

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 205.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 1910.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

AMERICAN CHEAP LABOR.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A FEW years ago it used to be English manufacturers who sent their commissioners to America to observe, and report upon “how the Americans did it,” that is to say, upon how American manufacturers managed to produce so cheaply. Now it is German manufacturers who are trying to find out and are finding out.

Dr. Joseph Hollenbauer, general manager of the Lauchhammer Company, which turns out bridges, structural steel for buildings and bronze monuments, is in America taking notes. Dr. Hollenbauer has given out some of his observations; they are worth reading and pondering over.

In, contrasting the workingman of Germany with the workingman of America, Dr. Hollenbauer says, with admirable candor, that “the German workmen are too much on the lookout for their personal safety and are unwilling to take risks.” Owing to this and several other causes Dr. Hollenbauer concludes: “The result is that it takes him [the German workman] a month to turn out work that a good American workman would accomplish in eleven days.”

In other words, the much boasted superiority of American over German wages is a half-truth that amounts to a colossal lie. The money wages which the American manufacturer pays are actually higher than the wages paid by his German cousin; nevertheless, he buys for those wages far more than the German workman sells. The German workman only sells his labor-power, the American workman sells, besides his labor-power, his limbs and life—the American manufacturer pays a little more for a good deal more—the wages he pays buy not only labor-power but the alacrity of the workman to “take risks,” that’s thrown in for good measure.

The long and short of the story is that the A.F. of L. cry of Chinese cheap labor applies to itself compared to the German standard.

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Uploaded January 2011

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