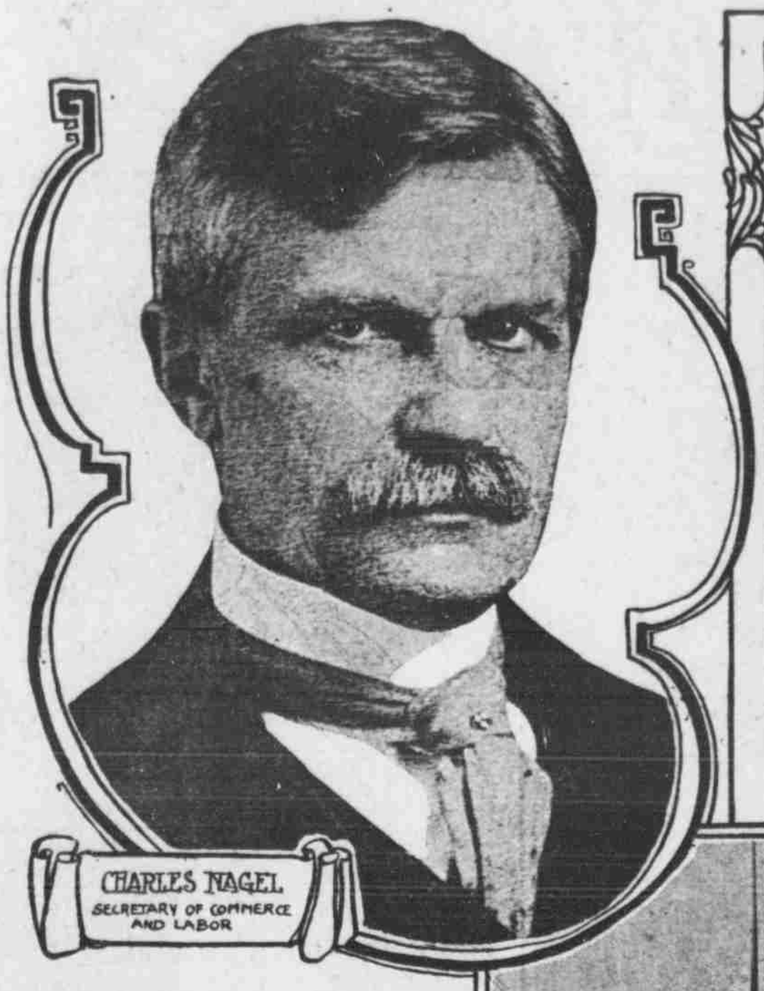
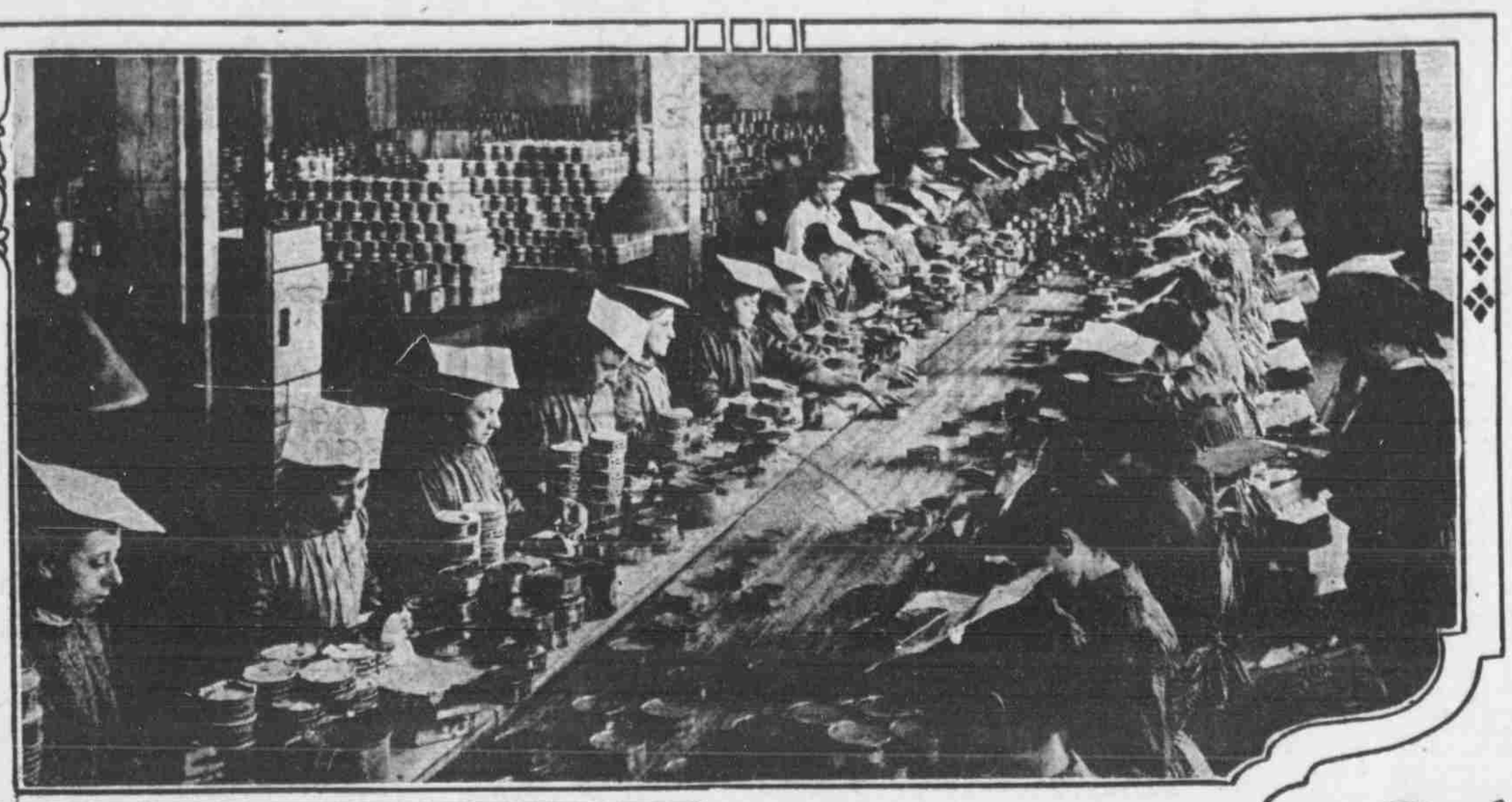
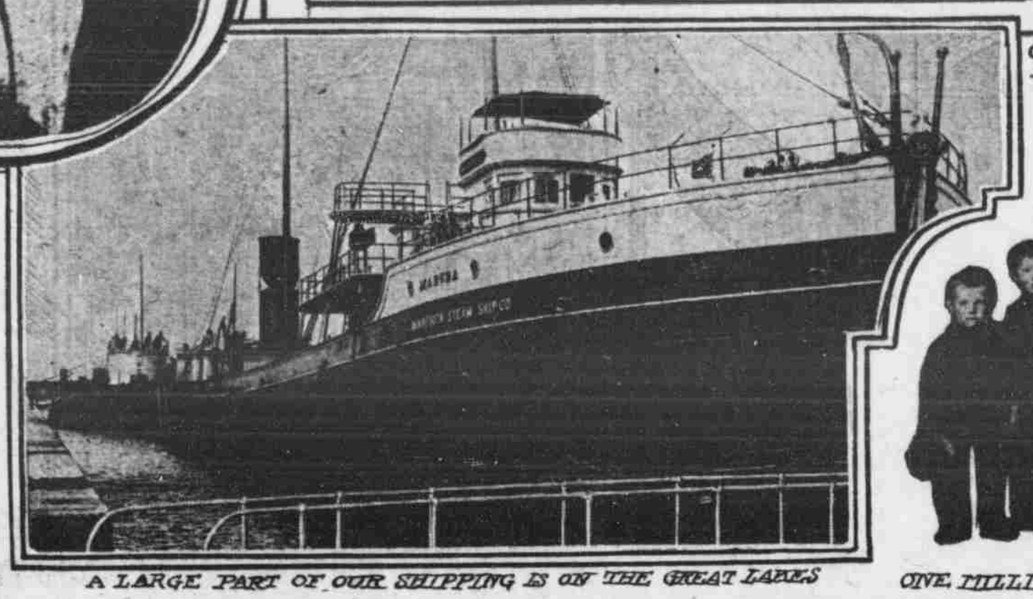
Secretary Nagel Recounts Work of His Department



CHARLES NAGEL
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE AND LABOR



GIRLS PACKING CORNED MEAT AT CHICAGO



A LARGE PART OF OUR SHIPPING IS ON THE GREAT LAKES

ONE MILLION IMMIGRANTS LAST YEAR

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—In describing the new schemes of Uncle Sam, patriarch, it is well to know something of the men at their head. President Taft, if course, bosses every job, but the detailed work is under the cabinet ministers. Take, for instance, Secretary Charles Nagel, the chief of the Department of Commerce and Labor, with whom I have been talking today. He is a fit manager of a great undertaking. Six feet in height, as straight as an arrow and muscularly well formed, at the age of 62, he is one of the most energetic and efficient of all those who are managing Uncle Sam's business. He is a broad-gauge man, fitted by wide training and experience for his place in the federal machine. Born in Texas, which we easterners look upon as a part of the wild and woolly west, he was educated first in St. Louis and then in Berlin, the progressive and aggressive capital of Germany. After graduating at the university there he came back to St. Louis, where he made a great reputation as lawyer and where he was practicing when he was made secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor by President Taft.

How Nagel Came to Texas.

In my talk with the secretary I asked him how he happened to select Texas as his birthplace. He replied that his father was an immigrant and that he came from Germany to this country in 1848, settling in Colorado county, Texas. The old gentleman was a member of one of a number of colonies which were established in our great southwest at that time by certain wealthy citizens of the German nobility. The immigrants belonging to these colonies were men of fine educaton. Many of them were university graduates, and they had a civilization far above that of the hordes which Secretary Nagel is now allowing to enter this country. For instance, the secretary's father had been a physician in Germany and he was a graduate of the University of Berlin. The secretary's school teacher in Texas was a graduate of the same university, and Mr. Nagel recently found a printed speech of the great Prince Bismarck which was made in reply to a paper written by his Texas schoolmaster.

Upon my speaking of the German revolution of 1848, during which so many prominent men left the Fatherland, I asked Mr. Nagel if it was not then that Carl Schurz and Joseph Pulitzer came to this country.

The secretary replied that Schurz came several years later, and that Joseph Pulitzer must have landed along about the close of the civil war. Said he:

"I knew Mr. Pulitzer during my early days in St. Louis and while he was still a reporter on the Westliche Post. Later on he bought the Post and united it with the Dispatch, making the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, which he still owns. It was from the money that he made from the Dispatch that he came to New York and bought the World."

Creative Features of Uncle Sam's Work.

The conversation here turned to the development of Uncle Sam, patriarch, and Secretary Nagel referred to some of the great creative works now under way in various departments. Said he:

"Every one of the administrative offices is taking on creative features. The postoffice, which was formerly a mere transmitter of letters, has just started postal savings banks, and it is protecting the people from frauds through the mails. The Department of War, which is the great national and international police force of the government, has taken charge of the Philippines and our other island possessions; and it is doing all sorts of creative work there. It is even building the Panama canal. The treasury, which was once only a machine for the collection of revenues, is now the foundation of our national banks, and it is also erecting public buildings throughout the country. The Department of Justice is watching your interests in the restriction of the corporations and trusts, and the Department of the Navy has many creative features. As to the interior, that has become a great conservation bureau, which is conserving our coal lands, reclaiming our deserts and draining the swamps. It is also watching over the safety of the men in the mines. And last, as to the Department of Agriculture, that has so largely to do with creative work that it is impossible to describe its ramifications."

The Secretary Talks of His Job.

"But how about your own department, Mr. Secretary?" I asked. "You, too, are not idle. Give me an outline of your work in a nutshell."

"It is difficult to put the Department of Commerce and Labor in a nutshell," was the secretary's reply. "A year or so ago we were employing more men than there are soldiers in the United States army. That was when the census was in full swing. We had last year over 71,000 enumerators and also a temporary force of clerks numbering 3,000 or 4,000. In addition to the census we have a dozen different bureaus here at Washington, each of which has its own work.

"This department, which was originally organized to deal with commerce and labor and especially with the corporations and the business interests of the United States, has taken in many of the bureaus of the other departments. The bureau of manufactures, for instance, is an offspring of the Department of State. It is devoted to the development of our domestic and foreign trade, and it publishes information gathered by the consuls, who are under the State department. We have also our own special agents who travel over the world looking up trade and trade openings. They are gathering information as to certain classes of exports, reporting the demand for them in each country and telling how they should be handled and marketed. We publish daily reports from other countries as to the opportunities offered for American manufactures, and in time we shall have a corps of such experts going from trade center to trade center in the United States and advising the people how and where to market their products abroad.

Our Foreign Trade.

"In the same way we have inherited the bureau of statistics from the Department of the Treasury. This has also to do with our foreign commerce and, together with the bureau of manufactures, it gives a vast amount of valuable information as to Uncle Sam's business and how it may be spread to every part of the globe. With other things we are now making a directory of the names of business houses which handle imported merchandise in all foreign countries. The material for this has already been gathered, and the book will be published some time this year.

"As to what our foreign trade is, the bureau of statistics will give you figures. Last year our exports were just about $1,745,000,000, or almost $6,000,000 a day for every working day of the year. Our imports were about the highest they have ever been in the history of the country, and they amounted, all told, to almost $5,000,000 for every such working day. These figures are so great as to be beyond comprehension, but they give one some idea of our foreign commerce, which is still at its beginning and which is bound to increase from year to year."

The Marine Bureaus.

"Your department has much to do with navigation, has it not?"

"Yes, indeed, we are the friend of the mariner, and of all those who travel by sea. We have a number of marine bureaus, which have come to us from other departments. We have a bureau of navigation, one of steamboat inspection, one of lighthouses, and also the coast and geodetic survey. You might not call the latter creative, but still it gives information as to the exact nature of our coasts for ships all over the world. The waters of the United States are much more carefully surveyed even than the land. We know the depth and character of every bit of sea which washes our shores, and have made surveys of the rivers to the head of tide water for ship navigation. We furnish such maps to sailors. We also give information as to the tides, and, by a recent invention, the coast survey can tell you just what the tide is at any port of the world and at any hour of the day. For instance, if you want to know just how high the tide will rise this afternoon in the Bay of Chemulpo, on the west coast of Korea, this machine will tell you."

"How about your lighthouses, are you putting up new ones?"

"Yes," replied the secretary. "We are adding hundreds of lights and lighthouses to the service every year. The main lights along the Atlantic and Pacific were erected long ago, but we are establishing new lights and signals between them. We have put up about fifty new lights, sixteen fog signals and 751 buoys. We are greatly extending the lighthouse service of Alaska and are building lighthouses there. We are also putting lights upon the Yukon and other rivers. We are improving the lighthouses of Porto Rico and Hawaii, and we have officers of the engineer corps of the army who are inspecting the lights on the Mississippi river and its tributaries.

Our Merchant Marine.

"And then as to the bureau of navigation," continued the secretary. "We are doing what we can to make our merchant vessels better and to take care of the sailors. We are inspecting the steamboats and insisting that they be properly equipped with life-saving appliances.

"I should like to see measures undertaken to increase our merchant marine. As it is, we have something like 25,000 vessels with a gross tonnage of more than 7,500,000, but nearly all this is devoted to our domestic trade, a large part of our shipping being on the great lakes.

"The most of our imports and exports now come and go in European bottoms. Last year we carried less than 9 per cent of them, and was paid many millions of dollars in freight to other nations. Our great European competitors for the commerce of the world find that it pays them to aid their merchant shipping, and I believe that we should do the same. There is a good deal of sentiment in commerce, notwithstanding all the proverbs to the contrary. 'Trade does follow the flag,' and the American flag in a foreign harbor is a great advertiser. If the United States is to hold its own in the trade of the world it must have equal advantages with other nations as to that trade."

Cheap Fish for the Nation.

Here the secretary spoke of the bureau of fisheries, saying:

"Another feature of this department, indirectly connected with the marine, is the raising of cheap fish for food for the nation. A few years ago it was almost impossible to get fresh lobsters or shad, but owing to the protection afforded and the plantings of the bureau of fisheries they are now to be found in every large market. We are propagating fish of many kinds all over the union. We raise the spawn and send it out to the states, and in addition do a great deal of planting ourselves. Our total output of fish and eggs last year was more than 3,000,000,000, and this will be greatly extended. The commercial fisheries of the country are now bringing in a product of something like $62,000,000 a year, and from oysters alone we are annually getting something like $16,000,000. The salmon of Alaska bring in $9,000,000 or $10,000,000, and the fish which come from the forest waters furnish a supply of food which annually sells for something like $21,000,000. We are doing a great deal for the salmon, both along the Columbia river and in Puget sound and Alaska. As to the fur seals, they are under the department, and if we could protect them from the robbers who, contrary to law, try to catch them on their way to the Pribaloff islands we could materially increase the herd. As it is, the sealskins now bring in something like $450,000 a year. In the past they have been worth a great deal."

One Million Immigrants.

The conversation here turned to immigation, of which the Department of Commerce and Labor has charge, and I asked the secretary as to the character of the new citizens we are getting from Europe. He replied:

"The most of them come from the southern and eastern countries. We admitted more than 1,000,000 last year and within the last ten years we have passed in between 8,000,000 and 9,000,000. At the present we are admitting more Italians than any of the others. In 1900 we had over 200,000 of them. Next came the Poles, who numbered 128,000, and then the Jews, Germans, English and Irish.

"You must remember, however, that a great many of these immigrants stay only a few years and that there is a steady flow back to the old country. I believe that some of them come here with the idea of making a fortune in a few years and then going back home. Some send their savings back from month to month, and this is one reason for the hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of money orders which are annually forwarded to Europe."

Keeping Out the Scrap.

"Do we get many bad immigrants?" I asked.

"Not if this department can help it. We have a force of about 2,000 men who are engaged in guarding the ports and our boundaries to keep out those whom the law forbids landing. These are, as you know, all those who have contagious diseases, all who are mentally weak, all who have been criminals in the countries from where they came, and all who are paupers and unable to support themselves. We turn about 25,000 such immigrants back every year, and, although at times it seems almost cruel to do so, we are forced to protect the people at home from such invasion from abroad."

"What causes the immigrants to come to the United States?"

"The number increases or decreases with good or bad times. Just now the country is prosperous, and foreigners come here to get the high wages and better conditions of living. The immigration is also largely a matter of freight. It is drummed up by the ocean steamship companies and the railroads in order that they may receive the passage money for carrying the immigrants here."

"Can you keep out the Asiatics?"

"The law forbids us to admit the Chinese, and the same is true to some extent of the Japanese. During the last year we have passed in 2,600 Japanese, and during the same time something like 1,500 came into Hawaii. California has also had something of an immigration of Hindus."

"What are you doing along labor lines?"

"We are gathering information of all sorts, not only for the government and the scientist, but for the laboring man himself and those who employ him. We are getting information as to child labor and woman labor, as to wages and strikes and as to accidents and how the laborer may be protected from them."

Investigating the Corporations.

"I suppose that a great part of your work is connected with the corporations?"

"Yes, that was one of the main reasons for founding this department. It was to promote the best business interests of the country and to give information which would lead to the maintenance of the honesty and stability of the vast machinery of our industry and commerce. The bureau of corporations gathers information for the use of the administration and others as to corporations of all kinds. So far we have been dealing chiefly with the great corporations or trusts, and we have investigated a number of them, such as the beef trust and the steel trust. We have about completed our work on the steel trust."

"I should think such a report would be very extensive?"

"It is so. It would take several volumes to contain it."

"Will it have as many words as a big family Bible?"

"I should say so."

"How do you go about investigating a trust of that kind?"

"We have to begin at the bottom. We want first to know the purpose of the organization, to learn what its charter gives it the right to do and then find out whether it carries on its business in accordance with that charter. We want to know all about the methods of the organization, its profits and losses, the wages and prices, the cost of materials and everything concerning it. We want to know whether it has combinations with the railroads by which it gets unfair advantages over its competitors, and to know whether it is in a conspiracy to control or make prices. In the steel trust we have had great aid from the management. The books have all been thrown open to us, and we have been aided in many ways. This is so with most of the corporations with which we have had to deal. It was not so with the tobacco trust, but the recent decision may make that organization more compliant in the future."

"What investigations have you on hand at present?"

"At the end of the last fiscal year the work was still pending as to the investigation of the lumber, steel and tobacco industries and also as to the International Harvester company, transportation by water in the United States and the concentration of water power industries. Some of this work has been completed."

Testing Our Weights and Measures.

I here asked as to certain other bureaus of the department and the secretary replied:

"It will be impossible for you to give the details of the Department of Commerce and Labor in a single newspaper letter. Every one of our offices teems with creative work. Take, for instance, the bureau of standards, which is testing weights and measures of all kinds. We have made almost 50,000 tests of such things during the last year, and these included measurements of tests for length, mass, capacity and density. They embraced measurements of time, heat and electricity and of all sorts of materials and forces under the sun. All the thermometers in the United States are now made after the tests of this department. Indeed, the most of them are sent in to be tested. It is the same with all measures for photographic lenses and optical glasses. We are inspecting the ordnary weights and measures used in the various states and they are being brought up to standard. Two of our inspectors visited eighty-seven cities and towns the last year. They worked chefly in the east, covering twenty-seven states, and they expect to go over the western states during the coming twelve months. I believe the day will come when all the weights and measures of the country will be based upon the work of the bureau of standards."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.