

No Compromise With Slavery:  
Speech in St. Louis  
[excerpt]  
(May 1, 1902)

It is indeed with great pleasure that I am before you here today. May Day sets my whole being afire and upon its every recurrence I consecrate again my life to the revolution which it holds in its meaning. It is with this spirit of revolution, new born, that I will say what I have to say.

The days of the reformer have gone and those who would change our conditions today must be made of sterner stuff. In determining the liberty or the freedom of the slave there is no room for reform, no room for compromise. If one man is to be denied the power to live off the labor of others then slavery must be abolished. Its rigors can not be mitigated by lessening the number or lashes or reducing the amount of the robbery. Robbery and lashes are not the lot of free men, and if we would be free men we must put an end to both.

In the life of Wendell Phillips, the great emancipator of the black slave, there occurred an incident which showed the true worth of the man who seeks to compromise, who seeks to go step at a time. In the church, in the city of Boston of which he was pastor, there was inscribed over the entrance way the words, "God bless this Commonwealth." Wendell Phillips had seen these words since his boyhood and they had sunk deep into his brain. At one time during the worst days of Southern slavery a little black girl who had run away from her masters in the South took refuge in this church, and at once there arose a question, what was to be done with her?

Some wanted to send her back; others wanted to deliver her to the officers, and still others declared that while they favored sending her back to the master whose property she was, they insisted that it should be done under condition that she should never again be mistreated.

After all others had given their views, Wendell Phillips arose and in a voice without a falter declared:

For many years have I entered this church and every time I have seen that inscription over the doorway but let me say that if in this place there is to be made a compromise with slavery, if we here do aught that will sanction ownership of flesh and blood, I will insist that that inscription be changed and instead of writing "God bless our Commonwealth," let us write it "God damn our Commonwealth."

Wendell Phillips is gone and the slavery against which he fought has disappeared; no longer is human flesh and blood sold in the open market. But yet slavery still exists. Wendell Phillips never dreamed of the slavery of today, a slavery more awful than that against which he struggled, more awful because its helpless victims imagine themselves free.

There was no compromise with slavery in the '60s and there will be none today. As the ownership of the man was at the root of chattel slavery and as it was abolished only with the abolition of that ownership, so today the ownership of the machine is at the root of wage-slavery and wage-slavery will come to an end only with the abolition of the ownership of the machine. Society itself must control the machine. Socialism is the only hope of the wage-slave.

Compromisers never destroyed chattel slavery, neither will they destroy wage-slavery, and those who advocate a step at a time in securing the emancipation of the working class would do well to remember the words of Wendell Phillips.

Through socialism alone will this be accomplished and it is the duty of every workingman to align himself with the Socialist Party. Do not be discouraged if you are the only socialist in your precinct, you are a monument to the degeneracy of your neighbors. Join hands, fellow workers, join hands with your brothers of other lands and when at last the glorious day comes, when there is no longer a master, no longer a slave, it will be your reward to know and feel the part you have played in its accomplishment. No grander reward could fall to any man.