Boston, May 1.—In the New Era Hall tonight Mr. Edward Atkinson delivered an address before the Central Labor Lyceum, in which he compressed more solid, though unpalatable, truth than has been given to laboring men from any platform in a long time. Mr. Atkinson was plain spoken, and appealed to the common sense of his hearers by the force of unanswerable argument, urging them to lay aside passion and consider calmly the economic facts presented by the struggle between capital and labor. He announced at the beginning that he was not a Knight of Labor, but a Squire of Work, “and if am not wrong,” he said, “the Squires will get ahead of the Knights in the long run.” Then he boldly grappled with the question of wages and hours of work, and showed that capitalists buy the work of their employees for what it is worth to them. If the workmen are not satisfied they can say good-bye to him, as he can to them; they can do better than that—they can save something and become employers themselves. “All this talk about wage slavery is nonsense,” said Mr. Atkinson. "There is no slave labor, no compulsion in this country now, unless it is the compulsion of the Knights of Labor, and that is pretty much played out already.”

The speaker showed the fallacy of the George theory about taxing land and exempting all other kinds of property. “You may put all the taxes on land," he said, “but you can’t make them stay there. Nobody will buy, or hire, or occupy that land to build houses or shops on unless they can charge the taxes to the tenant or occupant, or put the taxes into the price of the goods that are made in the factory or sold in the shop. If they couldn’t collect the taxes put upon them, then they wouldn’t get any profit on their capital invested in the houses or buildings; and if there is no profit to be had in building houses, or shops, or works, or factories, who but a fool would build them? Would you? If you choose to vote for men who will shorten the time of city laborers to eight hours a day you have a perfect right to do so, because you will pay most of the bill. The consumers, most of whom are working people, pay all the
Mr. Atkinson gave what he called a “spectrum analysis” of a piece of cotton cloth, which consisted in showing on a large chart, by means of colored squares, each part of the cost of the cloth, so that the exact proportion was made very clear. By means of this he showed that on a capital of $1,100,000 absorbed in the manufacture of cotton cloth the operatives were paid for the work $940,000, the profit was but $145,000, and the rest $15,000 was eaten up in taxes. “You may not like the statement,” said the speaker. “You may feel like using some swear words about me. Well, that won't hurt me, and if it does you any good I hope you will swear; but you don’t damn the facts; if they are the facts it won’t alter them if you do. If they are not the facts, if I have not told you the truth, then go ahead and find out the truth in your own way. That is what you can do in these organizations, clubs, Knights of Labor, eight-hour associations, and the more you study the more you will find out that the capitalist is your friend and not your enemy. If you treat him right he will treat you right.”

Mr. Atkinson continued:

“The way to shorten your time and work less hours is to do more while you do work, and I don’t know of any other way. Some of you are trying to rule the workmen. You are trying to tell men how they shall work, when they shall work, where they shall work, and how long they shall work. You call a man a scab who won’t submit. Is that fair play? Now, you won’t like it when I tell you right here that the ‘scab’ is the man who will come out ahead and you will get left. But don’t mistake me. I wholly approve of the organization of labor. I don’t care what you call it, whether trades union, Knights of Labor, or by any other name; all that I claim is that you mind your own business. What is needed now is a club of ‘scabs;’ that is, a liberty club, a mind-your-own-business club. If you have Knights of Labor why not have Squires of Work? I believe in a Squire more than I do in a Knight. The Squires have been licking the Knights for the last 300 years, getting on top, and by and by they will bury them. We have done with Kings, with Princes, with Dukes, and other privileged classes; now what business have the Knights of today to take up the privileges which the squires took away from the old knights long ago? What were these privileges that the Princes, the Dukes, and the knights used to claim in old times? Just what the Knights of Labor claim now, the right to tell you or me what we shall do with our time and
our brains, and how we shall use our hands. That won’t work. The Squires won’t have it. There are more Squires than there are Knights, only they don’t know it yet. Then I say let the Squires organize, support each other, and help each other to find out what their work is really worth. They don’t want any Master Workmen; they don’t want any masters of any kind to order them around. They want Corporals and Sergeants, men of their own kind; non-commissioned officers to keep them in line and to keep them all up to the best mark. When you organize such a club as this every member will get higher wages because he will be the best man of his kind; each one will be a man who knows how to make his own bargains and manage his own affairs. There will always be work for him at the highest price, because he will be the man who will make goods at the highest wages and at the lowest cost. That’s the kind of man that every employer wants to find. I don’t care whether the times are hard or easy, good or bad, that kind of man always gets work and always gets the best pay that the price of the goods which he makes will permit the employer to pay.

“It is a great blunder to say that while the rich are growing richer the poor are growing poorer; it is only the poor who can’t work well or who won’t work well, who grow poor while the rich are growing rich in this country. The best times for the manufacturer are the times when he makes the most money, and they are always when the wages are highest and not when they are the lowest, because wage earners are their principal and most important customers. Therefore, I tell you, organize, organize, organize; but organize the squires of work; call in all the ‘scabs’ to join, and don’t refuse any man who works for a living either with his hands or his head, with his own capital, or his own tools, or his own brains, if he is an honest and a true man. I tell you here and now that by the acts of the Legislature which you have tried for, and some of which have been passed, and by way of by-laws of your Knights of Labor, your clubs, and your associations, which you have tried to force people to adopt, you are driving capital out of the State of Massachusetts, tip to this time the true men of this country, the free men of this country, the scabs of this country have managed their own affairs fairly well, without much regard to your meddlesome acts; the result of that has been that the men of special skill, who are at the head of their trades, are 100 percent better off today than they were 20 years ago and more. That is, they can buy twice as much food, fuel, clothing, and as good a shelter today for a year’s wages as they could buy 20 years ago with what they then earned. The average carpenter, mason, painter, or
other mechanic who minds his own business and keeps the control of his own time can buy nearly twice as much, but not quite. The average factory operative can buy two-thirds more than he or she could buy 20 years ago with a year’s wages, and the common laborer can buy 50 percent more. But this will not go on if you don’t stop. There is no time to prove to you what I say tonight, but if you will go up to the State House and ask the Treasurer you can get the facts, and you can find out for yourselves that you are driving capital out of this State into other States, where men are left more free than they now are here to manage their own affairs."