

Day After Day - September 1935

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes the working conditions at a power plant and the indignity “clients” experience at the Welfare department. (DDLW #292).

Edison Plant

Distributing papers at the power house over in Brooklyn between four and five on a hot afternoon. The Hudson Avenue plant supplies all Queens, Brooklyn and lower Manhattan. It takes 700 men to work it and 680 are organized. At the offices of the Edison company there are 5000 working. There are in addition, seven district offices. For the actual generating of electricity there are two hundred in the plant. The men work in three shifts and some of them work eight hours straight and have no time off for eating. They eat while working. The mechanics work from eight to five and have an hour off for lunch. Before the men started the brotherhood of Edison Employees, the pay was \$23 to \$36. Now it is \$27 to \$46. The men are supposed to get a pension at 65 but usually long before this the pay is lowered to \$25 and the pension amounts to about \$7 a week. Or perhaps they get fired for mistakes.

While we distributed there was a steady roar of the machines in our ears which filled the air unbearably. The men work in the midst of this roar all the time. We could look out over the river while we waited for the men to dribble out of the plant, over a field of weeds, burdock, dandelion and grass growing cheerfully in the shade. There is a bend in the river right there and we watched the tugboats and the barges going by. The overhanging bridge was like poem. To one side there is a gantry.

This, one of the workers said proudly, is the largest generating plant in the world. They use coal to generate the electricity. The heat would melt the machinery so the men have to work practically in a refrigerating plant and in the hottest weather wear warm clothes!

Welfare Dept.

Went with Margaret to the Welfare Dept. The waiting. room was small, and so crowded, by, nine thirty in the morning that fifteen people already were standing up. The investigators came out into this crowded room to interview their “clients.” It is hard to watch people trying to achieve some privacy, speaking behind cupped hands, their faces working. The investigators telling them to speak up. There are many children in the room underweight, pale and sad. It is hard to see grown people crying and young children with set sad faces terrified at the sight of adult despair.

There is a Negro there with crucifixes in her ears. A young girl with a trembling baby with an old white face. There is a strange contrast between the impassive faces of the investigators and the twisted anguished faces of those investigated.