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EDITORIAL

MORE “PROSPERITY.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

YESTERDAY, in our editorial article entitled “Prosperity and Strikes,” we drew from certain facts, previously ascertained and carefully weighed, the following conclusion: “It seems quite safe to say that the average earnings (of the American wage working class) are probably twenty-five per cent less than they were eleven years ago.”

We did not expect that this conclusion would pass unchallenged by the mouthpieces of capitalism; still less did we expect that it would be confirmed by those among them who are especially appointed to enjoy the “authority” and emoluments attached to the function of “statistician.” But here comes by wire from Harrisburg, this very day, the press summary of a report of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Statistics, which fully corroborates our estimate.

This report deals with the glass industry, “the condition of which is at present the best in its history.” It shows—or purports to show by returns obtained from the manufacturers themselves—the wages paid in the glass-works of Pennsylvania to the labor force employed therein and divided as follows: 9,806 skilled workmen, 9,464 unskilled, 1,633 females, and 2,130 children.

In the summary given to the press, the usual attempt is made to first befog the public understanding and convey a false impression as to the rate of wages which actually appears from the interested and unverified declarations of the employers. It is known that few persons have access to official documents and that the public readily accepts as sufficient the incomplete figures published by newspapers. We are therefore told, with extreme emphasis, of the high wages paid to a comparatively very small number of men—a sort of “aristocracy” of labor—whose skill is great and as yet indispensable, despite the progress of machinery. We are told, for instance, that “flatteners and cutters are making from \$10 to \$12 a day;” that “flint bottle blowers earn from \$3 to \$7 per day;” that “blowers in lamp shade and chimney factories get from \$4 to \$7 per day,” etc. Through this first “process of exceptions” we acquire the notion that wages in the glass industry are enormous. Then comes the “averaging process,” which

consists in bunching together the ill-paid and the better-paid, thereby getting a figure far above the earnings of the lower rank and file, whose actual condition is thus hidden from view.

And yet, all cannot be concealed. The figures as given to the public, ever so suspect because of the sources from which they come, ever so well manipulated into deceitful averages, yield to the intelligent inquirer results that were certainly not expected by the manufacturers who supplied them, by the political "statistician" who collected them, and by the capitalist press agent who served them up to the public.

According to the report in question, the average earnings of the skilled workmen last year were \$712.07; of the unskilled \$311.27; of the women \$197.29; and of the children \$139.75. Taking into account the respective numbers of those four categories of labor, we therefore find that the general average earnings were \$418.24.

Now, if we turn to the census of 1890, we find that the average earnings in the glass-works of Pittsburg were \$497.70. The decline of earnings in this great and growing industry—"the condition of which is at present the best in its history"—is therefore \$78.46. In other words, the earnings of labor in this highly prosperous branch of American manufacture were nineteen per cent greater in 1890 than they are at present.

But if such was the case in that particular branch, does it not fall under the sense that it must have been far worse in many others? We know for certain that in the cotton and woolen industries the reductions were enormous during the crisis, while the subsequent "recovery," nominally small, was practically fictitious and in some cases amounted to a further reduction, fraudulent in its character, more work being exacted than in proportion to the so-called "advance" granted. On the railroads a labor force now about equal to that of 1892 is handling at a lower rate of wages an amount of traffic considerably larger. In the mines, the situation of the workers has become intolerable.

Go on, statisticians, with your records of "prosperity." You will soon have figures of another sort before you—namely, the number of indignant, class-conscious Revolutionary Socialists marching to the polls under the banner of the S.L.P.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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