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LABOR AND TEXTILES

**BY ROBERT W. DUNN
AND JACK HARDY**

INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

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LABOR AND TEXTILES



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LABOR AND TEXTILES

**A STUDY OF
COTTON AND WOOL MANUFACTURING**

by
ROBERT W. DUNN
and
JACK HARDY



**INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK**

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PREFACE TO LABOR AND INDUSTRY SERIES

THIS is one volume in a series of industrial studies being prepared by the Labor Research Association, an organization devoted to the gathering and interpretation of economic material for the labor movement.

The aim of this series is to present a picture of the development of the important American industries in relation to the workers employed in them. Other books dealing with American industries have been written from the viewpoint of the employer, the personnel manager, and the technical expert. But they have all been interested in perpetuating the present system of exploitation and in piling up more profits for powerful corporations.

The present series studies American industries from the worker's viewpoint. What is the trend of production in a given industry? What are the wages, hours, and conditions of employment, and how do these compare with those in other industries? What is the extent of unemployment and what are the prospects of keeping their jobs for those workers still employed? What profits are the companies making, and how are they often concealing them? What mergers are being carried through as the employing class attempts to tighten its control? How are the corporations associated to protect their interests and oppose those of labor? To what extent are the workers already organized in company unions, in the American Federation of Labor, in the new Left Wing unions? What are the prospects for effective unionization? What is the real purpose of the "welfare" and "industrial relations" propaganda of the employers? What can the

workers in the industries of the United States look forward to under the present economic system? These are some of the questions this series seeks to answer.

These books describe not only the hardships and grievances of the workers in a given industry. They analyze the class conflicts arising between those who uphold the capitalist system of production and distribution and the workers who are organizing for revolutionary change. Those who seek to put an end to the rule of the employing class will find in these volumes not only graphic pictures of living and working conditions, but an interpretation of economic struggle and suggested programs of action to meet the offensives of the corporations.

To the militant workers who, in the face of overwhelming obstacles, are carrying on the fight against the strongly organized forces of the capitalist class these books are dedicated.

LABOR RESEARCH ASSOCIATION.

FOREWORD

TEXTILES were depressed long before the international crisis of capitalism developed in 1929-30. For years these industries, especially the cotton and wool branches, have been regarded as "sick." They are among the oldest industries in America. They are "protected" by an especially high tariff. But the wages of the workers have always been notoriously low. Hours are long, and night work and tuberculosis a special menace to health. Unemployment is a permanent and growing plague. Shop conditions are worse than in almost any other American industry.

Textiles have seen many uprisings of the workers, calling forth severe repressions by the employers and the capitalist state. In recent years textile strikes were more spectacular than others. Passaic, New Bedford, Gastonia, Marion, Danville—all have shown that textile workers have had an unusually heavy burden to carry and that they readily resort to strike action to improve their conditions.

Attempts to organize textile workers have met with active sympathy from thousands of persons not directly connected with the labor movement. Scores of local and national craft unions have been formed. More recently the launching of the National Textile Workers' Union in 1928 and the struggles that followed it, as well as the half-hearted campaign of the American Federation of Labor unions in southern cotton mill states have attracted much attention.

Hundreds of articles have been written in recent years attempting to answer the question, "What is wrong with textiles?" The present volume not only tries to answer this

question but presents in a systematic manner the salient facts of the industry, its trends, profits, employers' associations and tactics, its workers and their conditions, and the various movements to organize them.

In 1929, Grace Hutchins of the Labor Research Association wrote *Labor and Silk*, one of the first books in this Labor and Industry Series. It dealt with silk and rayon manufacturing and contained general references to conditions in other textile branches. The present volume covers cotton and wool manufacturing, the two other basic textile industries that manufacture yarns and fabrics.

The data in this book are taken from a mass of documentary sources, some of which are given in the reference notes that follow the text. These sources were supplemented by the experiences of one of the writers, formerly organizer and research director for a textile union. Much of the material in the chapters on union organization is from an unpublished monograph, *Dual Unionism in the Textile Industries*, prepared by Mr. Dunn while engaged in this union work and while holding a fellowship at the New School for Social Research in New York City. In connection with these studies he had occasion to visit dozens of cotton and woolen mills in this country and to interview hundreds of textile workers. Later he gathered comparative material in the textile centers of England, Austria, Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union.

For careful and critical help in the preparation of this volume the authors are deeply indebted to their colleagues in the Labor Research Association. They also owe a special obligation to scores of rank and file workers in cotton and woolen mills who have given facts, shared experiences, and interpreted developments in their particular plants. To help these militant workers in their efforts to organize and win the industry this book has been written.

APPENDIX

DESCRIPTION OF PROCESSES AND OCCUPATIONS *

Cotton Manufacturing

Opening and Picking: Several picking machines or "pickers" open the cotton, loosen fiber, and beat out dirt, seeds and foreign substances, finally turning out a downy roll of cotton or lap. (Picker Tender, Opener Tender.)

Carding: Large machines with revolving cylinders, covered with wire teeth, comb the fibers into parallel position removing the shortest fibers and turning out a white rope-like "sliver." (Card Tender—who feeds the lap into the cards and doffs, or takes off the cans of sliver as they become filled. Card Stripper—who cleans the card cylinders. Card Grinder—who sharpens the fine teeth on the cylinders.)

Combing: A continuation of carding process which takes out more of the shorter fibers. This process is used only when very strong and fine yarn is required. (Comber Tender.)

Drawing: Machines combine several slivers into one, running them through a series of rollers. (Drawing-frame Tender.)

From the drawing frame the sliver passes through several fly frames called slubber, intermediate and roving frames, the function of which is to draw, twist and reduce it further until the strand of cotton is about the size of an ordinary string. (Slubber Tender, Speeder Tender and others.)

Spinning: Completes the drawing out of the fibers to the required size, at the same time firmly twisting them into a compact thread, or yarn. The slender rod which holds the bobbin on

* There are hundreds of separate occupations or jobs in each industry. In a typical large worsted mill, for example, there are, exclusive of the general help (yard labor, carpenters, oilers, painters, pipers, etc.), some 175 different occupations demanding separate attention and remuneration. A complete list of these telling what each worker does in the mill is given in *Description of Occupations, Textiles and Clothing*, prepared by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1918. Those here described are only a few of the major occupations.

which the thread is wound is called a spindle. The old form of spinning was called mule spinning but only 1,400,000 such spindles are left in American mills. The prevalent form in this country is ring spinning done on a "ring frame" with two sides, each spinner tending a definite number of sides. (Mule Spinner and Helper, Ring Frame Spinner and Helper, Doffer—who takes the full bobbins off the spinning frame.)

Spooling: Is done by a machine which winds the yarn from the bobbins on large spools. (Spooler Tender.)

Creeling: Unwinding the full spools from a creel, or frame, preparatory to running the yarn on to a beam. (Creeler.)

Beaming, Slashing and Warping: The yarn from the creel runs to a beam (Beamer Tender). From this beam the yarn is run through a solution which coats it with "size" and gives it greater strength preparatory to weaving (Slasher Tender). The yarn is then run on to another beam—warp-beam—which is later put on the back of the loom. (Warper Tender.)

Drawing-in: The ends of the yarn from the warp-beam are drawn in through the eyes in the heddles of the loom harness. (Drawer-in.) In modern mills the warp-tying machine takes the place of this process. (Warp-Tying Machine Tender.)

Weaving: A machine, known as a loom, actually makes the fabric by raising and lowering the alternate lengthwise threads of yarn (warp) while a shuttle is thrown back and forth between them, carrying the crosswise threads (weft) which fill the warp threads thus producing the cloth. (Weaver, Loom Fixer.)

Converting and Finishing: These processes include bleaching, printing, dyeing, mercerizing and other finishing operations which prepare the cloth for the market. The operation, of course, varies with the type and quality of goods. (Dyer, Dyer's Helper, Printer, Inspector, Folder, Mangle Tender, Calender Tender, Singer, Washer Tender and others.)

Woolen and Worsted Manufacturing

Sorting: The bundles of wool fleece are opened in the sorting room and the fleeces classified according to their various grades and qualities. (Wool Sorter.)

Scouring: The fibers are moved through a long vat-like machine and washed with a solution to remove oils, grease and dust. (Wool-washer Feeder, Wool-washer Tender.)

Burring and Carbonizing: This machine process either beats

out burrs and remaining foreign matter or removes them by chemicals. (Burr Picker Tender or Soaking-tank Man.)

Carding: Similar to the process described for cotton above with the same occupations.

Worsted Only

Up to this point the processes for woolen and worsteds are the same. There follow certain processes peculiar to worsteds, the chief of which are:

Backwashing and Gilling: A back-wash machine takes several of the slivers as they come out of the carding machine and combines them into one, at the same time washing and drying them. (Back Washer Tender.) Then the sliver is fed into a series of gill boxes, machines where the fibers are pressed and straightened, a process kindred to that of drawing in cotton mills. (Gill-box Tenders.)

Combing: These machines separate the short fibers, or *noils*, from the relatively long ones, or *tops*, at the same time combing the latter in parallel position. (Comber Tender.)

After the *tops* come from the comb they are again run through a series of gill boxes with the object of further drawing them out and combing several slivers into one. (Drawing-Frame Tender.)

Spinning: There are several systems of spinning worsted yarns, the main three being flyer, cap, and ring frame, but the same general operation as in cotton spinning takes place. (Spinner, Doffer and others.)

Twisting: Several strands of the yarn as it comes from the spindle are twisted together to make it stronger for weaving. (Twister Tender.)

Woolens Only

In woolens the elaborate drawing and combing processes are omitted and the spinning comes immediately after the carding.

Mule Spinning: Is a process similar to that mentioned under cotton, a movable "mule" being used instead of a ring frame. (Mule Spinner and Helper.)

Woolen and Worsted

After spinning, the preparing of the threads for weaving is much the same as in cotton the processes of *spooling*, *warping*, *beaming* and *sizing* (similar to *slashing* in cotton) and *drawing-in* following in turn. (Workers in these departments are Spooler Tenders, Dresser Tenders, Drawers-in, Size Makers, Winder Tenders, etc.)

The *Weaving* also follows the same principles as in cotton, the workers, of course, watching much fewer looms. (Weaver, Loom Fixer.)

The *finishing* of woolens involves a percher, who inspects the cloth, a *curling and mending* process to remove imperfections, a *fulling* operation which reduces the cloth to the desired weight or thickness, and a washing and drying process. (Some of the workers are Burlers, Menders, Perchers, Fillers, Cloth Inspectors, Washer Tenders and Dryer Tenders.) Some of the final processes are *gigging*, *napping*, and *packing*.

While the finishing processes are very important in woolens, in worsteds, on the contrary, the materials are practically unchanged after they come off the loom. The yarns are usually dyed before weaving. In woolens the dye may be applied to the fiber, the yarn or the finished fabric.

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