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IDLENESS, WAGES AND EARNINGS

By Daniel De Leon

From the last report of Carroll D. Wright on wages and cost of living it appears that cotton operatives, when employed, earn on the average \$1.02 per day in the Northern district of the United States, 69½ cents in the Southern district, and 66 cents in Great Britain. But the average period of employment is so much shorter in the United States that the total earnings of the operatives are considerably lower than in England. For instance, in a period of six months the operatives of the Northern States worked only 79 days and earned \$80; in the Southern district they worked 54 days and earned \$38; whereas in Great Britain they worked 131 days and earned \$86. According to these figures the amount of enforced idleness in the United States was over 50 per cent. of the working time; in other words it was greater than the amount of employment. Again, the average earnings of operatives while at work convey no correct idea of the actual rate of wages, because piece work is the rule and the working day is longer in the United States, especially in the South, than in England. By taking into account the number of working hours and the amount of product turned out, it is found that our Southern operatives are paid considerably less than the British for the same amount of labor. The most important point, however, is as to the small earnings in America, consequent upon the enormous amount of enforced idleness in the face of a prodigious development of the cotton industry. These facts cast a lurid light on the condition and prospects of labor in this country. They are in a line with the state of affairs in the iron, steel, coal and other great industries. Will they open the eyes of the poor masses that "pure and simple trade unionism" has chloroformed?

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