

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 33.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2, 1911.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

BERGER'S MISS NO. 17.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AN insult—calm, cold, deliberate, cruel and brazen—was offered to the working class of the land, in general, the cotton mill operators of the South, in particular, by Representative James F. Byrnes of South Carolina from the floor of the House of Representatives.

Answering the attack of the Pennsylvania Republican Benjamin K. Focht upon industrial conditions in the South, Representative Byrnes said: “In comparison with the salary and mileage of the gentleman from Pennsylvania the operatives [cotton mill operatives of the South] are poorly paid, but for the class of work demanded of them their wages are fair.”

“Will the gentleman allow a question?” was due from the seat occupied by a Socialist member of the House the instant the gentleman from South Carolina had closed his much applauded peroration. Whereupon the question should have followed clip and clear:

“What does the gentleman mean by ‘the class of work’ demanded of the cotton mill operatives of the South, and for what reason does he consider the wages, which he admits are ‘poor’ in comparison with the salary and mileage of a Representative to this House, to be ‘fair’? A Representative receives \$7,500 besides mileage, not to mention other perquisites; the operative in the Southern cotton mills receives, according to the latest (1905) available figures, \$4.68 a week. What are the services rendered, or goods produced by the two? The Representative turns out yards of laws. What the quality is of this commodity may be judged from the expressions that have dropped plentifully from the lips of the gentleman’s own fellow Democrats, to the effect that the masses of the country have been legislated into poverty, and from his own lips in the short rattling speech that he has just delivered, when he quoted the summary of the situation by a citizen of Ohio, showing that nearly

\$1,000,000 a day or 67¹/₂ per cent. of all Government expenses was incurred for war purposes, the figures in detail given by him being: 'For education, 3 per cent. and for agriculture 1⁴/₅ percent; for feed, \$1; for fight, \$37; for brains, \$1; for bullets, \$22; to encourage production, \$1; to encourage idleness, \$37; to shoot brains in, \$1; to shoot brains out, \$22; for culture, refinement and education, \$1: for shotgun business in time of peace, \$22.' On the other hand, the cotton mill operative turns out yards of cotton goods. The usefulness of this output need not be enlarged upon. Comparing the two outputs—yards of laws and yards of cotton goods—they stand to each other in the relation of shoddy to genuine products. If the pittance paid to the producer of useful goods is 'fair wages', then it should follow that the bountiful salary and mileage paid to the producer of shoddy is wasteful. And vice versa, if the bountiful salary and mileage paid to the producer of shoddy yards of law is legitimate, then, it seems to me, that the producer of useful yards of cotton goods should be remunerated many times more bountifully. I should thank the gentleman from South Carolina if he will explain on this floor the process of reasoning by which he implies disparagement of the 'class of work' that is done by the cotton mill operatives of the South, and admiration for the 'class of work' done in the law mill of the Nation. The explanation, I trow, will be of deep interest, not to the Southern cotton mill operatives only, but to the working class the land over."

The insult offered by Representative Byrnes to the wage slaves of the land remained unresented, unrebuked. The A.F. of L. labor-leaders in Congress applauded with the consent implied by silence, if they did not actually join in the handclapping that greeted Representative Byrnes's speech.

And what about Victor L. Berger? He again missed the opportunity to puncture the class reasoning of the exploiters' class. Representative Byrnes's speech was delivered on May 2. On that day, the "first Socialist Congressman" was illustrating outside of Congress, outside of Washington, how impossible it is for the "ONE Socialist Congressman" to do anything in Congress, seeing that, even when he is at his post, he might as well be thousands of miles away.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded June 2012

slpns@slp.org