

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 31.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 1901.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## NEW METHODS IN SLAVERY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**C**IVIL Service Commissioner Rodenberg, who has just returned from a visit to Hawaii, says that conditions there, especially in the sugar plantations, are such that it will be necessary to abolish the existing laws against Chinese labor. He says:

“The labor question is the most serious problem which is now confronting the Hawaiian sugar planters. The proper kind of labor is scarce already, and future agricultural developments will be greatly retarded unless some provision is made to supply this element in the community. The Chinese are the ideal sugar plantation workers. They are better workers than either the Japanese or Portuguese, and, besides, they give no trouble. They are quiet and always live up to their contracts. Since the islands were annexed, however, no more Chinamen can be secured, and sugar planters are very much exercised regarding this question.

“I am informed that a strong effort will be made by Hawaiians at the next session of Congress, when legislation on the Chinese question will be made necessary by the expiration of the Geary act, to have a clause in the new law providing that Chinamen may be taken from China to the Hawaiian Islands under contract to do purely agricultural work for a period not to exceed ten years, when they will be deported. Under the terms of such a provision, it is believed that no conflict would be precipitated with organized labor, as the law could provide that the Chinamen should do nothing but agricultural work, and white men cannot do this class of work in Hawaii on account of the climatic conditions.”

The first main point here is that Chinese labor is docile. Chinamen make ideal plantation hands because they always live up to their contracts, and under no circumstances rebel. The second point is that they should be brought to the island as slaves. Ten years of plantation life is enough to kill any man, even a Chinaman, the quiet, ideal worker who always lives up to his contract. Those few men who could endure the ten years of bondage would be useless when they were past, and it would be no loss to the planters to have them deported—at the expense of the government.

The cry against Chinese labor was as strong in Hawaii as it was in California. The planters themselves raised the cry, because they found in the Chinaman a steady, persistent worker who had the faculty of pushing his way into the ranks of the owners, and who by his sleepless energy and aptitude for exploiting his fellow Chinamen could beat the Caucasian planters at their own game.

The Chinaman who will be imported and deported for the plantations will have no such opportunity. He will have no rights, because his existence on the island is conditioned on the contract held by his owner. He will have no standing as a citizen, no standing in the courts, because his presence will be recognized only to the same extent that the presence of a horse or any other animal is recognized.

Commissioner Rodenberg voices the aspirations of the capitalist class of Hawaii. This class would hold up its hands in horror at the thought of chattel slavery. They would indignantly repudiate the thought of enslaving the African. Yet they demand, and stand ready to make their demands good, that contract slavery be introduced. The contract is the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. It serves to shield their actions, and it consoles them in the thought that they are not like other men. They are not like the manorial lord with his serfs; not like the Southerner with his slaves. The new method is more refined and less costly. The serf or slave might die, and there would then be a distinct monetary loss. The wage worker might strike, and there would be a suspension of business. But the contract slave can die, and his owner will not be out of pocket. The contract slave may strike, but he is bound hand and foot by that contract, and the same power—the power of this land of the free—that imported him, will subdue him, or will supply other men to take his place.

The United States permits slavery in the Sulu. It has allowed the corraling of Cuban and Porto Rican workers for shipment to the Philippines. It upholds the convict labor contracts of the South, and it does not interfere when the contractors, who, under cover of their business, include in the ranks of their slaves men whom they have been able to take by force. The United States stands behind the recent forcible acquisition of farm laborers by the Western farmers. It supports the imprisonment of men who have been inveigled to enter factories where there was a strike on. Why should it not extend its operations and not only protect the masters in the exercise of their functions as slave drivers, but also furnish the slaves?

Commissioner Rodenberg shows that this will be done, and how it will be done. Capitalism demands slaves, and it demands slaves that are more abject than the ones

it now has. It finds them in the teeming Chinese Empire, and it finds the means in the ten-year “contract.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded April 2006