

## I. Exposing the Meatpackers ( 1906)

*In 1906 Upton Sinclair, the youthful and prolific socialist writer, published his novel The Jungle, a damning exposure of conditions in the Chicago meatpacking plants. Seeking to turn people to socialism, he succeeded in turning their stomachs. The 1Congressional Record, 59th Cong., 1st sess. (June 4, 1906), p. 7801. 191 192 Chapter 28 Progressivism and the Republican Roosevelt, 1901-1912 uproar that followed publication of his novel caused President Roosevelt to initiate an official investigation, and the following sober report was hardly less shocking than The Jungle. It confirmed the essential truth of Sinclair's expose, except for such lurid scenes as men falling into vats and emerging as lard. Which aspects of this official investigation revealed conditions most detrimental to the public health?*

... Meat scraps were also found being shoveled into receptacles from dirty floors, where they were left to lie until again shoveled into barrels or into machines for chopping. These floors, it must be noted, were in most cases damp and soggy, in dark, ill-ventilated rooms, and the employees in utter ignorance of cleanliness or danger to health expectorated at will upon them. In a word, we saw meat shoveled from filthy wooden floors, piled on tables rarely washed, pushed from room to room in rotten box carts, in all of which processes it was in the way of gathering dirt, splinters, floor filth, and the expectoration of tuberculous and other diseased workers.

Where comment was made to floor superintendents about these matters, it was always the reply that this meat would afterwards be cooked, and that this sterilization would prevent any danger from its use. Even this, it may be pointed out in passing, is not wholly true. A very considerable portion of the meat so handled is sent out as smoked products and in the form of sausages, which are prepared to be eaten without being cooked ....

As an extreme example of the entire disregard on the part of employees of any notion of cleanliness in handling dressed meat, we saw a hog that had just been killed, cleaned, washed, and started on its way to the cooling room fall from the sliding rail to a dirty wooden floor and slide part way into a filthy men's privy. It was picked up by two employees, placed upon a truck, carried into the cooling room and hung up with other carcasses, no effort being made to clean it. ... In one well-known establishment we came upon fresh meat being shoveled into barrels, and a regular proportion being added of stale scraps that had lain on a dirty floor in the corner of a room for some days previous. In another establishment, equally well known, a long table was noted covered with several hundred pounds of cooked scraps of beef and other meats. Some of these meat scraps were dry, leathery, and unfit to be eaten; and in the heap were found pieces of pigskin, and even some bits of rope strands and other rubbish. Inquiry evoked the frank admission from the man in charge that this was to be ground up and used in making "potted ham."

All of these canned products bear labels, of which the following is a sample:

ABATIOIR No.-

THE CONTENTS OF THIS PACKAGE HAVE BEEN

INSPECTED ACCORDING TO THE ACT OF

CONGRESS OF MARCH 3, 1891.