason that a large proportion of these women and girls were working in laundries connected with religious institutions. He believed the chief objection to the inspection of such laundries came from those which were carried on under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. In England he believed the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other churches under which these laundries worked had no objection to the inspection of their laundries.

THE CHAIRMAN

The hon. Member is now entering on a subject which in his opinion requires legislation; that he cannot do; he can deal only with matters of administration.

§MR. T. L. CORBETT

submitted that he was entitled to ask whether the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for the Home Department admitted, as his predecessor had admitted, that voluntary inspection had failed. He hoped that what he had said would draw the attention of the right hon. Gentleman to the pressing need of something being done with regard to this matter.

Factory and Workshop Act 1907:

1901 Act amended to include all laundries, including Magdalene laundries

13. The 1907 Factory and Workshop Act brought all laundries within the remit of the 1901 Act. Magdalene laundries were included, in almost the exact same language as s84 of the Irish 1955 Factories Act:

s5 Application of Factory and Workshop Act to certain institutions

(1) Where in any premises forming part of an institution carried on for charitable or reformatory purposes, and not being premises subject to inspection by or under the authority of any Government Department, any manual labour is exercised in or incidentally to the making, altering, repairing, ornamenting, finishing, washing, cleaning, or adapting for sale, of articles not intended for the use of the institution, the provisions of the principal Act shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, apply to those premises notwithstanding that the work carried on therein is not carried on by way of trade or for the purposes of gain, or that the persons working therein are not working under a contract of service or apprenticeship.

14. The House of Lords record of 12 June 1907 clarifies further that Magdalene laundries were included in the Act as follows

(http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1907/jun/12/factory-and-workshop-bill-hl#S4V0175P0_19070612_HOL_71) :

FACTORY AND WORKSHOP BILL [H.L.]

HL Deb 12 June 1907 vol 175 cc1387-91

THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

asked for an explanation as to the effect of an Amendment which was carried in Committee to Clause 5. The words as they originally stood were— Where in any premises forming part of an institution carried on for charitable, reformatory, or religious purposes—. The words "or religious" were deleted in Committee, and he wished to know whether that change excluded from supervision or from inspection any laundry which, had those words remained, would have been supervised or inspected.

§EARL BEAUCHAMP

said that convents would be excluded from the operation of the Bill if there were no other inmates than the nuns themselves, no matter whether they did industrial work or not. If they had any inmates at all for reformatory purposes, they would be subject to inspection when regular industrial work was performed.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

asked what would happen if industrial work were performed by hired women who came from outside.

§EARL BEAUCHAMP

said the Bill would still apply to them. With the inspection of convents in order to prevent abuses alleged to exist in the case of Roman Catholics and the Church of England this Bill did not profess to deal. It only professed to deal with factories and workshops, and to bring laundries under the usual provisions of the Factories and Workshops Acts. These laundries would be inspected.

15. Another reason for us to find a copy of the 1905 list of institutional laundries laid before Parliament is that in response to a PQ from TL Corbett in 1909, the Home Secretary stated that all institutional laundries on the 1905 list “have been brought under the [Factory Act](#), and are now included in the general registers of factories

and workshops which are kept by the Factory Department”
(http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1909/aug/23/laundries-religious-denominations#S5CV0009P0_19090823_HOC_83):

Laundries (Religious Denominations).

HC Deb 23 August 1909 vol 9 cc1768-91768

§Mr. T. L. CORBETT

asked whether the right hon. Gentleman will lay upon the Table of the House the list of 1769 laundries in connection with religious denominations which, under the **Factory Act** of 1907, are now subject to inspection by the Home Office, and also a list of those laundries which, under Clause 5 of that Act, have applied that inmates shall only be examined in the presence of one of the managers?

§Mr. GLADSTONE

A list of religious and charitable institutions, in which laundries are carried on, was presented to Parliament in 1905. Since that date all such laundries have been brought under the **Factory Act**, and are now included in the general registers of factories and workshops which are kept by the Factory Department. I do not see that there is any public object to be gained such as would justify the trouble and expense of the special list which the hon. Member desires.

§Mr. THOMAS SLOAN

Is it the fact that during these inspections a manager of the institution must be present, and what public advantage is gained by that?

§Mr. GLADSTONE

This question was fully debated at the time of the passing of the Act, and I am sure the hon. Member knows as well as I do what the reason for the provision was. There is no reason whatever to suspect that any unlawful practices against the Factory Acts occur in these institutions.

§Mr. CORBETT

Does the right hon. Gentleman remember that an Amendment to this Clause was carried by a snap vote in Committee?

§Mr. GLADSTONE

It was not so.

§Mr. SLOAN

May I ask what public advantage is to be gained by the presence of a manager when an inspection takes place?

16. Section 5(2) of the 1907 Act provided for special modifications to the 1901 Act's requirements for institutional laundries (due to a request from the institutions, according to the 14 May 1907 House of Lords debate below), including options to:

- (a) substitute the institution's own scheme (subject to the Secretary of State's approval) for the regulation of working hours, intervals for meals, holidays and education of children;
- (b) have the institution's medical officer appointed as the certifying surgeon;
- (c) ignore the requirement to affix notices to the walls, except that the general register had to include the required particulars of the scheme regarding hours, meals, holidays and education of children; and
- (d) have a manager of the institution present during examination of an inmate by a factories inspector.

If the institution wanted to avail of these modifications, it was necessary to obtain an order from the Secretary of State.

17. I haven't yet found a record of the House of Commons debate on this Bill, although it appears to have taken place on 5 May 1907 (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1907/may/15/inspection-of-laundries#S4V0174P0_19070515_HOC_135):

FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACT (1901) AMENDMENT.

HC Deb 05 May 1905 vol 145 c10871087

§Bill to amend The **Factory and Workshop Act, 1901**, in respect of Laundries, ordered to be brought in by Mr. Cameron Corbett, Sir Hugh Shaw - Stewart, Mr. Arthur Henderson, and Mr. Trevelyan.

18. However, the House of Lords' debate on 14 May 1907 gives an interesting explanation of the Bill's background, including how 'curious' it was that the Irish MPs almost defeated the passage of the entire 1901 Act with their small concern regarding Magdalene laundries. As to the special modifications included in the 1907 Act for institutional laundries, opinion in the House of Lords was divided as to whether these were a sensible means of enabling the nuns to carry on their educational and reformatory work, or whether they would cause unnecessary expense and complication. The whole record of this debate is here http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1907/may/14/factory-and-workshop-bill-hl#S4V0174P0_19070514_HOL_22.

19. Lord Archbishop of Canterbury's contribution to the 14 May 1907 House of Lords' debate is important. He said that it was clear from the inspection of institutional laundries which had volunteered for inspection after 1901 (I will see if I can find any of these inspection reports in Westminster Reference Library) that accidents were rife due to the lack of mechanical expertise in the institutional laundries - stunningly, the exact same argument as made by John Kennedy in his testimony to JFM, regarding Limerick in the 1960s. Lord Archbishop of Canterbury's statement is below, with the material I have described in bold:

FACTORY AND WORKSHOP BILL [H.L.]

HL Deb 14 May 1907 vol 174 cc735-48735

§[SECOND READING.]

§Order of the Day for the Second Reading read.

...* **THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY**

My Lords, I should like to be allowed to say a few words on this subject. The story of this measure is an odd one, and it affords a curious example of how what may seem like 740a comparatively small matter maybe found to involve issues which materially and gravely complicate the actual working of our legislative machinery. It is not very easy to explain in a word, nor is it necessary to do it now, why it has been found that the incorporation of laundries under the ordinary regulations of our factory legislation is an exceedingly troublesome and difficult thing...

The noble Earl has referred to the pathetic scene which took place in this House in 1901, when tears were almost brought to our eyes by Lord James of Hereford's appeal to us as to the disasters which would follow if anything were done to touch the Bill of 162 clauses which was then presented to your Lordships with the knowledge that unless it were read a third time within twenty-four hours it would not become law and the whole country would suffer in consequence...

Most of the difficulty in dealing with laundries by legislation arises from the fact that the work they perform is found to be the most suitable kind of work for philanthropic institutions, the main

object of which is not the making of money, but the reform of their inmates. That complicates the matter considerably and accounts in a large measure, though not, I think, altogether, for the difficulty which has arisen. I was very glad to hear the noble Earl in charge of the Bill say that those institutions will no longer be allowed to stand in the way of the reform which is needed in the conditions under which the industry generally is carried on. For myself, I have from the first always failed to understand the objection raised in some quarters by the supporters of these institutions to inspection. I have always urged inspection. I think the inspection of these institutions is not only possible, but proper and right. Every institution with which I have any connection, and they are many, at once took advantage of the offer made by the Home Office in 1902, that if institutions wished it, inspectors would be sent to inspect them. I welcome something stronger than that. I desire that such inspection should be universal and compulsory. The fact that some of the institutions which carry on laundry work declined to take advantage of the offer of the Home Office, and therefore are at this moment not inspected, is to my mind the strongest proof of the necessity which exists that some more stringent clause such as this Bill contains, should find a place on the Statute Book.

It may be said that, if it be only these charitable institutions that block the way to reform of the conditions under which laundry work is carried on, why should we not leave institutional laundries ⁷⁴²out of consideration altogether and deal with commercial laundries only? Such a course would be exceedingly unfair to commercial laundries. These laundries maintain that even now charitable institutions have some advantage over them. I do not agree with that; but there can be no doubt that if stringent restrictions are now applied to commercial laundries and none to charitable laundries commercial laundries will have a strong reason to complain of disparity of treatment. That is the reason why we cannot separate the two classes of laundries. I hold that charitable institutions need inspection, and that they gain from the help which such inspection gives. Therefore, for everybody's sake I most earnestly hope that some such provision as finds its place in this Bill may very speedily become law. At the same time I think it is indisputable that there must be some special arrangements in connection with the laundries managed by charitable institutions. Anyone who will look into the details will find that to apply to institutional laundries verbatim et literatim the rules which are applicable to ordinary commercial laundries would have consequences quite other than those which the Legislature desires, and that some modifications to meet their special and different conditions are absolutely necessary...

It is of very great interest to read the reports by those inspectors, male or female, who have inspected the institutions which voluntarily asked for it under the Home Office circular of 1902. There are very ample reports given by some of those who conducted these inspections, and I doubt whether anyone would rise from reading those reports without seeing that, with the best possible intention to act rightly, the managers of these institutions require the help which inspection gives. For example, most of the laundries connected with charitable institutions were started in days when the work was not done by machinery at all. The introduction of machinery has resulted in this: that a large number of excellent and devoted ladies find themselves called upon to supervise work which involves the use of complicated machinery without having anyone to tell them how ⁷⁴³to do it, and if it were not tragic it would be laughable to read the accounts in regard to this which are given by the inspectors. They quote instances to show how girls too stupid for anything else have been set to work the machinery, and this, of course, is liable to result in numerous accidents. I submit that inspection, wanted always, is more and more required as mechanical means are applied to these institutions...

Inspections of Magdalene Laundries post-1907

20. In 1909, in response to a PQ from TL Corbett MP, the Home Secretary stated that all 358 institutional laundries to which the 1907 Act applied had been inspected (http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1909/aug/12/inspection-of-laundries#S5CV0009P0_19090812_HOC_72):

Inspection of Laundries.

HC Deb 12 August 1909 vol 9 c640640

§Mr. T. L. CORBETT

asked how many laundries have been inspected under The [Factory and Workshop Act, 1907](#), and in how many cases the managers of such laundries have requested that no inmate should be examined except in the presence of one of the managers?

§Mr. GLADSTONE

I understand the hon. Member's question to refer to institution laundries under Section 5 of the Act of 1907. There are 358 of these on the registers of the Department, all of which have been inspected. One hundred and eighty-one of them have made the request mentioned in the last part of the question.

Further legislation

21. The Police, Factories, & c. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1916 is available online here http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1916/31/pdfs/ukpga_19160031_en.pdf, and in 1920, an Order regarding the welfare of workers in Laundries (Order No. 654 of 1920) was made pursuant to the 1916 Act (I will upload this to Dropbox).