

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 110.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE ROOT OF SLAVERY.

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AS if the world had not been for half a century complacently patting itself upon the back that slavery had been abolished, international journals are to-day full of revelations on the subject of slavery—actual, raw, undisguised chattel slavery—existing here, there, and everywhere.

First it was King Leopold's rubber kingdom in the Congo, that was proven to be the scene of wholesale kidnapping and impressing of natives, with mutilation and murder as penalties for reluctant labor. Then from free-thought Belgium to Catholic Portugal the accusing finger moved. Portuguese Africa was found to be as bad as Belgium. Men and women were bought and sold there like cattle; death of overwork or starvation was their common fate. Next the British Tract Society felt a pang in its Anglican conscience over the island of Jamaica. Revelations followed—revelations of more kidnapping, overwork, torture and abuse. Suddenly in Puritan America a Paul Pry of a magazinist threw a bomb. He had unearthed in "our sister Republic," whose president only the other day "ours" enveloped in a fraternal handclasp behind closed doors, a system of chattel slavery under which its victims are "bought and sold, are kept in perpetual bondage, are punished, and killed at the pleasure of their owners." And close on the heels of this, the English press is set aflame with records of conditions in British Peru where the helpless and inoffensive natives are held in chain-gangs by their exploiters, "subject to all the vilest passions of cruelty and lust of which human nature is capable."

In following this series of exposures around the horizon, one is quite likely to become a victim of dizziness and lose his balance—which may not be the least warmly nursed object of those making the most hue and cry over them. Bad as they are in themselves, the abuses so far mentioned do not touch the root of slavery. Overwork is not slavery—else would every scientists, every man with an earnest

purpose in life, be a slave. Kidnapping and expatriation are not slavery—young Cudahy and Willie Whitle were no slaves, neither, if recent reports of junketings be true, are the missionaries to China. Purchase and sale are not slavery—slavery existed for centuries before sales and trades were conceived of. Starvation is not slavery—on the contrary, the more a slave costs, the surer is his master to feed him and keep him well. Finally, physical abuse, mutilation and even death, are not slavery—they are cases for the criminal courts.

Slavery, then, is something separate and apart from all of these. That something is labor whose recompense is anything less than its own full product. The other abuses may be added—they do not make it any the more slavery; or they may be absent, it is none the less slavery on that account. Wherever man works for less than he produces, there is slavery, in all its essential iniquity.

Which is why a great noise is made over the abuses which accompany the slavery in the Congo, Mexico and elsewhere, and nothing at all said about what slavery really is. Because the workers at home, who have been tickled with the feather of “liberty,” would then see that they were slaves themselves, and would organize to overthrow that slavery.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2010

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