

Issue: Consumer Protection

Reform Leaders: Upton Sinclair, Theodore Roosevelt, The Consumer's League

Source: Excerpt from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, 1906

*Sinclair was a writer who wrote *The Jungle* after investigating Chicago's meatpacking industry, originally wanting to draw attention to the working conditions, but instead uncovering unsanitary practices. After the release of his book, he stated "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."*

"There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white – it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one – there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage."

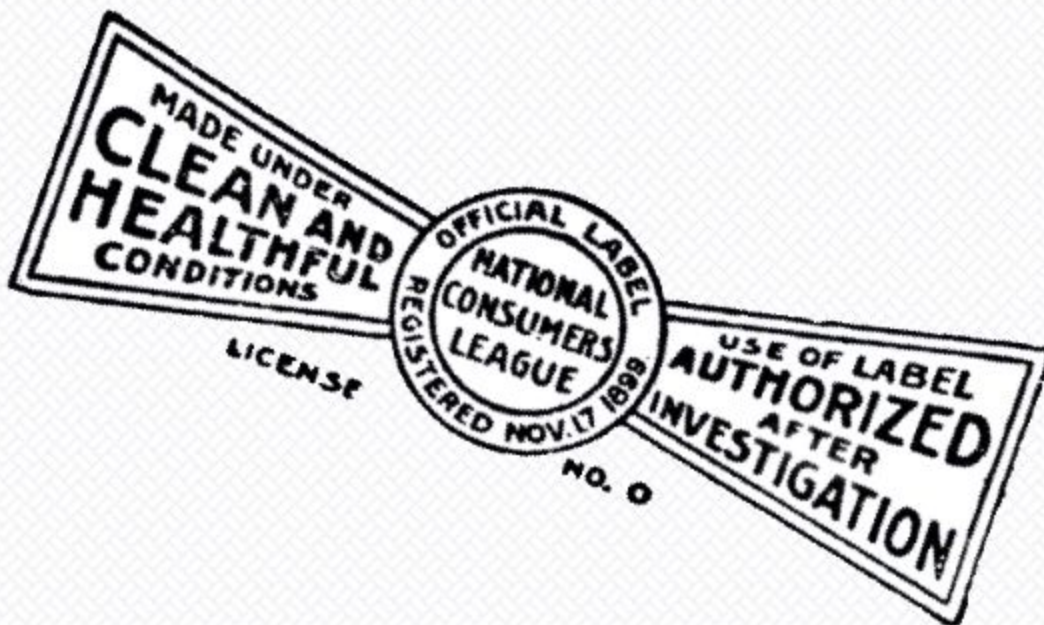
Source: The Neill-Reynolds Report, 1906

In response to Sinclair's book, Congress launched an investigation into meatpacking factories. Below is an excerpt from their findings as well as a picture taken from a Chicago factory, showing men without sanitary equipment, using mostly their bare hands, to butcher and slaughter the meat. Overworked men sometimes made costly mistakes that resulted in the loss of limbs.

"Abominable as the [factory] conditions are, the one that affects most directly and seriously the cleanliness of the food products in the frequent absence of any bathroom provisions. Washing sinks are not furnished or are small and dirty. Neither are towels, soap, or toilet paper provided. Men and women return directly from the unsuitable bathrooms to plunge their unwashed hands into the meat to be converted into such food products as sausages, dried beef, and other compounds...In some of the largest establishments, slabs of meat that are sent to the boning room are thrown in a heap on the floor. The workers climb over these haps, select the pieces they wish, and frequently thrown them down upon the dirty floor next to their bench..."



Eleanor Roosevelt worked for *The Consumer's League* in New York. Her work consisted of visiting the tenement apartments where workers both lived and worked under dangerous and unhealthy conditions in so-called "sweatshops," making note of the workload, the physical toll on the workers, and the sanitary and safety conditions of the rooms where they lived and worked. The "Consumer's White Label" campaign was an endorsement given to manufacturers of products that were made under certain labor conditions, such as the elimination of unpaid overtime work, and hiring of workers under the age of sixteen.



Source: Ellen White, The Ministry of Healing, 1905

Ellen White was a Seventh Day Adventist who used the scientific language of the Progressive Era to promote religious ideas and societal reforms. White adopted a Christian perfectionist stance that stressed not only personal piety but also physical health and hygiene.

In this fast age, the less exciting the food, the better. Condiments are injurious in their nature. Mustard, pepper, spices, pickles, and other things of a like character, irritate the stomach and make the blood feverish and impure...

Tea and coffee do not nourish the system...what seems to be strength is only nervous excitement...The continued use of these nerve irritants is followed by headache, wakefulness, palpitation of the heart, indigestion, trembling, and many other evils...

Tobacco is a slow, insidious, but most malignant poison...It excites and then paralyzes the nerves. It weakens and clouds the brain. Often it affects the nerves in a more powerful manner than does intoxicating drink...Among children and youth the use of tobacco is working untold harm. The unhealthful practices of past generations affect the children and youth of today. Mental inability, physical weakness, disordered nerves, and unnatural cravings are transmitted as a legacy from parents to children...How much of the Lord's money do you spend for tobacco? Reckon up what you have thus spent during your lifetime. How does the amount consumed by this defiling lust compare with what you have given for the relief of the poor and the spread of the gospel?