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EDITORIAL

A PEEP AT THE CHAIN-GANG.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHILE Congress is “critically discussing” the question whether child-labor is beneficial or otherwise to the little tots, who are tugging at the ropes of the social coach, on top of which our capitalists and their politicians are comfortably lodged, a few facts, gleaned from the latest Census Bulletin on Child Labor, may give some idea of the sources of our “National Prosperity.”

There are in the United States (continental) 1,750,178 children under 15 years who are compelled to be breadwinners. Of this total, 790,623 are below 13 years, and no less than 142,105 are of the still tenderer age of 10.

In point of sex, 1,264,411 are boys—485,767 little girls.

Among the industries in which one would least expect to see child-labor, least of all girl child-labor, and yet actually found consuming the tender substances of children, mining and quarrying leads with 8,961 boys—39 girls; the metal works occupy 2,266 boys—198 girls; the injurious trade of painting and varnishing engages 331 boys—12 girls; printing, lithographing and pressing has 644 boys—55 girls; boot and shoe making, 612 boys—306 girls; finally the laborers (unspecified) compete with 40,616 boys and 8,810 little girls. These are but samples.

A fourth side from which to contemplate child-labor is that of illiteracy, simultaneously with its occupation and location:

In the cotton mills industries there are 4,426 illiterate children of 15 years and under, Georgia and South Carolina leading with 1,576 and 1,099 respectively, while in “classic New England,” Fall River, Mass., can boast 174 and Warwick, R.I., 132 of these waifs.

In the messengers and errand office boys’ occupation, New York City leads with 3,253 illiterate child breadwinners; Chicago, Ill., follows closely with 2,665; and

even Boston, the “Hub” and “Cradle” furnishes a quota of 475.

In the coal mining industry, Luzerne County, Pa., employs and thereby keeps in illiteracy 2,514 children under 15 years.

In the dressmaking industry New York and Chicago again carry off the palm, the former with 2,355, the latter with 1,605 illiterate little girls toiling as seamstresses and tailoresses.

In the silk mills there are 1,932 illiterate boys and girls—813 in Lackawana County, Pa.; 629 in Paterson, N.J.; 490 in Luzerne County, Pa.

Altogether the Census gives 23,482 as the number of male and female illiterate working children.

“So long,” said Louis Blanc, “as a single human being suffers through social conditions, that social system is criminal.” What must be the degree of criminality of the capitalist system that keeps thousands and hundreds of thousands of little boys and girls fettered to the chain-gang of wage slavery, with tens of thousands disabled even from acquiring the rudiments of letters?

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