

AMERICA'S 3,000,000 CHILD SLAVES

HOW many child laborers are there in this country? How many children 16 years and under are employed in the industries and agricultural fields of this country? How many children are really subjected to the frightful exploitation that always accompanies work for profit of the boss?

U. S. Report Runs Short.

These are questions which must be answered correctly; the answers which have been given up to now are decidedly conflicting and insufficient. The official statistics of child labor given by the children's bureau of the United States department of labor, based on the census of 1920, state that 1,060,858 children between the ages of 10 and 15 are at work. But at the same time the report admits that the census was taken in January, a time of the year when thousands of children who are employed on farms are at school, waiting for summer before turning to slavery on the farm; also it does not take into consideration the child laborers under the age of 10, of whom there are legions, and children between the age of 15 and 16. It does not take account of the children in the street trades, like boot-blacking, newspaper sellers, assistants to fruit, etc., peddlers and the like; and it omits the little children who slave in the unsanitary confines of their homes.

Child Labor Committee Figure.

The National Child Labor Committee almost doubles the estimate of the children's bureau in the June 1924 issue of its official organ, The American

Child .p. 4). "It is now reliably estimated that at least two million children under 15 years of age are being gainfully employed," it declares. But even this figure does not tell the full story!

A Different Estimate.

We believe that a more accurate estimate of the extent of child labor can be secured in the following manner: If we compare the statistics of the number of children there are in this country between the ages of 5 and 16, with the number of children between those ages who attend school, the difference will more closely approximate the number of child slaves. It is almost a certainty that the overwhelming majority of the children of those ages who do not attend school are engaged in working at something or another.

According to the census of 1920, there were 19,916,965 children between the ages of 5 and 16 attending school. The total population of children of those ages is 25,863,907. This is of prime significance. It is this figure that we can use as a basis for computing the amount of children in industry and agriculture in the country. The overwhelming majority of majority of children who do not attend school are either employed, or are confined to institutions for the insane, hospitals, jails and the like. Of course, these last form a very small percentage of the total. The rest work.

In order to get a nearer figure, we will, for the moment, completely eliminate from our calculations the

By Max Shachtman

children of 5 and 6 years of age. Of these two ages, there are a total of 4,687,121; 1,922,125 are recorded as attending school, leaving us 2,764,996 who are supposed to be at work. But because of the fact that in many states and rural localities children do not start to go to school until after they are seven, and yet do not work in the meantime, we shall omit the entire section, although thousands of children of these ages are at work. This leaves, as the total of children between the ages of 7 and 16 who do not attend school, the sum of 3,181,946.

Real Extent of Child Labor.

This, it can be safely said, is the real extent of child labor in this country. At any rate, it is a figure that is much more correct than any that has yet been given. It may be said, in contradiction to this estimate, that there are thousands of children among these who neither go to school nor go to work. True! But the amount of these children can be more than overbalanced by the following factors in child labor calculations:

1. There are scores of thousands of children who go to work during the summer, especially during the harvesting season in the agricultural fields.

2. There are other thousands who are employed in part time work, after school, doing such jobs as messenger boys, office work and similar tasks.

3. Large numbers of children, who

go to school, are slaving in tenements, working at flowers, clothing, jewelry, or lace finery.

4. There are hundreds of children, below school age, children as young as 2 and 3 years of age who work in tenements, or in the fields (beets, cotton, and so forth) as exploited wage earners. (The figure of 2 and 3 years of age, although rather rare, may seem absolutely beyond belief, but may easily be confirmed by reading the report of the New York state commission whose recent investigation of tenement labor in New York City revealed horribly appalling facts.)

Balance Leaves 3,000,000.

These facts easily balance the other factor, especially when it is remembered that thousands of children were omitted because of the possibility that they are able to enter school, that is, children of 5 and 6. Even the department of labor, however, agrees that there are thousands of 5 and 6 year old child laborers in such industries as cannery, packing, and in truck farming, cotton and beet picking, and other agrarian pursuits.

The Reliable and Unreliable.

The report of the children's bureau of the department of labor is admittedly incorrect. No estimate is made of children below the age of 10 or the children working on farms in the summer; neither does it take into account the child laborers who work part time and in home work industries.

The figures of the National Child Labor Committee are also incorrect since they merely report that

reliable estimates are that 2,000,000, at least, are at work under the age of 15. Child labor should be considered up to 16, however, since that is still the average year of the passing of boyhood into youth, with its attendant changes of body and mind, which make it dangerous to the future of the youth to be used as an object for exploitation instead of education.

Reformers Better'n Gov't.

At any rate, the reformers of the National Child Labor Committee have a better figure than the department of labor. They say "at least" 2,000,000 children are at work. Add to this the children at work under the age of 16 and compare it to the amount arrived at by the writer above, taking into consideration all the important factors mentioned, and it will be seen that there are at least 3,000,000 children in this country who are working for an employer's profit.

Three million child slaves in the most glorious land on the face of the globe! An average of more than one child in seven who is forced to spend the tenderest years of life coining profits of the country who are never to bloom, but whose bodies and minds are withered almost from the moment of birth!

A system of society which tolerates such a hideous state of affairs has not the slightest claim or cause for existence.

A working class which permits such conditions to go unchallenged has not yet taken the first step in the march to freedom.